



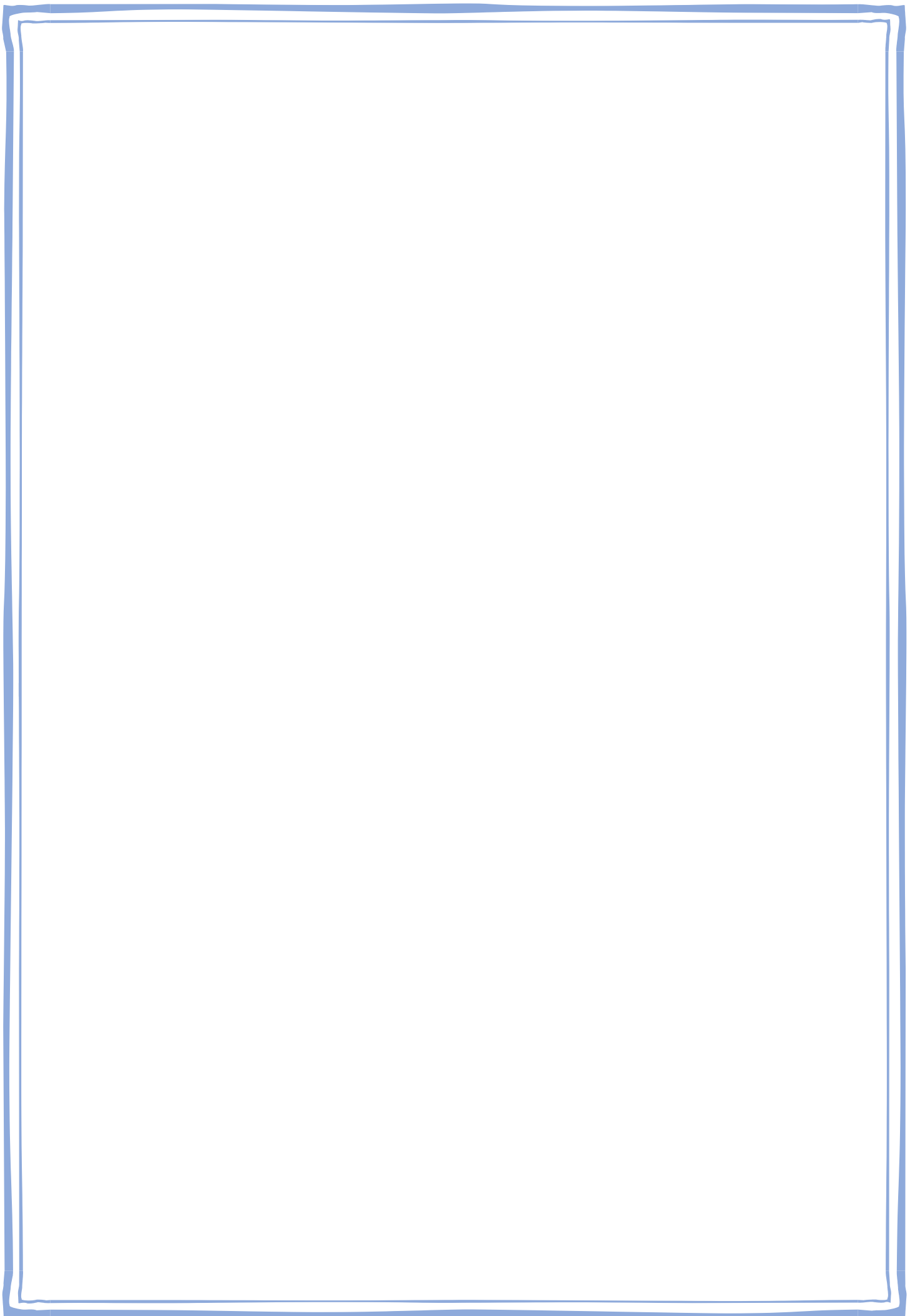
*Supporting bereaved children*

## **Mosaic Parent/Carer Bereavement Information Pack**



[www.mosaicfamilysupport.org](http://www.mosaicfamilysupport.org)  
01258 837071

Registered Charity no: 1158138



Dear Parent/Carer

Coping with the death of a loved one is the most traumatic and painful experience any family can ever go through. We know that nothing can bring a loved one back but it is our hope at Mosaic that we can help support you and your family with any advice or information you might need at this time of loss.

Mosaic Supporting Bereaved Children is a charity that is committed to helping families following the death of a family member or a significant person. We offer bereaved children and families both pre and post bereavement counselling and help with early bereavement support. Children who are referred to us for bereavement counselling are also invited to our activity days and residential weekends where they will have the opportunity to meet other children who have had similar bereavement experiences.

We know that not every child or young person will need bereavement counselling, as every child will grieve differently and in their own way, however they will all need the support of the people who care around them during this time.

At Mosaic we recognise that if you are a parent or carer of a bereaved child your own supports are essential at this time in helping you to support your child. Families that grieve together can encourage children to share and talk about their feelings and help them start to process what has happened. To help parents/carers following a death in the family - we have put together this Parent/Carer Bereavement Pack which we hope you will find helpful. Your pack will be given to you with leaflets that we hope will support your own individual needs as a family. However further leaflets and information will be available also on our website [www.mosaicfamilysupport.org](http://www.mosaicfamilysupport.org).

Mosaic Parent/Carer leaflets available are: -

- Ways to Support Your Child Following a bereavement
- Talking about death
- How to break sad news
- Understanding children's bereavement responses
- Children's understanding of death
- Responding to frightening events
- School support
- Funerals/Saying Goodbye
- Preparing a child to view the body
- Remembering activities
- Supporting children bereaved by suicide
- Supporting children bereaved by violence/murder/manslaughter
- Supporting bereaved children with Special Needs
- Looking after yourself
- When to get professional help
- Helpful organisations

We hope that you will find this Pack useful. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or if you would like to talk to someone from Mosaic about your child. We can be contacted by phone, email or social media.

Mosaic – Supporting Bereaved Children

Dorset wide support for bereaved children, young people and their families

[www.mosaicfamilysupport.org](http://www.mosaicfamilysupport.org)

[01258 837071](tel:01258837071)

## WAYS TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD FOLLOWING A BEREAVEMENT

We all find it hard to cope when someone we love dies. It is particularly difficult when you are trying to support your family when you are also struggling with your own grief. We are all unique and will cope with the death of someone important in our own way. However, as a parent it can be worrying when you are experiencing different grief responses within the family. You may for example have one child showing their emotions openly, with another silent/withdrawn and another acting as if nothing has happened. All these grief responses are normal – it can be helpful to remember that we are all individuals and it is your child's way of coping with what has happened. It is hard for any parent to see their child in the pain of grief and we have set out below what we hope will be helpful information on how you can best support your children with their grief.

This information has been put together through our own experiences working with bereaved families and from feedback from the young people themselves.

### Let them know it's ok to feel different emotions

Children may feel a range of emotions, confused, upset, angry, sad or indeed nothing at all. The key is to let them know that it is ok to feel and express different emotions when grieving the loss of a loved one - **all these emotions are normal when we are grieving**. Younger children may swing from feeling distressed one minute to acting as if nothing has happened the next. Very young children are unable to deal with strong emotions for long periods of time. So remember they are still grieving but in their own way – encourage them to show their emotions and let them know it is also ok to play and have fun - it is their way of coping with their grief feelings.

### Showing your own feelings

Grief is exhausting for the whole family for both adults and children, so it can help when families share their grief together. It's natural for parents to want to protect their child from the intensity of their own grief and the need to 'be strong for them'. By hiding your own feelings this can communicate to children that they also need to 'be strong' and hide their feelings. So let them know that it is ok to feel strong emotions when grieving, that they can talk to you about their grief or if they prefer with another relative or friend. If they do not want to talk that is ok too – some young people may find it hard - or are not ready to talk. If so support them by giving them opportunities to talk when they are ready.

### Keeping to routines

When a loved one dies, understandably this will have a huge effect on the whole family and keeping to routines can be difficult to do at first. However whilst everything in a child's world appears different - keeping to routines can help to create the stability for a child that some things have not changed. Encourage children to keep to routines/activities as this will create normality for them and will also help them to link into their friends and other people around them for support. It is a normal grief response for children to feel 'clingy' and anxious following a death in the family.

Although it is important to acknowledge these feelings, gentle encouragement to keep to routines will help them to feel more confident in coping with the difficult emotions they are feeling.

### **Reassurance they are not at fault**

Sometimes children, particularly young children can blame themselves. They may remember an argument, or a time when they were naughty etc. or have regrets about something they had said. They may need reassurance from parents/carers that nothing they said or did could have changed what has happened. Also letting them know that these feelings are normal when a loved one dies.

### **Expect behaviours may change**

Don't be surprised if younger children revert back developmentally to earlier stages for example such as wetting the bed or having tantrums etc. This will be temporary in most cases and an understanding that this is normal will help to reassure everyone that this will pass and is a normal response to their grief.

Children and young people will often communicate their feelings through their behaviours and any behavioural difficulties already present may escalate. It is important that although, children are grieving – you still keep to behaviour strategies already in place. It can be hard for any parent to discipline a child when they are grieving, however in doing so this will help children know that this is something that has not changed. Along with the behavioural strategies their feelings will also need to be acknowledged and this can be an opportunity to support them in finding other ways that they can express their emotions more positively. Sharing ways that help you calm down when you are feeling angry and upset ie. breathing, walking in the garden, distractions etc. can help to start a discussion often about what can help them. Ask your child what they think might work for them and help them to build up their own 'emotional tool box' of coping with difficult feelings. For some children this may be writing their feelings down in a journal, reading or doing something active. This will need practice and encouragement and may not always work well at first. However giving lots of praise when your child has used a positive way of coping with their intense emotions instead of acting out will help to build their confidence and resilience in coping.

### **Reassurance what will happen now?**

Death can cause a great many complications about the day to day running of a family. Children can become very anxious about the future and what will happen now that their loved one has died. It can be helpful to give clear information to your child and offer reassurance if this is possible. However, they may also need to have some preparation of any changes that may occur e.g. moving home, school etc. It is also ok to say that you don't know what will happen, but will talk to them when you have a better idea. Even when there are lots of questions about the future, children who are kept informed often cope better with this uncertainty, as thinking they are not being told can be more stressful. At a time when there may be lots of changes ahead as a family it is always important to reassure them whatever happens in the future - they will always be safe, cared for and loved.

### **Ensure there is a consistent nurturing person to support them**

All children particularly younger ones may need lots of cuddles and physical contact during this time. Your child may be more clingy and anxious about leaving you or other family members. This is a very normal response following a death in the family and will usually improve in time. However gentle encouragement to keep doing activities and praise when they have successfully coped with their separation anxiety will help to rebuild confidence with their ability to cope with these feelings. Again all children are very different and some may not want a lot of physical comfort, particularly teens who may prefer time alone or to be with their friends as a way of coping. For teenagers, friends will be an important support and they may feel safest with them. As a parent/carer of a teenager it can be hard to know how to support your teen but by giving them opportunities and letting them know that you are there when they are ready to talk will reassure them they can do so.

### **Let them know it is 'ok to have fun'**

Younger children will often make sense of their world through play and it is important to encourage them that it is still 'ok to play and have fun'. It is often difficult for children to express their feelings verbally and play is a great way for them to express and make sense of the feelings they are having. Children will often act out difficult feelings through their play. As a parent/carer you can use play also to help children with their understanding of what has happened. It is often easier to 'talk through a puppet' and ask questions about what has happened for some children than talk openly. So be creative with children as play is the language that they understand. Using drawings, pictures and stories can aid starting difficult conversations and helping your child ask any questions that might be troubling them. But importantly play is a way of them letting go of their stress and simply for them to have fun.

