

# JUST 'B'

Bereavement Support

Just 'B' is one of the services offered by Saint Michael's, the local charity helping people live with terminal illness and bereavement. Other services include inpatient care, planned respite care, lymphoedema support, day therapy, specialised support at home and palliative care education.

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# JUST 'B'

Bereavement Support

Bereavement  
Support Booklet  
For children and young people





# JUST 'B'

Bereavement Support

## Just 'B'... There

If you have been given this booklet then you are involved in the support of a child or young person who has had a significant person in their life die.

The information is written with the parent or carer of the child in mind. For professionals using this booklet, recognise that use of the word 'you' is aimed at the parent/carer.

It is impossible to gauge how anyone will react to the death of a person who has played a significant role in their life, but it is important to be prepared and flexible enough to deal with a range of emotional reactions.

To help, try and remember to...

**Just 'B'...Honest,**

**Just 'B'...Understanding,**

**Just 'B'...Prepared,**

**Just 'B'...Involved,**

**Just 'B'...Informed, and**

**Just 'B'...Within Reach**

**These principles and the information in this pack will help support the child over time. If you can remember this and provide an environment for the child or young person in which to express their emotions, you can make a big difference in their life.**



# JUST 'B'

Bereavement Support

## Just 'B'... Aware

It is vital to acknowledge that there is no one way to enable a child or young person to prepare for someone's death.

Some faiths and cultures have very specific rituals and it is important to be respectful and follow the customs.

When planning and preparing for any type of funeral it is really essential to gain a detailed picture of someone's faith and culture to then know what helpful suggestions to offer.



# JUST 'B'

Bereavement Support

## Just 'B'... Honest

- **Tell the truth** as much as possible. Instinct tells us to protect children from upset, but if a young person is able to ask the question, they are ready for the answer. However they may still be distressed by what they will hear.
- **Trust is vital.** If a child loses trust in you, it can have a serious impact on the grieving process and the relationship between you.
- **Repeat if necessary.** It may be difficult for your child to believe that someone is dead so repetition is important even if it is painful to do so.
- **Include them.** If they feel something is being kept from them, they may feel like they're causing a problem or are in some way to blame. If they start to imagine something is their fault it can be very frightening for them.

Be **honest**, be **understanding**, be **prepared**, be **involved**, be **informed** and be **within reach**. It's the best way to Just 'B'.



**“Grief doesn’t always make sense and isn’t always clear. Learning to manage grief is like finding your way in the dark. Young people and children need support to guide them and be alongside them on this path.”**

**JUST ‘B’**  
Bereavement Support

## Just ‘B’... Honest

**Grieving** means feeling and expressing all the emotions that you have. It isn’t about forgetting the person who has died.

Grieving is about being able to remember with acceptance the person’s life and death and the changes that it brings.

We cannot stop the pain that children and young people will feel when someone dies, but we can support them in their sadness and be open to their distress.

Sharing your own grief and feelings with your child can help you both grow stronger together.



## Just 'B'... Understanding

### What will happen?

There is no set pattern for grief and dealing with it. It affects everyone differently and these are some of the things to consider:

- Reactions in children and young people are influenced by age, development, temperament and previous experiences.
- The relationship they had with the person who died.
- Their personal routine and how it has been affected.
- Their environment and whether they can grieve safely and openly.

### Keep in mind...

Some feelings may be too big for children to understand or deal with and they might protect themselves by avoiding the subject. So don't necessarily expect full and instant openness. They need understanding and time as well as the space to open up when they feel ready.



