



Grief in the Classroom



A **confidence-building** guide 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](https://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.**





What's Changing in the Curriculum

At its core, this guide is about creating safe, supportive environments where children can begin to understand and talk about difficult experiences in an age-appropriate way.





From 2026, grief and loss will form **part of the statutory RSHE curriculum**, recognising the important role schools play in supporting children's emotional development and wellbeing.

This does not mean teachers are expected to become grief specialists. Instead, schools are being asked to help pupils develop a **basic understanding of loss**, build **emotional awareness**, and know how to **seek support when needed**.

Why Grief Is Being Introduced

Bereavement is a common childhood experience, yet many children receive **little or no support** in understanding or expressing their grief. Without early support, grief can impact emotional **wellbeing**, **behaviour** and **relationships**, and engagement with **school and learning**.

By introducing grief into the curriculum, schools can:

-  **Normalise** conversations around loss
-  **Reduce stigma** and isolation
-  Support children **before difficulties escalate**
-  Build **lifelong emotional skills**

This is not about "teaching grief" in a clinical sense – it is about helping children feel **seen**, **understood**, and **supported**.

Starting Reflection (2–3 mins)

Ask pupils:

- What are some **changes** people might experience in life?
- How might people **feel** when things change?

Optional **scaffold**: Draw or name a feeling

There are no right or wrong answers.

A Note for Teachers: You don't need perfect words or specialist knowledge to deliver this content. What matters most is creating a safe, calm space where pupils feel able to explore and express their thoughts and feelings.



Key Themes to Cover

What schools need to cover	What this means in practice	How to approach it
Change and loss can bring up many different feelings	Pupils may experience a wide range of emotions, sometimes all at once or at different times	Normalise all feelings and give language to emotions without trying to “fix” them
Grief is a natural and normal response to loss	Children may not follow a clear pattern or timeline in their grief	Reassure pupils there is no “right” way to grieve and avoid setting expectations
Everyone grieves differently	Some children may talk openly, while others may withdraw or express grief through behaviour	Avoid comparisons and create space for different responses
Families and relationships change over time	Pupils may experience changes in routines, roles, or family dynamics following a loss	Acknowledge change gently and provide reassurance around stability and support
It’s important to talk about feelings and ask for help	Children may not know how or when to seek support for themselves or others	Clearly signpost trusted adults and encourage open, pressure-free conversations
Understanding and respecting difference matters	Cultural, religious and family beliefs influence how grief is experienced and expressed	Use inclusive language and avoid assumptions; check where needed



Where Does Grief Education Sit in Schools?

Grief and loss are now part of the wider RSHE and wellbeing curriculum, but in practice, they sit across multiple areas of school life.

Grief education may be delivered through:



RSHE lessons – as part of structured learning around relationships, change, emotions and mental health



Pastoral support – through 1:1 or small group support for pupils who have experienced loss



Assemblies and awareness sessions – to introduce key concepts such as empathy, change and seeking support



Everyday classroom practice – through language, routines and how adults respond to pupils

This flexibility allows schools to approach grief education in a way that is appropriate for their **pupils, staff confidence, and existing provision.**



Classroom activity - Think–Pair–Share (3–5 mins)

Think:

What helps people when they are going through a difficult time?

Pair:

Share one idea with a partner

Share (optional):

Collect a few ideas as a class





Teaching Grief + Loss to Neurodivergent Pupils

Some pupils will need more structure, clarity, and predictability to engage with learning about grief and loss.

Neurodivergent pupils may process emotions, language, and abstract concepts differently, so **small adaptations** in how content is delivered can make a significant difference to understanding and participation.

This section focuses on **practical ways** to make grief and loss education accessible, safe, and meaningful for all pupils.



Before the Lesson: Prepare + Reduce Uncertainty

Neurodivergent pupils often engage best when the **structure of the lesson is clear** and they know they can **opt out if needed**. Share a **clear lesson outline** in advance and use a **simple visual structure** to show what will happen and when.

