

# Supporting a bereaved pupil - A pupil's expression of grief - Emotions

Each young person is different and grieving pupils may display none, one or all of the emotions described. Be aware that some pupils may try to conceal their emotions and it may be difficult to assess how they are feeling.

Emotion	What can school do to help?
<p><b>ANGER</b></p> <p><i>Recognise this as a symptom of grief rather than 'naughty' behaviour or causing 'trouble'.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What specifically has made them feel angry today?</li> <li>• Visualise the build-up of anger using analogies such as an erupting volcano or a firework with a long or short fuse.</li> <li>• Agree on safe strategies to help a bereaved pupil take control of their anger and offer them an outlet. Consider accessibility, practicality in your setting, adult supervision, disruption to others, suitability for a bereaved pupil.</li> <li>• Where possible, offer an element of choice.</li> </ul> <p><b>Some suggestions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Physical exercise</b> – run 2 laps of the playground, 50 skips, 2 minutes with a punch bag in a gym, kick/throw a ball against a wall.</li> <li>- <b>Venting</b> – punch a specific cushion or soft item, pop bubble wrap, blow up and release a balloon, shout into the wind/box</li> <li>- <b>Distraction</b> – pluck an elastic band or resistance band, stress-balls, fidget toys, gels and foams, computer games etc.</li> <li>- <b>Writing</b> – scribble, draw, chalk art, paint, keep a journal or diary.</li> <li>- <b>Wrecking</b> – salt dough, modelling clay or putty to create and break, rip or screw up paper, build sandcastles and smash, crush cans, burst a paper bag, stamp on cardboard boxes, knock down skittles etc.</li> <li>- <b>Calming</b> – listen to music, use a tactile object, walk outside, take care of living things - fish, pets, plants, repetitive actions, count up and down, breathing exercises.</li> </ul>
<p><b>SADNESS</b></p> <p><i>The natural response to the death of someone</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reassurance – sad feelings are part of the normal grieving process.</li> <li>• Allow a pupil time to grieve.</li> <li>• Offer a simple 'time out' with a safe space – many bereaved young people do not want to get upset in front of others.</li> <li>• Try to avoid 'rescuing' a grieving pupil by distracting them from their sadness.</li> <li>• Create a list of 'feel good' activities to refer to in times of need:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- spending time with friends</li> <li>- playing sport/music/computer games; dancing</li> <li>- creating a piece of art, craft activity</li> <li>- watching their special team/TV programme</li> <li>- eating their favourite food</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Remind bereaved pupils that it is normal to feel sad at times as they grieve.</li> </ul>
<p><b>WORRY &amp; ANXIETY</b></p> <p><i>Insecurity and uncertainty about the future</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find out what is <i>specifically</i> worrying a bereaved pupil – try not to make assumptions.</li> <li>• Remind a grieving pupil – adults in school are there for them.</li> <li>• Identify their supportive network of people and construct a visual representation - include members of their friendship groups, clubs or teams as well as their family, extended family, friends and school staff.</li> <li>• Reassurance - many grieving people have 'imagined conversations' with a person who has died, and they find these comforting and helpful.</li> <li>• Listen to any worries about their own or others' mortality and take them seriously; talk about the life cycle and inevitability of death as well as how precious life is.</li> <li>• Be there - some pupils find it easier to share their worries with supportive adults at school rather than risk causing further upset at home.</li> </ul>
<p><b>GUILT &amp; REGRET</b></p> <p><i>"If only..."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow pupils to express these feelings rather than try to make them feel better.</li> <li>• Reassurance - it is very common for bereaved people to feel guilty when someone has died.</li> <li>• Explain - even when grieving, it is OK to have fun and be happy at times and that it does not diminish their grief or change how they feel about the person who has died.</li> <li>• Feeling responsible - young people often feel guilty but can be reluctant to share these feelings with anyone.</li> <li>• Treasure memories - encourage them to capture memories of their special person – memory jar, memory book, photographs, craft work.</li> </ul>

<p><b>CONFUSION</b></p> <p><i>Amid the chaos of bereavement</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reassurance - these overwhelming emotions are normal, and everyone grieves in their own way.</li> <li>• Find out - What has a bereaved pupil been told? What is their understanding of the situation? Are there any other significant changes?</li> <li>• Explain how change can be daunting, but it helps us develop resilience and an adaptability for the future.</li> <li>• Remind them of previous changes in their lives - encourage them to think about what or who helped them.</li> <li>• Encourage questions and answer them honestly where you can. When they have difficult questions respond with, "That's a great question, what do you think?" or "What have you been told at home?" and do not be afraid to say, "I'm afraid I don't have the answer to that" and possibly, "I can try to find out if you would like?"</li> </ul>
<p><b>SHOCK</b></p> <p><i>The impact will be felt forever</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A supportive school will make a big difference.</li> <li>• Let them know who is available to help and, where possible, try to offer a choice of who they can talk to.</li> <li>• Check in regularly and talk to them, showing that there are people who care.</li> <li>• If the death is not mentioned, this can prevent a pupil from addressing their emotions and accepting the death.</li> <li>• Provide a quiet space with an activity as a distraction as this will feel less threatening and puts less pressure on a pupil to talk. Once distracted, they may start to talk but this should not be an expectation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>LONELINESS</b></p> <p><i>Feeling 'different' to their peers</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friends are important to a bereaved pupil but there can be a lack of understanding or empathy among a friendship group.</li> <li>• Ask a bereaved pupil about their friendships; encourage them to talk to their friends, offering help with vocabulary if they need it. Suggest phrases such as, "I need some time on my own just now, but can I find you later?" or "I don't feel like chatting, but I would like to sit with you at lunchtime."</li> <li>• A bereaved pupil's friends may not know what to say and might be afraid of causing upset.</li> <li>• Seek permission from the bereaved pupil to facilitate open discussions with their friendship group.</li> <li>• Lunchtimes and breaktimes can be difficult – offer an option of somewhere to go or someone to talk to, if needed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>NUMBNESS</b></p> <p><i>Feeling empty</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normalise feelings – avoid any expectations of how a bereaved pupil should feel or behave.</li> <li>• Reassurance – many bereaved people feel empty and numb.</li> <li>• Invisible – it can be easy to overlook these pupils, but they need support too.</li> <li>• No pressure – bereaved pupils should not feel under pressure to behave or feel in a particular way.</li> <li>• Regular reminders – adults in school do care about them.</li> </ul>
<p><b>LOSS &amp; RESILIENCE</b></p> <p><i>Adjusting to a changed world</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reminder of previous changes or 'losses' – How did they cope? Build on these strategies to manage the upheaval following a bereavement and develop their resilience by drawing on the skills they already have.</li> <li>• Preserve familiar routines and standards, with some flexibility.</li> <li>• Improve self-esteem (Adapted from Grotberg 1997) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I am" (someone who can be liked/loved)</li> <li>• "I have" (someone to depend on/believe in me/support me/people I trust and love)</li> <li>• "I can" (do things really well/find ways to manage problems I face)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>