### What to do?

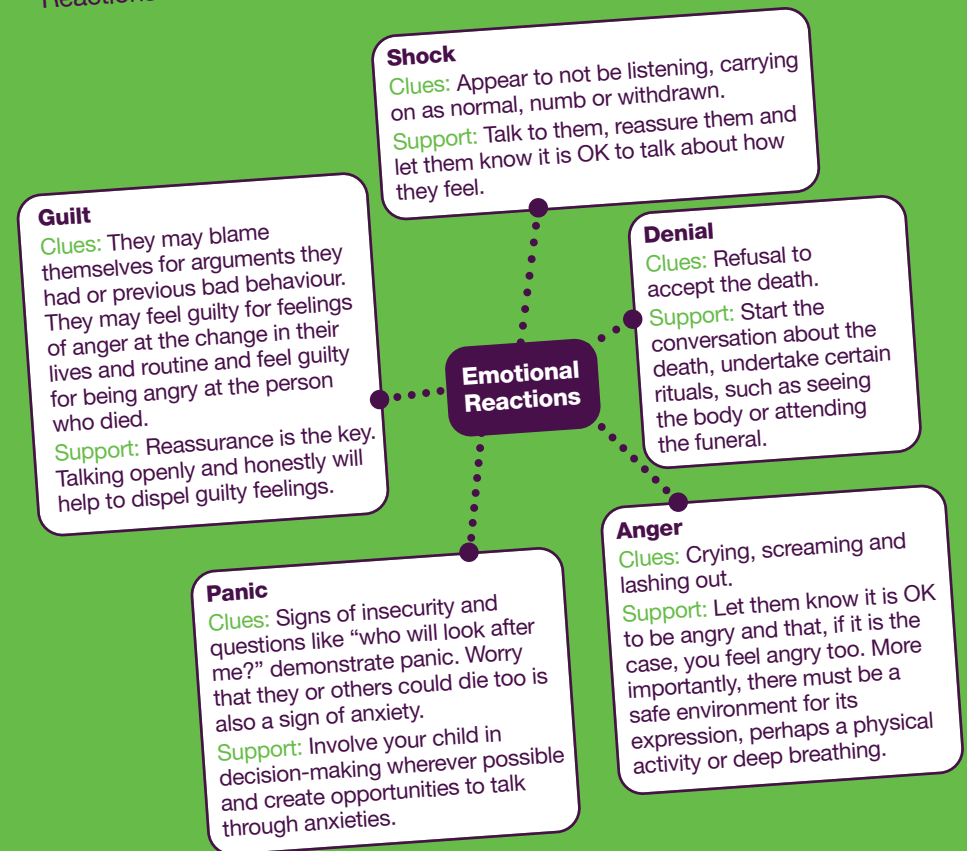
- Children and young people need the opportunity to express feelings. Knowing they have support gives them the safety net they need to be open and not bottle anything up.
- Take a walk in their shoes. How does the death affect them in different ways to you?
- Nobody can be sure of a child's reactions, but giving them the choice and the freedom to express them is what is important.

## Just 'B'... Understanding

### Emotional reactions

There are many emotional reactions to bereavement that we might expect from a child or young person. And, contrary to popular belief, there is no set pattern or timeline. Any one or combination of reactions could be seen and at any particular time. Reactions are not independent of

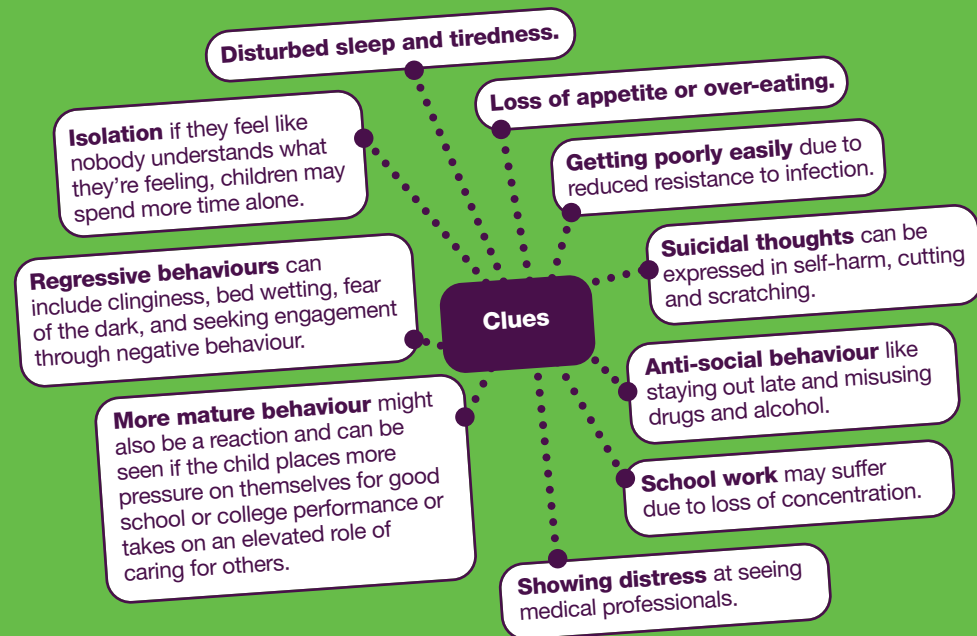
each other and one could lead to another. Emotional reactions to bereavement can be unpredictable. The illustration below will help in identifying the different possible responses and what you can do to provide support.



