

# Grief and Loss: Supporting Communication and Connection



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**Family Services Lead**

# Introductions

- Penhaligon's Friends – Who are we?
  - Cornwall charity supporting bereaved children and young people and their families.
  - Contact details – [www.penhaligonsfriends.org.uk](http://www.penhaligonsfriends.org.uk)  
Tel. 01209 215889
- Housekeeping
- Health Warning – Emotional content

# Aims For The Session

## Gain an understanding of:

- Childhood grief & loss
- Common reactions children have and how that may differ at different ages and stages
- What you can say/do to help support your child
- What support is available

# Grief and Loss

- **Affects everyone differently**
- **How grief and loss are experienced depends on a number of factors**
- **Grief, Loss and COVID**



# Grief

**Grief:** The normal process of reacting to a loss

Particularly to the loss of someone or some living thing that has died, to which a bond or affection was formed.

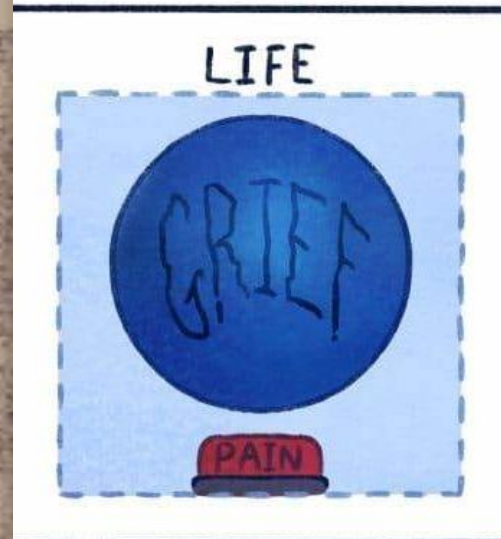
Although conventionally focused on the emotional response to loss, grief also has physical, cognitive, behavioural, social, cultural, spiritual and philosophical dimensions.

(wikipedia)

# Grief

Grief is like the ocean,  
it comes in waves,  
ebbing and flowing.  
Sometimes the water is  
calm, and sometimes it  
is overwhelming. All we  
can do is learn to swim.

Vicki Harrison



"Grief is like an earthquake. The first one hits you and the world falls apart. Even after you put the world together again there are aftershocks, and you never really know when those will come."

~Author Unknown

# Loss

## **LOSS OF RELATIONSHIP**

Separation, Divorce, Death, Moving  
New Baby or Family Member, Parent / Carers Illness, Friendship

## **LOSS OF EXTERNAL OBJECTS**

Toys/Comforters, Robbery

## **LOSS OF ENVIRONMENT**

Changing School, Moving House, Family Separation, Change in Routine,  
Clubs / Activities close

