

# Supporting children and young people navigating loss

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We find ourselves in some of the most difficult days. The impact of death and loss is woven through the news, our communities, our conversations and our emotions in ways we have never experienced before and with this comes a deep sense of grief and mourning. As we process this ever changing situation, we are conscious of the children and young people that we know, teach, serve and minister to, and how they are navigating both this national emergency and the personal loss that they may be experiencing. We have produced this resource to help support you and the children and young people you are with, both physically and virtually, with resources, sessions and advice.

## **This short resource contains:**

- [Links to organisations and projects working specifically around these issues of death and loss with children and young people](#)
- A session on grief and mourning which has been adapted for both [children](#) and [young people](#)
- An [example letter](#) for schools informing families about a death within the school community

Be assured of our prayers for you during this time as we face these challenges and losses, but also as we keep our eyes fixed on the hope of Jesus and seek to bring that hope to others.

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# Helpful Resources

## Winston's Wish

**Strategy for schools** - A policy and procedures aid for a death in the school community.

[Go to resource](#)

**How to say goodbye when a funeral isn't possible** - Guidance for talking to children about funerals during this period.

[Go to resource](#)

**How can schools support bereaved children** - Specific advice for schools to support bereaved pupils impacted by the coronavirus.

[Go to resource](#)

**Supporting bereaved children and young people** - advice for reassuring bereaved children and young people who are worried about the effect of this virus on their family.

[Go to resource](#)

**Telling children and young people that someone is seriously ill** - Guidance and advice on the importance of talking to children and young people about an illness.

[Go to resource](#)

**Telling a child or young person someone has died from coronavirus** - General guidance on talking to children about the death of someone close, with particular advice on for talking about death due to coronavirus.

[Go to resource](#)

**Managing grief in self-isolation** - Advice for anyone experiencing grief during a time of social isolation.

[Go to resource](#)

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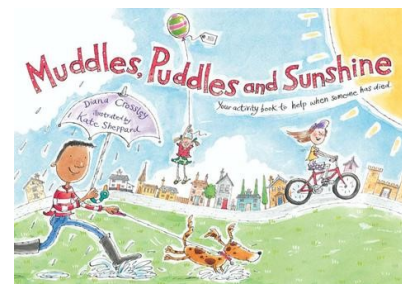
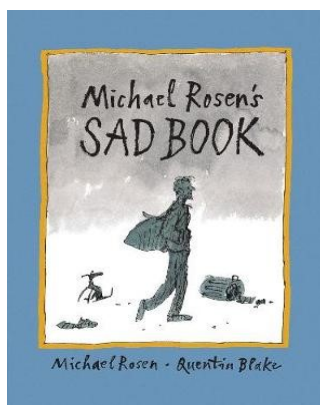
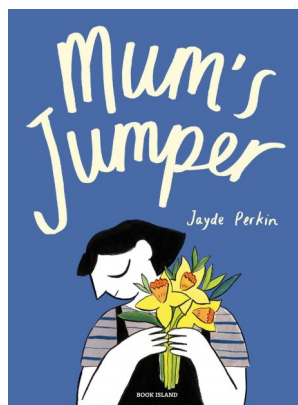
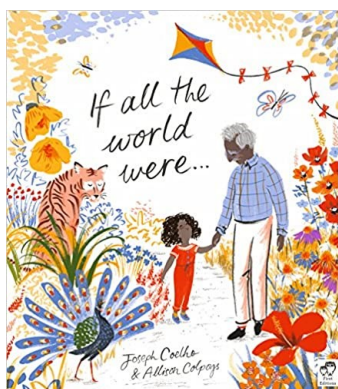
## YoungMinds

**Grief and Loss** - General guidance on supporting children and young people during times of grief and loss.

[Go to resource](#)

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## Books



*Please note, we advise reading any book in advance in order to ensure its suitability for the child*

# Helpful Resources

## Child Bereavement UK

**Supporting a child with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** - A short video with tips and guidance for supporting a child with autism spectrum disorder when somebody dies.

[Go to resource](#)

## Cruse Bereavement Care

**Support for schools** - A collection of resources for schools supporting pupils experiencing a bereavement.

[Go to resource](#)

**Hope Again**—A website created for young people for support living after loss.

[Go to resource](#)

## Youth for Christ

**How to support children dealing with grief** - A short video from child bereavement counsellor on supporting children and young people dealing with grief.

