



# A Parent Guide to

## Supporting My SEND Child with Bereavement



The death of a loved one is incredibly hard and confusing for both SEND children and their parents. This guide offers information and advice about how to talk to your SEND child about bereavement and how to support them through their grief. It also provides guidance on where to access further support and how to look after yourself through this challenging time.

## Talking About Death

If a parent, sibling or other close family member or friend has died, you may be wondering how to talk to your SEND child about what has happened. In this section, you can find information about why and how to talk to your SEND child about death.

### Why is it important to talk to my SEND child about death?

Talking about death is the first step on your SEND child's bereavement journey. It is natural for you to want to protect your child from difficult news and you may worry that they will struggle to understand what's happened. However, whatever your child's developmental age or stage, they will be aware of their loss in some way, so it's really important to talk to them about the death of their loved one in a way that they understand. This also helps them to express their feelings and make sense of their world as you support them through their sense of loss.

### How can I talk to my SEND child about death?

How you talk to your SEND child about the death of a loved one will depend on their age and developmental stage. Try to provide all the key information in a way that your child will understand, using a mode of communication that is accessible to them.

### You may wish to consider:

What does your child already understand about death?

What is the best way of communicating with your child?

Where or how does your child feel most comfortable communicating?

## Talking to Your SEND Child About Death

Use clear and simple language.

To avoid confusion, use the words 'death' or 'died' rather than 'passed away'.

Break information down into chunks to make it more manageable.

Talk to your child at a time when they are likely to be alert, calm and relaxed.

Be prepared for your child to be confused or upset, and to have questions.

Talk to your child in a place where they are comfortable and relaxed.

Use props to aid your child's understanding, such as toys, photos, drawings and videos.

Consider strategies you may need to utilize in order to help your child manage difficult emotions, such as having comfort objects to hand.

Repeat information in clear and concise ways to help your child absorb it.

Use a reassuring tone of voice and body language, such as squatting to their level or holding their hand.

Stay consistent. Your child might ask about it more than once, so try to keep your response the same each time to help them understand.

Don't expect them to respond in the same way you do – you might be feeling upset or sad but it's OK if your child doesn't echo those emotions. They might need time to process and understand the situation, so it's important not to expect them to feel a certain way.


## How can I support my SEND child through grief?



How your SEND child expresses their feelings or exhibits their grief will be personal to them. They may be able to verbalise their feelings in some way, or they may show their grief primarily through behaviour. In this section, you can find information about how to recognise when your SEND child is grieving, as well as a range of supportive strategies and activities for helping your child to express and manage their feelings.

## How might my SEND child exhibit their grief?

All children are different and will exhibit grief in different ways. It's important to be observant of your child and mindful of their specific understanding, emotions and needs. These are just some of the ways in which your child may exhibit their grief.



Your child may be more demanding or need more comfort than normal.

Your child may ask excessive questions about their loved one.


Your child may display strong emotions, such as anger.

Your child may appear to jump in and out of grief.

You might notice behavioural changes.

Your child's sleep or eating may be affected.

You may notice that preoccupations increase.



## Strategies for Supporting Your Child with Grief

Provide your child with physical outlets, such as running, moving outside, throwing balls or beanbags and playing with manipulable objects.

Make a photo book of your child's life to help them make sense of their journey and the changes that have happened.

Create safe spaces, such as dens, for your child to hide in when they need calm.

Explore therapeutic approaches, such as massage, yoga, breathwork and play therapy.

Fill a box or bag with items that make your child feel calm or happy for them to access when they feel upset or overwhelmed.

Provide opportunities for artistic expression, such as painting, sculpting or photography.

Create a memory box to help your child remember their loved one.

Keep your routine as normal as possible so that your home is a safe and reassuring space.

Consider creating traditions and routines within your family that will help you to regularly remember and celebrate your loved one.

## Looking After Yourself

When you're a parent of an SEND child, it can be easy to forget about your own needs, especially during times of grief and loss. However, it is vital that you set aside time to look after yourself in order to avoid burnout, stress and depression.

Establish routines that provide you with the space to express and connect with your own grief.

Ask friends and family for support.

Prioritise self-care, such as eating, showering, dressing and sleeping.

Give yourself space to cry if you need to.

Engage in activities that provide an emotional outlet, such as walking, art, music or talking to friends.

Seek professional support if you're struggling.

## Accessing Further Support

If you are struggling or feel you need further support, reach out to friends, family, your child's school, your GP or other medical professionals to access the support you deserve.

You might also find the **Winston's Wish** website to be a helpful space to explore further support. Winston's Wish is a registered charity for bereaved children and their families, providing digital information and support across the UK.