

I get to talk about my feelings and emotions.

I can talk to people of a similar age with a similar experience.

They have helped my self-confidence.

I love Simon Says because...

Bereavement Support for Young People



I can just listen if I want to, I don't have to talk.

I am not the only one.

The volunteers listen when I thought no one would.

I've made new friends

They give me support.

They are brilliant.

I've been given helpful advice.

They have taught me techniques to help like writing things down in a letter or journal.

They have taught me it's ok to have fun.

Acknowledgement

The original version of this booklet was written on behalf of Simon Says by Jennie Carlton. Jennie wrote it in loving memory of her son Carl.

We trust that it will offer some hope and understanding to those young people who know someone close who has died or is dying.

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'What do I need to know?'

Sometimes it can be difficult for adults to relate to young people and they forget what it is like to be in their teens and what a confusing time it can be. When someone close dies this can often accentuate the feelings of confusion and anxiety that already exist.



You need to feel 'normal'.

Often, young people who are bereaved will feel anything but normal. You may feel apart from your family, friends, society, even from yourself, as you struggle to come to terms with your loss. The experience of someone dying often exposes people to an aspect of grief themselves that they were previously unaware of.

Denial versus guilt

Denial and guilt both form a huge part of the grieving process and everyone feels loss in their own way, at their own pace.

You may be in denial of the bereavement. You may blame yourself or your parent(s) for the death of your significant person. You may feel the need to 'protect' other members of the family, in particular, the other parent if one parent has died. Adults around you may be in denial and therefore unable to be open to your needs. You may feel you deserve to die as your significant person is no longer alive.

All of this is normal bereavement behaviour. Processing the grief is different for everyone and there is no 'normal' time scale.

The need to belong versus rebellion

Everyone needs a sense of belonging - to be part of the group. Important people who may provide this to you are other young people. This is who you identify with, seek support and approval from and imitate. Alongside this need to belong comes a need to rebel. You may not want to be like your parents or older people. You probably want to be who YOU are, different to what has gone before. There may be resentment towards parents at this time as you may feel the need to be independent, but are unable to do so because of having to study or not being able to get a job.

These aspects of development are likely to become more obvious when a young person experiences the death of someone close.

The importance of friends and relationships

Friends are of vital importance when you have experienced a bereavement. It is important to feel normal and to feel that you belong. You may act as if you don't care about anyone but yourself. You may be unhappy to discuss your feelings with your friends for fear of being seen as 'different'.

Relationships are extremely important, especially at this time and sometimes it might appear that 'Lizzie, aged 16', is only interested in boys instead of studying. The intense need to belong, in this case, in an intimate relationship, often overrides other important issues and sometimes young people become promiscuous when they are bereaved as sex makes them feel 'alive' and provides intimacy and escapism, albeit briefly.

Peer group pressure

Peer group pressure is a powerful force and you may often feel excluded if you do not go with the crowd. Smoking, drug taking and drinking behaviours have all been shown to be strongly linked to peer pressure. It is important to remember that the pressure may not be obvious, but may be more subtle. Peer approval and the need for acceptance within the peer group are THE most important factors at this stage of your life and when someone dies you might be more likely to take risks in an attempt to gain acceptance within the group and to make yourself feel normal.

Taking risks and experimenting

Young people, generally, will often take risks and engage in destructive behaviours. There are several reasons for this expression of energy. Hormones and pent up energy can lead to frustration and anger.

Young people experiment for a number of reasons: excitement, a need to be different, or merely a lack of knowledge. You may engage in dangerous activities at times, but it is important to remember that experimenting is a natural part of growing up. Following a bereavement you might experiment using drugs and / or alcohol to numb the pain of the loss, being careless of your own life, or merely to escape from the reality of your situation.

It is important to remember that this is normal but you should also remember it is a temporary escape and managing to face your new thoughts and feelings will, in the long run, be better for you.



Ritualistic behaviour

Research has emphasised the need for young people to resolve some of their conflicts and express their emotions, at the same time as feeling supported through routines which offer a sense of belonging and a sense of continuity.

Routines contribute to your personal identity. You may invent your own meaningful activities within your peer group and these will allow you to act out your fears and anxieties in an emotionally safe environment.

