



The widespread media coverage and the new rules about movement and behaviour brought in during the new Covid-19 pandemic led to many children and young people feeling frightened and worried about themselves and their loved ones. Their fear is a natural reaction to what is a rare global event. With so much uncertainty around, children who have already been bereaved may be especially worried that they might die, or that someone else close to them may die.

### Strange Times and Secondary Losses

For children and young people, this unprecedented situation led to losses that aren't actual bereavement, but still trigger the same emotional responses as grief. Children and young people may have experienced a grief response as a result of sudden changes to normality. Schools were closed at short notice, so there was a sudden 'loss' of structure and day-to-day routine, and time with friends and

## Bereavement through the Covid-19 Pandemic

teachers. For many older pupils, the loss of anticipated exams after a year's hard work was a huge emotional blow, coupled with feelings of uncertainty about their future education and careers. They may be feeling angry, anxious and confused. Add to this their worries about loved ones, and grief for those who have died, and we have a potentially intense emotional situation.

### Talking with Children & Young People

Be honest and open with your child about the Coronavirus and what is happening, but use age-appropriate language. There is no need for lots of detail, especially with younger children. It's helpful to explain things such as why hands are needing to be washed so often and so thoroughly, why visits to grandparents aren't allowed, why school was closed and why we've been asked to stay at home to stay safe.

Limit children's and young people's exposure to news and social media, as this is where too much detail can lead to feelings of anxiety and can be overwhelming.

Talking about the pandemic is likely to be an ongoing conversation over the weeks and months and beyond. To start with, ask children what they already know, and be guided by their questions. Answer what you can, but remember that it's okay to say 'I don't know the answer'. Adults can explain that top scientists around the world are working hard to fight the virus but that it will take a long time before we see changes.

Explain to children that people's bodies react differently to this new virus. Most people will have mild symptoms and some people will have no symptoms at all. A smaller number of more vulnerable people (who are elderly, frail or already poorly) may become seriously unwell, and some will die.

Don't make promises (e.g. 'Grandpa will be okay') but let children know that they are loved and supported and that everything is being done to protect them.

Children will feel more settled in routines, so aim to create new routines and keep to familiar routines during and after lockdown. Having regular mealtimes, time for schoolwork, playtimes and bedtimes gives shape to the day. Giving children simple jobs around the house, and choices about what they do will help them feel in control

and give a sense of normality and stability.

It's a worrying time for everyone, so do make sure that you get support for yourself too if you're struggling to cope with your feelings (see signposts at the end of this leaflet). Children and young people pick up on adults' distress, even if you're trying to hide it or it doesn't seem obvious to you.

### Impact on Funerals and Saying Goodbye

The social measures that have been put into place during the Covid-19 outbreak are highly restrictive. Social distancing and self-isolation are challenging for everyone, but for people bereaved during this time it is particularly distressing, as the usual ways of saying goodbye are not possible – even if the loved one died from something other than Covid-19. Together with uncertainty about what will happen in the near and distant future, this means that everyone be feeling especially vulnerable.

From 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020, all places of worship in the UK were closed and funerals only conducted at a crematorium or graveside, with many delayed or shortened, and only small numbers of people allowed to attend; all keeping social distancing rules. Some mourners will be unwell and

self-isolating so unable to attend.

Under normal circumstances, funerals provide a much-needed grief ritual; a chance for families and friends to join together to say goodbye to loved ones, recall fond memories and celebrate the life lived. The situation during lockdown causes great distress to the bereaved. Children and young people who would usually have been given the option of attending and taking part in funeral rituals may have been denied this choice, and could find it emotionally challenging.

### Ways to Handle Funerals & Memorials

- In addition to the simpler, smaller funeral that is allowed during the lockdown phase of the pandemic, plan for a fuller additional memorial service later. Focussing on this could be helpful in the grieving process as contributions can be carefully chosen and a date can be set well in advance – perhaps on the loved one's birthday or other significant date.
- Find ways to stream the funeral service to people who are unable to attend. This can be done through several platforms such as FaceTime, Facebook or Zoom. Much will depend on technical knowledge of those involved, but

internet searches can provide lots of help.

- Contributions from people who can't be there in person are a good way of being involved, and children will appreciate being included in this. Songs, readings, eulogies or poems can be pre-recorded or live streamed.
- Include a virtual slideshow of treasured photographs as part of the service. This can be interspersed with quotations and a playlist of the loved one's favourite music.
- If there are musicians in the family (or even just keen singers) encourage them to sing live together via online platforms. Alternatively, record a song in advance to play at the funeral, or simply agree to all sing the same song or read the same poem at an agreed time. Even if it's not recorded or streamed, it can give a sense of togetherness through a shared activity.
- The 'chat' feature on platforms such as Zoom allows people to write comments during streaming. This can be used as a virtual 'Memorial Book'.

As the situation unfolds over the following months, many organisations are updating and adapting their support and information regularly.

During the lockdown Balloons has suspended all face-to-face grief support, but we still provide support and information remotely, to help you to support your family, friends and students. You can leave messages on our helpline number 01392 826064 and we will get back to you, or you can email the staff team for any resources and queries:

[sarabennett@balloonscharity.co.uk](mailto:sarabennett@balloonscharity.co.uk)

[lizcook@balloonscharity.co.uk](mailto:lizcook@balloonscharity.co.uk)

[donnajames@balloonscharity.co.uk](mailto:donnajames@balloonscharity.co.uk)

*If you are reading this after lockdown restrictions have finished, then contact us to find out what our current service delivery arrangements are.*

### Signposts for further support and information

#### Pre-bereavement

- [www.hospiscare.co.uk/news/2020/04/06/COVID-19-support-and-advice-for-patients-families-and-vulnerable-groups](http://www.hospiscare.co.uk/news/2020/04/06/COVID-19-support-and-advice-for-patients-families-and-vulnerable-groups)

#### Funerals

- <https://nafd.org.uk/funeral-advice/>

#### National Charities

- [www.childline.org.uk/get-support/contacting-childline/message-from-childline/](http://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/contacting-childline/message-from-childline/)
- [www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief](http://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief)
- [www.childbereavementuk.org/about-our-helpline](http://www.childbereavementuk.org/about-our-helpline)
- [www.giveusashout.org/](http://www.giveusashout.org/)
- [www.samaritans.org/](http://www.samaritans.org/)
- [www.ataloss.org/covid-19](http://www.ataloss.org/covid-19)

### Free E-Books for Children

'Piperpotamus Learns About Coronavirus':

[www.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/medicalschool/documents/Piperpotamus\\_learns\\_about\\_Coronavirus.pdf](http://www.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/medicalschool/documents/Piperpotamus_learns_about_Coronavirus.pdf)

'Dave the Dog is Worried About Coronavirus':

<https://nursedottybooks.com/dave-the-dog-is-worried-about-coronavirus-2/>

Animation Explaining Coronavirus:

<https://ineqe.com/2020/03/20/animation-story-book-explains-the-coronavirus-to-children/>

Activity and Information Book:

[www.tes.com/teaching-resource/child-friendly-explanation-of-coronavirus-by-manuela-molina-12267168](http://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/child-friendly-explanation-of-coronavirus-by-manuela-molina-12267168)