### **Create memory activities and ways of remembering**

Children can often struggle to remember a parent who died when they were very young. So creating a memory box or memory book of special times together with their loved one can be a very precious reminder they can keep. For example, a jar with post it notes to put in e.g. 'funny things my Dad said' can help to record and keep simple memories that might otherwise get lost. Memory activities such as this can be really helpful at any age for children and teenagers to remember their loved one. See the pack for examples of other memory/memorial activities children/young people can do.

Some families may like to create a memorial or a special place where they can go to remember their loved one e.g. on anniversaries and birthdays. This may be the grave for some families, for others this may be a memory of a special place that was shared with their loved one. Children, who choose not to attend a funeral or have been unable to do so, will benefit from having a form of ritual or memorial to say their goodbye to their loved one. Getting your child involved in choosing the special place or how they would like to create a memorial can be really helpful in processing their grief. However, some children may prefer not to - let them know that this is ok to.

## Grief has no timing

Some children will take longer to process their grief than others. Grief never goes away but in time children will start to adjust to the death and life will become easier. However, it is important to keep awareness that grief feelings can be triggered, particularly around significant dates in their lives. At these times children may need some extra support or someone to talk to in school. Therefore, let school staff know so they are aware if they see your child having any difficulties with i.e. concentration, behaviour, getting emotional – **they will know that these are grief responses**. In a busy school life significant dates can often be forgotten and school staff will be pleased to be reminded so they can support your child. Children are very resilient in nature and with good supports around them from family, friends and school they can cope and adjust well to life with their grief.

## Self care

**Remember you are important too.** As a parent/carer you can often forget yourself whilst supporting your children's grief. Asking for support from your own family and friends is essential so that you can best help your family. It is not a sign of weakness or a sign that you are not able to cope, asking for help from others. Don't expect too much of yourself managing life, your family's grief and your own can feel exhausting. People are often wanting to help but don't know how they can? Let them know what support you need, this may be practical or emotional - but reaching out can really make a difference. In this pack there are leaflets on Self Care and Helpful Services with some suggestions you may find helpful for you and your family.



## TALKING ABOUT DEATH

Talking to your child about the death of someone close may be the hardest thing you have ever done or will ever do.

Yet to keep talking about the person who has died – offering information, remembering memories and stories, and sharing feelings – is one of the most important things you can do to help your child as they journey through grief. One of their greatest fears may well be that they will forget the person who died.

When children ask difficult questions, there is no automatic need to give a long explanation. It is often best to start by asking them 'what do you think?' and finding out what they already know first – and then building on their answer.

Younger children may be confused by some of the everyday expressions that people often use when someone dies, such as describing the person as 'lost', 'gone' or 'passed away'. It is often with good intention that adults might want to soften the reality of what has happened when talking to a child. However, it is best always to give accurate child friendly information keeping your language simple and direct. Saying that someone has 'died' or is 'dead' is honest and will help to avoid confusion. Leave spaces for children to ask questions and check their understanding of what has been said. Younger children will need short bite sized pieces of information, which will need to be repeated again to help them understand.

At Mosaic these are some comments we have received from bereaved children:

**'We've lost your mother'.** *'I worried that she had been lost and that no one was looking for her?'*

**'Granny has gone to sleep'.** *'I remember it made me worry that my mum and dad would go to sleep and not wake up; I didn't like going to sleep after I heard that. I remember Mum and Dad had difficulties getting me to sleep for a while after that when I was little'.*

Even the language we use with the very best intentions of giving appropriate and accurate descriptions can sometimes confuse a child. Here are some examples of misunderstandings that children have shared with us:

**'Someone attacked daddy in his heart but I couldn't see the cuts.'** (His father had a heart attack.)

**'They told me my baby sister was born dead. But how could she be both?'** (Her sister was stillborn.)

The language surrounding funeral rites can also confuse children. Children who are asked if they want to see their mother's body have asked: 'Why not her head too?' Similarly, when people talk of burying or cremating someone's body, children can wonder what happens to all the other parts of the body.

Children who have always been told to avoid fire and flames may be alarmed at the idea that their loved one's body is to be burnt. Therefore explaining what happens at a cremation can be helpful to children. Encourage them to ask questions and if you don't have the answers let them know that you can find this out together (see leaflet on Funerals/Cremations in pack). Funeral directors are a great support with helping families with explanations and information and will often be happy to help with any questions.

### Family beliefs about death

Families will try to tell their children what they believe about life after death. Some families may believe in a heaven or another place beyond this world. Some may believe that the person who has died is a star, or an angel, or is 'all around us'. Some may believe that the dead person will be reborn in some form. Some may believe that death is an ending and nothing else.

Whatever a family belief is – it is best to encourage children to ask questions about what they know and have heard and try to answer any worries they may have – it is also ok to say you don't know. Helping children to learn about what death means and about differing beliefs they will hear from others can be confusing. It is best to use simple explanations to help their understanding. This is a suggestion that can be adapted to your own beliefs as a family:

***'People have all sorts of beliefs about what happens after someone dies. We know that they can't come back and visit us or ring on the phone. Being dead isn't like being in another country. When a body is dead it cannot talk, breathe or do the things it did when it was alive. When someone is dead you can no longer see them anymore. These are some of the things that people believe ..... and I believe this ..... I wonder what you believe? You may change what you believe as you grow older'.***

Particularly younger children will struggle with the understanding of death and what it means. They will need simple and short explanations, which may need repeating. Also as young children develop and begin to understand more about the finality of death - expect that they may have more questions that they will want to ask.

## HOW TO BREAK SAD NEWS OF A DEATH

One of the most difficult challenges a parent can ever face is telling their child that a loved one has died. This may come at a time when you are also facing your own loss and pain. So it is understandable that you might start to doubt your ability to deliver this news and support your children with it. There is no easy way of doing this, but your children will be receiving this news from the person that they love and trust and know you will be there to help them. Don't be afraid to show emotion as this will model to your children it is ok and natural to show their feelings. It may be helpful to have someone with you to support you with talking to the children and who can be there for you all.

If you or someone else is giving the news – try to prepare beforehand what to say. Expect awkward questions about the death so preparing what you might say or talking this through with someone else can help prepare your answers.

- Choose a safe quiet place where you won't be interrupted
- For younger children have some comfort toys available
- Don't be afraid to show emotion – this can model to your child that it is 'ok' to show feelings
- Start by saying that you have very sad news to talk about and that you are there to help them with this
- Be honest, give the news stating simple facts and keep this very brief – for younger children bite sized child centred information is needed which may need to be repeated later
- If you don't know any information be honest and say that – let the children know that you will tell them when you know more
- Use the correct words such as 'death/died'
- Encourage them to ask questions about what they have just heard
- Keep checking their understanding of what they have heard
- You may need to repeat the information again – remember to give only short bits of information as they will not be able to retain too much
- Acknowledge that it is 'ok' to feel a lot of emotions about what they have just heard and that it is ok to feel nothing at all
- Be aware that children may start to ask unrelated questions or become distracted e.g. want to play, watch tv – do not assume they have not heard or are not reacting
- Once the information has been given take your lead from them what they need to do next. This may be something unrelated or they may want time on their own – wait for them to ask more about what you have said, they will be processing this in their own way

- Some children may like to read bereavement related books to help them with their understanding around what they have been told (see Mosaic book list in pack)
- Let them know that it is helpful to talk about how they are feeling and that you (or someone else a trusted friend/relative) are there to talk with them if they want to
- If they don't want to talk don't force them to – let them know this is ok and they can if they want to and offer opportunities for them to do this.
- Offer creative ways they can express their feelings i.e. writing a journal, drawing their emotions. Children can often find it hard talking about emotions and may prefer to write down any questions or worries they may have. Creating a worry box or worry bag can be a safe and indirect way for children to express any worries they have or to ask questions. Spending time to look through these together or if they prefer with a trusted person i.e. ELSA Worker in school can offer different ways to express themselves
- Let school know as soon as you can so that the children and your family can access supports from staff. They can help you with what to do about informing others about the death and how to help with the children returning to school. Also, schools are essential in giving children the on-going awareness and support they will need with their grief
- Communicate with family and friends so that you have the supports around you. In the early days following the death it is often a case of families muddling through together the best way they can. People will often want to help but not know how - so let them know what practical and/or emotional help you need at this time.

## UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S BEREAVEMENT RESPONSES:

Every child is unique and reactions to a death will vary and depend on a number of factors, including their relationship with the person who died, their developmental understanding of death and the family and support network around them.

### Emotional Responses:

Children can often feel scared of the intensity of their feelings. Therefore let them know that their feelings are a normal response to the tragedy that has happened. Tell them that these feelings are called grief. Do not assume that you understand what they are feeling – ask questions about how they are feeling and what they understand. This will give them the opportunity to ask specific questions and gain a better understanding of the situation.

Children can often 'puddle jump' from one feeling to another following a death. It is common for younger children to feel at one moment overwhelmed with grief and the next to rush out and want to play with their friends as if nothing has happened - this is a normal coping reaction for children and should be encouraged. Just as all children are different, so are grief responses. Some children will want to talk openly whereas others will not want to talk at all – both reactions are normal.

### Behavioural Changes:

Expect different expressions of grief through a variety of behaviours. Some children may regress to earlier behaviours for some time and negative and uncharacteristic behaviours may appear. Awareness of grief reactions can help parents and schools to identify behaviours and will help awareness of what supports are needed.

Encourage children to access support so they can talk – but never force them to do this. Knowing where to go for support can be helpful for children who are resistant to talking. Some children may need more tangible supports such as 'time out' cards to help them or a key member of staff they can access when needed.

### Sleeping difficulties:

Bereaved children can often experience difficulties with their sleep particularly in early bereavement through their grief emotions, worries, or with having nightmares and disturbing dreams. Disruptions in sleep patterns can be seen as normal and to be expected when a child is coping with grief. In most cases sleep difficulties will begin to ease in time but if they become worse or persist for a significant period it would be helpful to discuss this with your GP to get further support.

What can help? Keeping to normal routines will help children feel secure when so much of home life around them has changed. Encourage good sleep routines and factor in time during the day (not at bedtime) when they can discuss any worries with you. Some children find having a 'worry box' or 'worry bag' that they can put their worries into is an easier way of expressing worries. This can be a helpful and creative way of looking at these worries together and talk about them. Talking over worries can also help to reassure and problem solve any worries that children may have about the changes around them.

## Anxieties:

Bereaved children can often become very concerned about being apart from their parent/carers after a death. They may worry that other people they love will also die or in some way disappear from their lives. This is a normal reaction to a death in the family. Helping children by acknowledging these feelings so that their fears can be talked about - can help to rationalise fears. Although we cannot give children any certainty over other loved ones dying, we can let them know that in the most situations people are usually very old or very ill when they die.

Children will often lose their confidence in being able to cope with anxious situations when they are grieving. It can help to build their confidence in reminding them of successes and challenges they have managed previously. Everyone will cope differently so giving lots of praise and encouragement using small achievable goals will help to build up resilience that they can cope with anxious situations. For some children separation anxiety can be heightened during times of grief. Children with anxiety difficulties will often be overestimating the fear and underestimating their ability to cope with it - but with gentle encouragement they can learn to cope. Below are some suggestions how parents can help a bereaved child if they are struggling with separation difficulties: -

**Handprints** - Place your hand and your child's hand on a piece of paper, with one or more fingers touching. Draw around the hands. Do another sheet so that each of you has a copy. For a child, this could be tucked into a school bag, or a coat pocket. Whenever they feel the need to be close to you, they can place their hand over their handprint and 'feel' your hand alongside, supporting and encouraging them.