## **LOSS OF SELF**

Abuse, Health, Being Bullied, Moving Area / Country

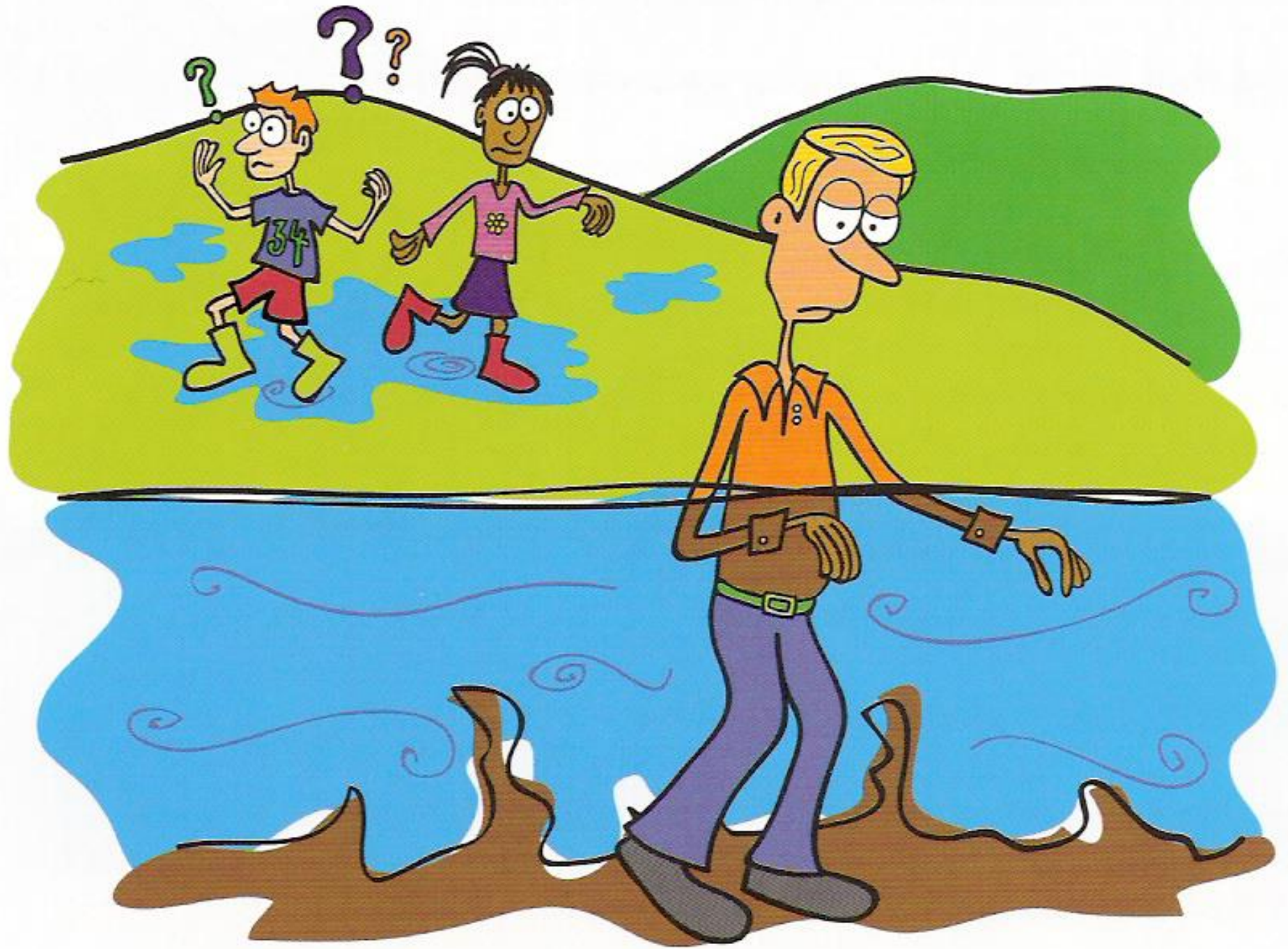
# Children's Understanding and Reactions to Death

“Each person is unique and will deal with a significant death in their own way, therefore there is no right or wrong way to grieve”

(Dent, A)





