



# The Archie Foundation

We're here for you  
Supporting Bereaved Children in Grampian



# Support

# Guide



Visit us at [www.archie.org](http://www.archie.org)



Registered Charity SC039521

# Who We Are

Archie's Child Bereavement Service (ACBS) provides support to bereaved children and young people throughout Grampian.

We believe that if children and young people are provided with the appropriate support, information and guidance then they will manage their grief.

Grampian Child Bereavement Network (GCBN) was formed in 2009 by a group of professionals who identified that there was a gap in services for bereaved children and young people in Grampian. In 2019, GCBN joined The Archie Foundation.

ACBS is supported by professionals, who are skilled and highly experienced in supporting children and families. Our volunteer responders are recruited, trained and supported so they can offer effective support to bereaved families.



# Our Services

- ★ A telephone service to give advice and support either in the immediate aftermath or at a later date as issues arise.
- ★ Our home visiting volunteer responder service offers direct support and guidance to children and their families.
- ★ A book gifting service which provides over 50 specialist titles covering all situations and assists families in understanding bereavement together.
- ★ Activity Days to allow bereaved children to meet others, build confidence, have fun and remember their loved one. At these events parents also meet with others over a cuppa.
- ★ Teen Groups to allow teenagers to come together and share experiences while doing fun activities.
- ★ Free training to health, childcare, and education professionals, to build confidence and skills on how best to support a bereaved child. Bespoke training to schools to assist them in responding when a death impacts on a school community.
  - Hospital response offering support and guidance to families where someone has died in hospital and a child has been bereaved.

In 2020, The Archie Foundation secured funding from Children in Need to employ two Bereavement Support Workers whose role is to provide quick time support to children and their families when a loved one dies within an NHS Grampian Hospital.

# Our Aims

- ★ To assist children and young people in accessing appropriate bereavement support in Grampian.
- ★ To raise awareness of the impact of bereavement on children and young people.
- ★ To provide opportunities for children, young people, parents and carers to come together to acknowledge their grief and share in activities and memory work in a safe and supportive environment.
- ★ To provide resources, information and support to families and carers where a child or young person is bereaved, including suitable books to help the child on their journey.
- ★ To provide training, support and information to schools and professionals working with bereaved children and young people.
- ★ To provide opportunities for family support by working directly with children and young people through our responder service.

At ACBS we  
believe that:



- ★ Bereavement is a normal part of life.
- ★ Children and young people who are bereaved should be able to have their loss acknowledged and should be offered the support they need.
- ★ Children and young people grieve in their own way and at their own pace. Age and developmental stage will make a difference to how a child or young person manages grief.
- ★ Whilst children and young people are resilient, they need space and support from adults whom they trust.
- ★ Every child and young person and their experience is unique, as will be their reaction to bereavement, and support should reflect this.
- ★ The relationship the child or young person had with the deceased person will impact on their response and the way they experience their grief.
- ★ The circumstances that led to the death and the impact of this on those close to the child will also affect the way a child or young person manages their grief.





# Advice for



# Parents & Carers

# Young Children

Common responses to loss in younger children are:

- ★ A higher level of anxiety and clinging
- ★ Sleep disturbance
- ★ A need for reassurance
- ★ Asking questions about health
- ★ Acting out death via play
- ★ Anger Regression to an earlier stage of development
- ★ Sore tummies
- ★ Changes in eating patterns
- ★ Tears
- ★ Withdrawal



## Supporting a Child

Common reactions to the loss of a significant loved one may be that the child becomes unsettled and insecure. This can lead to the child not eating or sleeping and becoming very clingy.

Very young children can be affected by the impact of the parent or carer's emotional availability and how this affects their ability to respond to the child's needs so it is really important that parents and carers are able to be supported with regards to their own loss and grief issues.

## Supporting Babies

Babies may be more fretful and unsettled so continuation of established routines will help them to feel secure along with safe care from significant adults.

## Pre School Children

Toddlers and pre school children are unable to understand the permanence of death and may continue to ask when the deceased person is coming back or why they have disappeared. This may be difficult for the parent or carer.

The child may search for the person who has died, and appear to have forgotten that you have told them that the person is dead. They will not understand why significant adults are behaving differently.

Children of this age can be involved in magical thinking, they may believe that it is something they have said or done which has caused the loss and they may need reassurance that this is not the case. They may also believe that the person will come back if they do certain things and again will need reassurance about this.

