

# **Coping with Death**

**- some practical thoughts when helping children through the process of grief**

afraid of going to bed at night. Using the word 'lost' could also introduce a hope that the dead person may be found.

- Reassure your child that other healthy family members, including themselves, have a long healthy and happy life ahead of them.
- Older children may need reassurance over arguments they may have had with the person who has died. Reassure them that the person who has died is now at peace and is happy with God and ourselves.

### ***Ways of Remembering***

- In the early stages of bereavement it may seem far too painful to worry about mementos but later many people find such things helpful. Ask your child if there is any particular item they would like to have. It could be important that you let all significant adults know how special this is to the child.
- It may be helpful to visit together places which hold special memories.
- Look through photographs together and share memories and stories.

Please remember that you belong to our parish and school family and we will help and pray with you. If we can be of any further help please contact:

*Father?????? - St ??????? Mr?/Mrs?/Miss?*

*Tel: ??????????*

*Head Teacher all schools in Parish.*

Please feel free to share this leaflet with anyone who you think could be helped by its content.

continuing support for you and you will be in their prayers. Do not hesitate to talk to them. Keep them informed of anniversaries and birthdays that might be particularly sensitive times for you all.

- Talk to your child about his or her friends. Explain that friends, yours too, often find it difficult to know what to say or how to help.
- Make sure you always arrive on time to meet your child.

### ***Answering Awkward Questions***

- Young children tend to know more than you think. They will notice a change of atmosphere at home and may overhear adult conversations. Try to keep them informed as to what is happening rather than letting them hear things second hand.
- Be prepared for unusual and or repeated questioning.
- A child's question may be more straight forward than it appears. 'Where has x gone?', may not require you to delve into deep theology. It could be simply about the location of the grave.
- Try to be open and honest with your child and admit when you don't know the answers. This is a process you are going through together.
- Explain that the dead person can no longer feel pain, or heat, or cold. This may relieve some of the child's anxieties about burial/cremation.
- Some phrases cause confusion and should be avoided. Talking about death as a long sleep may make the child

Death is the one sure thing that will happen to all of us. As Children of God we firmly believe in resurrection, but the painful experience of bereavement hurts deeply and is felt as intensely by children as well as adults. If a close family member has died you yourself will be grieving so you have to manage your own grief *and* the distress of the child.

One of the most difficult problems at the time of a death is what to tell young children. There are no easy answers but we hope that this little booklet, together with our prayers and any help we can give, may assist you at this difficult time.

## **Saying Goodbye**

- The funeral service is a Liturgy of Thanksgiving for the life of the person who has died, a celebration of their gifts and our opportunity to say goodbye. If a child wants to go let them make the choice. It's okay to go. It's also okay not to go.
- At funerals people will be sad and cry. Sometimes a child would like to have an input into the service. Your school or parish should be able to support them to do this, perhaps by choosing a favourite song or reading.
- If a child chooses not to go to a funeral look for other ways of giving thanks to God and celebrating the life of the person and saying goodbye. Encourage the child to talk or write about the person. Perhaps they would like to light a candle either in Church or at home.
- When a baby dies shortly after birth it may be helpful for older brothers and sisters to be alone to say hello and goodbye by themselves.
- When a sibling dies, the child may need to be given the choice as to how to say goodbye. Long term support may be essential.

## ***Coping with Grief - no blue print***

- Every child will respond differently to bereavement depending on age, temperament and many other things. Reactions include tantrums, denial, feelings of guilt, irritability, tiredness, displaying indifference, or unusually good or quiet behaviour.
- Reassure your child that s/he is not to blame for the person who has died.

- Try to maintain as normal a routine as possible. Children need to remain within the family home and not moved to a 'seemingly protected' environment.
- Don't hide your own grief. Seeing you grieve and talking with you about the person who has died may help a child express his or her own feelings.
- Drawing and playing may help young children work through their grief and express their feelings. Older children may like to keep a journal of their thoughts and feelings.
- Suggest to children books they might like to read exploring themes of loss and bereavement. A list of helpful fiction and non fiction books may be available from school.
- Reassure your child that they do not have to feel guilty about having fun. Explain that the person who has died would be happy at the thought of children enjoying themselves.
- Try not to burden older children by expecting them to be brave or take on the role of the person who has died.

## ***School***

- Remember that your child may be scared of leaving you or the rest of the family in case another death occurs when they are away.
- Remember though that going to school is a way of maintaining a degree of normality. It may also be the only place where a child can escape the atmosphere of grief at home.
- Keep in contact with your child's teacher to see how your child is coping. Explain to school how you have approached the death with the child. Your school and parish will provide