

Supporting Young People Through A Bereavement By Suicide

“Bereavement, loss and change can affect relationships, school work and happiness. If children are not encouraged to express their grief they may never learn how to live with it”
Unicorn Service

“You don’t have to be an expert to talk and listen” Newport Mind

Coping with a bereavement and the feelings of grief has no set timescale, it is normal to feel a whole range of emotions after a loss. Let your child know that it is okay to feel however they feel, whether that is sad, overwhelmed, angry, worried, irritable, lonely, withdrawn, shock, fear, numbness or something else and that there is no right or wrong way to grieve. They may have good days as well as bad days. Reassure your child that it is okay not to be okay; they are loved, they matter and support is available.

1. What do I say and do to support my child who is coping with the suicide of a friend?

It is natural for your child to question why this tragedy has happened or look for reasons behind the young person’s decision, reassure them that it is normal to search for answers to try to make sense of it all but that we might never have the answers to these questions. If the person was a close friend your child may be worrying that they did not spot signs that their friend was struggling with their mental health which can bring feelings of guilt and a sense that they could have done more. Reassure them that guilt is a common thing to feel but that it is in no way their fault or responsibility.

Allow your child time to talk if they want to but also allow them time to reflect and talk in their own time if they are not ready to open up.

If they are ready to talk use active listening skills outlined in part 3. Do not be afraid to talk directly about suicide, talking about suicide will not encourage them to have dark thoughts themselves but addressing the issues in an open and honest manner will help them in coming to terms with what has happened. Do not feel you need to fill the silence, some processing time to think about their feelings before voicing them is a good thing. Acknowledge how they may be feeling for example *‘you sound/look sad right now’ ‘I can hear you are angry’* etc. Ask them if they would like help with managing how they are feeling. Remember it is not your job to fix everything, just being there for your child is important, valuable and comforting.

If your child is not ready to talk reassure them that you love them, they’re not alone and you are there for them when the time is right to listen and support them. It might help to start a conversation while doing an activity for example going for a walk or a drive etc. Sometimes these activities enable you to be side by side for a conversation which can feel less intense than a face to face conversation.

They might find it is easier to talk to someone they don’t know and you can provide them with some of the support contacts at the end of this document in part 6.

Alternatively, they may want to talk to someone they know who is in school and they can access this through the school's booking system.

You will find it is quite natural for them to want to be with and share their emotions and grief with their friends. Support them to do this but try to talk to them afterwards, enquiring how everyone is in the friendship group and also themselves.

Your child may have feelings of 'what is the point?' when it comes to 'normal' everyday activities such as self-care, playing sport, school work, making time to be with friends, spending time with the family etc and so it is important to try as far as possible to keep 'normal' routines going to provide a sense of security.

Other tips that can really help:

