

# SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMMEDIATELY AFTER A BEREAVEMENT AND BEFORE THEY CAN BE REFERRED TO BALLOONS



Balloons accepts referrals to provide 1 to 1 grief support to children and young people aged 5 to 25 in Exeter, Mid and East Devon from 12 weeks after the bereavement.

Balloons has a 1 to 1 referral criteria which should be carefully read at the point of a possible referral to ensure that the referral is appropriate both in terms of timescale and in terms of circumstance.

Balloons doesn't provide 1 to 1 support immediately after a death for a range of reasons, but mainly because support at that time is best provided by loving and trusted adults already known to the child.

In the immediate aftermath of a bereavement everyone will be understandably distressed. This is a completely natural response to the pain of grief. As far as possible this should be accepted and responded to with loving support. Many primary carers find it very hard to see their child in pain. As parents and carers, we are used to resolving pain quickly with a cuddle and a sticking plaster.

It can be distressing to allow your child to express pain, but this is what we must try to do when they are bereaved.

There will be no quick fix and we mustn't seek to 'rush them through to a safer place'. Everyone should be allowed to grieve in their own way and at their own pace.



The child or young person needs to be given the opportunity to express how they are feeling without fear of judgement or of upsetting those around them. They will have the best chance of healthy adaptation to the death of the significant person if they are given time and space to express their grief and shock.

They will find it comforting to know that others around them are also sad and upset. They will find it comforting to be 'held' in the family unit and to mourn alongside those who love them.

## OUR TOP TIPS FOR MANAGING THE FIRST FEW WEEKS

**Ring the Balloons helpline** – call us on 01392 982570. We will listen to your concerns and help you with ideas and resources to manage the first few weeks as you support your grieving child.

**Honesty is best** – even though it can be hard, it's best if children are told as soon as possible after the bereavement and are given as much information as possible in an age appropriate way. It might seem right in the moment to tell half-truths to protect your child but if whole truths will have to be told at some point then straight away is usually best.

**Let them know you are hurting too** – as adults we often seek to 'protect' children by not revealing that we are in pain. Within reason, help them to understand that you too are sad, as this makes them feel less alone and confused. There is a saying 'Families that mourn together, grow together'.

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## OUR TOP TIPS FOR MANAGING THE FIRST FEW WEEKS (CONTINUED)

**Involve them in what is happening** – many families say that the best thing they did in the first few weeks was to involve everyone, including very young children, in memorial activities, funeral planning etc. This helps the family to move forward with understanding and a sense of being together. The Balloons information sheets on The Funeral and on Family Activities after the Death of a Loved One might be helpful for you.

**Be there for them** – this sounds simple, but it can be hard when you yourself are grieving and in pain. As far as possible, be there to listen to your child as they give voice to their upset and fears. Children will often ask the same questions over and over and will seek reassurance for the same things repeatedly. Try to be patient with this very normal process.

**Look after yourself** – you may well be struggling and finding it hard to eat and sleep and do all of the normal things that make up everyday life. This is the time to reach out for all the help on offer in your family and your community. Let others take some of the strain.

**Referring your child to Balloons** – from 12 weeks, we can start to consider whether a referral for 1 to 1 support is needed, or whether with the passage of a few weeks the child is settling and managing their grief. Call us if you are still worried, and we can talk this through together.