**Transitional objects** – For some children having a transitional object such as a painted stone or a teddy can be comforting. Identifying two identical but different sized teddies/animals or stones - with the parent as the large one and the child the small one. When the parent and child leave each other, they can swap the teddies/stones thereby looking after each other.

**'Later today...'** When parting, mention something that will happen after school. For example, 'remind me to buy bread when I collect you', 'let's feed the ducks on the way home tonight'; 'we must water the plants this afternoon'. Having a glimpse of the future that includes both of you can be comforting and a way of them focusing on the future and not on the parting

Remember that children have an amazing resilience and that these are all normal grief responses. For most children in time they will start to feel more confident in coping with anxious situations and these difficulties will improve. However grief is not a linear process and at significant dates/birthdays/anniversaries – difficulties may return for some children. Remind them that this is normal and how they coped and what helped before. Make school staff aware that they may need more support around these times with these feelings.

## CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH

In understanding a child's response to a bereavement, we do need to consider their developmental capacity to understand the concept of death. Children will all mature at different rates therefore the age stages below are guidelines only:

**Early Years – under 2 years** - Babies and children will not understand death as we know it. They can experience loss as a separation from someone they have made an attachment to. This can be shown as a grief response through their behaviours e.g. crying, clinging, anger, a need for constant reassurance, difficulty in sleeping or becoming withdrawn.

**Children 2-5 years** - Children still have 'magical thinking' and believe that death is reversible. Children can be convinced that it was something they said or did that caused the person to die – and also believe that they can use words, thoughts and actions to bring the person back. Reassurance at this age is very important and with young children this will need to be bite-sized information and constantly repeated. They need to understand that they are not responsible for the death with appropriate child-centred information.

Young children are very 'black and white' in their thinking so using the words 'died' and 'death' will help them in understanding and the concept of what death means. However, adults need to be aware that developmentally young children find it hard to grasp the finality of death and that they will need clear and repeated explanations.

Children may ask the same questions over and over again – this is the way they make sense of what has happened. Although this can be difficult for the adults around them, this is a normal way for children at this age to process information. Reading books on death and loss, using play and painting/drawing can help to stimulate talk about what has happened. Some children may have may revert to behaviour of a younger child e.g. tantrums, going back to wetting/soiling – again this is normal and it is important to tolerate and recognise this as a grief reaction. When life is more settled this should improve. Children at this age are most dependent on the adults around them to help them with their understanding and emotions. Helping them keep to normal routines will help them to regain the balance.

**Children 6-9 years** - Children are starting to develop a better understanding of death as being irreversible and part of what happens in the natural world. However, fears may develop from children finding death 'spooky' and frightening with stories of ghosts and zombies. It is important that such worries and anxieties are acknowledged and addressed.

Death may still be very confusing for them – so reassurance and opportunities to talk about death will help to normalise their feelings and enable them to gain a better understanding of what has happened. A natural curiosity at this age can be positive in helping children to ask questions. Although this can be quite difficult and sometimes shocking for adults, particularly around issues such as 'what happens after a body dies' it is all part of their normal development and healthy.

At this age children will often suffer with somatic complaints such as 'sore tummy' or 'headaches'. This can be the result of pent up or unexpressed emotions and their difficulty in separating their body feelings from their emotions.

**Children 9 – 13 years** - Children at this age are more aware of the finality of death and their understanding of what death means to themselves and others. They will be keen to 'fit in with their peers'. Therefore, a bereavement can lead to difficult feelings around feeling isolated and apart from others around them. During a time when they are starting to experience developmental changes they may find it hard to regulate their moods with 'ups and downs' and managing angry feelings.

They are also starting to become a little more independent in their thinking and needing more interaction with peers. It is important to build self-esteem and social skills at this age to help them with changing relationships. A significant death at this age can often destabilise them leaving them feeling unsafe and more dependent on family.

**Adolescents** - Friends and peers are increasingly important as young people develop their ideas of who they are and what is important to them. They want to be accepted by other important people in their lives. Their bodies are changing, they are aware of all sorts of possibilities for themselves and are more aware of the future - their future. It is quite common for risk-taking behaviour to increase during adolescence as young people test the boundaries.

They may struggle to make longer term plans as the death of someone important causes them to reflect on "the meaning of life" and ponder on the question "what's the point?" Or you may find that they are so busy with different activities they don't stop to reflect. This can be an effective way of keeping intense feelings under wraps if they are worried about losing control of their emotions.

If you notice a teenager who is withdrawing, acting very matter of fact and detached, or angry and protesting, then remain available for them - but don't push. Your job is to remind them that you're there and if they'd prefer to speak to someone else you'll help them find peers or other trusted adults to support them. Although an adolescent's growing process is most like an adult's they are still going through important emotional development at this age and are not ready to manage adult responsibilities even if at times they think they are adult. They need to be reassured of your love and support and to know that the limits you set are still enforced.



## RESPONDING TO FRIGHTENING EVENTS

Following traumatic events, children may present with a number of responses as they begin to try and understand and process what has happened. The following reactions can be seen as a normal response for a child following such experiences:

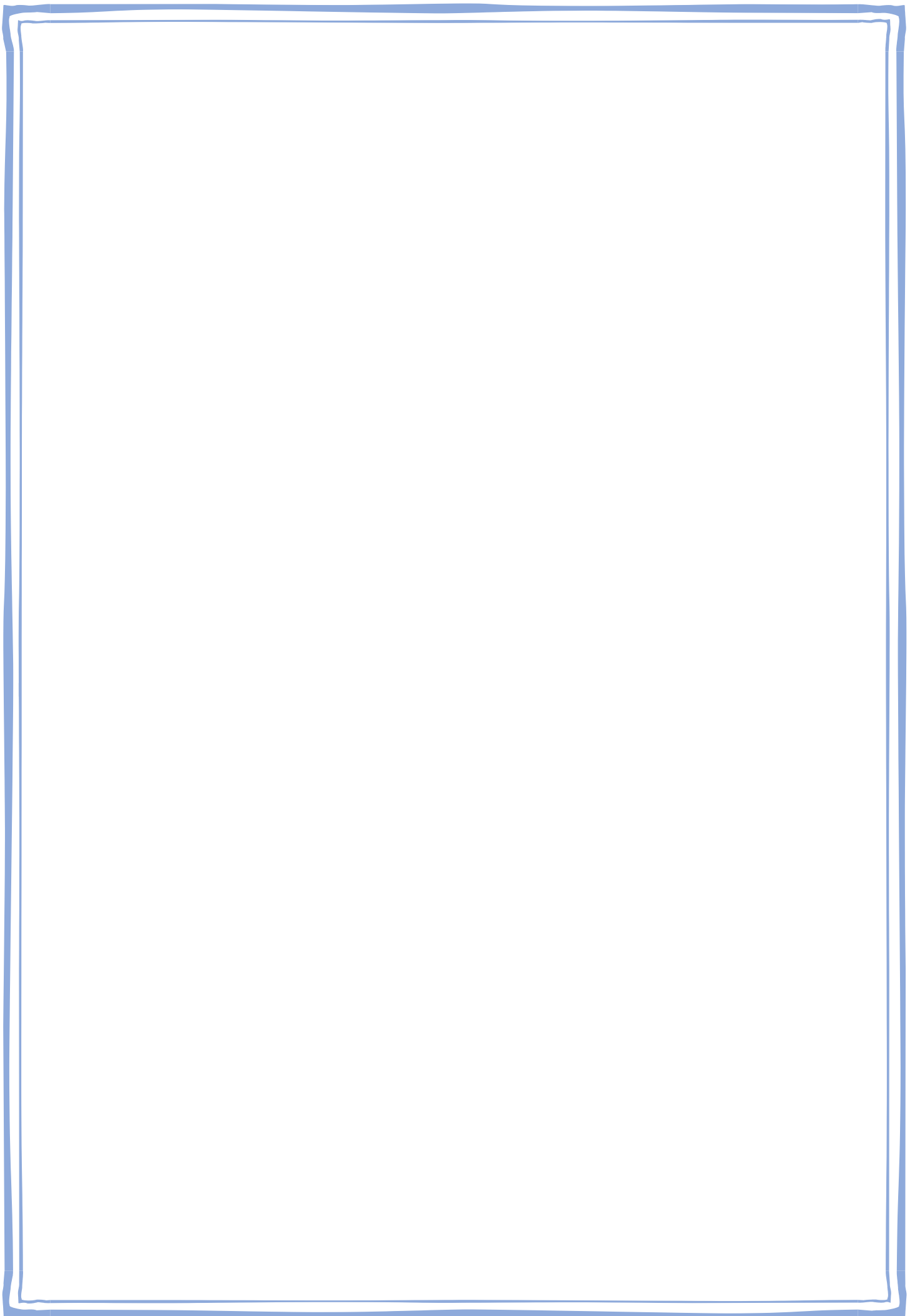
- Difficulties with sleeping, having nightmares
- Difficulty with concentration
- Feeling insecure needing constant reassurance, clingy with parents/carers
- Memories or pictures unexpectedly popping into their mind
- Anxiety that it may happen again
- Using play and drawings repeatedly describing the event
- Not wanting to talk about the experience and avoiding anything that reminds them of what has happened
- Difficulties with managing their feelings i.e. anger, distress
- Hypervigilance – jumpy, increase in impulsivity
- Regressing to earlier stages i.e. toilet issues, early play, talking 'like a baby', earlier behaviours etc.
- Physical complaints i.e. tummy pains and headaches

Children can often become overwhelmed and frightened of their intense feelings, therefore 'normalising' letting them know 'it's 'ok' to feel angry/sad etc.' can help to reassure children. It's important to let them know 'its 'ok' to feel happy, to go out and play as well.

### HELPING CHILDREN UNDERSTAND WHAT HAS HAPPENED:

When we think about traumatic experiences being difficult for adults to process, it is even more important for us to take into account a child's developmental understanding so that we can be age appropriate with our communication.

- Children will need a truthful explanation of what has happened at their level of understanding. Even young children will 'pick up' on adult conversation which they may not understand and which could make them feel confused and worried. Talking through these experiences in an age appropriate way can help to correct any misunderstandings and help to prevent any worries. Some children can become confused and think it was 'their fault' in some way.
- Younger children will need 'bite sized' information so they are not 'overwhelmed' with facts. They may need to ask the same question over and over again – this is normal and important for a child to help them develop their understanding. Offer lots of opportunities for them to ask questions.



## SCHOOL SUPPORTS

Any death in the school community is a tragic event and will not only affect the child and family involved – but also the whole school community. Schools are often the first contact a bereaved family will make following a death. So, accessing supports through your school can be very helpful immediately following a death not only as a way of gaining information and guidance – but with help in what to do next.

Schools in general give good pastoral care and support to bereaved families. However, some schools may have different levels of experience with managing and supporting bereaved families. Therefore, this is a general guideline of support a school may offer:

### **Support and guidance immediately following the bereavement:**

Let the school know about the death as soon as possible, if this is very difficult then ask a friend or family member to do this. Schools can help with essential information and guidance of bereavement services and supports the family can use. At a time when you are trying to cope with your own and your family's emotional needs, they can take on a supportive role of informing school staff and pupils and putting in place the essential emotional supports your child will need in returning to school. Try to keep communication open with school with any arrangements and particularly dates of the funeral so they are able to support your child through this. Let them know if your child has any changes in behaviour and anxieties around returning to school so they are aware and can support you with this.