*"Today we will talk about **change, loss, and feelings**"*

*"We will **NOT** be asking anyone to share **personal experiences**"*

*"You can **take a break** at any time"*

Example:

Start → What is loss?

Middle → Different feelings

End → Where to get support



Make Abstract Concepts Concrete

Grief is an abstract concept — which can be harder to process.

Avoid:

*"Loss can feel **complicated**"*

*"Grief comes in **waves**"*

Use **clear, literal explanations**:

*"Grief is the **feelings** we have when **someone dies** or **something important changes**"*

Real examples:

- A pet dying
- Moving house
- A change in family structure



Teaching Grief + Loss to Neurodivergent Pupils



Teach Feelings Explicitly (Don't Assume Understanding)

Instead of asking:

"How might someone feel?"

Provide structured options:

Use emotion scaffolds such as emotion cards, scales (1–5) or matching exercises.

Example activity:

*"Match the **feeling** to the **situation**"*

- Someone moves school → nervous / sad
- A grandparent dies → sad / confused



Structured Participation (Reduce Open-Ended Pressure)

Open discussion can be

overwhelming or **inaccessible**.

Replace:

"Let's discuss how grief feels"

With sentence starters and multiple choice:

*"Some people **feel**..."*

*"One way people **cope** is..."*

*"Which of these might help someone **feel better**?"*



Repetition + Predictability

Neurodivergent pupils may need:

- Concepts **repeated**
- Language used **consistently**

Keep key phrases the same:

"Grief is different for everyone"

"All feelings are okay"



Manage Emotional Load

Even when not bereaved, content can feel intense. Use a "low intensity → higher → calm" structure:

Start: Neutral examples (e.g. losing a toy)

Middle: Bigger life changes

End: Safety + support + calming activity



End Every Lesson with Regulation

This is key for neurodivergent learners. Always finish with:

- A **calming activity** (drawing, breathing, quiet time)
- A **clear transition** back to normal lesson structure



Key Takeaway for Staff

Neurodivergent pupils don't need different content — they need the same content delivered with more structure, clarity, and choice.





Suggested **Lesson Flow**

(20–30 mins)

A simple structure can help make this content feel **safe** and **manageable** for pupils.

1. **Start (low intensity)**

Introduce the idea of change using everyday examples (e.g. moving house, changing class, losing a toy)

2. **Build understanding**

Explain that grief is a response to loss
Explore different feelings and responses

3. **Support + safety**

Talk about how people cope
Identify who pupils can go to for support

4. **End with regulation**

Finish with a calm activity (e.g. drawing, quiet reflection, breathing)
Return pupils to a settled, ready-to-learn state



If a pupil becomes **upset**

It's okay for pupils to have an emotional response to this content. If this happens:

Stay **calm** and **acknowledge** what you notice:

"I can see this feels a bit much right now"

Offer **choice** and **reduce pressure**:

"Would you like a short break or to stay with the group?"

Avoid trying to **"fix"** the feeling — **listening** and **being present** is enough

Give the pupil **time** and **space**, while ensuring they feel supported

Follow your school's pastoral or safeguarding processes if needed



For the **grieving child** in your classroom...

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.



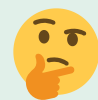
Praise small achievements - Acknowledge everyday wins: arriving on time, completing a starter task, contributing once in discussion. Micro-praise builds momentum and confidence.



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](https://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](https://www.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](https://www.tcf.org.uk)

Grief Encounter

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

☎ 0808 802 0111

[🖥 griefencounter.org.uk](https://www.griefencounter.org.uk)

Hope Again (by Cruse)

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

[🖥 hopeagain.org.uk](https://www.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](https://www.samaritans.org)

The Loss Foundation

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

[🖥 thelossfoundation.org](https://www.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](https://www.winstonswish.org)

