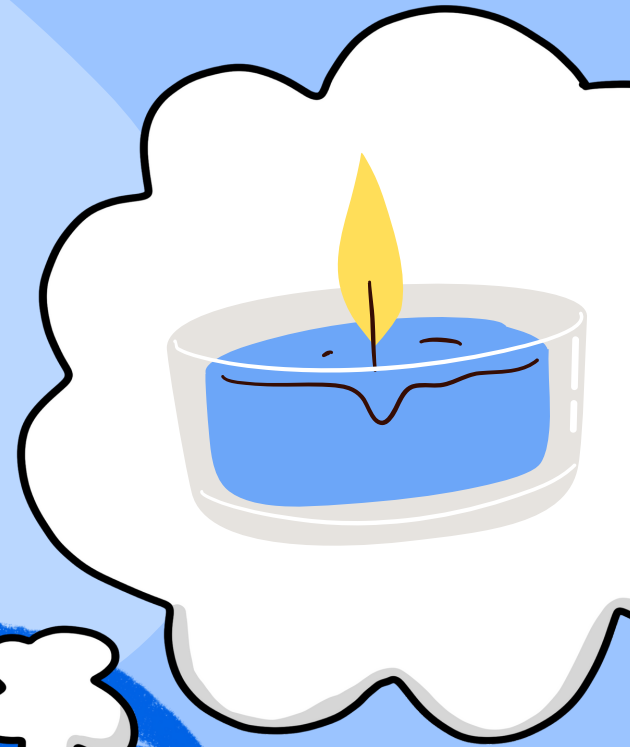




# UNDERSTANDING GRIEF

A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS, PARENTS  
& CARERS FOR SUPPORTING CHILDREN  
WITH BEREAVEMENT.



## WHY USE THIS GUIDE?

This guide has been created to support teachers, parents, and carers with supporting their child/children who have experienced a recent death. It is a guide that covers all aspects of what grief is and how to support young people in coping with this feeling that can be challenging and scary at times through practical strategies.

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Disclaimer: This guide has been put together as a supportive tool that can be used to inspire further ideas and thinking. It is NOT a therapeutic guide. Please use it at your own discretion. Exciting Teacher is not responsible for how this resource is used. Personal use only! : )

# 1. UNDERSTANDING

The first step in supporting your child is understanding that grief or sadness experienced following a death is completely normal. This is a natural process that helps us to come to terms with someone passing away. Grief can be very difficult to understand and cope with, but it is something that we all experience during our lifetimes. Everyone responds differently to grief and that is okay. It is a very personal experience but there are things that we, as adults, can do to support children and young people.

Children who are grieving may show signs of:

- Sadness, sorrow and misery.
- Shock, denial or disbelief.
- Numbness.
- Panic.
- Confusion.
- Anger, hostility or aggression.
- Feeling overwhelmed.
- Relief.
- Mixed feelings.

They may show one, several or none of these signs.

These symptoms and feelings may come in waves for children and young people. These waves will change over time and vary. It might be that it seems as though the symptoms of grief are easing but then they flood back. This is part of the process.



There is no right or wrong way to respond to a death. All feelings and responses are valid.

Grief can also lead to changes in sleep, appetite, physical health and withdrawing socially from spending time with others.

## 2. VALIDATION

The second step is to validate how your child is feeling. Let them know that this is normal and it is okay to feel worried, upset, angry, frustrated, etc. It is important to acknowledge those BIG feelings by saying things like:

*"I can see that this is upsetting for you,  
it is okay to feel sad about it..."*

Reassure the child that these feelings are normal. They may come and go. They may feel them in different amounts throughout the day. They may experience many emotions throughout the day.

