** Appendix 1:**

**Important reminders for parents and carers supporting a bereaved child**

* Remember that ‘super parents’ don’t exist. Just do what you can, when you can. Be gentle on yourself.
* There is more than one way to support your children. Choose the things that you feel most comfortable with.
* Accept that some things just can’t be ‘made better’ in a short space of time.
* Talk to children using words they understand and ask questions to check they have understood you.
* Give information a bit at a time if your children are younger. Pieces of the ‘jigsaw puzzle’ can be put together over time to make the complete picture.
* Show children how you are feeling: it helps them to know that it’s OK to show their feelings too.
* Encourage children to ask questions and keep answering them – even if it’s for the 100th time.
* Answer questions honestly and simply; and be willing to say ‘I don’t know’.
* Try to find ways in which children can be involved.
* Keep talking about the person who has died.
* Trust yourself and your instincts – you haven’t forgotten how to parent your child.
* Look after yourself too.

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**Appendix 2:**

**What are they feeling? Typical age-related responses to death**

**Children under 2 years old**

Very young children and babies are not able to understand death. However, if a death occurs in the life of a child in this age group they experience the loss as a separation from someone they have an attachment to. And although children at this age do not have much language to express their loss they will react to it. They may search for the person who died; they may cry inconsolably or be withdrawn.

Children this age will also be affected by the emotional state of other important people in their lives. It is important that as normal a routine as possible is maintained for the child. They will respond to a steady, loving, interested environment which will enable them to continue to thrive. As the child grows, so will their ability to understand and use speech to express themselves and so there will be opportunities to talk about the person who died and help them build their own story. When a child this young experiences the death of a parent it is particularly important they are helped to know about the person as it is an integral part of their history.

**Children aged 2 to 5**

Children aged between 2 to 5 years think that death is reversible and that people who have died can come back. Their thoughts are characterised by what we call “magical thinking”. Children can be convinced that it was something they said or did or thought that caused the person to die. The flip side of this thinking is that they can believe their words, actions or thoughts can bring the dead person back. They need to be reassured repeatedly that the death was not their fault. Children’s thinking in this age range is also concrete – they cannot grasp abstract concepts or roundabout ways of saying things. Instead use specific concrete words such as “She has died” and give specific explanations about why the person died. Don’t be afraid to be honest and tell your child if you don’t have an answer.

It is not unusual for children of this age to revert to behaviour patterns they had when they were younger such as bed-wetting, use of a security blanket or thumb sucking. Try to be tolerant. In time, these earlier behaviour patterns will probably disappear again, once family life resumes. One of the most difficult aspects of a child’s grief at these ages is how they ask the same questions over and over again in an effort to begin making sense of their loss. Children are naturally curious and they want to make sense of what is happening in their world. Their repeated questions are not a sign that your explanations aren’t good enough - it is just the way they do things at this age. Reading books on death and loss, playing, drawing and giving them opportunities to identify and talk about worries and feelings will all help them deal with the loss. When they experience a death in this age range they are at their most helpless and are most dependent on adults to regain their balance.

**Children aged 6 to 9**

In this age range the child begins to develop an understanding of death as irreversible and something that will happen to all living things but they may be confused about it. It is not uncommon for children to think of death as something spooky, like a zombie or a spirit that comes to get you. It is important that their specific worries are spoken about, that they share bad dreams and are told that what they’re feeling is normal. Children are reassured by having their worrying and negative thoughts talked through, giving them skills and confidence to be in charge of them.

Children may display what you feel is an unhealthy curiosity with issues such as what a dead body looks like and what happens to a body after a person has been dead for some time. This curiosity is natural and they will benefit from clear explanations. They may worry about how the person who has died will eat, breath and keep warm. It is important to give them information and tell them that once someone has died, the body doesn’t feel any more and they don’t get hungry.

Children at this stage may complain of a sore tummy, headaches or just generally not feeling well. These are what we call ‘somatic’ complaints, where unexpressed feelings and emotions can lead to physical symptoms or discomfort. Somatic complaints are normal but it is important that routines are maintained while gently acknowledging when someone important dies.

Children this age may have difficulty expressing feelings verbally and may retreat into themselves. In dealing with their feelings of helplessness, you may notice increased aggression. It is important to avoid clichés such as “You’re such a brave boy/girl”. Children will interpret this that you want or need them not to share their feelings. They need you and other important people in their lives to show them that it’s OK to express their feelings.

**Children aged 9 to 13**

In this age range children are much more aware of the finality of death and the impact the death has on them. They are able to understand death as both concrete and abstract.

Children may experience difficulties in their interactions with their peers. The death of someone important can make them feel different at the very time they want to be the same as everyone else.

It is important to find ways to build their self-esteem. Children at this age are beginning to think of the longer term consequences of the loss of the relationship. They are aware of the loss they feel in the present but also of the losses they will experience in the coming months and years when they encounter certain important milestones or occasions and realise that they won’t be able to share these with the person who has died. At this age children are beginning to move away from dependence on the family and they start to form important relationships with other children. The death of someone important can easily destabilise them, leaving them feeling unsafe and more dependent on the family. Their ability to manage their feelings may be disrupted and lead to mood swings or more definite up’s and down’s in their feelings. Big emotional releases (such as anger or distress) are not uncommon but can be scary for children at this stage. They will benefit from your willingness to listen and your assurances that the feelings are normal.

**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.