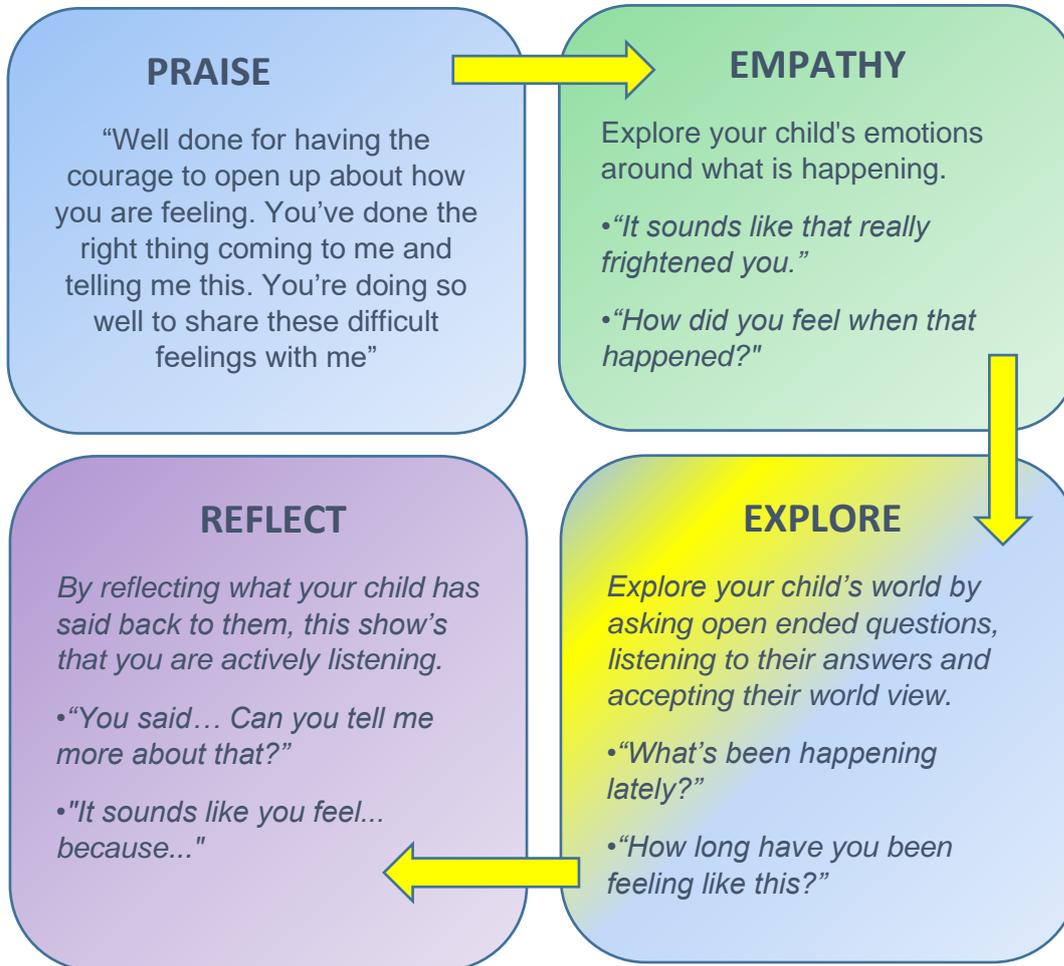
1. Spend quality time with your child to help them feel safe.
2. Encourage them to keep doing activities they enjoy. Reassure them that it is okay to feel happy, and that this does not take away from how much they care about the person they have lost.
3. Talk about the person who has died and share your memories together.
4. Encourage your child to express how they are feeling in other ways, by writing a letter to you, or to the person they have lost telling them all the things they want to say, or writing a message in a book of condolence.
5. Support your child to say goodbye. Covid-19 lockdown restrictions make it unlikely that many of us are able to attend funerals and other memorial ceremonies. There are other ways to celebrate the life of the person lost through sharing happy stories, sharing photos, lighting a candle, zoom memorial with friends, playing music, writing a song or poem. As a school we will support the pupils to plan a memorial as soon as covid restrictions allow.

2. What do I say and do to support my child who is having dark thoughts themselves?

If you have concerns that your child may be having dark thoughts which could include thoughts about harming themselves, here is some guidance to support you when starting your conversation:

- Find a quiet, suitable time and a place with no distractions or interruptions;
- Stay calm and listen with an open mind;
- Tell your child you are there for them;
- Use conversation openers such as 'I've noticed.....', 'How are you feeling.....', 'I am concerned about.....', 'What are your thoughts on this.....'
- Tell them you are pleased they have told you and that you are able to help them through this time;
- Listen to what they are saying even if they are angry;
- Listen without interrupting;
- Once you have listened to what they have said try to settle their emotions and make suggestions of things you can do together to distract them from their thoughts. Try to get them outside for a walk to get some fresh air and place them in a different environment;
- Keep checking in with them in a caring but not overbearing way;
- If you are concerned seek help and don't try to cope on your own. There are many superb agencies out there ready to help you get through this as a family (see point 6)
- **Speak to your GP about next steps if you are worried about your child's mental health or wellbeing**

3. How to actively listen to your child in conversation



Closing a conversation

- Be prepared to end the conversation yourself
- Summarise the conversation (and any agreed actions)

“I just want to check in with how you are feeling, we’ve been talking for a while”

“You’ve done really well talking to me about this. Shall we take a break for... now and talk again...”