Some helpful activities for validating and encouraging discussion surrounding emotions include:

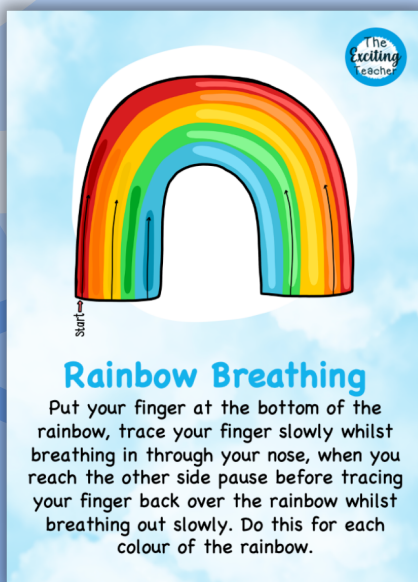
Create a memory box and talk about fond memories.

Invite the child to share how they are feeling.

Write a letter to the person who has died.

Paint a pebble to help to remember the person who has died.

Ask them to draw or write down how they are feeling.



YOUR feelings  
ARE valid

# 3. REFLECTION

During this time it is extra important that children feel listened to. Listen to them carefully and provide them with your full attention. Be led by the child in what they wish to talk about and when. Reassure the child that it is not their fault as it can be easy to want to blame ourselves when events like these happen. We should allow them to reflect on their memories of the person (or animal) has died.

It is important to use clear and age-appropriate language. Use the terms 'died' and 'dead' to prevent confusion and worry. Phrases such as 'passed away', 'gone to sleep', 'gone over the bridge', or 'in the stars' can be confusing for children, and hard to understand what are meant by these.

Using clear vocabulary shares the permanency of death and what it means to die. Children may ask when the individual is coming back but you should be honest in explaining to them that they are not.

If the child has any questions, try to answer them simply and honestly. If the child becomes upset, distressed or angry then pause the conversation to comfort them and validate their feelings.



# 4. ROUTINE

Consistent routines allow for our bodies to know what to expect rather than always responding to the unknown. Without our basic needs being met, such as eating, sleep, and hygiene, then it is hard for our brains to have enough space to think about anything else. Our bodies when deprived of those basic things are not ready or able to cope well with BIG feelings when they arise. Ever woken up after not much sleep and felt grouchy? Yup, that's your brain feeling sleep deprived and struggling to navigate the world around it!

Routines help us to feel grounded, safe and secure. This is particularly important for children as by having a consistent routine, your child knows what to expect and when, allowing for more brain space for all the other bits and bobs, such as moving through the grieving process or coming to terms with changes in their lives.

A child between 6-13 requires between 9-11 hours of sleep each night. Getting good quality sleep requires a consistent bedtime routine to be in place. Top Sleep Tip: A warm bath or shower is highly recommended for helping our bodies to realise it is time to go to sleep!



Eating healthily, including your 5-a-day is highly recommended as it helps our brains to feel nourished and reduces those feelings of anxiety. Children could be drinking 6-8 cups of water per day! Our brains are happiest when hydrated!

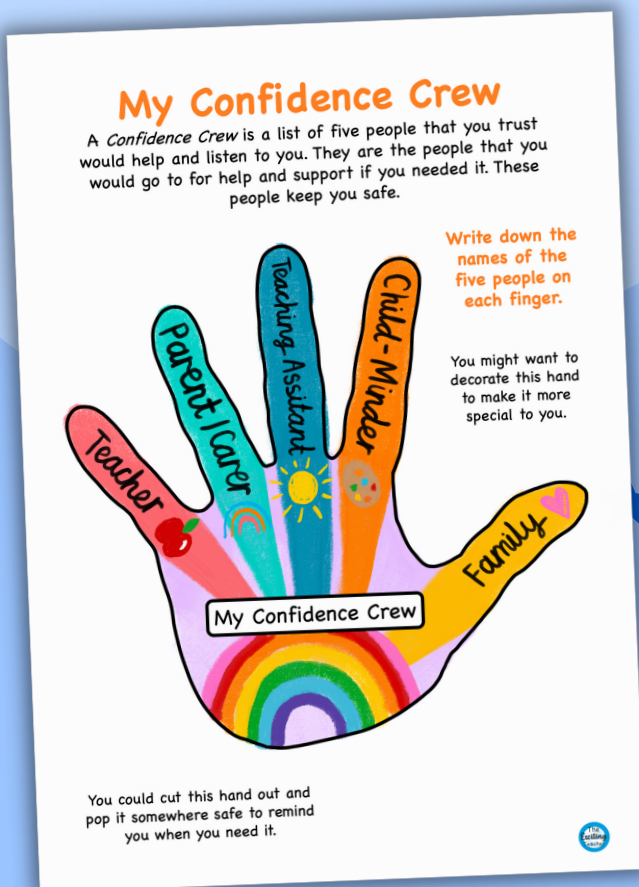


For more resources on sleep, healthy eating and hydration, check out: [members.excitingteacher.com](https://members.excitingteacher.com)

