

# Living with Bereavement



*Winston's Wish*  
the charity for bereaved children

# We help children live after someone close to them dies

The death of a parent, brother or sister can be a devastating experience for any child. How a child grieves is vital to their immediate and long-term future. And that's where we can help.

Winston's Wish is the leading childhood bereavement charity in the UK and offers the widest range of practical support and guidance to bereaved children, their families and professionals. We believe that the right support at the right time can enable bereaved children to live with their grief and build positive futures.

## **Grief is natural and necessary**

Sadness, anger, guilt and confusion are all very natural feelings for a child experiencing bereavement, and a necessary part of coming to terms with what's happened. Recognising that this is normal is very important – not just for the child, but for anyone close to them.

*'It has completely changed my life. I was so shocked, and so angry. I was shaking. I didn't know how to react. Now I miss him so much' Katie*

We can't make these feelings go away, but we can encourage children to express them and find ways to live with them, however painful and difficult they are.



## The fear of forgetting

Many children's greatest worry is that they will forget the person who has died. At Winston's Wish we understand the importance of memories. Some are painful, some are comforting – and they are all important. So we have developed a number of ways for children to keep their memories safe.

We have developed creative ideas such as memory jars and memory boxes, where children can keep and treasure all kinds of things that remind them of their relationship with the person who has died.



*“When my Mum died I was only eight years old. Now, nearly finishing secondary school I can't really remember things about her as clearly as I could then. Looking through my memory box helps me to remember things I love about her.”\**

## Grief affects whole families

We understand the impact of a death on the whole family. A parent who is struggling desperately to cope with their own loss may not know how best to support their children. Children often keep their feelings bottled-up because they don't want to upset other members of their family.

We encourage families to share their thoughts and feelings with each other, even if it's difficult. And we aim to help them regain strength and confidence – so that they can find a way forward and rebuild their lives together.

*“At the beginning we couldn't see how to get through. Now we know we can - we laugh, we cry, we find ways to live and remember.”\**



*\*Messages left by young people on the Winston's Wish website.*

# With the right support, bereaved children become resilient adults

If children are able to express their thoughts and feelings, if they are encouraged to talk about the person who died, if they are shown how to hold on to their memories, and if they learn to live with their loss – they can go on and achieve all the things in life they want to.

## **Natalie was able to share her feelings**

After her Mum died, Natalie was given the chance to meet other young people who were also struggling to make sense of a parent's death. Sharing her feelings helped her to cope with her Mum's death and gave her the strength and confidence to follow her dream of going to college.



*“Now I can share stories and memories of Mum without becoming very upset or angry. I now believe that life is for living. Mum would’ve wanted me to sort out the things I wanted to do, and now I am going to go for it.” Natalie*

# What happens when bereaved children can't express their feelings?



If children shut out grief and lock their thoughts and emotions away, they may become withdrawn, insecure and develop low self-esteem. This can affect their relationships, their school work and their happiness. If they aren't encouraged to express their grief, they may never learn how to live with it.

## **Ben wasn't able to talk about the death of his Dad**

After his Dad died, Ben wasn't given the chance to express his feelings or make sense of his death. With no other outlet for his feelings, Ben started showing disruptive behaviour at school. The lack of support and understanding Ben was shown contributed to his eventual exclusion from school.

*"This all started when our Dad died. I was 10 years old. It was the middle of the night, he was gone in the ambulance when I woke up, I never saw him again or went to the funeral. I was just left to get on with it, no one asked me what I felt like or how life changed after Dad died." Ben (16)*



# We are here to help...

## **Providing information and support**

Our website is a valuable resource for people of all ages, and particularly for children and young people who can ask questions and share thoughts and experiences.

For parents and carers and for professionals (particularly teachers) our website provides information, advice and helpful downloads for supporting a bereaved child.

Our online shop has a range of helpful books including "You just don't understand" which is aimed at teenagers and 'Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine' which works well for a younger child.



## **Training for professionals**

Our aim is for all bereaved children to be able to receive the help they need at the time they need it.

One of the ways we are working to achieve this is by training others whose work brings them into contact with bereaved children and adults who care for them, either through one of our regular study days or with bespoke training tailored for a professional's specific requirements.

Our training courses are designed and delivered by family services practitioners at Winston's Wish who work with the whole family, contributing to all the services we offer, and who can therefore draw on their own experience of working in a child-focused way with bereaved children and their families. Our training blends theory with practice, ensuring that those attending will leave with practical, creative ideas and comprehensive 'toolkit' of ways they can support the children and young people that they encounter.

## Listening and supporting

Our national Helpline provides support, information and guidance to anyone concerned about a child or young person who has been bereaved. We also talk to families and professionals when a family member is seriously ill and may die, helping them to support children through the experience. For parents or professionals who would like more in-depth conversations over the phone our callback service is available nationally. We also offer local drop-in services in Cheltenham and Wigan where families can meet and talk to experienced practitioners.

For many parents, just knowing that there is an organisation out there who understands what their family is going through can be very reassuring. Our professionally qualified staff help to rebuild the confidence of parents and also guide professionals thus enabling them to better support their children.

*“We just want to call to say thank you for supporting us over the phone. The advice was really helpful for me and my family. My sister died last week and although this was very difficult, we also spent a very special couple of weeks together with the ideas that Winston’s Wish gave us. I would happily recommend Winston’s Wish to anyone who is going through a bereavement of their own” David*



## Talking, sharing and remembering

We encourage children and their families to share their feelings with each other. We can help children to make sense of their feelings and, with support, thousands of families have found a way through their grief.

Winston’s Wish offers a national programme of specialist support to children and young people bereaved through murder or manslaughter, suicide or in the military. We know that in situations where they are more likely to have difficulty in coming to terms with how the person has died, the questions, frustrations, concerns and fears they have require specific support.

Sharing stories and experiences can be very therapeutic for many of the children we help. We run residential weekends in Gloucestershire and West Sussex where children and young people come together.

We offer a range of proven ways to help children and their families cope with death. With support, a child who has been bereaved can grow up to become a resilient adult, leading a full and rewarding life.

**Helpline 08452 03 04 05**



The Winston's Wish Helpline:

**08452 03 04 05**

(9am to 5pm Monday to Friday and Wednesdays 7-9.30pm). Calls charged at local rate.

General enquiries: 01242 515157

Email: [info@winstonswish.org.uk](mailto:info@winstonswish.org.uk)

**[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)**

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