# Just 'B'... Understanding

## Physical reactions and changes in behaviour

Changes in behaviour and physical reactions as a result of bereavement are common. Here are some clues to look out for and an idea of how best to support the child or young person...



These reactions, although they may seem quite severe and worrying, are relatively normal. However they can't be changed overnight. Try to take time to sit and talk or draw about how they are feeling and use the opportunity to share your own feelings too. If you are concerned that the child or young person in your care is self-harming or having suicidal thoughts, speak to your GP.





# JUST 'B'

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## Just 'B'... Prepared

### School or college

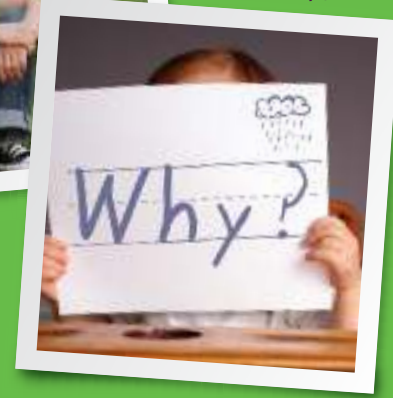
School or college can be a big challenge for you and your child following bereavement, but it can also be a huge source of comfort. The familiar routine of school can be a reassuring element. School support should be built around the needs and wants of your child.

### Communicating effectively with school or college

You should consider involving your child in decision-making where appropriate.

Time out from lessons and what information is shared with classmates are things that your child could be consulted on. Also, is there a designated teacher on hand to provide support?

Many children and young people find it hard to concentrate on school work when dealing with bereavement. Some will become wrapped up in work, or withdrawn from their friends. Some will struggle with discipline and others will try and be the perfect student. These are all normal reactions.





“Death ends a life,  
not a relationship.”

“Funerals help begin the  
process of accepting the  
reality that a person has  
died. Funerals can be  
moulded in any way a  
family chooses to reflect  
personalities, philosophies,  
beliefs and religions. They  
also provide an important  
shared experience for  
children and adults that  
can lead onto future  
discussions about death.”

## Just ‘B’... Prepared

### Viewing the body and funerals

They are important rituals a child should be encouraged to undertake. Remember the content of this page in particular may be affected by someone’s faith and culture.

### Why view the body?

Viewing the body can make the death real. It may be the first stage of grieving for your child, especially if they have shown signs of denial in the direct aftermath of the death. When they are given the choice and your support, it can be a significant ritual in the grieving process.

### Preparing to see the body

It’s a good idea for you to view the body first so you can prepare your child for what to expect.

Talk about...

- What the room will look like (including temperature).
- What the coffin will look like – open, decorated etc.
- What the body will look like – physical changes, skin colour etc.
- And how the body will be dressed – your child may like to be involved in this decision.

Also discuss...

- It is a choice.
- It is OK to react however they feel and it is OK to cry.