In our own culture we often expect the bereaved to 'recover' as soon as the funeral is over. Everyone carries on as before, when for you, life has been turned upside down forever. Meaningful rituals and routines can provide a positive outlet for the grieving process within your peer group.

Boundaries and rebellion

It is inevitable that you will test your boundaries as you adapt to your loss. This is normal behaviour and is part of the process of working through the grief and reaching maturity. It enables you to move through your grief into a 'new normal' routine and will help you to move on.



You may have low expectations of yourself and when someone close dies, this can lead to even lower self-esteem and may reinforce your own low expectations. Low expectations from guardians/parents and others can lead to low expectations for you and becomes a vicious cycle. It is important that you use your support network. You will need encouragement and as much praise as possible at this difficult time. Don't be hard on yourself, you need to give yourself time to come to terms with your bereavement.

Adults communicating with young people

Sometimes it can be difficult for adults to relate to young people, they forget what it is like to be a young person. Often, adults are so wrapped up in their own grief they do not recognise the pain the young person is experiencing. You may be unable to express your feelings openly and may become withdrawn, or alternatively want to stay out all hours of the day and night. You may not be able to talk about your emotions and so become frustrated, taking it out on those closest to you.

You may lash out verbally at those closest to you, this is because you are testing your own security which may have been unstable since your bereavement. Try writing your thoughts down in a journal or talk to someone you trust. Understand that sometimes it is easier for adults to avoid arguments by allowing behaviours that they would not generally accept.

The adult may feel exhausted if it is their bereavement too. Established boundaries are essential at this time. You need security and reassurance from those around you. Be kind to yourself.

Emotional energy

Emotions require energy and when we use up emotional energy it needs to be built up again in small steps.

Grieving takes a lot of energy, so it is no surprise that work becomes less of a priority for many young people. In some cultures, when someone dies, the grieving family is allowed to seek comfort in the community and is supported and cared for on a practical level too. There are no expectations placed upon them until they have worked through the grieving process.

Each person has their own healing process to go through and the rate at which this will happen varies, there is no right or wrong answer.



Other losses

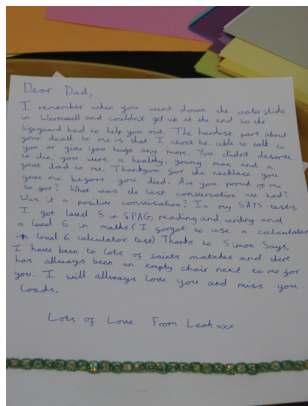
Young people often experience several instances of loss; for example a beloved pet, a parent through divorce, a friend or sibling through sudden death such as a road traffic accident or suicide. Feelings of, 'it could be me', or, 'it should be me' are accompanied by feelings of fear, anxiety and guilt. Adults can sometimes over compensate in an attempt to reduce the pain of the loss, but it is important that you be allowed emotional space whilst making sure that ground rules that were in place prior to the loss are kept as constant as possible!

Strategies for working with bereaved young people

Young people are able to help other young people

Friends are extremely important, using a 'Buddy' system can be very helpful. A friend who shares a similar experience, but is learning to manage their loss, will provide a more positive view of your future and help to reduce any guilt or anxiety you might be feeling.

Simon Says offers support groups for young people, providing a safe, supported and friendly environment for young people who are in various degrees of bereavement grief. Please contact us if you would like more information about the groups. (Contact information is on the back of this booklet).



Bereaved children can sometimes be bullied at school, and it is important for adults in schools to understand that their primary role may move between emotional support and educational, as you may struggle through the grieving process. Talk to someone at school, your tutor, head of year or the school nurse. You may have a teacher you enjoy being with, talk to them.

Positive communication

Within the family setting, communication is vital and this may be encouraged by using different methods to communicate. Simple activities such as watching a television programme together, going for a walk, or eating a meal together can provide emotional security and a space to share feelings. Activities such as preparing and cooking food or car journeys are times when there is a specific focus of attention, and you may choose this time for conversation without the pressure of having to make eye contact.

Writing letters, journals and messages to each other also helps. You can describe your thoughts and feelings and open positive communication without having to verbalise the words.

