



How Children Grieve



A toolkit for **teachers + school staff**
created by **Clinical Psychologists**

Start here: worksheets for every age

Grief looks **different at every age**. Our worksheet bundles give you **simple, guided activities** you can use right now to **build safety, language for feelings, and connection** to the person who died.

[thelossfoundation.org/
child-grief-worksheets](http://thelossfoundation.org/child-grief-worksheets)



Early Childhood (Ages 3–6)

“Concrete Thinkers”

Helping little ones make sense of what's happened through **play, story, and art**.

Middle Childhood (Ages 7–10)

“Curious Realists”

Building **emotional language** and **coping skills** while exploring **fairness** and **feelings**.

Preteens + Early Teens (Ages 11–13) –

“Feeling It Deeply”

Supporting **reflection, self-expression**, and the search for **meaning**.

Teens (Ages 14–18)

“Meaning-Makers”

Encouraging **independence, identity**, and **connection** through journaling and creativity.

When someone important dies, grief can feel **confusing** and **unpredictable** – for both children and adults. There isn't a finish line; **grief comes in waves** and **changes as children grow**. This guide offers simple, practical ways to support a child while also caring for yourself. You don't need perfect words – your **calm presence, honesty** and **patience** matter most.

Rather than trying to "fix" grief, the goal is to help the child navigate it **safely** and for them to **feel supported**.

What children need at any age...

-  **Emotional literacy** – noticing, understanding and naming feelings.
-  **Coping strategies** – safe ways to express sadness, anger, guilt or confusion.
-  **Resilience and security** – routines and reassurance that they are loved and safe.
-  **Connection to their loved one** – remembering, honouring and celebrating the person who has died.

How to use this resource...

1. Use the **worksheet bundles** in PSHE, pastoral sessions, or quiet reflection time (optional).
2. Use the **tips in this guide** to support conversations and routines.
3. Revisit activities around **milestones, anniversaries**, or noticeable **changes in behaviour**.

You don't need to fix grief. Just make space for it – safely, kindly, and without pressure. **Together, we can create classrooms that hold both learning and loss.**



A Child's Questions + Modeling 'Healthy Grief'

When someone dies, children often look to **trusted adults** at school to **understand how to respond**. They may ask **difficult** or **unexpected** questions – sometimes days, weeks, or even months later.

You don't need perfect answers. What helps most is **honesty, warmth**, and the **reassurance** that all feelings are normal.

Children and young people **learn about emotional regulation** by **watching adults** – not just parents, but teachers, mentors, and support staff.

Seeing you **acknowledge sadness** in calm, real ways helps normalise grief and shows that emotions can be expressed safely.

Examples: "It's okay to feel upset – I feel sad too sometimes when someone dies." "Let's take a few quiet moments together."

Note on Family preferences + language

Check the **parent/carer's preferred wording** (e.g., "died", faith-based explanations) and what may be shared with peers.

Avoid euphemisms like "went to sleep" which can cause anxiety, unless the family requests them – then add gentle clarity.

Child's Question

Suggested Response

"**Why** did they die?"

Keep it simple and truthful. "They were very ill and their body stopped working."

"**Will I die** too?"

Reassure gently. "You are safe, and healthy. Most people live a long time."

"Why am I **sad/angry**?"

Validate their feelings. "Grief can have lots of feelings – sadness, anger, worry. All of these feelings are normal."

"Can I **still talk about them**?"

Encourage expression. "Yes, you can talk about them anytime. It helps us remember them."

"Why is everyone else **acting normal**?"

Explain differences in coping. "People grieve differently. Some show it, some keep it inside – both are okay."





Common Reactions by Age

Every child **grieves differently**, and their reactions can be unpredictable. You might see **laughter** one moment, **tears** the next, or even periods of apparent calm with **no visible reaction at all**. All of these responses are **normal** - grief doesn't follow a set pattern, and children often experience a mix of emotions as they **try to make sense of their loss**.