- You may cry and that’s OK too.
- They may want to touch, kiss and hug the dead person and they may not. Both are OK.
- Younger children may want to explore the room and take some time to play.
- Some may want to place a special object of symbolic value in the coffin.
- Any particular faith or belief system should be explained.

**BUT** – Children and young people should not participate if the body is injured beyond recognition.

### The funeral

The funeral is a good opportunity for the child or young person to make their unique contribution. It is important for them to know they are not alone in how they feel and that they have family and friends to support them.

Talk about...

- What will happen, what it will look like, where it will be, who else will be there etc.
- If your child would like to say something at the funeral. It is OK either way.
- If they’d like to share something they have written or made.
- If they’d like to light a candle for the dead person.

# Just 'B'... Prepared

## Different age groups

The age of the child or young person will influence their reaction to the bereavement. You need to be prepared to deliver the information and communicate effectively with that in mind. Here is a brief guide to the different approaches...

### When talking to a... 0-5 year old

- Try to use simple language.
- Try to deliver information in short bursts.
- Use playtime to help explain the situation e.g. with dolls, puppets etc.
- Information may need to be repeated.
- Don't be surprised, shocked, or hurt if children go away and play, returning later to ask questions.

### When talking to a... 6-12 year old

- Try to use simple language.
- Honesty is the best policy when it comes to details that are known and those that are not.
- Children may need reassurance that they didn't cause the death nor can they catch the illness.
- It is important to have children and young people involved in decision-making.
- Children may worry about what will happen to them and who will care for them. Try not to see this as selfish, it is normal.

### When talking to a... 12-18 year old

- Older children will respond better if they know the truth.
- It is important to remember that young people are facing other life changes at this point too.
- Where appropriate, try to value their opinions in decision-making.
- Explore opportunities to speak to medical professionals to offer further information.

It is important to consider that, as well as age, reactions will depend on their development, temperament, faith, culture and previous experiences.



# JUST 'B'

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## Just 'B'... Involved

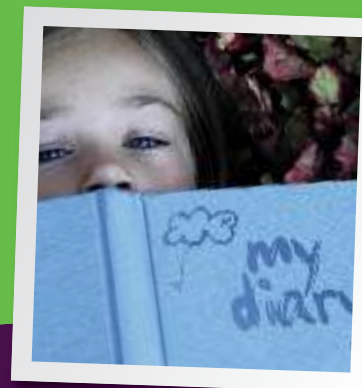
It will benefit your child if you are able to be part of their grieving process. Similarly, if there is any way your child may seek fun, enjoyment and escapism, independently or with friends, give them the space to do this where appropriate. Involving yourself in activities they enjoy will give you an idea of how they're coping.

### Younger children

- Play with dolls and puppets and use imagination.
- Draw and paint.
- Make collages using pictures and words from magazines.
- Use Plasticine or Play-Doh.
- Play with toys like Lego.
- Play in a sand pit.
- Play dress-up e.g. doctors and nurses.
- Read storybooks together.

### All children and young people

- Help them identify their behaviour, e.g. "You seem angry today, do you want to talk about it?"
- Reinforce that talking openly is healthy.
- Resist the urge to say "be brave"; it is better for them to express emotions openly without pressure.
- Encourage them to keep a diary – it doesn't need to be written, it can be pictures to help them express feelings.
- Acknowledge your feelings to your child. It reassures them that it is normal and will encourage them to do the same.



# Just 'B'... Involved

## Remembering

- **Visit the cemetery.** They may like to decorate the site.
- **Scatter ashes.** Plan a special tribute together.



- Make a **memory book or memory box** by collecting special objects, pictures, drawings, postcards and other special items that remind them of that person. A book could help record the family history and show photos from throughout that person's life, and a box could be decorated both inside and out.
- Make something from a **piece of clothing**, e.g. blankets, cushions etc.
- Keep a bottle of the person's **perfume or aftershave**.

