

Help them cope with the future

If possible, try to make sure that your 'normal' family routines continue.

Try to 'manage' any media focus on events. Don't let family life be consumed by media / community reports, or versions who said what, to whom etc.

If your child's reaction to certain distressing news items or is prolonged over a period of time or the level of their distress is causing you concern, then you should discuss this with some of the health and education professionals who may be able to offer advice and help.

There are a number of ways you can do this

You can discuss any worries with your child's class teacher or with some of the Senior Leadership Team in school. If necessary, the school can then access confidential psychological or counselling help or advice, if this is considered appropriate.

You can also discuss your concerns with your GP, health visitor or the school nurse. If your worries about your child are mainly being felt in the home and school life is largely unaffected, then this may be the most appropriate route for you to take. Again, these health professionals will be able to support you or access relevant support for your child.

Finally, there are also a number of voluntary agencies and websites such as Cruse, The Samaritans, Winston's Wish etc, that can offer support through troubling times. Any of the previously noted routes to help, will be able to provide contact details for these agencies.

How to contact us

In most situations, we would expect that you will make contact with the Educational Psychology Service through your child or young persons school.

Enquiries

However, If you want to make direct contact then telephone the team office for your area:

East Cambs & Fenland Office
Noble House, Ely
☎ 01353 612803

Huntingdon Office
The Meadows, St Ives
☎ 01480 375277

Cambridge City & South Office
Castle Court, Cambridge
☎ 01223 717666

What do I say to my child?

***Sharing difficult or
distressing news about a
bereavement with children
& young people***

**A guide for parents and
carers within the Wisbech
community**



Sharing difficult news with children

When a sudden or tragic bereavement occurs in a school community many children may struggle to understand what has happened, and quite naturally they turn to their parents or carers for explanations. This leaflet *is not* intended to provide all the answers to all the difficult questions that children and young people may ask in regard to a tragic death. Rather, it is hoped that it will provide some guidance in terms of how to respond to this distressing news, or how you might respond to difficult questions that your child may be struggling with.

'I don't know what to say'

Traumatic and sad events in a school community invariably cause confusion amongst parents and carers in terms of knowing what to say to a child. There is often a natural reaction from adults to try and 'protect' children from distressing news. Sometimes difficult questions are ignored or deflected, sometimes vague answers are given which can lead to further confusion in a child. Frequently adults will say that when faced with very difficult news or questions they just simply '*didn't know what to say*'

The first point to realise here, is that there are *no exact or correct* responses to some of the difficult questions that children will ask.

There is no failure as a parent or carer if you struggle to respond to some of the questions that a child may ask you.

How should I respond?

Children vary enormously in their social and emotional make-up. Therefore, it is difficult to precisely predict how each child will react to difficult or distressing news that may reach them. Factors such as a child's ability to understand, their level of developmental maturity and age, their emotional health etc should all be taken into consideration by those responding to a child's questions. Once these differences in children are considered, there are a number of key guidelines or principles that may be helpful to parents and carers;

Be honest with them

Firstly, try to be as honest as you can in your responses. Sometimes parents think that avoidance is the best course to take in difficult situations. But it can lead to confusion and worry in some children that they are not being fully informed. Also, if you are unsure about why something happened or how it happened, then *say this to your child*. It is better to say, 'honestly, I don't know why this has happened' rather than speculate or make something up. You can always add that *the more important things to think about are the wonderful memories they have of the person who has died.*

Listen to them

When children

experience distressing news about a bereavement they may become anxious about their own health or the health of their loved ones. Some children or young people may not be seeking well informed answers from their parents or carers, but are looking for reassurance from adults, or simply looking for someone to listen to their anxieties or worries. If you feel that your child would like to share some worries with you, then try to establish some protected time with them, free from interruption, where they feel that they can freely talk and you have *the space to listen*.

Be open with them

Try to use

clear and specific language in your conversations about difficult topics. Avoid more alternative phrases, which may be more comfortable to you, but could be more confusing to a child e.g. saying someone has gone 'away' or they are 'asleep'.

Although extremely difficult, try not to be surprised by sudden questions or comments, reactions or changing behaviours from children during any periods when distressing or difficult news is being shared with them. An outward presentation of '*calm control*' from you will greatly reassure a child. Also be aware that you may have to repeat explanations or go over events in your discussions.