Setting small goals/targets and raising expectations

Setting small goals and targets that are achievable will help to build confidence if you lack motivation or are in a depressed mood or anxious. They will help you to begin to believe in yourself and to think in terms of your future. There will be one and it will be positive! Confidence will develop with good communication and realistic expectations.

Confidence breeds confidence!!

Activities to aid the healing process

Positive activity

You need to express yourself safely when you are overwhelmed with lots of emotions that a death can make you feel. You might find that creative activities are really useful at this time. Drawing, painting, writing or even singing are all positive ways of expressing emotions and releasing frustration and anger.

Creative activities can provide an opportunity for your voice to be heard, your feelings to be expressed and offer you a chance to be constructive in shaping your own life. You may resist anything formal and might feel self-conscious when you are asked about your own bereavement, but in an informal group you will feel more secure and relaxed and may find it easier to talk about how you are feeling.

Emotional space is important too. You may hide away in your room for a while. This may be helpful as long as you are okay and you have someone available to talk to when needed.

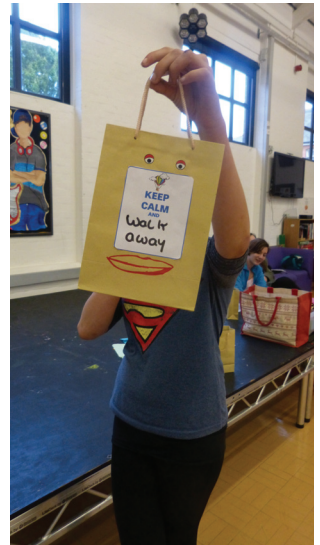
You should try to get out in the fresh air and take some exercise, rather than sitting in front of the television or computer. The exercise and daylight will help to lift a depressive mood. Try to get out for at least half an hour a day, take time to do something you enjoy doing, don't feel bad about having happy times, it is ok and part of the healing process.



Recovery?

It is important to understand that we are looking for adjustment and acceptance rather than recovery. Life is different for the people left behind when someone dies and coming to terms with this is a part of grieving. Many people continue the relationship with the person who died. They do this by sharing stories with people who knew them or by believing that they are somehow still able to influence the living.

This has become an accepted part of grieving, and nobody should be expected to 'recover' from the death of someone.



If you are a young person who has experienced the death of a relative or friend

Ask yourself the following questions:-

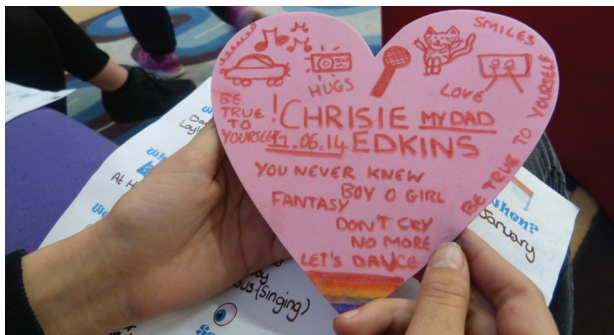
- Do you have someone who you can confide in?
- Are you able to talk openly about your feelings eg, anger, sadness, fear, anxiety?
- Do you feel you lack the energy to do anything?
- Do you feel really grown up one minute and like a child the next?
- What do you do to make yourself feel better when you feel bad?
- Where do you go to get away from it all?
- Do you have a place to write things down?
- Are you able to talk about the person who has died?
- Do you have a memory box, photographs, tickets, items of clothing, anything that helps you to feel that the person is still a part of your life and a safe place to keep them?
- Are you able to have your own space?
- What would you say to your friend if someone close to them had died?
- What would you want to do for your friend in this situation?



If you have difficulty answering these questions and you feel you need some support and advice, please do not hesitate to contact Simon Says.

And remember

- It is normal to be sad when someone dies
- It is okay to cry, in fact, it is healthy to do so
- It is ok to be happy and laugh too
- Set small goals and targets for yourself, this will help to increase your confidence when you succeed
- Creative and sporting activities can be really useful at this time. Drawing, painting, writing, running, swimming and even singing are all positive ways of expressing emotions and releasing frustration and anger
- Be kind to yourself, it is going to take time.