[Go to resource](#)

## Diocese of Birmingham

**Supporting children through loss and bereavement** — The Diocese of Birmingham have produced a guide for supporting children who are facing the death of a loved one, including further resources for support.

[Go to resource](#)

## Church Army

**Death, Grief & Hope** - Straight answers for young people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Go to resource](#)

## Fink Cards

**Conversations about loss and change** — Conversation cards to support children and young people talk about understand their feelings about loss and change. Cards for KS1–KS3.



# Help & Support



**Freephone National Helpline: 08088 020 021**

Therapeutic advice on supporting a grieving child or young person after the death of a loved one

**Crisis Messenger: Text WW to 85258**

For bereaved young people experiencing a crisis, free 24/7 text support

# Session Plan for Young People on Grief and Mourning

*This session was originally written in 2019 before the period of lockdown for COVID19 so there are parts of the session which would only work with young people in a gathered group. Where appropriate there is a suggested alternative for working with young people online.*

## Session aims:

To open up the subject of loss and death, and explore what grief and mourning is. To discover that God is in the midst of our grief and mourning, and completely gets it. To find space to experience and tell our stories of loss, and to discover or rediscover the hope of life in the midst of loss.

## Pre-introduction

You will know your young people and their individual situations, so you might want to begin the evening explaining that we are going to be talking about loss and the emotions around that. You might want to create an area for them to withdraw to if they need a bit of space and explain that there will be a point in the evening, near the end, where you can light a candle and remember people or situations that you grieve and mourn for. And remind them that God is there.

## INTRO ACTIVITY

### Lost! (10 mins)

*Equipment: important items such as keys, mobile phone, wallet, jewellery etc*

Hide a couple of really important items such as keys, mobile phone, and wallet around the space that you are meeting in. Make them **really** difficult to find. Ask the group to get searching, but give them only 4 minutes to search. Once they return, successful or unsuccessful, begin to open up the discussion around grief with these questions:

- What does it feel like to lose something?
- Can we cope?
- Can we live without it?

### Alternative activity for online:

You could contact the young people's families either before the Zoom or online session, or ask them during the chat to hide a number of items around the house for the young person to find. Alternatively you could ask the group if they have found anything that they thought they had lost while they have been on lockdown, or if there is something that they are still looking for.

## LETS EXPLORE

### Good grief (10 mins)

*Equipment: large jar with a lid, a thick Sharpie to write on the jar, pens and small pieces of paper*

Start this part of the evening by thinking about loss and death. Explain that this is a huge subject but something that's really important to talk about. You might want to use these questions to begin to identify the emotions that loss and death can create:

- How do you feel about talking about loss and death?
- Why do you think some people find it difficult to talk about?

Ask the group to think about the emotions and feelings that are connected to death and loss, and write them down on the pieces of paper. They can write anything they like – positive or negative emotions and feelings. Then ask them to put them in the jar.

When they have done this write the word grief on the jar. Explain that all the emotions that we deal with when we experience loss are our grief. We can keep adding to this jar as we go through the journey of experiencing loss. What we do with those emotions, with our grief, is our mourning. How we mourn is really important. It can be hidden, visible, loud or silent – but its healthy to keep the lid off the jar and not just close it and hope the feelings will go away.

### **Alternative activity for online:**

Send a note before the online gathering and ask the young people to have these items ready so that they can take part alongside each other. It doesn't necessarily have to be a jar – it could be a plastic box or another container with a lid.

## **SOMETHING TO DISCUSS**

### **Good mourning (10/15 mins)**

*Equipment: Bibles*

Ask the group to read through the story of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:21-43). They may already be familiar with it and that it weaves in with the encounter with the woman who is bleeding. Either in small groups or one big group ask them to identify the words, emotions and feelings that are expressed in this story about the little girl.

Once you have identified the different expressions of fear and grief from the passage chat through the following thoughts and questions.

- There is confusion, loud crying, wailing and begging. People's feelings and emotions are real. Jesus chooses to come and be with them in the middle of these emotions. Where does Jesus fit for us when we experience these kinds of emotions and experiences? Do we know that he understands and gets it?
- In other passages in the Bible we come across mourning, but it is usually accompanied by the words of comfort. Isaiah 53:4 says 'surely he has borne our grief and carried our sorrows'. God understands our grief and need to mourn, and is also in the business of comfort. How does this help us to mourn? Is it OK to feel and express these big emotions?
- Revelation 21:4 says 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away'. This passage gives us hope and certainty that in eternal life the difficult emotions and painful experiences have gone, but this verse also recognises that these are real emotions and part of our human lives. God understands and God gives us hope.