- Collect **video and tape recordings** of the person.
- **Make a playlist** of their favourite music.
- **Visit special places.**
- Create a **graffiti wall** on an agreed and allowable area, perhaps an area of wall covered in writing paper.
- Make a **salt jar**. Fill a jam jar to the top with salt then pour the salt out into 4-6 different piles on pieces of paper. Choose a piece of coloured dusty chalk and rub it into one of the salt piles. Pour the coloured salt into the empty jar, repeating this for each pile with a different coloured chalk. Each layer represents a different memory of the person who has died. Encourage the child to talk about each memory as they make the jar. Screw the lid on tightly and on a piece of paper make a key explaining the colours and the memory they represent. It is important to fill the jar right to the top otherwise the layers will mix together.



# JUST 'B'

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## Just 'B'... Involved

### Stress busters

- **Go for walks.** It relieves stress and is good exercise.
- **Kick a football** around a garden or park.
- **Listen to music** that makes you happy or relaxes you.
- Visit the **cinema**.
- Spend time **with friends**.
- **Punch a pillow**.
- **Practice deep breathing** and counting from one to ten.

- **'Check-in'** every day for five or ten minutes to talk about feelings.
- **Make a collage** - it can offer an opportunity for feelings to be revealed.



### Special occasions

- **Christmas and dates important to other faiths...** Find a symbolic object or image to represent the person who has died.
- **Anniversaries and birthdays...** Plan an activity, something to mark the day. It's OK to have fun in remembering.
- **Holidays...** Involve your child in planning. It might involve a trip with another family.



## Just 'B'... Informed

### Glossary of terms

How best to explain some of the words to children and young people...

**Ashes** What is left of a dead body after cremation.

**Bereavement** What happens to us when someone dies.

**Burial** Putting the body and the coffin into a hole in the ground.

**Cemetery** A place where many dead bodies are buried. Also known as a graveyard.

**Chapel of Rest** A place where some bodies are kept until they are buried or cremated.

**Coffin** A special wooden box, the final resting place, that holds the body.

**Cremation** Putting the dead body into a room with lots of heat and burning it until it turns into ashes.

**Dead** When a person's body stops working. It doesn't see, hear, feel, eat or breathe anymore.

**Emotions** How you feel inside. It is natural and OK to talk about them.

**Expression** How you let people know how you're feeling inside.

**Funeral** An occasion when family and friends get together to say goodbye to the person who has died.

**Grave** A hole in the ground where a body is buried at the cemetery.

**Grief** The way someone feels after a significant person has died. It can affect people very differently.

**Memory** The place in our hearts and minds for the person who has died.

**Special Place** A meaningful place where people can remember the person who has died. Sometimes ashes are scattered at such a place.

**Urn** A jar where the ashes are kept until they are scattered.

Remember to be aware of different faiths and cultures. As professionals it is important to speak to the child or young person, their parents or carers about belief systems and rituals that are expected to take place following a death, as they could differ from family to family and from community to community, even within the same religion.

## Just 'B'... Within reach

Just as your child needs you to be within reach, it is important you know you have **Just 'B'** within yours.

Here at Just 'B' we know that some people might require additional bereavement support. You may prefer the situation be handled by qualified professionals.

We know that some people would much rather deal with their situation within their family. In which case, you can simply use this information to guide yourself through.

There is no proven formula and no magic wand. We encourage people to do what feels right for their family, children, friends and, of course, themselves.

Just 'B' offers practical support to children, young people and adults who have been bereaved, as well as information and advice for the professionals working with them.

**Our services are free of charge and within reach.**

**“At Just 'B' we believe that with the right support, at the right time, children, young people and adults can find a way to manage their grief and embrace a future where they can live and remember their significant person in a healthy and positive way.”**

## How can Just 'B' help?

Our services include...

- Written and verbal information about pre and post bereavement
- Telephone support
- Face-to-face support
- Group support
- Remembrance services
- Counselling where appropriate
- Input from a psychologist where appropriate

## Contact Just 'B'

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