Comments by bereaved teenagers attending Simon Says support groups



What has been helpful:

- writing a journal
- writing a letter to the person who died
- friends who listen no matter what; who have been in a similar situation; who are also grieving
- talking to someone who knows about suicide
- people making time for me
- rituals like memorial services
- playing their favourite song
- drawing a picture of the person
- cards from friends and friends calling in
- student health service
- understanding teachers who show support if and when required

What has been unhelpful:

- study and school work pressure
- friends who don't understand or who are hypocritical, saying they understand when you know they don't
- parents saying you shouldn't cry
- teachers think they understand, being nosy, putting pressure on you, being insensitive
- people asking questions, demanding answers when you don't feel like talking, saying 'snap out of it', spreading rumours, always bringing it up, putting their foot in it

What has been the most difficult:

- being expected to be 'back to normal' after a certain time, for example 6 months
- being where the person who died used to live and them not being there
- going past the place where they died
- selling and removing their clothing and possessions
- not being able to talk about it because it happened a long time ago and so people don't mention it
- blaming myself
- not being able to cry at home
- having to explain why I'm crying and not wanting to talk about it – so it's better not to cry
- special days and anniversaries
- every one supporting our parents and telling us to support them – what about us?
- not being told the facts – the truth being kept back
- seeing parents cry

Alternative 'Goodbyes'

You may not have been able to attend the funeral, for whatever reason but there are other positive ways in which you can be involved. If the funeral happened some time ago and you have regrets that you did not attend, it is never too late to have a memorial or other ceremony that gives you the opportunity to say 'goodbye'. It could be linked to an important date eg date of their death, or birthday.

- Visit the grave or other special place, for example where the ashes were scattered
- Visit a place with special memories
- Create a special place of your choosing
- Visit a place that you went to regularly



Some of these ideas may make the occasion special:

- Hold a small ceremony with specially chosen music, poems and tributes
- Bring a picnic and include some of the favourite foods of the person who has died
- Prepare something to leave in the 'special place' – flowers, a poem, a toy
- Release helium-filled balloons to which messages are attached on labels
- Light a candle and share special memories with each other
- Start a collection of memories from family and friends of the person who has died

A charter for bereaved young people

“A child can live through anything provided they are told the truth and allowed to share the natural feelings people have when they are suffering” Eda Le Shan.

- 1. Enough information**
Bereaved young people need answers to their questions. They need information that clearly explains what has happened, why it happened and what will happen now
- 2. Being involved**
Bereaved young people should be asked if they want to help with important decisions that will affect them (such as planning the funeral, remembering anniversaries)
- 3. Family involvement**
Support for bereaved young people should include their parent(s). It should respect each young person's confidentiality
- 4. Meeting others**
Bereaved young people can be helped by meeting other young people who have had similar experiences
- 5. Telling the story**
Bereaved young people have the right to tell their story. This may be through drawings, letters or puppets. The stories can be heard, read and seen by people important to the young person
- 6. Expressing feelings**
Bereaved young people should feel comfortable, showing all feelings that go with grief such as anger, sadness, guilt and anxiety. They may need help to find ways to do this
- 7. Not to blame**
Bereaved young people often feel they are to blame for the death. They may need help to understand that this is not true!
- 8. Established routines**
Bereaved young people should continue with interests and activities they have enjoyed if they choose
- 9. School response**
Bereaved young people can benefit from a positive response from school or college
- 10. Remembering**
Bereaved young people have the right to remember the person who died for the rest of their lives. This may involve reliving memories so that the person becomes a comfortable part of the young person's ongoing life story

Every young person wants to be heard

- Who is listening?

What will help?

Most young people, at some time, say that nobody is prepared to listen to them. Are you sure you are actively listening to the young person whose father, mother, brother, sister, friend or grandparent has died? We make assumptions about the relationship the young person had with the person who has died, when we fail to listen fully. Type of death, circumstances surrounding the death, relationship with and age of the person who died have all been shown to have an effect on the grieving process. Listening means being available, not appearing to be in a rush and listening to what is NOT said as much as what the young person does say.

Child or adult?

Many young people may experience the death of a close friend or sibling through sudden death caused by a road traffic accident or suicide, and they will need time to adjust to the loss. Young people will experience many of the same emotions as children. What we need to remember, however, is how these years can be confusing for even the most emotionally stable and secure teenager. There are so many pressures in the modern world and so many choices. Young people are trying to become independent, but still need the warmth and security of a loving family as they continue to develop.

