

Someone has died suddenly

candle



St Christopher's Candle Project
Children, young people and loss

Someone has died suddenly

Helping your child

Everyone is very shocked when someone dies suddenly. There has been no time to prepare and often no warning that the person was going to die. Shock affects adults and children physically and emotionally, and some of the effects you may notice are feeling dizzy or sick, shaky, shivery, hot and cold. After a shock we often feel very unsafe for a while, and need to take things quietly. This leaflet mentions some of the things you and your child may be feeling.

Can't take it all in at once

It is very hard to believe that you will never see that person again, and it may take some time for your child to accept what has happened. You may find that it seems as if they don't feel anything and don't seem to be upset at all. This is part of not being able to take it all in at once and means that they need time to do that. Don't worry that your child doesn't cry for a while, it doesn't mean they didn't care about the person.

Viewing and going to the funeral

After someone dies, there is usually a chance to view their body and say goodbye to them

privately before the funeral. It can be helpful for children to do this, if they are prepared and given the choice about it. Someone they know and trust should talk to them before they go about what to expect, and be there with them all the time. If they decide they don't want to view the body, even at the last moment, that is OK.

The funeral is a chance to say goodbye along with other people who cared for that person. There is a leaflet in this series, *Children and funerals*, which covers some of the questions you might have.

Feeling really mixed up

Sometimes after a sudden death adults and children who cared about that person feel it might have been their fault, or that they should have been able to stop what happened. In most cases nothing that was done or said would have changed things, and talking to a trusted person can help you see this more clearly. It helps to share how you feel, even if it doesn't make the feelings go away.

When someone dies suddenly people often feel that someone must be to blame, and you or your child may get very angry as well as sad. The death can feel very unfair and any unexpected death brings many unwanted changes. There is a lot more for everyone in the family to do, and it

can feel that some are doing more than others. Children may feel very resentful about the way things change, but may not find it easy to tell their parent or carer.

Finding it hard to concentrate

It can be really difficult to concentrate on work after a sudden death, and children often find it hard to concentrate at school. It does help to try and stay with the usual routines, even if you feel that you don't get much done, and it does get better in time.

Lots of questions about the future

There are often lots of questions after someone dies suddenly, and it is hard for children to understand that there may not be answers to them all. Why did they die, how did it happen, what is going to happen to us now as a family, and who would look after me if something happened to you?

It is really helpful to share these questions, even if there aren't always answers; just saying them out loud can sometimes help. Children also need to be able to talk about these things, and may find it easier to talk to a teacher or the parent of a friend as they may not want to upset you.

Going to familiar places and doing the same activities as before the death can help to make you all feel safe, so that you can start to think about and make sense of all the changes.

What's next?

There may be difficult things to face, especially if the sudden death meant that there has to be an inquest or a court case. The dates for these may cut right through your grief, reminding all of you of the death and bringing the feelings back. It is important to plan how to cope in advance and ask for some support.

Wanting to get on with life

Children and young people need to be able to forget about their grief at times and get on with doing the things they enjoy. This doesn't mean that they have forgotten the person who has died, they just need to take some time out, and they may need your reassurance about this.

Here are some ideas to help

Physical activities can help. Exercise such as swimming, running, sport and even walking are all ways that use up energy and help you and your child to feel better.

Eat well. Bereavement is hard on you physically and emotionally, and you all need to eat things that will keep you healthy, even if it is hard to think about that at times.

Try to rest even if you find that your sleep pattern is affected. Most people find their sleep pattern changes after a death, and it can be a problem if you feel very tired all the time. Children need a regular bedtime routine, they need to rest even if they don't go off to sleep straight away. Remember that it will get better in time.

Do things together as a family or with your friends. You are all going through the same experience even if it feels a bit different for everyone, and it is important to keep talking to each other and sharing the activities you are used to doing together.

Give yourself and your family time to adjust. Don't be too hard on yourselves if it takes a long while to get back to an ordinary life. This is normal after a sudden death.

About the Candle Project

www.stchristophers.org.uk

The Candle Project offers one to one and group counselling for any child or young person in South East London experiencing loss through death, training advice and consultancy for local schools and other professional agencies, and an advice service for parents and carers.

Other places to get help

Childhood Bereavement Network

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

Lots of information and a directory of services providing support for bereaved children.

Winston's Wish

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Practical support and guidance for families, professionals and anyone concerned about a grieving child.

Cruse

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Cruse provides a telephone helpline and face to face support from trained volunteers.

Other leaflets in this series

Candle Children, young people and loss

Candle How to help your bereaved child

Candle Children and funerals

Candle Helping bereaved young people

candle



St Christopher's Candle Project
Children, young people and loss

St Christopher's Hospice
51-59 Lawrie Park Road, London SE26 6DZ
Telephone 020 8768 4500 Fax 020 8659 8680

www.stchristophers.org.uk

St Christopher's Hospice is registered charity 210667

© St Christopher's Hospice September 2011