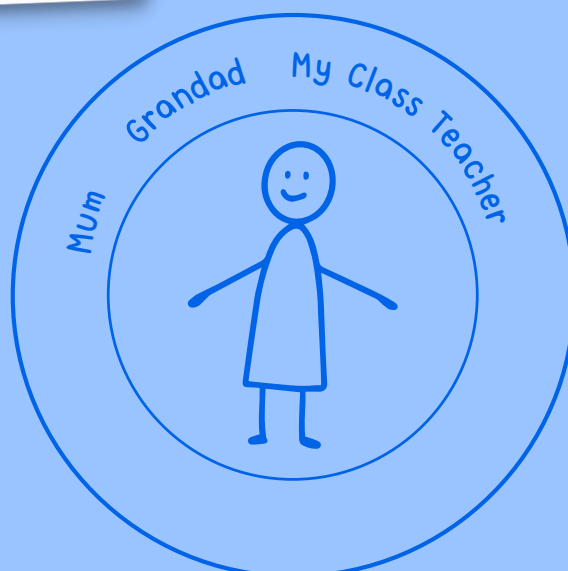
# 5. SUPPORT

You should encourage the child to consider who is there to support them during this time of grief. Ask them to list 5 trusted adults who are there to listen to the child and support them in ways that work for them.

Ask the child to draw around their hand and write one on each finger of an adult who will be there to support them both in and outside of school.



An alternative idea is to draw two circles. Ask the child to write their name or draw a picture of themselves in the center of the inner circle, then in the outer circle write the names of 5 adults who are available to support them.



# 6. SELF-CARE

Self-care helps us to remain both physically and mentally healthy. This can take many forms as it includes a variety of activities from being active, taking time out for yourself, yoga, reading, sleeping, mindfulness and so much more!

TAKE  
TIME for  
your  
SELF

We can work to promote self-care practise amongst young people by encouraging your child to do the things that they enjoy as a means to look after their physical and mental health. Create a list or poster alongside your child with all their ideas for practising positive self-care. Some ideas:

- Start a journal.
- Reach out to a friend.
- Go for a walk.
- Doodle.
- Meditation or yoga.
- Take a bath.
- Water the garden.
- Deep breathing.
- Notice your body.
- Note 3 things you are proud of today.

**DON'T  
FORGET  
ABOUT  
YOU!**

Don't forget about yourself and your mental health. It can be challenging to see our children feeling upset or angry. This is distressing and can lead to having a negative impact on you. Therefore, ensure that you are promoting and modelling positive mental health and wellbeing practise and importantly, ensuring that you are okay. Children rely on having role models who demonstrate how to go about things when they happen, both good and not-so-good.





# 7. ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

There are lots of services available for supporting both adults and young people should they need extra support for their mental health and wellbeing. Here are just a few that we recommend in the UK:

For Children and Young People:

- Childline
- YoungMinds
- MeeToo App
- Kooth
- Local Mental Health Support Team in Schools (depending on area), including CAMHS and EMHPs.

For All:

- Your GP
- Samaritans
- Mind
- The Sleep Charity
- NHS 111 (24/7 FREE Physical and Mental Health Support)
- For emergencies go to A&E or phone 999.

For Bereavement: Grief Encounter, Barnardo's, Winston's Wish, Cruse Bereavement Care, Marie Curie (terminal illness support), The Compassionate Friends (helpline for adults following the death of a child).

BE KIND  
TO  
YOURSELF

YOU ARE STRUGGLING OR YOU ARE  
WORRIED ABOUT SOMEONE ELSE,  
**TALK TO SOMEONE.**