### **Schools can offer a grieving child a sense of 'normality' at a time of great loss and change:**

Following the death of a loved one everything in a child's 'world' will feel very different. So keeping to normal routines as much as you can within the home and outside, will help to reassure that some things have not changed. For a grieving child school is an environment that will have stayed the same with the same routines. Also, importantly school will also be a place your child can access supports through school staff and friends during this time. Some children we work with at Mosaic have told us that in order to 'protect' family members at a time when everyone is grieving – having someone at school who is not directly involved has helped them.

Some children will want to return immediately following the death and others will find it more difficult to leave the family home. All children will respond differently even in the same family however it is important to remember that the longer your child is away from school, the harder it may be for them to return. Schools can be really helpful in preparing with you a plan of support for your child for their return to school. They can also offer help with any anxieties and reassurance of emotional supports that will be available.

These are some examples of how your school may help:

- To meet and talk with you and your child about their return
- To involve them in how best to break the news of the death to others at school
- Reassurance that your child's grief will be acknowledged but without a fuss – children can often worry about having the spotlight on them
- Identifying a key member of staff your child can talk to if they need to
- Having a 'time out' card to use when your child feels they need time out of class and would like to talk with someone
- An understanding about school work, flexibility with work and time deadlines - understanding that often concentration will be affected when a child is grieving
- Accessing emotional support – short and long term needs

### **Emotional Supports Schools can offer to a grieving child:**

We know that all children will have different grief responses experienced at different times so being led by your child to what they need is really important. This can often be different to what the adults around them feel they need. There may be days when they are feeling overwhelmed with their feelings and other days when they just want to carry on and do 'normal things'. These are both normal grief responses and schools can offer the supportive environment in helping them to do this.

Particularly in early bereavement having someone available to talk to at school is going to be the most helpful. School staff do not need to be trained bereavement counsellors, all they need to be is both caring and know 'how to listen' to your child. ELSA and pastoral staff are trained in helping children with ways they can talk about their feelings and many of these staff members will have experience of working with grief. Schools can also offer support with referrals to other services for support for your child if this is needed.

At Mosaic we work closely with schools to support staff with training and discuss referrals for children who may need more professional support with their grief. Your school can access training supports and advice from Mosaic so please direct them to us if they feel this would be helpful.

## FUNERALS/SAYING GOODBYE

The early weeks just after someone special has died can be very tough for families. Knowing how to talk to children about death and what happens after a person has died can be confusing and hard for all concerned, particularly as many people have different views on life, death and religion. It is easy for adults to assume that children know what is a funeral and why we have them. However in reality many children, unless they have experienced a death previously, may be confused about what happens at a funeral.

When discussing the funeral and what happens after a death children will need adults to be honest with them giving factual, accurate information about what is going to happen and space to ask questions, no matter how simple or deep. We naturally want to protect children from the harsh realities of life, however children will benefit from hearing the truth of what happens as they will often make up their own 'truth' which can be worse or more frightening than the reality. What you say will be influenced by your culture, religion and beliefs so some of the information given below are only suggestions and may need changing to take into account your own individual family's beliefs.

Whenever possible it is good to include children in any decision-making and discussions about funeral rituals. This helps them to feel part of the family and valued. It will ultimately support them in coming to terms with their loss. Children who have never experienced a death or funeral before will need to be told clearly why we have them and what happens at a funeral.

Here are some guidelines when explaining a funeral to a child: -

- Be honest and keep it simple.
- It's a good idea to find out what the child knows about funerals already. Children are keen listeners and may know more than you think.
- If your child expresses lots of feelings when talking about the funeral, let them know that these feelings are natural.
- Talk them through what will happen on the day of the funeral from the morning, right through to bedtime.
- Ask them if they would like to get involved in the funeral, put something i.e. note/toy/picture in the coffin or choose a song, poem or do a reading,
- Ask them to help you think about refreshments and explain where the funeral will take place.
- Discuss the difference between a cremation and burial and if you know, why the person chose this funeral.
- Explain what a coffin is, it can be easy for us to assume that a child will know but they may not. It may be a good to show some pictures of coffins so that the child or young person knows what to expect when attending the funeral or cremation.
- Explain what happens during a funeral service and after. Some children choose to go to the service but not the burial.
- Give the child lots of space to ask questions and most definitely give them the choice to come.
- If you're child chooses not to come, offer to take photos.

These are some examples of conversations with children to explain funerals and what happens. It will naturally depend very much on their age and developmental understanding about death with how much information they will need. But a general guideline would be to start with asking what the child already knows, what they would like to know and give reassurance that they can ask further questions in the future if they would like to:

### **FUNERAL:**

*'When someone dies we have a special ceremony that we call a funeral. Because Daddy has died we are going to have a really special ceremony just for him. Our ceremony is going to be held in a ..... where everyone who loved Daddy can come along to remember the special times they had with him. It is a ceremony for us to say goodbye to Daddy and to think about how much we loved him. The funeral is going to be on .....*

*'You can have a think about if you want to be there, you don't have to decide right now and you can change your mind at any time and that will be ok. You can ask me any questions about the funeral and I will try to answer them. If I don't know we can both ask the funeral director who will help us with any questions we both might have'.*

*'At the start of the funeral we will all go into the ..... and sit down. Daddy's body will be in a special box called a coffin and it will have a lid on it. Remember that because he is dead he is no longer alive and his body doesn't work so he doesn't need his body anymore. The coffin will be at the front of the ..... and will be brown?? and will have shiny handles with lots of flowers on the lid. '*

*'At the funeral we will be singing some songs and listening to some music. You can help pick some of the songs and music that remind you of Daddy if you would like to. At the funeral there will be people talking about Daddy and saying things about him that they loved and telling stories about his life. Some people can get very sad at funerals and you may see them cry but you might see that others might not cry at all. It's really ok to cry and not cry at funerals'.*

### **BURIAL:**

*'At the end of the funeral what happens next is the coffin will be taken to a grave yard/cemetery where a deep hole will have been dug. The coffin will be gently lowered into the hole, which is called a grave, and then it will be covered up with soil. On top of the grave eventually the grass will grow over, and we can put a grave stone there with Daddy's name on it. We can visit the grave whenever we want to remember Daddy and remember all our happy memories of him'.*

### **Cremation:**

Explaining cremations will need to be thought through sensitively and will be influenced by a child's age and understanding. If a child is asking and wants to know they will need to have accurate child centred information to help them understand what happens to a body.

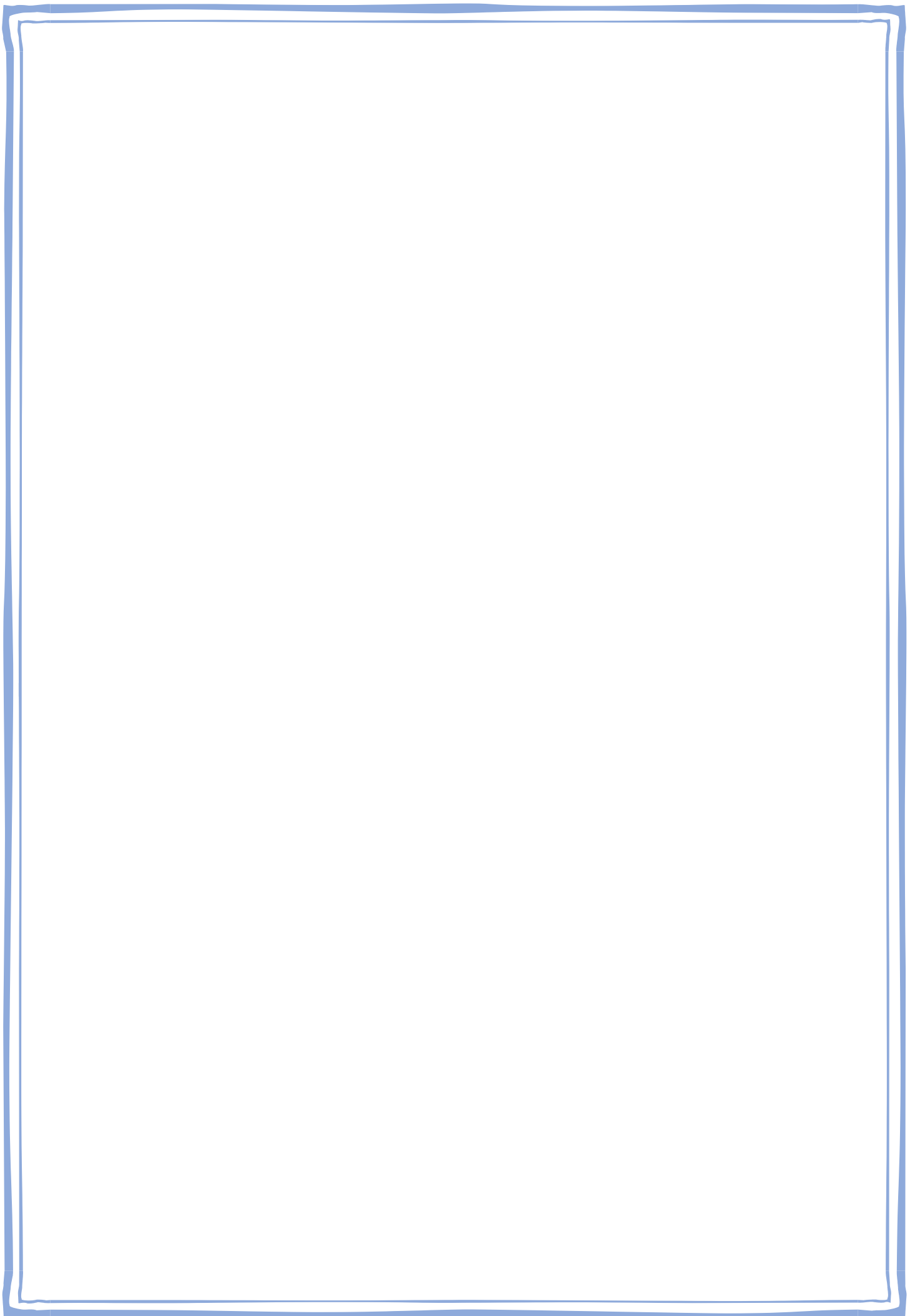
It is generally best to take your lead from the child and only give as much information as your child asks for.

Some children will be affected by the use of words burnt – these are examples of different approaches that can be used to explain cremation and can be adapted to some of the questions your child may be asking about cremation: -

***'After the funeral the coffin with grandma's body will go to a place called a crematorium where her body will be turned into soft powdery ashes and put in a special pot called an urn. Some people like to scatter the ashes somewhere very special to the person who has died or we can bury the ashes in the ground. We don't have to decide straight away we can have a while to think about it first. I think it would be good to decide together what we want to do with granny's ashes?'***

***'At the end of the funeral the coffin will go behind some curtains and we won't see it again. When everyone has gone home the funeral directors will take the coffin with the dead body to be put into a special very hot oven to be burnt and turned into ash. The ashes are put into a special pot called an urn. We will be given nanny's ashes back and some people scatter them somewhere very special to the person who has died or we can bury them in the ground. We don't have to decide this now, we can take some time to decide together what to do with granny's ashes'.***

If your child does not want to attend the funeral then their wishes will need to be listened to but it would be helpful to encourage them to think about how they would like to say 'goodbye' to their loved one in their own way. You can also let them know it is ok for them to change their minds right up to the funeral if they want to, and that both decisions to go and not to go are absolutely fine. Helping your child with a 'goodbye' ritual can be carried out in a special place to them and their loved one or in their garden or home. They can plan their own goodbye ritual i.e. write something, sing songs, poems or bring flowers, toys. Saying goodbye and marking with a ritual is an important part of the grieving process. Some children may be resistant of doing this also, so let them know that this can be done when they feel they are ready to – this may be when an important anniversary, birthday comes around.