Behaviour can often regress to an earlier stage of development and some common reactions may be:

- ★ Reverting to baby talk
- ★ Regression in toilet training
- ★ Inability to get to sleep and nightmares
- ★ Seeking constant reassurances and clinginess



## Primary School Age Children

Children in this age group gradually develop an understanding that death is final. They move from magical thinking to a more concrete thinking stage, where they begin to gain an understanding that death means that the person is not coming back. They can flit between the different stages and this can prove scary and confusing for them.

Depending on their age, they may still struggle with understanding changes in the behaviour of significant adults around them.

Sometimes a child's play can become aggressive and he or she can seem to be preoccupied with death. Children may become fearful that the adult who is caring for them will also leave, and this can lead them to seek higher levels of reassurance.

Anxiety about another loved one disappearing from their lives is not unusual and this can lead to greater fear about separation around normal activities such as going to school. In the weeks or months following loss, the child's behaviour can commonly include:

- ★ Sleep disturbance
- ★ Eating problems – over eating or loss of appetite
- ★ Fear of the dark
- ★ Anger and aggressive play
- ★ Regression to an earlier developmental stage
- ★ Difficulties with concentration at school
- ★ Sore tummies and limbs
- ★ Lethargy



## Some suggestions of what the parent or carer can do to help

Try to keep the child in a routine and to remember that, if the child is regressing, then this is a normal reaction and with reassurance and security they will recover. Remember that young children, like adults, will go in and out of grief and some days they may appear to have “moved on” and then the grieving behaviour reappears. Return the child to school as soon as it is practical. School can provide routine and support that can assist children. Speak to the teacher so that the school know what has happened. It is important that there is an understanding of this for the school to be able to respond appropriately to the child and support them. Provide a security item such as a cosy blanket or familiar cuddly toy. This can provide comfort and a feeling of security for the child. Use a night light for reassurance and keep bedtime to a routine. Warm milk and a bedtime story can help. If the child is experiencing nightmares then reassure them and encourage them to tell you about the dream.



Be prepared for unusual and recurring questions, try to answer honestly as children are often quick to know when something they are told is not right. Allow a child to act out their confusion or anger. While for adults it can be upsetting to observe a child playing death or appearing to be acting aggressively with their toys, this can assist a child to process the information and begin to make sense out of it. Often children will replay the same game over and over. Talk to your child and encourage them to talk about the person who has died.

Looking at photos or DVDs and remembering happier times reminds the child that memories are still special and that these have not been lost. Help the child to build a memory box, gathering special items which hold memories of the deceased person and their relationship to them.

Help the child say their goodbyes to the deceased person in a way that is meaningful to them: writing a message to put in a special place, e.g. star and angel tree hangers; lighting a candle; planting a special tree or flowers; going to a special place together can all be helpful. Don't stop crying in front of the child: reassure them that it is okay to show emotion, and that it is your time to be sad. Reassure the child that, while it is okay to cry, it is also alright to laugh and be happy. Sometimes children will talk about 'seeing' the person who has died and ghosts can become a topic of interest. If the child says they have 'seen' the deceased person, don't dismiss it but reassure them that they will always remember the person in different ways. Include the child in arrangements and special anniversaries and encourage them to express their views about how they would like to remember. Sometimes the child may want to keep an item of clothing of the person who has died or perfume or aftershave. Smell is an important sense and the reminder of the smell can provide children with comfort.

Whilst the pace of grief will be unique for each child, remember that the impact of bereavement will have affected them in some way. Initially the child may show no reaction at all and it may come some weeks or months after the death. The timing for the process of grieving can't be pressured or predicted and children need time, space and the opportunity to consider what has happened, the impact of this upon them and their feelings. Reassurance and encouragement to remember the deceased person in a way that they wish to, and that is helpful to them, is important. One of the most difficult tasks for parents or carers can be not to get stressed and this can be particularly difficult when they are grieving themselves. Try to find a peaceful and relaxed time in the day to sit with the child, to read, to play, share news, interact and just be together. If, as a parent or carer, you feel unable to respond to the child as you would want to, due to your own grief, then arrange for a close friend or relative who knows the child to spend time with them each day. Don't feel guilty about this, you too need support and time to grieve.