## **LET'S PRACTICE**

### **Around the cross (15 mins)**

*Equipment: large roll of backing wallpaper, newspaper, pens, glue sticks, tea lights, matches, Bible, jar of grief and a candle to light from*

*Note: this is a BIG space activity so you might want to do this in church or in a hall. If you don't have access to these kind of big spaces then use a few pieces of flip chart paper instead. It will still work.*

Lay the backing paper out in the shape of a cross and ask the group to sit around it. For about 10 mins ask the group to fill the cross with words and pictures with:

- words that bring hope,
- thoughts about how we can support each other in times of grief and mourning,
- practical ways to bring comfort and support,
- prayers for those who are experiencing loss,
- God's promises and words that bring comfort and hope.

They can draw and write, or if they want to find pictures of hope and comfort in the newspapers these can be pasted on too. Invite them too to write the names of people that they have loved and mourn if they wish to as well.

Place the jar of grief on the cross and a lit candle.

Draw the group together, invite them to come and light a candle to remember someone or something if they want to and end the evening by reading out Psalm 23.

Just have some time to be still. Read the room and finish with prayer when you feel it's right.

### ***Alternative activity for online:***

Understandably this activity won't be possible during these days, but ask the young people to have a piece of A4 paper or bigger, depending what is available to them, and create their own reflections inside it using words and pictures. If you want to come back to this session once the group is able to physically meet again you might want to produce a big cross and ask them to bring their pieces of paper in and fill the cross with them. This would create the opportunity for conversation around their thoughts and feelings during the lockdown period and about how dealing with those feelings of grief and loss changes by being back together.

## **LET'S EXPERIMENT**

So what now? These are some ideas to encourage your young people to know God's hope and be hopebringers.

- Create a different jar. A jar of hope, a bit like the jar of grief, but this time spend the week thinking of ways in which you can bring hope to the lives of others through words, actions, cards etc. Write them down on pieces of paper and stick them in your jar. And just keep doing it. You can never have enough hope.
- Psalm 73:26 is brilliant. It's about a person who feels like he doesn't have the best life, feels like other people have nicer homes and more cash. He talks about his heart being 'grieved', that somehow he has lost something. But then he realises that actually he has God, and in God are his greatest riches. Verses 23-26 say this (and this is magnificent!)

Yet I am always with you; you hold me by the right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever'

Over the next week think about these words. Write them in your diary or a journal, or a postit on your fridge. Think about how these words impact you. How amazing is it to know that God is more than enough. Always more than enough. Write down times when it feels like your heart fails and write over them the assurances that God brings that are full of love, hope and comfort. Keep the piece of paper. Maybe put it in your jar of hope.

# Session Plan for Talking with Children about Grief and Mourning

*This session was originally developed to be used in groups. Where appropriate there is a suggested alternative for use at home.*

## Session aims

To give children the opportunity to explore that their feelings in responding to loss to grief and bereavement. To discover that God is in the midst of our grief and mourning and understands. To have space for children to share their stories of loss. To see the hope of life in the midst of loss.

## Pre-introduction

You will know the children and their individual situations, so you might want to begin by explaining what is going to be talked about. You might want to let them know it's okay to withdraw if they need to and have a space set aside for that. Let them that you are going to light a candle and remember people or situations that you grieve and mourn for. And remind them that God is with them.

## INTRO ACTIVITY

### Lost! (10 mins)

*Equipment: important items such as keys, mobile phone, wallet, jewellery etc*

Hide a 3 or four really important objects around the space that you are meeting in. Items such as keys, mobile phone, and wallet/purse work well. Make them **quite** difficult to find. Ask the group to get searching, but give them only 4 minutes to search. Once they return, successful or unsuccessful, begin to open up the discussion around grief with these questions:

- Have you ever lost something that was important to you?
- What did it feel like to lose that thing?
- How did you cope with that?
- How did you manage without it?

## Let's EXPLORE

### At home

You could still have this treasure hunt maybe with less time, maybe even outside if you have such a space connected to your home.

*Resources: Paper plates, felt tips, large jar, small pieces of paper,*

### Inside/Outside Feelings (10 mins)

Ask the group how they think people feel talking about loss and death. Ask them why they think it's something people can find difficult to talk about. Tell them they are going to have the chance to think about any feelings they might have to think about feelings they might have when someone we love or care about dies. Then pick one of the options depending on the age of the children.

