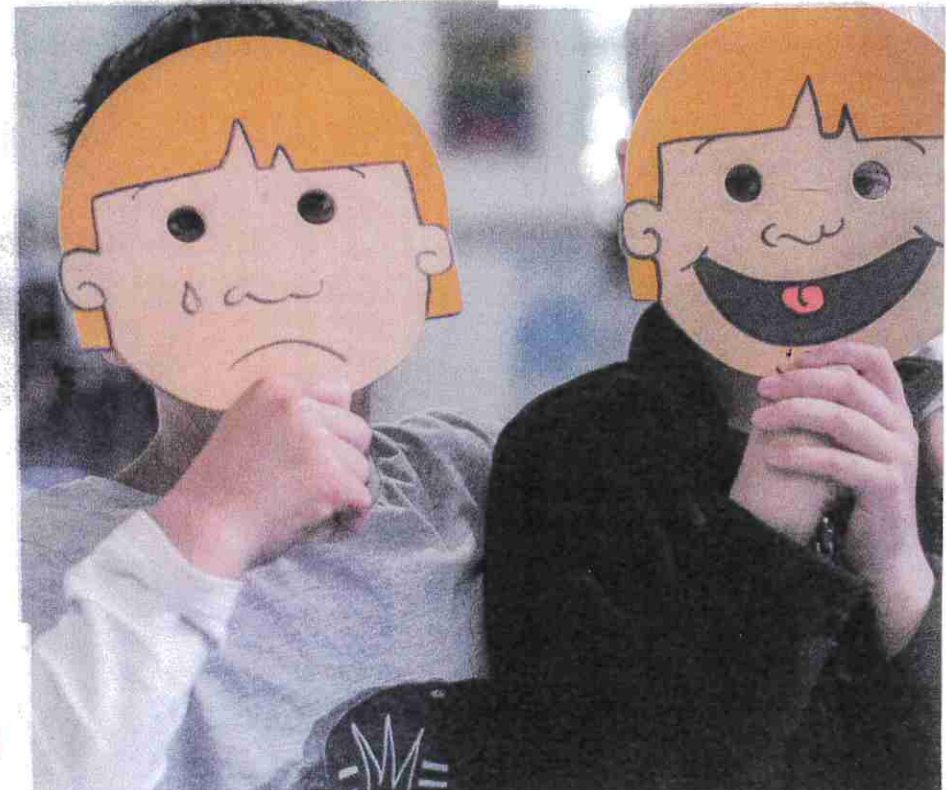


TELLING A CHILD WITH SEND THAT SOMEONE HAS DIED

A key aspect to supporting bereaved children with SEND (and any bereaved child), is to be honest and open with them. This means we need to:

- **Tell them what has happened** e.g. *'Nanny has been very ill and the doctors and nurses have worked very hard to try and make her better, but sadly they were unable to'*
– supplying details appropriate to the child's level of understanding.
- **Use the real words and no half-truths** when explaining to the child what has happened. Use the correct terms – dying, death and dead, rather than euphemisms such as 'passed away'. Using these accurate words makes it much clearer and easier for the child to understand. Avoid telling half-truths. If a child asks you a question, answer it honestly. If you answer with a lie you will only have to unpick it later and this is infinitely more difficult than just telling the truth in the beginning.
- **Answer the child's questions** immediately or if you are unsure of the answer, say *'I don't know, but I'll find out for you'*. Then find out the answer as quickly as possible and immediately share this with the child. However unusual or insignificant you may feel the question is, for the child it is immensely significant. Having the answer will help to reassure the child.
- **Accept their feelings**, even if these feelings are not as you thought they would be. Some children will react in a way that we find surprising, e.g. laughing when they learn that someone has died. This is not the child being rude, rather it is their immediate and emotional reaction. The news is so big it is the child's only way of coping with it.

- **Let them know that it is not their fault** – some children may worry that the person has died as a result of something they have or have not done. It is imperative that we explain to the child (to the level of their understanding) how and why the person died and that this was not caused by anything they did or said. It can be helpful to repeat this whenever the death is explained to them.



"I was very naughty last week and Daddy told me to go to my room. He didn't want to see me. Is that why he died – because he doesn't want to see me anymore?"

- **Deliver information about the death in small chunks** rather than giving the child lots of information all in one go. Instead, provide it gradually: a drip, drip approach of all of the relevant information.
- **Provide information about the death to their level of understanding.** As the child gets older and their understanding develops further, slowly give the child more information about how the person died. The types of questions that the child is asking will help to gauge their comprehension of the situation and how much information you should provide. It is like giving a new version of a jigsaw puzzle with more pieces in it. The earlier simpler jigsaw still gave a clear picture, for instance, *'Daddy has died and cannot come back to life'*. Later a child may be able to understand and assimilate other pieces of information that give a more detailed picture of how he died and factors that may have contributed to his death. The complexity of the picture and the number of pieces of information that a child can make sense of will be determined by their level of understanding.
- **Ensure the child trusts you** – regularly remind the child that you will always listen and that they can ask questions and share their thoughts and feelings with you at anytime.
- **Are you sitting comfortably?** When you share the news of the death, think about where you do this and how – the physical environment and positioning of you and the child. Choose a place that is relaxing and comfortable for the child. Sit alongside the child, rather than standing over them. Be ready to provide comfort. For some children it may not be appropriate to be seated face to face as this puts too much focus on them. Instead, they may prefer no direct eye contact. If this is the case, you can talk to them about the death by being 'side by side', perhaps looking at a shared view, or walking together. This approach will be much less challenging for them.