# Older Children & Teenagers

## Common responses to loss in older children and young people:

- ★ Sleep disturbance
- ★ Changes in eating patterns
- ★ Anger
- ★ Risk taking behaviour
- ★ Challenging behaviour
- ★ Preoccupation about death and dying
- ★ Changes in personality
- ★ Withdrawal



## Suggestions to support a child or young person:

- ★ Don't pressure a child or young person to speak about how they feel – they often can't verbalise this. Give them space, time and opportunity.
- ★ Acknowledge that you are aware that they have lost someone important. Always name the person who has died.
- ★ Be sensitive to changes in their behaviour. They may have difficulty in understanding these; for instance, crying one moment and laughing the next.
- ★ Give them opportunities to talk or to express themselves when they want to. Some children and young people find this easier by drawing, acting out and creative work.
- ★ Tell the truth and the detail about the death in a way that is appropriate to their age. This may need to be done in stages depending on the nature of the death and the age of the child.
- ★ Consider them in decision making and planning the funeral, attendance at the funeral and visiting the grave or a special place to remember the person that they have lost.
- ★ Give them the chance to remember the deceased in whatever way they feel is necessary and is helpful to them.



## Teenagers

Whilst teenagers generally have the same level of understanding of death as adults, at times they can find it hard to manage their emotions. Below are outlined some of the ways in which teenagers may be affected by or react to bereavement.

Mood swings are often experienced by teenagers, but when they are trying to cope with extreme emotions following a death, these can be more frequent, extreme and difficult to understand. Anger is a normal part of grieving but for some teenagers, this can at times feel overwhelming which can lead to them feeling out of control and appearing difficult to control. Some young teenagers may also demonstrate more evident or extreme risk taking behaviours following bereavement.

An increasing awareness of their own mortality can be frightening for young people. This can lead to increased anxiety and fear of death, both of their own, and that of others. Occasionally they may become preoccupied with death focusing overly on morbid things.

Loss of appetite and over eating can also be indicators that a young person is struggling with the emotional impact of the loss of a loved one. Avoidance can be a strategy that a young person adopts, where they try to suppress their emotions.

Avoidance of talking about the person, or spending time with family members, may be ways in which the young person is trying to cope with their grief. Sleep disturbance, difficulty in getting to sleep or in staying asleep can affect bereaved teenagers, they may also just want to spend long periods in bed.

Fear that their feelings and emotions are getting out of control may also be very distressing for teenagers when they have experienced a significant loss.

## What helps?

Acknowledge that grief is normal and that everyone's loss and reaction to bereavement is personal and unique. Reassure them that their feelings and reactions are ok.



Give the young person space, allowing them to talk at their own pace. It can be frustrating for adults who want the young person to talk about how they are feeling, but putting pressure on them can alienate them and make it difficult for them to speak when ready.

Help the young person to find a way to channel their anger. This can be a physical method, through sports or physical activity, art, music, or a feelings focused activity, making a feelings jar or just hitting a pillow or punch bag.

Be open with them. Young people can manage difficult information if given to them in an honest and supportive way. Whilst adults may want to protect the young person, it can lead to them feeling excluded and isolated.

Allow the young person to find some respite from the family home, if they want it. The opportunity to stay with a friend or relative may give them both emotional space and normality when things are difficult.

The young person may find it easier to talk to someone outside of their family, possibly a peer, teacher or family friend. If a close family member has died, then other family members will be grieving and sometimes young people find it hard to share their grief in case they “upset” other people.



Talk about the deceased person, remind young people that learning to live without someone they love doesn't mean memories are lost.

Support the young person to attend the funeral, thanksgiving or memorial service if they want to. Allow them to make up their own mind about what they want to attend.

Support the young person in finding their own ways of marking the death of a loved one and remembering them, such as creating a memory box, framing a special picture or planting a tree.

# Viewing The Body & Attending The Funeral

There are no right or wrong ways of approaching these events, but they need careful consideration, taking into account the age and wishes of the child or young person.

## Viewing the Body

For adults, viewing the body is a very personal decision. Some adults do not wish to view a loved one's body and prefer to remember the person as they were when they were alive. Family traditions and expectations may play a part in this. The decision for a child to view the body of a loved one needs careful and sensitive consideration.

It is important that the child is supported to understand what has happened (within their abilities) and prepared for what the body will look like. The nature of the death and any possible changes to the person they knew and loved, such as disfigurement through accident, need to be considered and whether this may cause confusion or increase anxiety for the child.

Some families will have the body of the loved one home whereas for other families, the body will rest at a funeral parlour. Rituals such as wakes may include the children. Whatever way the family choose, it is important to explain to the children what is happening and why. Try to keep them informed and involved as much as possible in the process and support them to make helpful choices.

Depending on the age and stage of the child or young person, it is helpful to discuss these issues with them so that they can make an informed choice about whether they wish to see the body and who might accompany them.

If the body is resting at the funeral home, it may help to discuss a child viewing the body with staff, who will have experience of supporting families and children with this.