### Younger children

Take a paper plate. On one side ask children to draw a picture of their face with the feelings they have when someone we love or care about dies that they show to others. They can write words on too. On the other side ask them to draw a picture of their face which shows any feelings that they might keep inside and do not let others see on the other plate.

Then ask them to share their pictures if they would like to. Are any of the words different? Why do they think that is? How do they think they could share all their feelings with other people?

### **At home**

This would still work but would be better if everyone joins in, adults too.

### **Older children**

Ask the group to think about the emotions and feelings that they might have when someone they love or care about dies and write or draw them down on the pieces of paper. They can write anything they like – positive or negative emotions and feelings. Explain that we often have feelings we can share with others and explain these are called 'outside feelings'. Sometimes we have feelings we do not share with others but keep on the inside and these are called 'inside feelings'. Ask the group to lay any outside feelings around the jar and any inside feelings in the jar.

Invite the children to share their inside and outside feelings and emotions. Are any of the words different? Why do they think that is? How do they think they could share all their feelings with other people? Are there any they would like to take out of the jar and turn them into outside feeling? Invite them to do so if they wish.

### **At home**

This would still work but would be better if everyone joins in, adults too.

### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT (5-10 mins)**

*Resources: Have some children's bibles around.*

This is a time to do some wondering and talk with the children but also to reassure them that God is with them through all of their sadness. Use the following as a guide to open the conversation.

- I wonder if you have heard about any times when Jesus was sad
- I wonder if you can think of any times when Jesus was with people who were sad
- I wonder if how that makes you feel.

Jesus understands our sadness and pain because he went through these things too. But we know we have hope. In the last book of the bible Revelation (21:4) it says that God 'will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared.'

God understands that these are very real feelings and are part of life. But we also know that we have hope because we know too that Jesus is with us through the good times and the bad. He promises (Matthew 28:20) 'I will be with you always, to the end of the age.'

### **At home**

Perhaps you can go through your favourite Bible together to find examples of when Jesus was sad.

### **Hope**

#### **Around the cross (10-15 mins)**

*Resources: large roll of lining paper or printed or cut out crosses or flipchart paper, felt-tips or markers, a large candle.*



There are several ways you could undertake this activity depending on the number of children in your group and what you think will work best for them:

- Give each child a cut out cross shapes or printed on A4 paper, felt tips, coloured pencils
- Have some big cross shapes drawn on pieces of flip paper
- Take a role of lining paper and make a cross shape (if you have a big enough space!)

Whatever you choose, invite the children to fill the cross with words and pictures:

- that bring comfort and hope
- prayers for those who are experiencing loss
- ways we could bring comfort to people
- names of people they are close to who have died

### **At home**

Choose one of the activities and do it together, adults too.

### **Conclusion**

If you have made individual crosses place them around the inside/outside jar or if you have made a big cross, bring the jar and outside pieces of paper and place it on the cross.

If you have a candle you can light safely, then do so asking the children to say in their mind someone or something they want to remember. Read out Psalm 23: 1-4 and finish with the prayer below or one you compose.

*Dear Father God, thank you that you know us and love us. Comfort us we pray when we are sad because we have lost something or someone. Take care of those who have died and take care of us. And help us always to have hope in you. In Jesus name we pray. Amen*

### **At home**

This might be nice to do outside if you have a space to do so. Under supervision, everyone could light a tea light to remember someone or something they have lost. Make sure to blow them out after the prayer.

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# Example letter for schools

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Dear parents/carers,

It is with great sadness that I share the news that \_\_\_\_\_ died due to complications of the coronavirus.

Our thoughts are with the family and friends of \_\_\_\_\_ at this difficult time and we are providing what support we can to the family. We are letting you know about this sad event so you may inform your children. When someone dies, it is normal for children, indeed all of us to feel sad and confused. Any death may make children anxious, as they become more aware of their own mortality and that of those around them. We know that children hearing about a death benefit from maintaining normal routines, being listened to, having their questions answered honestly (sticking to known facts rather than rumour) and having their feelings acknowledged and normalised. We do not yet know when the funeral will take place and obviously attendance will not be possible. When children return to school we will of course devise a suitable memorial activity.

In the meantime, you may find helpful information on this site:

<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus/>

We appreciate your understanding and support with this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact us via email if you have any questions or concerns.

Yours sincerely

***An alternate example letter can also be found in Winston's Wish: Strategy for Schools***