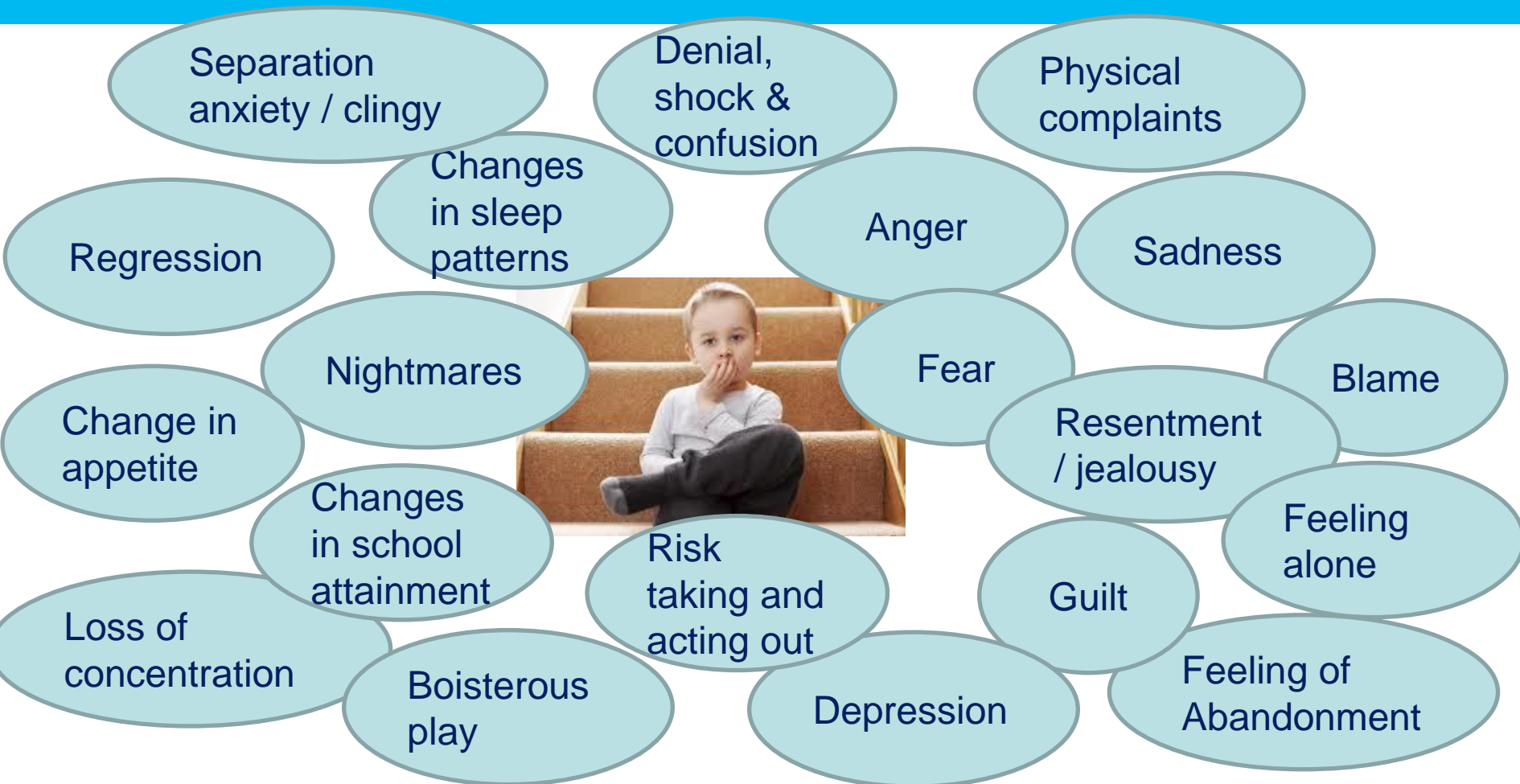


# Children's Understanding & Reactions are Affected By:

- The age and development of the child
- Media and social media
- Vocabulary
- **Past experience**
- Family culture / Religious belief
- Environment
- The cause of the death
- Relationship to the person who has died
- **Reactions of carer and how they are grieving**



# Common Ways Children Respond to Loss include:-



Young people may experience grief again in a new way as they each developmental milestones

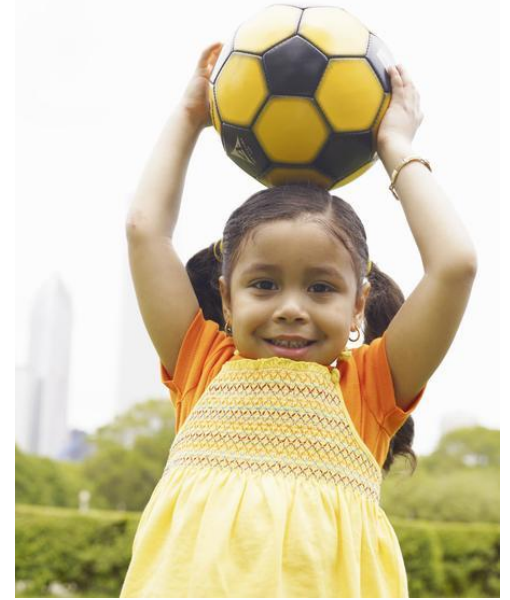
# Adjusting to Life Without that Person

- An aspect of the mourning process includes adapting to the loss of those roles which have died with the person
- Adjustment goes on over time. As they develop children realise in a new way what has been lost through death

**“Grief does not simply disappear, over time it changes waxes and wanes, but losses always have a lasting impact”**



Fiorini, Mullen 2006



# Ages & Understanding



# Babies and Young Children

## They still grieve – it just looks different

- They experience a sense of absence but don't know why
- Most helpless & passive