SAFETY

If your child has said something or has started engaging in behaviours that concern you:

- “I’m worried about you and I want to make sure you’re safe”
- “What’s happening isn’t ok and I think you deserve to be supported with this”

If you think your child is in immediate danger call an ambulance on 999.

Call 111 if your child is not in immediate danger but is unwell or hurt.

4. Helpful advice from young people affected by suicide



- **Expressing feelings and thoughts:** finding ways to let out their feelings and having people around who can listen and accept them
- **Making opportunities to remember:** this may mean talking about the person, looking at pictures, and videos of them, going to places that remind them of that person, creating a box with physical memories (tickets, cards, pictures etc.), writing a journal or blog about them
- **Participating in activities:** continuing to do things they have previously enjoyed, such as sports, social events or music
- **Putting their feelings on paper:** they may not feel ready to talk to anyone, but writing down their thoughts and feelings may help. This could include writing a poem, song, creating some art work.
- **Looking after themselves:** eating well and getting sufficient sleep.
- **Spending time outside:** getting out of the house for a change of scene, connecting with nature or doing exercise
- **Meeting, speaking with or reading the words of other people who have been bereaved:** see details of the range of support organisations in point 6
- **Developing an 'emotional first aid kit':** collecting together some things that can help when they are feeling sad, upset or angry (a music play list, favourite chocolate, a ball to kick)

5. What young people affected by suicide found unhelpful

- **Study and school work pressure:** teachers can help with this and will be understanding of what your child is going through right now. Your child's teachers will be supportive and work with your child to gradually engage them again with their learning when the time is right. Please contact the school if you have concerns;
- **Avoiding talking about what has happened:** although it may be really difficult to start with, talking to someone young people can trust can make all the difference;
- **Drinking alcohol, taking drugs:** it can be tempting to try and blot out the pain of what has happened, but the short term oblivion doesn't take away the sadness and is likely to make them feel worse;
- **Hurrying to make big decisions:** it may be better to let some time pass before making major changes to their life;
- **Taking risks:** after someone close has died they may feel 'what's the point?' and take risks with their own health or engage in risk taking behaviours e.g driving too fast. Encourage them to talk and gain their trust;
- **Not seeking help:** a young person may feel they can't ask for help as they are worried it will make them seem weak, or they don't want to bother other people when they are grieving themselves, or when they think a person is too busy. Let them know you are there for them and share the support contact details (part 6) so they know there are always people there for them.

6. Who can I ask to help me support my child?



Help lines

Child Line - 0800 1111

Samaritans- 08457 909090

Support line - 0208 5549004

Self-harm Network-0800 622 600

The Amber Project-02920 344776

Young Minds- 08088 025544

Cruse Bereavement Care – 0808 808 1677

SHOUT – Text SHOUT to 85258
(24/7 text support service)

HOPELINEUK –
call: 08000684141
text: 07786209697
(confidential suicide prevention advice)

Unicorn Service –01633 851051
(supporting young people to cope with grief)

GP-out of hours Gwent- 01633 744285

Emergency services - A and E 999

Useful Websites

- **The Mix:** www.themix.org.uk
- **Newport Mind:** www.newportmind.org
- **Cruse:** cruse.org.uk
- **Hope Again** (Cruse's website for children & young people) www.hopeagain.org.uk
- www.bbc.co.uk/headroom
- www.nspcc.org.uk
- www.youngminds.org.uk/young-people
- **Dying Matters:** dyingmatters.org

In school support

Head of 6th Form – Mrs James

Talking zone – referral form on school website

School Community Nurse – Karen O'Brien (01633 492468)

Newport Youth Service

Newport Mind

Safe guarding team – Mrs Nelson/Mr Bartley

Parental support

Parent line- 08088 002222

NSPCC-08088 005000

Mental Health helpline Wales- 0800 132 737

Young Minds
www.youngminds.org.uk

Parents advice line: 0808 802 5544
(Mon- Fri 9.30am –4pm)

Talking Zone: parent consultations - www.talkingzone.southwales.ac.uk/community-counselling

Newport Mind: adult/family services -www.newportmind.org

Remember that to be there for your child it is important to put on your own life jacket first; be kind to yourself and reach out for support.