As adults, our expectations of young people sometimes vary according to our own needs, adding further confusion to an already confusing time. Frequently, adults expect the young person to take on the role of the adult who has died, for example, telling a teenage boy that he is the man of the house now. These are meant as words of encouragement but may be heard by the young person as an expectation that they should be more grown up and not allowed to show their emotions. Young people will often say, "One minute you treat me like a child, the next minute you expect me to be grown up. Which one am I?"

The young person is unsure as to whether they are child or adult. They are trying to work out their own identity and values. However, it is normal to feel lost and child-like when you are experiencing loss. The young person is looking for security and consistency and when they are bereaved they feel that this is lost. They may want to please the surviving parent and yet they may resent them at the same time.

They will feel huge loss and insecurity as they struggle to find their own identity amongst this uncertainty for the rest of their lives. This may involve reliving memories so that the person becomes a comfortable part of the young person's ongoing life story.



What to do if you are a parent or guardian of a young person who is bereaved

Summary of points to remember

- Encourage clear and open communication
- Help to raise expectations and build confidence
- Reinforce positive behaviours
- Set small goals/targets to encourage positive behaviour
- Encourage creative and/or sporting activities
- Allow 'time out' – emotional space for the young person
- Allow time out for yourself. Maybe you need some emotional space
- Perhaps you need the help of other professionals and/or colleagues
- Be consistent with your approach
- Make sure the school / college are aware

Simon Says support groups

Aims and objectives of our group

- To give support to bereaved children and young people in Hampshire.
- For children and their carers to meet others in a similar situation to them and know that they are not the only ones to have lost someone special.
- Our groups are tailored around the needs of the families in a safe, friendly and informal atmosphere.
- Past themes include: Happy memories, change, relationships, guilt, anger, stress, sadness, fears and worries.
- Children and young people take part in therapeutic activities eg. Memory boxes, scrap books, decorated candles and coloured sand jars.
- These activities encourage children and young people to sit together and talk about their bereavement and related issues whilst busy with the craft.
- With this support the children will find it easier to talk about their feelings in the wider community.
- Those who attend the groups are able to attend as and when they require and for as long as they feel necessary.

Helpful websites

simonsays.org.uk	Child/Adolescent Bereavement Support Hampshire.
winstonswish.org.uk	Help for grieving children and their families.
childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk	Childhood bereavement.
hopeagain.org.uk	Specifically for young people aged 12-18. Information and interactive.
cruse.org.uk	All aspects of bereavement. Some information for children.
childline.org.uk	Free national telephone helpline for children and young people. Information on bereavement.
griefcounter.com	Helps bereaved children & young people rebuild their lives after a death.
papyrus-uk.org	Provides resources & support for those dealing with suicide, depression or distress – particularly teenagers & young adults.
riprap.org.uk	Helps children who have a parent with cancer.
uk-sobs.org.uk	Those who are left behind after a suicide can be helped by talking to others who have experienced a similar loss.
supportline.org.uk	Confidential emotional support for children, young people & adults.
teenissues.co.uk	Internet based unique reference point for teenagers to find answers to commonly experienced issues.
tcsiblingsupport.org.uk	Support and information for siblings after a death. Pen-pal link for over 16's.
childbereavementuk.org	Support, information & training when a baby or child dies, or when a child is bereaved.
seesaw.org.uk	Grief support service for children and young people. Support for schools.
mosaicfamilysupport.org.uk	Individual, family and group bereavement support - Dorset.
daisysdream.org.uk	Child bereavement support - Berkshire.

Please see the Simon Says website for a list of useful books and up to date information. Follow us on:



Simon Says Child
Bereavement Support



@SimonSaysCBS

It's ok to be you.

Get help from school, teachers, classmates and friends.

Get help from others to get through it.

Give yourself permission to talk.

Talk to someone, don't bottle it up.

Don't blame yourself.

Have people around you that you trust.

It's ok to have fun.

You are not the only one.

Be kind to yourself.

Make school aware.

Don't take it out on yourself.

It's ok to cry.

What advice would you give another teenager...