



saying goodbye

When Someone Special Dies

Written by

Dr Elaine Klewchuk and Dr Susie Willis

Paediatric Clinical Psychology Department,
Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children

Information

For parents and carers

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected us all. Life is completely different to what it was only a few short weeks ago. Sadly, many people (adults and children) have experienced the death of a loved one during this time. Due to the nature of COVID-19, this has unfortunately resulted in changes in how people and families mark these losses.

Many parents and carers find that death is a hard concept to explain to children. What often helps children following the death of a loved one, is for them to be involved in opportunities to say goodbye. Children often attend funerals and wakes, and there is evidence that shows that, as long as a child feels comfortable, involving them in these traditions and rituals can help them make sense of the death. It can help them understand that the loved one is not going to come back and it can often provide much needed emotional support and solidarity, as well as reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness.

We created this booklet for children to address the issue of them saying goodbye to a loved one, when they are not able to take part in practices that they would ordinarily be invited to be involved in. Saying goodbye can be done in lots of different ways, and although children and adults are understandably going to be feeling very sad, and perhaps also very angry, about the loss of rituals and changes in practices, we hope this resource provides some comfort and reassurance to you during this difficult time.



The world feels very different right now.



I can't leave my house.
I can't see my friends.

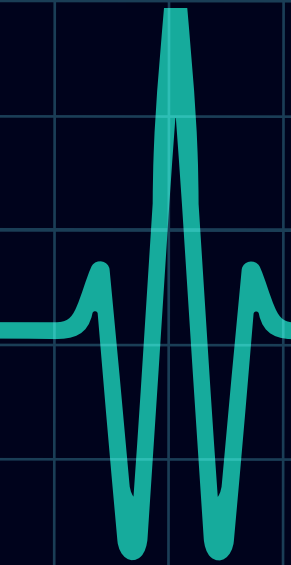


I can't go to school. And I am feeling sad.

Someone very special to me died yesterday.



When my mum told me she gave me the tightest, longest hug.



I knew this special person was in hospital sick, but I didn't think they would die.



The doctors and nurses did everything they could to try and make them better.

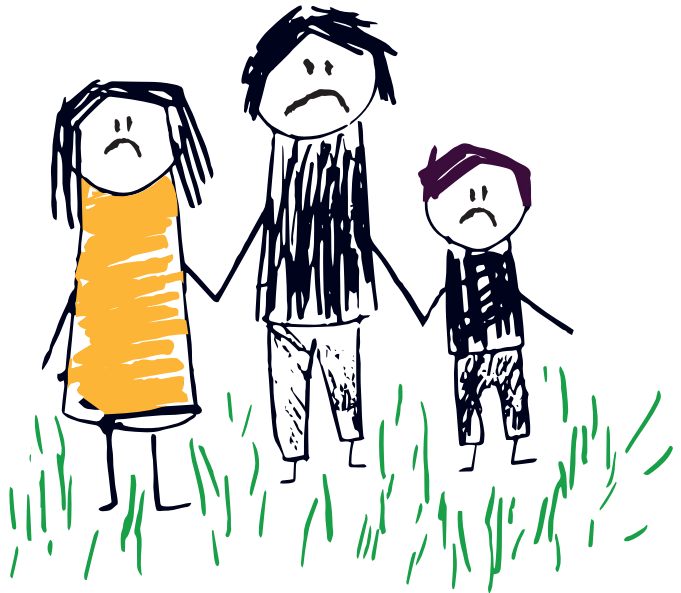


Mum said they tried really hard.

I wished I could have gone to the hospital to say goodbye,
but I wasn't allowed. Mum and Dad couldn't go either.



We were all very sad.



They were not alone. The kind nurse
sat with them and held their hand.



The nurse told them how much we all loved them.

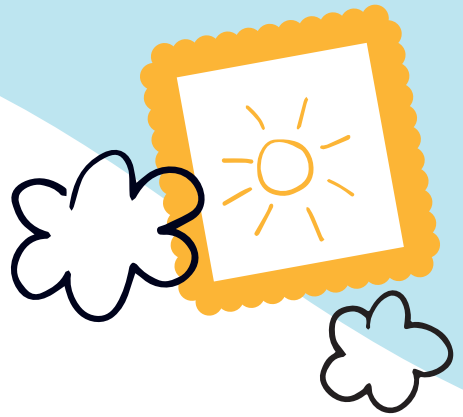
I wanted to go to the funeral,
but I wasn't allowed to do that either.



It is all very confusing.



I chatted to my Mum and Dad and they helped me feel better.



We wrote letters and I drew a picture of the beach.
This was their favourite place to be. We cried.

I wished I could have hugged them. This was our goodbye.



Today we are going to find lots of photos of us having fun together. We are going to make a book and fill it with stories about the times we shared together.



I miss them so much.

Mum told me that when someone dies they can never come back. But this doesn't mean that I will stop loving them. They will always be very special to me and will live in my heart forever.



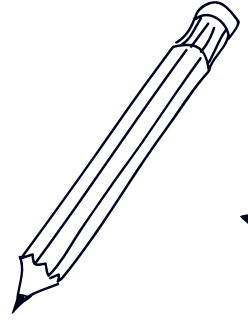
I Love you
XOXO



Questions just for you...

Draw a picture or write your answers below.

Ask a grown up to help you if you want.



Who is your special person?

What are your favourite memories of them?





What did they do that made you laugh?



How are you going to say your goodbyes to this very special person?

Guidance

For parents and carers

As difficult as it is, children will feel safer and more secure when a parent or carer gives honest, age appropriate information about the death of a loved one.

Children benefit from just knowing you are there for them. They might not want to talk about the person who has died and this is okay. Give them time.

Children often play out (with toys or through art) their thoughts and feelings rather than explicitly talk about their worries or sadness.

Expect young children to react with behaviour changes (sleep/toileting/eating habits for example) rather than verbal expression of difficult emotions.

Your child may need lots of physical reassurance and support from you at this time. Being physically together in isolation will allow more time to support each other. Everyone benefits from hugs.

Create a sense of digital connection with wider family members for your child by setting up video calls. These could be used as a way of sharing memories with others about the person who has died.

Family members could share drawings, songs and poems with each other, like you would have done at their funeral or wake.

Remind yourself that there is no right way to grieve. There is no set pattern that each person must go through. No single grief journey is the same for adults, and children are no different.

Be present and available, and your children will feel safe and loved.

Produced by Psychological Services,
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust



On behalf of



In partnership with