## Attending the funeral

The parent or carer will have to consider whether the child or young person attends the funeral. They may also need to balance what they can manage, particularly if it is a very close loss for them, alongside the desire to protect the child and do what is best for them.

Attending the funeral can be helpful to the child or young person although some people are concerned that witnessing the grief of adult mourners can increase the child's distress. Whilst it is a personal decision, being involved in the funeral can provide the child with evidence of the completion of the ritual of death. It also includes them in the family event, allows them to understand that it is okay for them (and others) to be upset and provides the opportunity for a goodbye with the family.

The decision for a child or young person not to attend needs to be explained and considered with them as appropriate to their age and understanding. This can reduce potential later upset about having been excluded. Not being a part of the opportunity to say goodbye can increase denial of the death.

If the child does not attend the funeral it may be helpful to arrange some special time or event for them to say goodbye properly. If the child or young person does wish to attend the funeral, it can be helpful to arrange for a close friend or relative to be their 'buddy' for the day. This can leave close mourners freer to express emotions and be supported in a way that is helpful to them with the reassurance that the child or young person is being cared for and their needs are being met.

It is important for the child or young person to know what will happen at the funeral and to have clear information about this. Ministers or funeral celebrants may be able to help explain things.

Children and young people can find it helpful to contribute to the funeral in some way. This may be something simple, for example choosing their own flowers, writing a card or adding a special memory for the minister to speak about. All these things can bring a sense of the child being included in the funeral and acknowledges their relationship to the deceased person.

## When you may need to seek professional help

In some circumstances children may be traumatised by death. This may be due to the nature of the death or the child being a witness to the death, or a survivor of the event that led to the death.

If the death was caused by murder, the child is likely to experience a traumatic response. There may also be the added complexity of media involvement. In these circumstances it may help the child to have the opportunity to have some external support.

If the child was involved in the death, for example surviving an event that led to the death of others, it is likely that they will have a traumatic response. They may benefit from having external professional support to address their individual needs.

Loss through suicide can be particularly complicated, leading to a heightened sense of guilt and uncertainty. In such circumstances the opportunity for the child to have professional support and reassurance would be helpful.

Traumatic responses are normal responses to an abnormal event. Trauma can increase the normal emotional response and lead to overwhelming feelings of distress. It is important to remember that, with support, children do recover from trauma and go on to lead healthy and successful lives.



# Training & Consultancy

Our training and consultancy service aims to:

## Training

- ★ Increase awareness of the needs of bereaved children and young people.
- ★ Inform and build knowledge of the impact of bereavement on children and young people.
- ★ Increase and enable professionals and others who are supporting bereaved children and young people to respond and provide appropriate support.
- ★ Provide information, enable and build capacity in professionals and others to support children and young people to manage grief.

## Consultancy

- ★ Provision of information and advice on resources.
- ★ Advice to professionals on responding to and supporting children and their families.
- ★ Direct mentoring to key workers.
- ★ Advice and assistance to organisations on planning and response to emergencies and critical incidents.
- ★ Support to agencies, professionals, organisations and companies on responding to a critical incident.

# Activity Days

Our Activity Days were developed in response to requests for opportunities for bereaved children and young people to get together with others with similar experiences.



We try to balance the chance to meet others, have fun and learn new skills with providing a supportive place for considering feelings and keeping memories safe.



Activity Days have evolved to take account of what children and young people want to do and we are always willing to hear from them.



An additional benefit is the opportunity for bereaved parents and carers to meet parents who are in a similar situation. Parents and carers often find these sessions to also provide a valuable opportunity to speak with our volunteer bereavement responders and professional staff who are providing support for their child or young person. .

To register for our Activity Days just phone or email the ACBS Coordinator (details found on the back page), you will also be added to our mailing list for all future events. We try to organise days in venues with good public transport links. An adult who the child knows and trusts must come along with the child to support them. You do not need to attend all the days - families decide what suits them. There is no cost involved; everything is provided. Around 8 activity days take place each year.

# Fundraising

The Archie Foundation receives no government funding and we rely solely on donations to continue our services. Please get in touch if you would like to fundraise on our behalf. Your money could fund:



**£10**

One of our books gifted to a child or family



**£50**

A craft day, such as making memory boxes



**£100**

A teen activity day, such as climbing



**£150**

A volunteer responder kit bag with books and activities to use with families



**£250**

Our summer picnic



**£1000**

Activity Days for the year



**£10,000**

A year's supply of books



# Here For Children... & Here For You

For more information or to talk to one of the team contact us:



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