## Young Children

- Reduced capacity for understanding
- Have an interest in dead things
- Intense emotional demonstrations
- Regressive behaviours; wetting, soiling, sleep disturbances
- Do not understand finality of death & believe death is reversible
- May ask questions over & over
- Helped by their openness



# Ages 5 to 8 years

- × Magical thinking - may feel they caused the death / think of death as a punishment
- × Concerns of guilt
- × Concern with the process of death
- × Repetitive questioning
- × Death / loss is seen as abandonment
- × Intense but brief response
- × Need honest explanations
- × May be more vulnerable as more may be demanded of them to 'be strong'
- × Schoolwork affected
- × Denial and suppression/avoidance seems to increase with age





# Ages 8 to 12 years

- × Fantasy - death personified as ghosts & monsters - scary
- × Magical thinking
- × Difficult transition- Still want to see death as reversible but beginning to see it as final.
- × Behavioural problems - Aggressive outbursts, acting out, suicidal thoughts.
- × May have short attention span / difficulty concentrating
- × Need encouragement to express feelings
- × Protecting adults
- × Desire for complete detail
- × Fantasize & idealize previous relationship
- × Concerns over own health



# Adolescents

- ✗ Understand mortality and death as a natural process
- ✗ Life transitions
- ✗ Death of a parent may be stigmatising
- ✗ Intensity of feeling may lead to repression, avoidance or confrontation – depression, denial, aggression.
- ✗ Self-identity
- ✗ More comfortable with peers
- ✗ Work at making sense of philosophies & teachings
- ✗ Often thrust into role of comforter
- ✗ Often participate in dangerous, risk-taking behaviors which in turn
- ✗ May lead to confrontation with parents/authority figures



# Support

**Most** grieving children will not need support from outside their family and circle of friends. Most children feel supported enough and find healthy ways of grieving. Many will be much helped by a supportive school environment, understanding social circle, and perhaps meeting other bereaved youngsters.

**Some** bereaved children may benefit from one-to-one sessions or other therapeutic encounter.

**A few** children may require further referral to psychological services or other health practitioners.

# Adults Commonly.....

- Worry when their child overly talks about the deceased or doesn't talk about them at all.
- Protect the child from further upset by not initiating discussions.
- Avoid discussions because of own distress.
- Avoid showing their feelings in front of the child in fear of upsetting them further.

# The Importance of Giving Children Information

- ▶ It keeps the children's trust
- ▶ Knowledge can alleviate distress.
- ▶ It can encourage communication within families.
- ▶ Grief can be postponed or more complicated if they do not have appropriate information and the opportunity to be involved in the family's mourning process.



# What Helps a Child or Young Person's Grieving Process?

- **Opportunity to say goodbye**
- **Social support**
- **Permission to express emotions**
- **Meaning making – accurate and balanced**
- **Developing a continuing bond with the person that died**
- **Processing the traumatic nature of the death**

David Trickey – UK Trauma Council

[https://uktraumacouncil.org/research\\_practice/why-some-bereavements-more-difficult-for-children-young-people-and-what-can-help](https://uktraumacouncil.org/research_practice/why-some-bereavements-more-difficult-for-children-young-people-and-what-can-help)

# What Can Parents and Carers Do?

## Try to:

Keep to daily routines as much as possible and identify changes the child may have

Be Honest - Talk to your children using words they understand

Let them and yourself have some fun

Remember children need information a bit at a time – Allow Time

Encourage your children to ask questions and answer honestly and simply

Find ways to involve them when saying goodbye to the deceased and remembering them

Don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it for yourself or for your child

Do involve the School and liaise with any other professionals that may be involved with your child

# What Can We Say?



It's not your fault



Not everyone who gets ill will die – this was very serious



Avoid euphemisms – star in the sky/gone to sleep/lost/gone to a better place – use concrete language



We like to believe that..... Because it helps us feel a little better about not having them with us anymore.