Age	Common Reactions	Examples / Scenarios
Young children (3-7)	Confusion, regression, clinginess, fear of separation, sleep disturbances.	Bedwetting, tantrums, repeated questions ("Will they come back?"), refusing to sleep alone, nightmares, needing constant reassurance.
Tweens (8-11)	Withdrawal, guilt, anger, anxiety, irritability, preoccupation with fairness, somatic complaints.	Avoiding friends, irritability, blaming self, stomach aches, headaches, obsessive questions about the death, reluctance to participate in activities they once enjoyed.
Teens (12+)	Masked grief, risk-taking, mood swings, isolation, existential questioning, changes in sleep or appetite.	Irritability, isolating in their room, experimenting with risky behaviours, sudden disinterest in hobbies, questioning life/death, fluctuating motivation.
All ages	Physical manifestations, sudden changes in behaviour, regression in social skills.	Clinginess to caregivers, increased tantrums, regression in toileting or speech, frequent crying, loss of interest in friends or play, somatic complaints (stomach, headaches), trouble concentrating in school.



How Children Grieve: Age-Specific Guidance

"Over 70% of bereaved children report that talking openly with a parent or carer helped them feel supported and understood."
 - Winston's Wish / Child Bereavement UK

	Young children (3–7 years)	Tweens (8–11 years)	Teens (12+ years)
Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May think death is temporary or reversible. Ask repetitive questions as they process the concept. Grief may show as regression (clinginess, toileting accidents, tantrums). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand finality, but may struggle with expressing emotions. May hide feelings, become irritable, or show anxiety about fairness/justice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can grasp permanence of death and broader existential ideas. May mask feelings, withdraw, or act out in anger or risk-taking.
Tips for support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use simple, concrete language: <i>"They have died, which means we won't see them in person again."</i> Repeat info gently and consistently. Use books, drawings, and play to help express feelings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage them to journal/write to the person who has died. Allow privacy, but check in regularly. Guide conversations – ask specific questions <i>"What do you miss most about them?" / "What did you love doing together?"</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respect their need for autonomy while keeping communication channels open. Encourage peer or mentor support, online or in-person. Offer creative outlets (music, art, activism, volunteering).

Key tips for all ages: **Repeat** key points gently. Use **clear, honest** language. **Invite questions**, but don't force. **Validate all feelings**. Check **understanding**.



Supporting Neurodivergent Children Through Grief

*“Children with ADHD are nearly **three times more likely** to experience **anxiety disorders** compared to their neurotypical peers, **which can intensify** during periods of **grief.**”*
– Psychology Today

Children with ADHD, autism, or sensory regulation differences may **experience grief differently**:

-  Reactions may be **heightened** or **delayed**; meltdowns or shutdowns are common.
-  May struggle to verbalise feelings, needing **visual** or **concrete cues**.

Tips for Support:

-  Use **visual reminders**, social **stories**, or **calendars** to mark routines, funerals, and anniversaries.
-  Create **predictable routines** to provide stability.
-  Allow **movement breaks** or **sensory activities** to help regulate emotions.
-  Use **clear, concrete language** and check understanding frequently.

*“Neurodivergent children benefit from **understanding, acceptance, accommodations, and adjustments** that support their unique needs, especially after a **bereavement.**”*
– Winston’s Wish





Supporting Wellbeing at School

Children need both **structure** and **safe ways** to express emotions to **feel secure** during grief. Reactions can change from **day to day**, so staying **flexible** yet **consistent** is key.



Routines = security – Keep the school day predictable (timetable, seating, transitions). Offer advance notice of changes (trips, supply teachers, assessments). Predictability helps pupils feel safe.



Encourage expression – Build in creative outlets: art, journaling, poetry, music, drama, movement breaks. Offer quiet options (reflection cards, “time-out” pass, calm corner) without forcing talk.



Notice cues – Watch for withdrawal, irritability, tearfulness, headaches/stomach aches, or sudden dips in focus/attendance. Check in gently and share observations with your pastoral lead.



Validate fun and joy – Reassure pupils it's okay to laugh, play, join clubs, and enjoy lessons even while grieving. Joy and grief can coexist.