## PREPARING A CHILD TO VIEW THE BODY

Most children and young people may not wish to view the body of their loved one prior to the funeral, but if they decide that they want to, careful consideration and preparation is essential. Again you may be concerned about the impact that this may have on your child and it is only natural that you will want to protect and shield them from this – but if your child, especially older ones, are insistent on viewing the body please do listen to them and take into account their views and opinions without thinking that you know best. This also applies to being insistent that your child views the body and they don't wish to. It must be what feels right for them and again please do consider their thoughts and feelings.

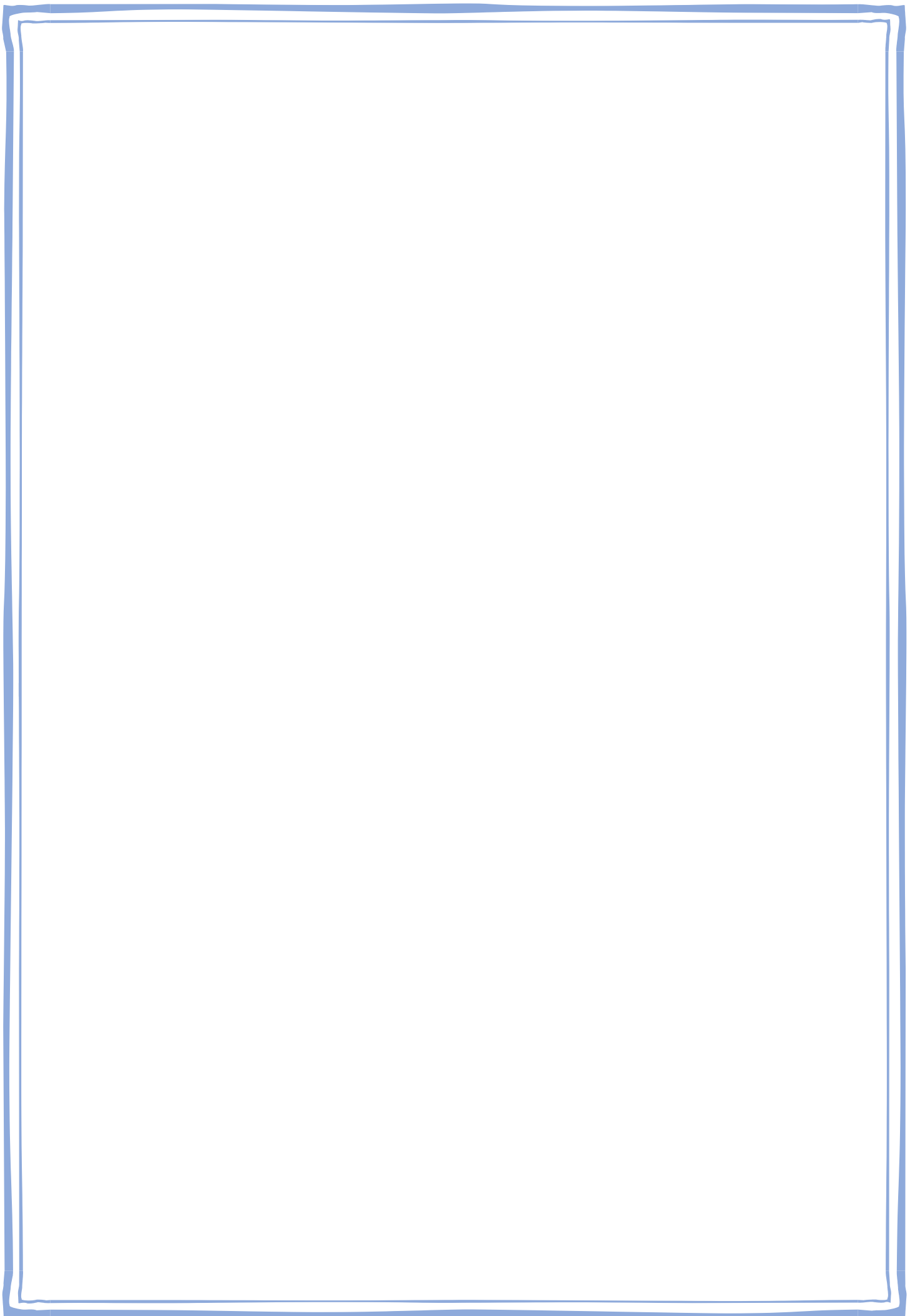
Talk to the funeral director and ask for their co-operation in this matter as they may have some useful ideas and information for you to be able to support your child. Seeing the body of your loved one is a difficult enough task for an adult to do let alone a child so any additional assistance you can get beforehand would be beneficial to you all.

It is good to explain to your child what they can expect from seeing their loved one. It's also an opportunity to talk to them in an age appropriate way about what being dead means and that the appearance of their loved one will be different to what they remember. Be mindful of using euphemisms as this can be potentially frightening especially to younger children i.e.: "they are sleeping/going to sleep for a long, long time". It is also worth pointing out that saying "head stone" could cause confusion especially with younger children or those with additional needs as they may think that the head will be taken from the body and turned to stone. It is important to use the correct terminology in a simple but factual way that is not open to any interpretations that could cause further distress.

It may also be worth you or another adult going to the funeral home beforehand to take some photographs of what the building looks like from the outside/reception/chapel of rest/the hearse/church yard or crematorium – especially if you're child has additional needs such as ASD or learning difficulties.

It may be difficult for a child or young person to know how to react to viewing the body and they will most likely take the lead from you, and if you cry this is an appropriate response as you are modelling that it is perfectly normal to be sad and upset about the death of your loved one. Equally it is okay for your child not to show any emotion - but do bear in mind that they may do so later – if this happens do be available or have another trusted adult to be there to offer their help.

Please remember that we all grieve in different ways and that there is no such thing as doing it the right or wrong way.



## REMEMBERING ACTIVITIES

Children may find it difficult to express their grief verbally and helping them with creative memory activities can offer opportunities for them to talk about the person who has died, to talk about their feelings and reflect and share memories with others.

Children can often worry about forgetting the person who has died and creating activities to help remember words, events and stories is really important for them when grieving their loved one and something they can always keep as a reminder.

The following examples of memory activities are aimed to:

- help preserve a continuing link with the person who has died
- involve children and young people in the mourning process
- help create and store memories for children to keep into the future

### Memory Boxes:

Bereaved children will benefit from collecting into a special box items that remind them of the person who has died and times shared with them. Examples could be: - cards received, perfume or aftershave, shells from a beach holiday, tickets from an outing, an item of clothing, jewellery or photographs. Children often like decorating their memory box and drawing memories, patterns and colours that can be used to reflect the person they are remembering. Making a memory box can also be a creative activity which can help a child to talk about their loved one if they are finding this difficult to do.

### Memory Books:

This is an activity similar to the memory box which can contain memories, pictures, drawings, tickets, postcards, letters, certificates – all important keepsakes connected with the person who has died. Children can make their own memory book for their loved one from a scrapbook. Using a ring file folder can also be a way of adding more pages and memories.

### Family Records:

A family record can help a child or young person gain a sense of where they and the person who has died fit into the family. A family tree can be put together. Family photographs, documents, certificates and mementoes can be included. It can be particularly powerful to include stories about the person's life, which can be contributed by family members and friends; this is often a welcome way for them to be involved. For example, what was the funniest thing the person ever did? What was their best subject at school? If you are going to include videos or sound tapes of the person who has died – please consider making a copy – just to be safe.

### **Memory Stones:**

Memory stones can be a lovely activity for a bereaved child. Picking a stone to remember their loved one and using colours and shapes reflecting that person. Memory stones can also be used as a way of letting a member of staff at school know they are having a hard day. Sometimes children will find it difficult to verbalise how they are feeling and they can use their stone if they need some 'time out' or someone to talk to.

### **Memory Jars:**

Memory jars can be a good way of remembering someone. All that is needed is an empty jam jar, lots of different coloured chinks and table salt. The child will then choose a coloured chalk to represent a memory of the person e.g. 'yellow because Mum had a sunny smile', or 'red because Dad loved Liverpool FC'. They can then roll the coloured chinks into the layers of salt, one by one, building individual layers of colour carefully inside the jar. The jar is finished with either the lid or a cloth top and a label attached setting out the colours and the memories for them to keep.

### **Memory Plant Pot:**

This is an activity where children can decorate a plant pot in a similar way to their memory box and then plant seeds or a bulb that reminds them of a memory or something about the person. This is like crushing the chalk into the salt for the memory jar and can be a very sensory/tactile activity with the child scooping the soil into the plant pot. This activity will need nurturing and watering so this will need to be overseen by family or school if staying within school.

### **Telling the bereavement story:**

During the grieving process children may start to ask questions that they hadn't felt able to immediately following the death. It is important that children and young people gain a clear understanding of what happened and have their questions answered. Younger children may appreciate using dolls, model figures or puppets to tell the story. Older children may prefer to use paper and pens. If a child is asking lots of questions and wanting to know more about what happened before and around the death and what has happened since, it can be helpful to break the bereavement journey into 5 stages:

- What was life like before they died?
- How did they die?
- How did they hear about the death?
- The funeral or what they heard about the funeral
- How do they see the future?

Listening to them talk about what happened can also help to gently correct any misunderstandings and to provide any additional information and answers to any questions.

## **SUPPORTING CHILDREN BEREAVED BY SUICIDE, MURDER OR MANSLAUGHTER**

A suicide, murder or manslaughter in the school community is something nobody ever feels prepared for but sadly they do occur. When supporting a child where a family member has decided to take their own life or has died violently, having an action plan in place (within the School Bereavement Policy) will help to have an immediate response.

### **SUICIDE:**

Deaths by suicide have escalated considerably in recent years, particularly amongst teenage boys and young male adults (75%). Suicide and violent deaths will inevitably have a devastating impact on the whole school community.