Their body stops working – don't feel pain/need care or food



# Every Young Person is Unique

**You DON'T have to have all the answers – in fact you can't**

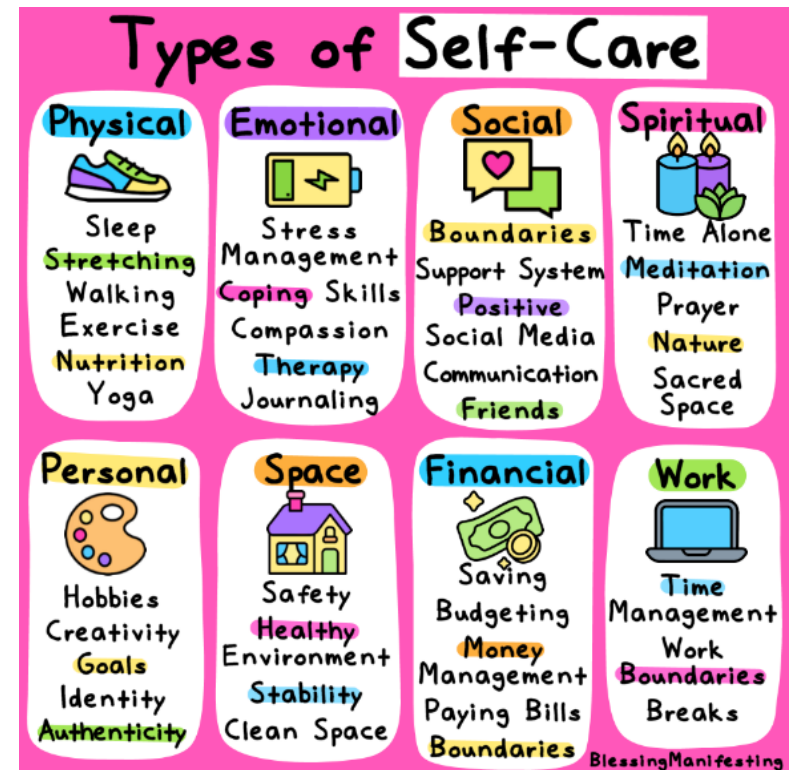


- Stay calm – take a breath and be kind to yourself
- Allow Time
- Listen and acknowledge what they are telling you
- Ask them what they think – be interested and curious
- Never be afraid to say 'I don't know'
- Try to comfort them with their feelings rather than trying to fix them or make them go away

# Looking After Yourself

Parenting can be hard – there's no manual and every child is different

- ❖ Time for your own needs to be met
- ❖ What do you need to be ok?
- ❖ Do you need support for yourself?





Suicide Liaison Service



*The Compassionate Friends*  
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

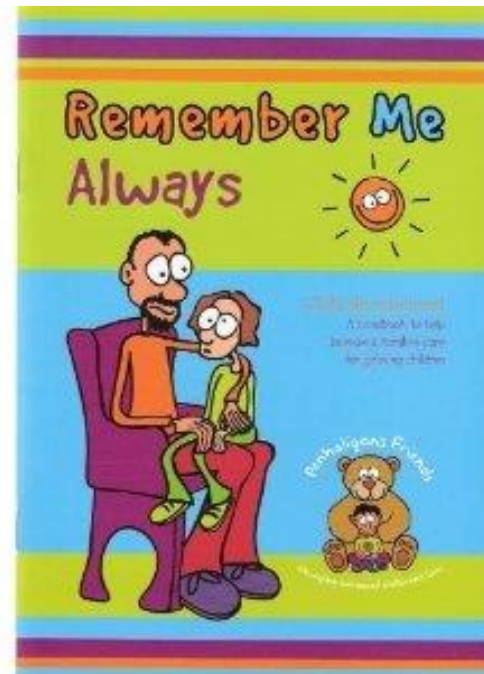


# Further Information

## Free handouts

[www.penthaligonsfriends.org.uk](http://www.penthaligonsfriends.org.uk)

- Telling children.
- Children's reactions to grief.
- Supporting children with special needs.
- Support after suicide.
- Early Years bereavement support.
- Support for bereaved children and families – COVID 19.



