

Death and loss in schools

Advice for pupils



Why does talking about it help?

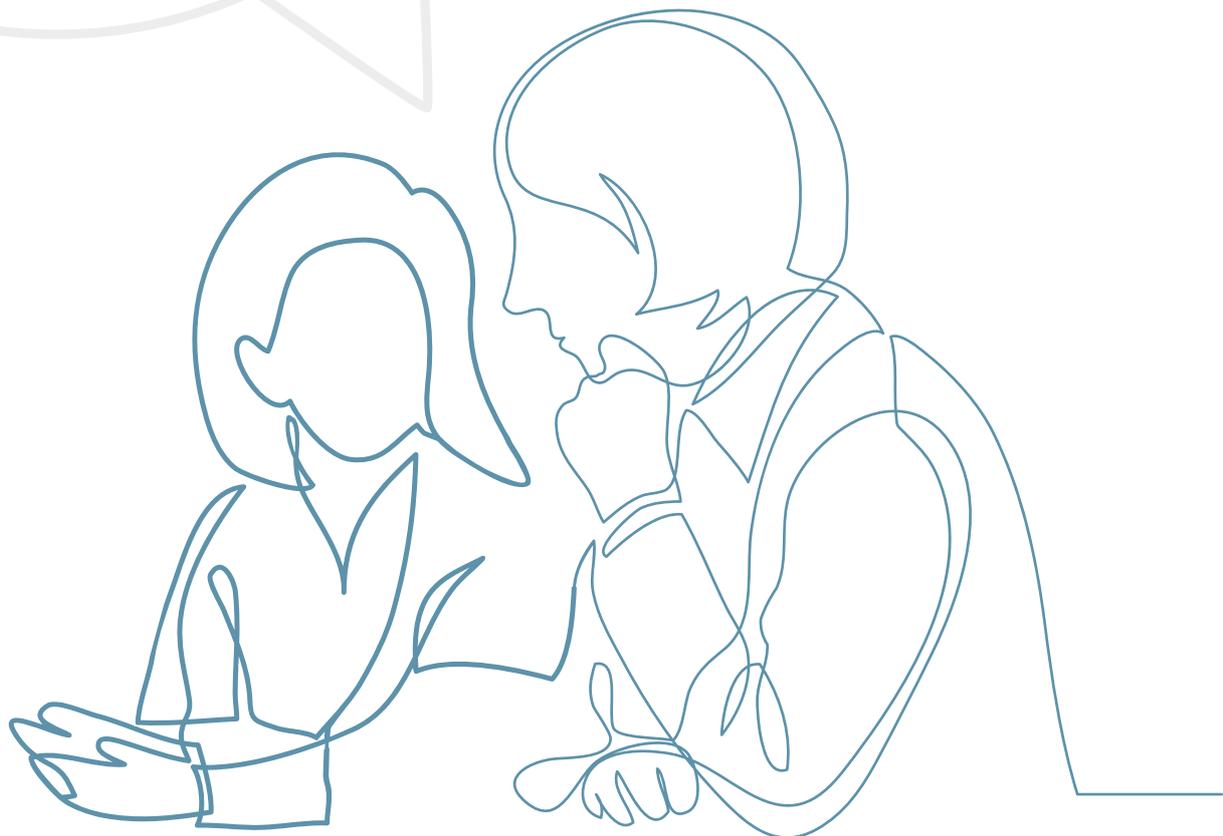
If there is something troubling you, it can be helpful to talk about it. This can help in making sense of the event and beginning to have the words to express thoughts, images and feelings related to the event.

If something very frightening has happened to you or if a close friend or family member has been badly hurt or killed, you may be experiencing traumatic stress.

Traumatic stress happens when your body's normal ways of coping are totally overwhelmed.

Serious accidents, such as road traffic accidents, or violent deaths such as murders, are like this. Everyone involved in these sorts of events will be likely to suffer some traumatic stress.

Traumatic stress is a very normal reaction to an extraordinary event. If people are not helped at the time they can develop an illness called post traumatic stress syndrome. Children can have this as well as adults and so, when children have had a very frightening experience, we offer to talk to them in a way that will help them to understand what has happened.



What happens when you talk to us?

It can be helpful to be supported by and talk to trusted adults and friends around you when someone close to you dies or if you witness a traumatic event. Depending on the situation, it may also be helpful to talk to a professional trained in working with adults and young people during these times. We will talk with the adults to think about if it might be helpful for you and if so, here are some of the ways it could help:

It is very important to sort out what has happened and how you feel about it if you are going to be able to grieve in a normal way after the event.

It is often difficult to talk to close friends and family because they are feeling very distressed and sad as well. We know that if you are going to start feeling better and sort out your feelings, you will need to talk about what has happened in quite a lot of detail.

We start by asking you to tell your story, or what you believe happened. We then ask you to say how you felt when it was all happening and afterwards.

Sometimes you might have misunderstood or not been told some of the things that have happened. Just finding out the truth can help.

We also ask you to think what you would like to do next, and if you feel that you will need to talk about this again.

What sorts of things do children feel when they have post traumatic stress?

- Nightmares (bad dreams)
- Irritability (bad temper)
- Flashbacks (pictures of the event suddenly coming back)
- Feeling cross and angry with everyone
- Behaving badly when you didn't really mean to
- Feeling extremely afraid
- Finding it very difficult to sleep at night
- Feeling guilty or that it was all your fault
- Finding it very difficult to concentrate on school work
- Crying at the slightest thing



Is there anything we can do?

- If someone has died, is there anything you would have liked to say to them? You could write them a letter or send a card.
- You might like to collect together some special memories of them, such as photographs or letters, or reminders of things you have done together. If you do not have a photograph, then perhaps you could draw a picture that will help to remind you of them.
- If they have died because of an accident, you and your friends might like to think how you could help to prevent that kind of thing happening in the future.

Normal grief reactions

You might also need to think how you would like to be involved in any formal events, such as funerals or memorial services, that are being planned.

- Sometimes, after a sad or tragic death, money is collected for a good cause or for a lasting memorial to the person. You might have some ideas about what could happen this time.
- Adults often send sympathy cards when someone dies. Children can do this as well.
- You are probably not the only person to be feeling sad and upset. Look after your friends, talk to anyone who is obviously upset and remember that it helps to talk. If you don't know them very well, tell a teacher that you think they might need help. Even if people don't feel like talking they will feel better for a friendly smile and a greeting.

What do I have to do if I would like to talk to someone?

- Tell your tutor, or ask the teacher who is organising the help in your school that you would like to join a support group.
- We will then arrange to see you in small groups.
- Usually, children who have witnessed what happened are seen together, and we try to let friends come together as well.
- If you really feel you cannot talk about what has happened, you might feel able to put your feelings into a story, a poem or a picture. You may want to do this as well as talking to someone.
- Talking about your experience will not stop you feeling sad about what has happened, and it won't make you forget the incident. It will begin to help you feel better about it and if you have been experiencing any of the symptoms of post traumatic stress, it will help them to go away.

Contacts and information

Web:

www.kelsi.org.uk/special-education-needs/educational-psychology/crisis-support-service

Grief and Loss Resources

www.theeducationpeople.org/products/partner-providers/grief-loss-and-crisis-support

Email:

Educational.psychology@kent.gov.uk

Phone:

03000 410 100

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