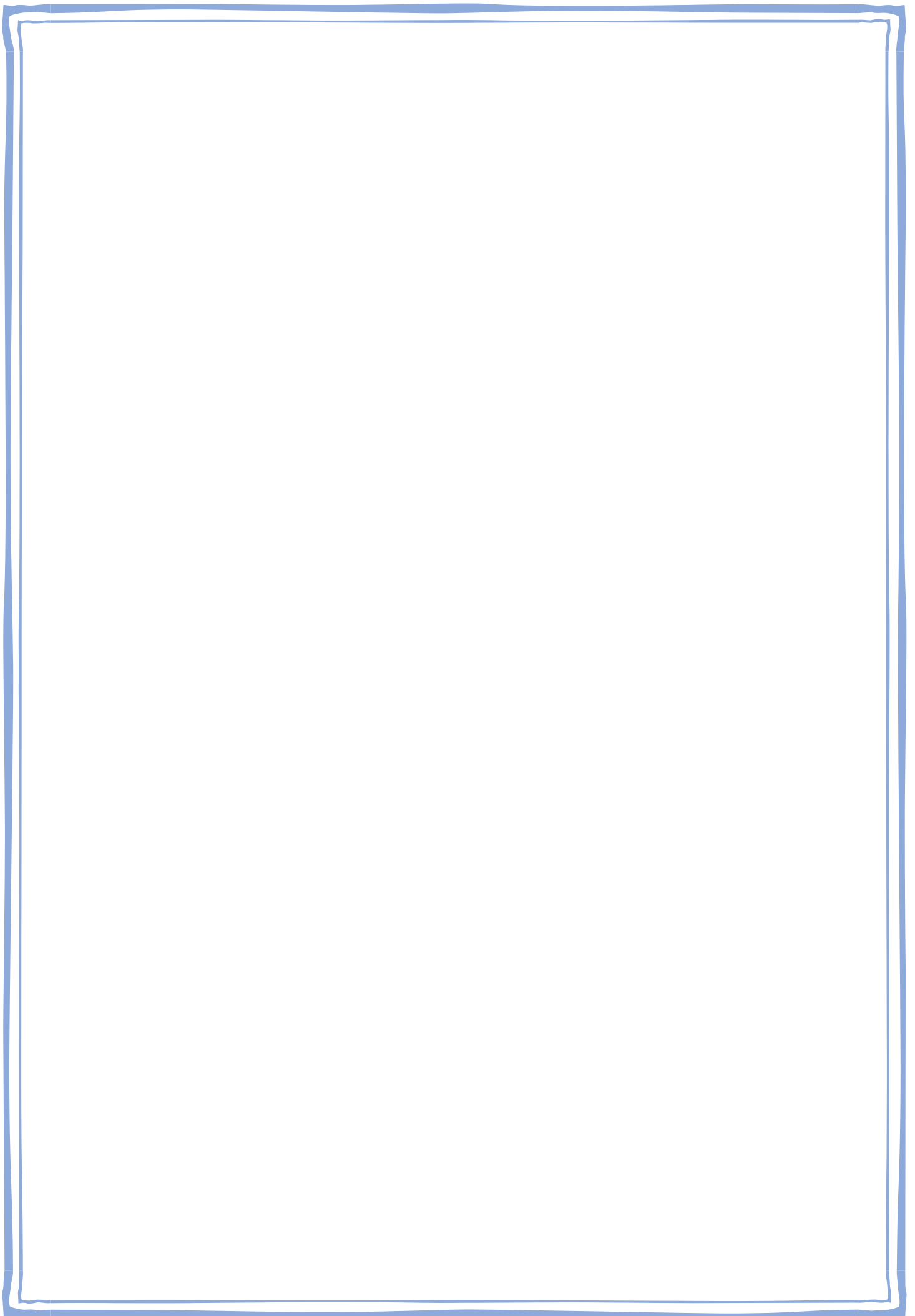
The very nature of death by suicide is still a 'taboo' subject within our society which can be particularly difficult for bereaved children and family members to understand and start to process their grief. Suicide is a very public event and as the inquest into a death can take a considerable time; in some cases up to 2 years or more – information can often be confusing for a family, with the risk of rumour and social media misinterpretation.

Children bereaved by suicide will have many questions about the death but very few answers. Trying to find a reason for what has happened and make sense of the events can complicate the natural grief process. Children affected by suicide or any traumatic or violent deaths are more likely to need professional help. The normal grief responses of guilt and anger will likely be felt more intensely particularly with the destructive effect suicide can often have on the lives of surviving family members, peers and the wider community.

### **MURDER OR MANSLAUGHTER:**

When a death occurs by violent means, this comes with an added trauma to a bereaved family, to what is already a devastating situation. These types of deaths will necessarily involve the criminal justice system which can cause lengthy delays to the funeral and gaining answers to questions the child and family may have. The nature of the death may also cause some considerable anxiety about their own safety and a view of the world as an 'unsafe place'. Children who have witnessed or have been involved in any part of the situation may also be at risk of post-traumatic stress disorder. The death is almost certainly likely to be reported in the media which can result in media intrusion and difficulty for children to keep to normal routines.

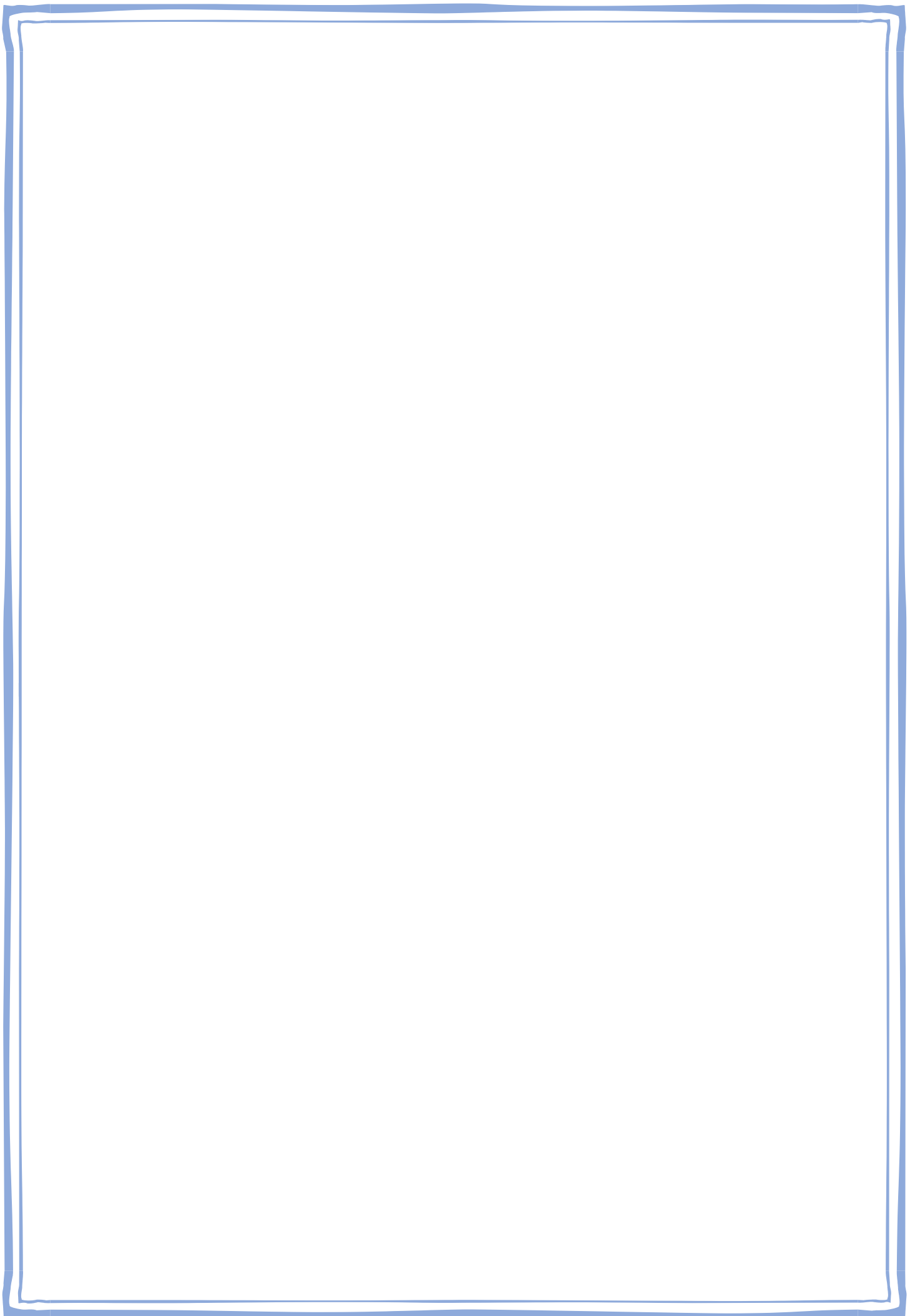
The majority of violent death statistics show that a killer is often known to the victim. In some cases, this may be a family member who is known to the child. Therefore, this may involve the child having to move from their home to live with someone else which can add to their feelings of insecurity and confusion. If the perpetrator is a parent or a family member this will also increase the sense of loss by another loved person in their lives going to prison.



## SUPPORTING CHILDREN BEREAVED BY SUICIDE & VIOLENT DEATH:

Some important points to remember when supporting a child bereaved by suicide and violent death:

- With the confusion and difficulty about knowing the facts around the death it is even more important for children to have someone they can trust to talk to and ask questions about what has happened. Gaining answers can often be difficult as some information may not be known but talking can help children to feel less isolated.
- Children who have witnessed a murder or found the body of a suicide may experience recurrent and intrusive memories of the event. This will have a major impact on their ability to concentrate. If these symptoms persist or escalate they will need to see their GP to be assessed by mental health services for possible post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Overwhelming feelings of anger and guilt following a suicide or violent death may cause challenging behaviour at school. Children will need constant reassurance that nothing they did or said caused the death. The person who died by suicide chose to take their own life. In a violent death reinforcing it was the person who killed their loved one who is to blame not them.
- Feelings of rejection are a common response and this may have an impact on a child's self-esteem. Offering support within school to help reinforce positive thinking and help the student to recognise even the smallest achievements.
- Children will naturally feel anxious about themselves and others around them following a suicide/violent death. Although you cannot offer definite reassurance this will never happen again, it can be helpful to say something along the lines of **'there are some very bad people in this world, but not many – most people are good and kind'**.
- Offering support to help them get a sense of 'control' over their lives when many aspects following the death may feel like everything is out of their control, will help them be proactive about making decisions and actions that are positive for them.
- With any death it is important for children to know it is 'ok' to feel happy and have fun despite what has happened. The wider aspects involving the legal and criminal system can weigh heavily on children. Even small children will pick up on anxieties within the family, so giving them accurate and child centred information can help to manage this. Children should know that despite what is happening, they can carry on with normal life, have fun and feel happy.





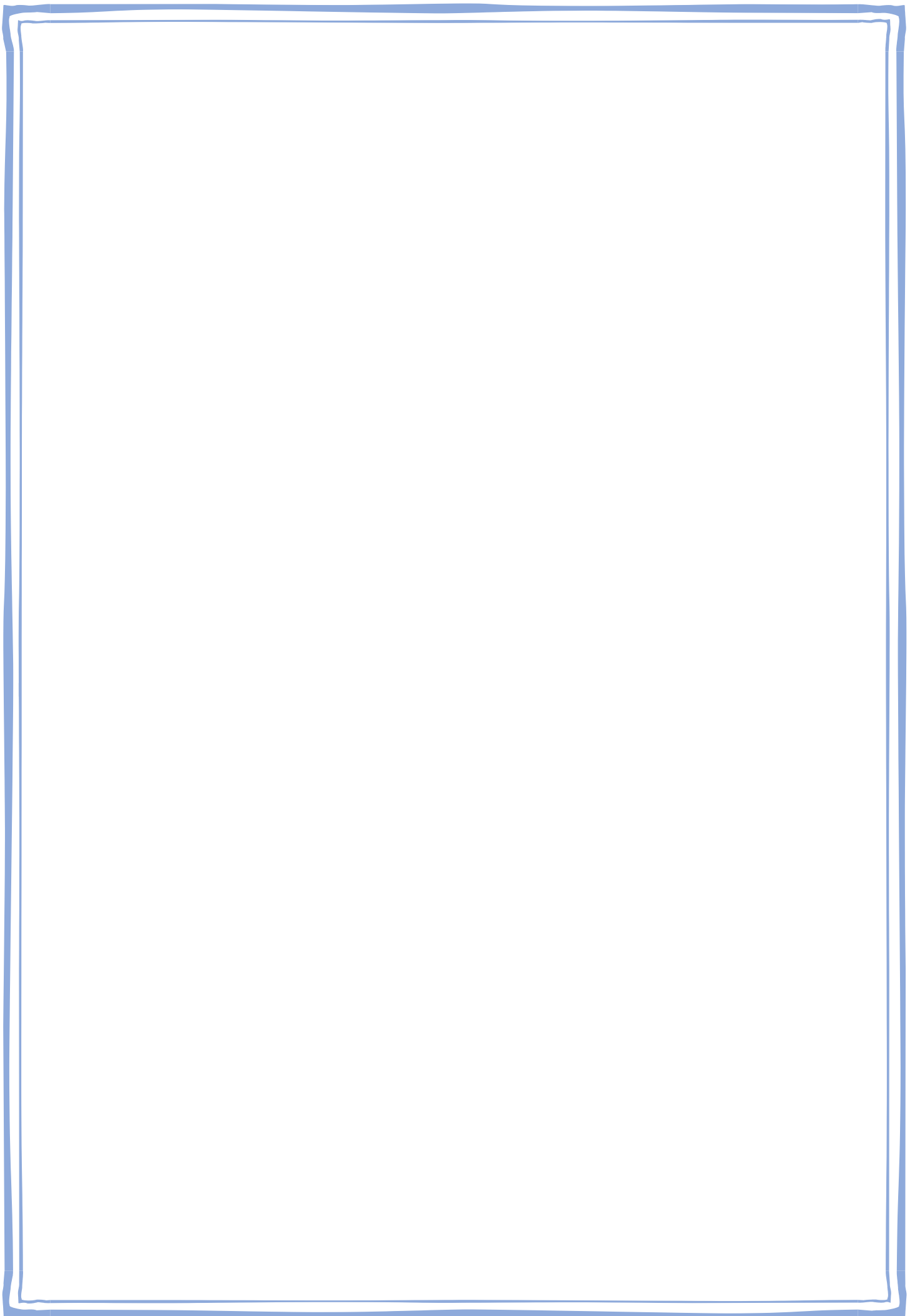
## SUPPORTING BEREAVED CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Every child deserves the right to have grief support and although their needs may be more complex; children with learning difficulties are no different. However, they may need extra support with their understanding and ability to communicate their feelings due to their learning difficulties. We can be led to believe that they need to be protected from knowing about death and that they will not cope, however, this is far from the truth as with the right support and understanding children with learning difficulties can access grief support really well.