Praise small achievements – Acknowledge everyday wins: arriving on time, completing a starter task, contributing once in discussion. Micro-praise builds momentum and confidence.



Keep communication open – Invite conversation (“I’m here if you want to talk”), but don’t press. Offer choices: “Would you prefer to write, draw, or just sit with the group today?”



Balance honesty with reassurance – Use simple, truthful language that aligns with family wishes, while reminding pupils they are safe and supported at school. (Check wording with parents/carers where possible.)



Help them name feelings – Teach and model feeling words. Use quick tools (feelings scales, check-in cards, “thumbs 1–5”) to help pupils notice and label emotions, which supports regulation.

“You seem **angry** – of course you are, that **makes sense**. What **could help** with that anger right now?”

“You looked **thoughtful** just now. Do you want to **share** what you were **remembering** or **thinking** about?”

“Today sounded like it was **a hard day** for you. Would you like some **quiet time**?”

“I see you’ve been **keeping to yourself**. That’s **okay** – **I’ll be here** when you feel ready to talk.”

“You **drew a picture of them** – that’s a lovely way to **keep them in our memories**.”



Grief worksheets for children + young people



Our grief worksheet packs are designed to help children of all ages **explore feelings, build safety, and express memories** in developmentally appropriate ways. Each pack recognises how children **think, feel, and make sense of loss** at different stages.



Early Childhood (Ages 3–6) "Concrete Thinkers"

How they think: See death as temporary or reversible; use play and imagination to make sense of events.

What they need: Simple honesty, routine, reassurance, and creative outlets.

Example worksheets:



My Feelings House – Draw feelings in different “rooms” to understand emotions.



When I'm Feeling Sad – Identify comforting people, activities, and safe spaces.



Middle Childhood (Ages 7–10) "Curious Realists"



How they think: Begin to grasp the permanence of death; ask practical and emotional questions.

What they need: Clear information, emotional vocabulary, and coping tools.

Example worksheets:

 **My Grief Jar** – Teaches that grief doesn't shrink, but life grows around it.

 **Helping Myself When I Miss Someone** – Encourages self-soothing and problem-solving.



Grief worksheets for children + young people



Preteens + Early Teens (Ages 11–13) "Feeling It Deeply"



How they think: Understand finality; seek meaning and connection.

What they need: Space to reflect, honest conversation, and permission to feel mixed emotions.

Example worksheets:



The Box + the Ball – Visualises how grief changes impact over time.



5-Minute Check-In – Quick emotional reflection and regulation tool.



Teens (Ages 14–18) "Meaning-Makers"

How they think: Explore abstract ideas of identity, justice, and purpose.

What they need: Autonomy, creative expression, and opportunities to find meaning.

Example worksheets:



A Letter I Need to Write – Express unspoken thoughts and memories.



Exploring Who I Am After Loss – Reflect on identity, change, and growth.



[thelossfoundation.org/
child-grief-worksheets](http://thelossfoundation.org/child-grief-worksheets)





More support

Child Bereavement UK

Supports families and educates professionals when a child grieves or when a child dies.

📞 0800 02 888 40

💻 childbereavementuk.org

Compassionate Friends

Provides peer support for bereaved parents and siblings after the death of a child. Offers helpline, local and online groups, and supportive resources for families coping with child or sibling loss.

📞 0345 123 2304

💻 tcf.org.uk

Grief Encounter

Specialist support for children and young people who have lost someone close.

📞 0808 802 0111

💻 griefencounter.org.uk

Hope Again (by Cruse)

Online community offering advice, forums, and resources for young people experiencing grief.

💻 hopeagain.org.uk

Samaritans (24/7)

A confidential listening service for anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide.

📞 116 123

💻 samaritans.org

The Loss Foundation

A UK charity providing **cancer bereavement support** for **adults** through groups, events, and resources.

💻 thelossfoundation.org

Winston's Wish

Offers support for **children** and **young people up to 25** after the death of someone important.

📞 08088 020 021

💻 winstonswish.org

