

## Supporting Children and Bereavement

### *Practical and considerate guidance for adults supporting children*

- Use Simple Language - Avoid potentially confusing euphemisms and explain death in literal terms
- Maintain Routine - Discuss the impact of the deceased loved one on the child's routine and how this can be supported. 'Normality' is OK if the child is comfortable, as is the child deciding when they want to talk. Providing flexibility of boundaries is OK; but make new boundaries clear
- Explore and Validate Feelings in a Safe Environment - Draw on resources such as emojis, craft activities and guided journaling
- Accept Anger to Support Externalisation:
  - Explore at times of calm
  - Explore safe ways to channel anger
  - Agree 'anger rules'
  - Reassure the child they will not be judged
- Create a Pick-Me-Up Prompt:
  - At times of calm, discuss and agree coping strategies to use during times of distress e.g. breathing techniques. Agree with the child what adults can do / avoid doing when the child becomes distressed
  - Create a visual prompt for the child to carry
  - Inform all key adults, including Parents / Carers of the above prompts and strategies
  - Re-visit prompts regularly, with potential to amend
- Generate Positive Feelings - Validate positive feelings and relate to what the child's loved one would have wanted. Discuss activities that previously provided happiness to the child, and how these can be adapted, if necessary
- Create a Safe Space to Cry - Explore memories of the loved one and validate crying. Discuss the child watching emotive movies or reading emotive books, possibly at home with family
- Capture Worries and Help Make Them Tangible - Discuss worries and practical solutions. Some children may want to write or draw their worries and / or name their worries as butterflies (often described as what we feel in our stomach). Older children may want to list their worries and rank them in order of their perceived relevance
- Provide Opportunity to Say What Was Left Unsaid - The child may want to communicate with their loved one through a letter / video / picture / other. Encourage the child to provide an update to their loved one and discuss how the person may have responded. Explore the child's potential feelings of guilt and how their loved one would view their guilt
- Keep and Make Memories - Use a memory jar / box to keep precious items and pictures etc. Give permission to create new memories and to use these to communicate with the loved one
- BE CONFIDENT! Every child is an individual experiencing bereavement in their own way. They may be unpredictable but will appreciate your consistency

## **NELC Community Educational Psychology Service**