And lots more



**WE ALL GRIEVE**

SUPPORTING BEREAVED CHILDREN WHO HAVE  
SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES

**WINSTON'S  
WISH WW**  
Living hope for grieving children



**NEVER TOO YOUNG  
TO GRIEVE**

SUPPORTING CHILDREN UNDER 5 AFTER THE DEATH OF A PARENT

**WINSTON'S  
WISH WW**  
Living hope for grieving children



beyond the  
**rough rock**

Supporting a child who has been bereaved through suicide

**Winston's Wish**  
the charity for bereaved children



**HOPE** beyond the headlines

Supporting a child bereaved through murder or manslaughter

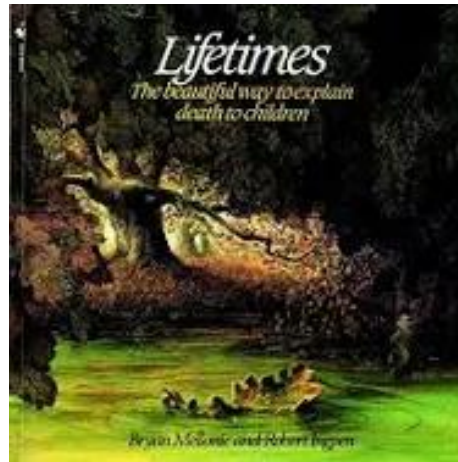
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# Books

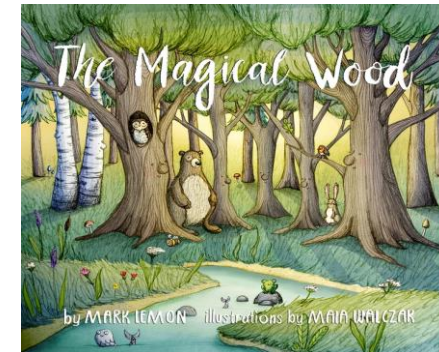
WHY DO THINGS DIE?  
By Katie Daynes



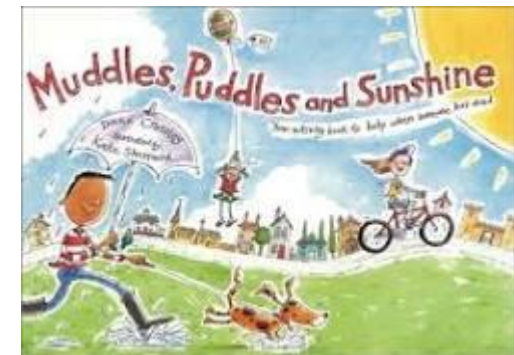
LIFETIMES  
By Bryan Mellonie  
and Robert Ingpen



THE MAGICAL WOOD  
By Mark Lemon



MUDDLES, PUDDLES  
AND SUNSHINE  
By Diana Crossley



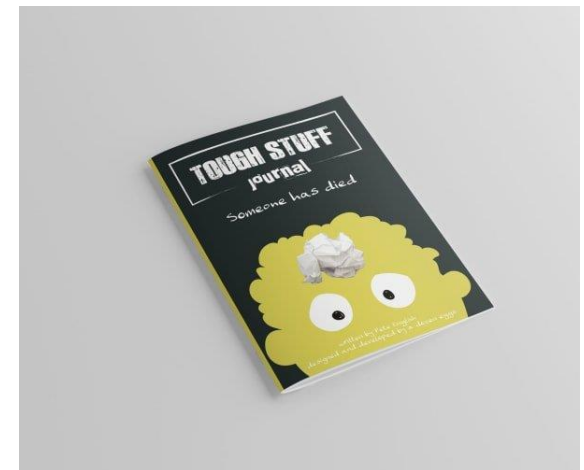
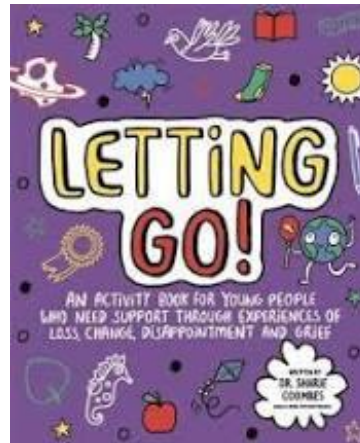
THE INVISIBLE STRING  
By Patrice Karst

# Older Children



SOMETIMES LIFE SUCKS WHEN  
SOMEONE YOU LOVE DIES  
By Molly Carlile

LETTING GO!: An activity  
book for children who need  
support through experiences  
of loss, change,  
disappointment and grief  
By Di Sharie Coobmes



TOUGH STUFF JOURNAL:  
SOMEONE HAS DIED  
By Pete English (At a Loss)