Helping children with learning difficulties it is important to remember: -

- To use the correct words i.e. 'dead, dying' not euphemisms such as 'gone to sleep' as this will confuse them
- To use a creative approach with communication i.e. visual media, pictures, cartoons, films, using an interest the child already has to aid understanding
- If a child has had a pet bereavement this can be helpful when discussing death
- Acknowledge any death, don't ignore what has happened
- Gather information on what they know; try to clarify their understanding of death this may be developmentally different to their peers.
- Give factual information on how the body works, what happens when someone dies i.e. the heart stops pumping blood around the body etc., using pictures
- Create a scrap book of pictures of e.g. bunch of flowers when fresh and when dead, a fish in the supermarket to a fish swimming in the river.
- For some children who wish to see the dead body, it can be helpful in understanding the concept of 'no life' but this will need careful preparation

Children with learning difficulties can sometimes need support with communicating their emotions and a bereaved child can feel quite anxious and distressed on the intensity of the emotions they are feeling. Letting them know that these feelings are normal and called 'grief' and maybe it's because 'they are missing the person who has died', will help to name and normalise these feelings for them.



## LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

As a parent/carer of a bereaved child it is normal to want to put your children's grief needs first, before seeking out your own. But it is important to remember that by taking care of your own grief needs this will help you to feel stronger and better able to support your family. At a time when everyone is grieving together as a family they may also be worrying about you so it will be reassuring for children to know that you are being supported and it will model it is ok for them to do this too.

Often family and friends will find it hard to know how to help, concerned that they are saying the wrong thing or unsure what to do? Let them know how they can best help you and the family, this might be something practical ie. cooking meals, helping with the children, taking them to activities etc. They can also help you with the essential emotional supports - but may be unsure about how to do this? Let them know what you need from them, this may be you need to talk to someone, or someone just to do 'normal everyday' things with. In early bereavement this may also be to help with breaking news to your children and family, or to others in the community. People are often really pleased to help and will welcome your guidance on how they can do this – **don't feel awkward about doing this just ask.**

When we grieve it is especially important to take care of ourselves - below are some suggestions. Remember that everyone grieves differently and only you know what will help for you.

- **Listen to your body** – if you need to cry, then cry. If you need to sleep, then do so. If you need to talk to someone, seek out someone who will listen.
- **Lower expectations for yourself** – remember you will not be able to run at full capacity for some time, you are grieving. It is ok and normal not to perform as well as you did before your loss. Let others know this and that you will need to have the time to grieve.
- **Seek out professional support and advice if needed** – Get the support you need. Mosaic can offer parents bereavement support and advice about how to support their children, however it is also important for you to seek out your own adult bereavement support (see pack for a list of recommended services/websites). Don't hesitate to contact your GP with any medication or medical concerns particularly with any feelings of hopelessness or suicidal thoughts.
- **Take the time to do the things you need to do for yourself** – when you feel ready to do so try to engage in activities that you previously enjoyed or what you feel drawn to. Research shows that taking time out in nature, walking and other physical activities can help to stimulate the brain to feel more positive and motivated. Ask friends to help you to start activities again or to resume hobbies that you once enjoyed.
- **Pamper yourself** – Treat yourself well. This does not need to be expensive pampering, just being around people who make you feel nurtured can make all the difference. Don't feel guilty about doing this at a time when you are grieving focusing on your own self care is more important than ever.

- **Be creative or keep a journal** – We know that talking to someone is really helpful in trying to process grief feelings, however some people can find it hard to talk and express their feelings verbally particularly at a time of loss. If this is the case think of other ways to express your feelings, this can be writing them down in a journal, using drawings or painting. Find out what helps for you? This will be different for everyone.
- **Physical exercise** – If you exercised prior to your loss, try to keep to the same routines. If you feel drawn to starting physical exercise this can improve the way you are feeling and can be a helpful coping mechanism, as long as you are medically ok to do so.
- **Focus on a proper diet and sleep** – It can be a normal response following a bereavement to have difficulties with eating and sleeping. However at a time of grieving it is essential to function as well as you can. So call on support from family and friends with shopping and meals if this is needed to help you and the family to keep healthy. If you are struggling with prolonged sleeping difficulties don't hesitate to see your GP who may be able to offer advice and some short-term medication to help. There are also sleep apps and websites that can offer help with sleep problems. However keeping to regular routines during the day with some physical exercise even if this is a walk may also help.
- **Don't be put off by others' reactions** – Some people are uncomfortable in responding to grief and loss situations. When you are grieving your emotions are heightened and it can be hurtful if people you know can react inappropriately or appear to ignore your situation. People have different ideas about death and about how others should react in grief. They may have had difficult grief experiences themselves. This does not excuse some behaviours but it can help for you to understand them. Be true to yourself and let others know if they say or do something you feel is inappropriate. Starting a conversation with someone like this can be really helpful to both parties, about what you need from them. But remember some people's reactions may not change so seek out those people who can help you with your grief at this time.

## WHEN TO GET PROFESSIONAL HELP

The challenging feelings we face when somebody dies can be overwhelming. These feelings are natural and over time, with support from family or friends, should lessen in frequency and intensity. That is not to say that we ever get over a special person dying, but the feelings change and we adjust and learn how to adapt.

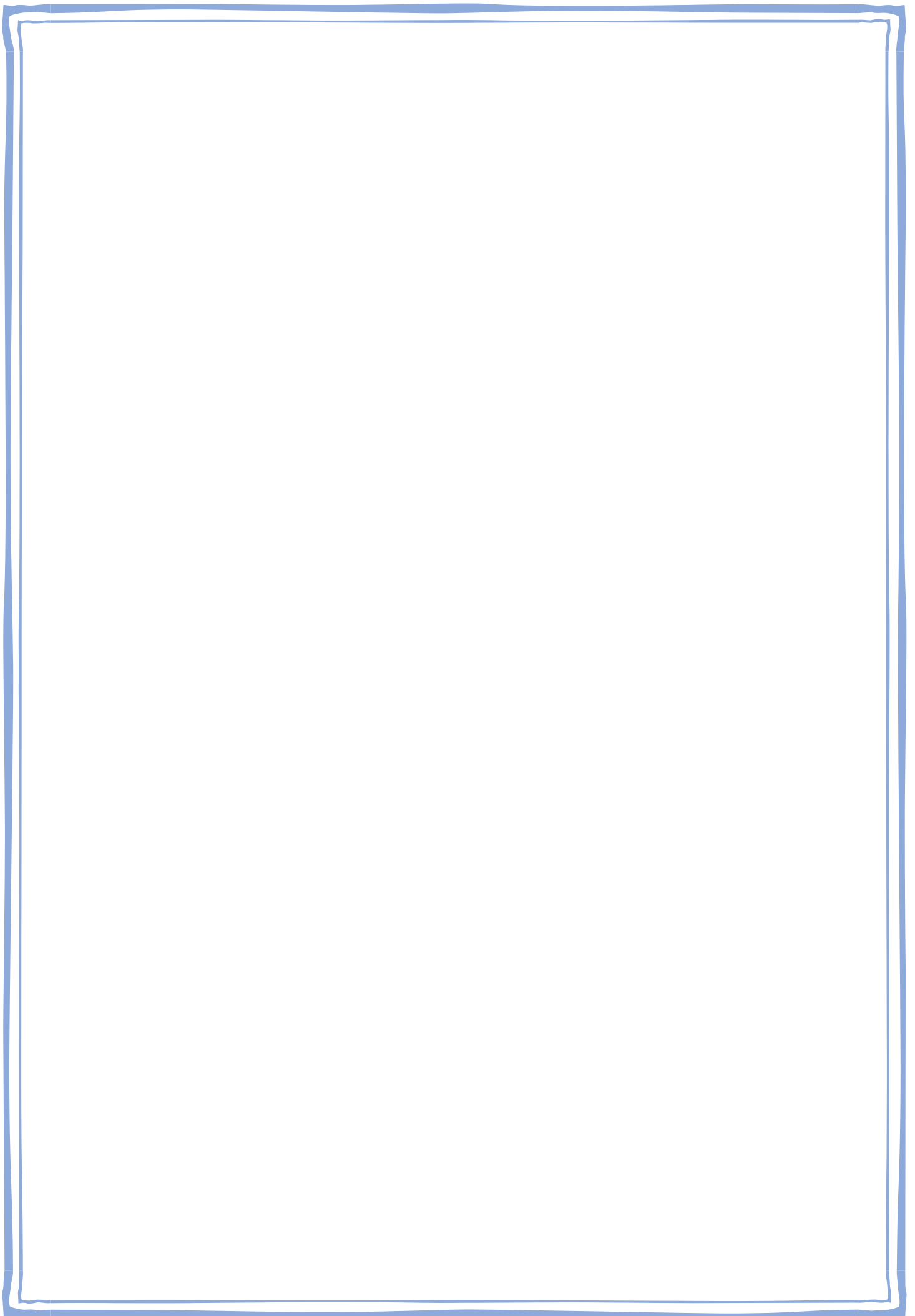
If children and teenagers are having prolonged difficulties or displaying behaviour that is concerning, it is always advisable to speak to a professional to talk this through. In some cases, if the symptoms are physical such as not sleeping, eating or physical pains for a prolonged period, a GP, health visitor or school nurse should be contacted to rule out any other possible problems. This is also the case with self-harm. The GP would then advise on the best course of action depending on the severity of the behaviour. If your child becomes withdrawn or acts out for a prolonged period, disengages with friends or family, begins to experiment with drugs or alcohol or starts taking excessive risks, it is a good idea to seek support from your GP and specialist services who can support your young person further.

Your child or teen may ask to speak about their grief to someone away from the family home or school setting and it would be appropriate in this instance to contact Mosaic who will advise you whether a referral for bereavement counselling would be appropriate.

### PRE/POST BEREAVEMENT COUNSELLING

Grief is a normal part of life and it touches most people's lives at some point. Most children with the support of their family and school may not need any additional bereavement counselling. However, in some cases it can be very helpful to have external support to help process grief. Some children as they develop may 'revisit' their grief as their understanding of death changes. Although this is very normal they may have questions they want to ask about the death of their family member that they were too young to talk about at the time. Also, some deaths such as suicide or traumatic deaths may have led to some secrecy or confusion about the events. Helping children to understand what happened can be helpful in processing their grief. Knowing the facts can be far better than imagining what happened from fragmented bits of information.

If you are enquiring about pre or post counselling support it is best to contact us first to discuss your concerns about your child's needs before a referral is made. Bereavement counselling is a very specific type of counselling so to ensure that your child gets the most appropriate support - one of our Senior Counsellors can talk this through with you. If bereavement counselling is appropriate for your child, we may ask you to contact their school or a supporting service to make a referral so that we can access funding to support your child. It is important to note that when considering bereavement counselling for your child/young person they must be willing and have requested this support for it to be beneficial to them. We also recognise with pre bereavement counselling it is a very difficult and sensitive time and we are available to talk through any concerns and needs you have as a family to see whether this form of support would be helpful and give any advice and information.



## EARLY BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

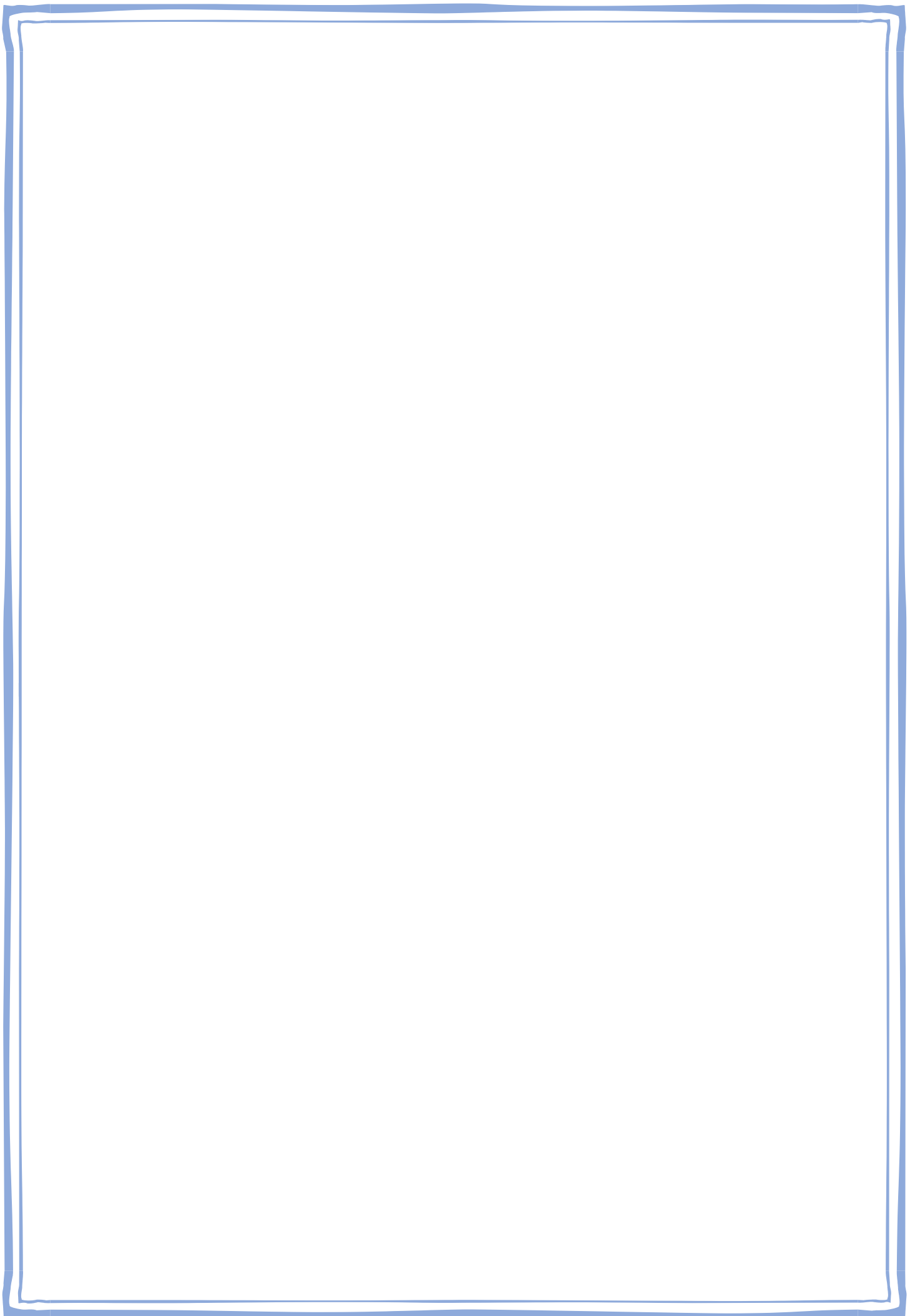
At Mosaic we recognise the importance of families receiving early bereavement support following the death of a loved one. Access to early support following a traumatic bereavement can make a great deal of difference to a family. Bereavement research shows that in the early stages of grief early advice and information, to normalise and understand grief responses can significantly help families to manage the challenges they are facing.

All children and young people will grieve in their own unique way, so we do not believe there is a set time when children are ready or indeed will need to access bereavement counselling. Therefore, offering our Early Bereavement Support to families and professionals can help to reassure families there is support there if needed. We offer this service through contact by telephone, email and social media. We can also offer up to 3 home visits to bereaved families at this early stage. This service also helps us to link families into other supports and services and offer training to school staff and other services if needed. By working closely with our families and other professionals we can then respond swiftly if a young person and family would benefit from an early referral for bereavement counselling.

At Mosaic we offer bereavement telephone support 5 days a week during office hours for parents/carers and their families. For a parent/carer of a bereaved child sometimes just chatting things through over the phone can help ease any worries or anxiety, particularly in early bereavement. If you have any concerns or questions one of our trained counsellors is available to offer advice to support you on the best course of action.

Our Early Bereavement Intervention is funded by Mosaic. As a bereavement charity for children and families we are grateful to our incredible fundraising team and volunteers who help to fund this support.

For more information please contact  
01258 837071  
[info@mosaicfamilysupport.org](mailto:info@mosaicfamilysupport.org)





## HOW MOSAIC CAN HELP YOUR FAMILY

Mosaic is here to help young people who have experienced the death of someone special. We offer 1:1 sessions with a trained Counsellor who have a speciality in the area of childhood bereavement. Our counsellors can work with individual children or whole families at home, at school or somewhere mutually suitable. The sessions are tailored towards each family, depending on the children's age and a plan of support is agreed with the young person and family during the initial assessment. Sessions with children and young people can include playing, crafting, building memory boxes, drawing, reading and talking.



Children and young people tell us that they often feel lonely and isolated and that it is really helpful to meet others who have had similar experiences. In order to do this, we organise activity days throughout the year and residential weekends where they can have fun, laugh, cry and make friends.

### Who can come to a residential weekend?

Children and young people aged between 5 and 18yrs who have had individual support from Mosaic because someone close to them has died. Children stay over-night, but parents and carers are also invited to a day session on the Saturday on a separate site.

### What happens at the weekend?

The weekend is filled with activities. Everyone works in small groups with others of a similar age. We talk about your special person, exploring some of the feelings you may have, and we have fun activities like archery and teambuilding games. It is good fun, and everyone enjoys meeting others and making new friends.

The weekend is free for all children and young people who have had individual support from Mosaic.



### **Children and Young People who have been to the weekend have said:**

*"This weekend has been great for all of us. It's taught us different skills to help with our emotions. We've learnt about anger and what to do with it, so we don't hurt ourselves and others. We are all leaving today feeling a lot better and with a lot more friends who understand what we are going through"*

*"I enjoyed the archery and talking about my mum, the food was good too"*

*"I enjoyed the candles, it was good remembering my dad and meeting other children who have had their dad die"*

### **Social events**

Mosaic organise a number of events each year to enable the families we work with to interact and have some fun. Meeting people over the residential weekend can form special friendships and it is great to keep in touch.

Each year the events vary, but we have run adventure activity days with climbing and raft-building, Christmas parties and summer picnics. From time to time, companies and charitable organisations will also invite Mosaic families to be involved in special events from ice-skating to football matches, pantomimes or parties.

### **Fundraising**

The other aspect of Mosaic is our charity fundraising, we are always running fundraising activities across the county to raise money to help run Mosaic and the family events. If you would like to get involved and have a few hours to help at a country fair, baking a cake, or even marathons and skydives, we would love to hear from you!

## HELPFUL ORGANISATIONS:

### Below is a list of useful contacts and websites

#### **Mosaic – Supporting Bereaved Children**

Dorset wide support for bereaved children, young people and their families

#### **E-mail and phone i**

The Mosaic office is open during the week, Monday to Friday, so please do call or e-mail us if you have any concerns or questions.

[info@mosaicfamilysupport.org](mailto:info@mosaicfamilysupport.org)

01258 837 071

#### **Website**

Our Mosaic website holds a variety of basic information about the charity and the work we do with families

[www.mosaicfamilysupport.org](http://www.mosaicfamilysupport.org)

#### **Social media**

Parents or children may want to keep in touch with Mosaic via Facebook or Twitter, our accounts are regularly updated with news of what we are doing as a charity and you can send us private messages this way.

[www.facebook.com/mosaicdorset](http://www.facebook.com/mosaicdorset)

[www.twitter.com/Mosaic16](http://www.twitter.com/Mosaic16)

#### **Childline**

National helpline for children

[www.childline.co.uk](http://www.childline.co.uk)

#### **CRUSE**

Bereavement care for adults

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

#### **Childhood Bereavement Network**

Information and advice on bereavement services nationwide

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

#### **HOPElineUK 0870 170 4000**

Support, practical advice and information to anyone concerned that a young person they know may be at risk of suicide

#### **National Children's Bureau – Childhood Bereavement Network**

Information, and advice bereavement services nationwide

[www.ncb.org.uk/cbn/directory](http://www.ncb.org.uk/cbn/directory)

**Papyrus**

A website to help young people who may be thinking about suicide

[www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)

**Parentline Plus**

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

**SAMM (Support after Murder and Manslaughter)**

A national UK Charity supporting families bereaved by Murder and Manslaughter)

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

**Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)**

[www.sobs.admin.care4free.net](http://www.sobs.admin.care4free.net)

**The Compassionate Friends**

Organisation to support parents who have lost a child of any age

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

**The Mesothelioma Centre**

The leading mesothelioma cancer resource

[www.asbestos.com](http://www.asbestos.com)

**The Way Foundation**

Organisation to support young widows and widowers

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

**At a loss**

Charitable movement of people across the UK who are passionate about enabling the bereaved to receive the support that they need

[www.ataloss.org](http://www.ataloss.org)

**CLIC Sargent**

UK's leading children's cancer charity which provides support and advice to children suffering from cancer and leukaemia and their families

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

**SPRING (Poole)**

Support for parents and relatives through baby loss

[www.springsupport.co.uk](http://www.springsupport.co.uk)

**Winston's Wish**

Offering information and support to anyone caring for a bereaved child, including professionals and family members

[www.winstonswish.org/Bereavement](http://www.winstonswish.org/Bereavement)

