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East Anglia's
Children's Hospices

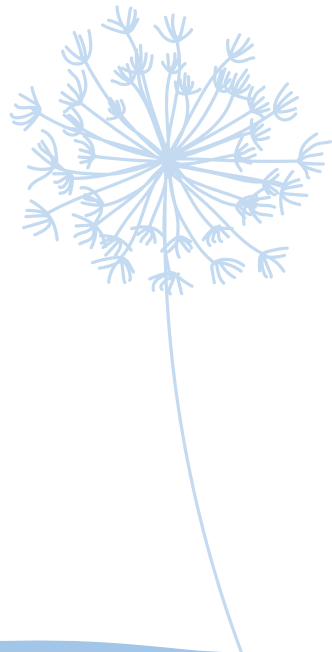
Understanding grief

The death of a child is one of the most painful things that can happen to you. You may feel you have lost a part of yourself and there can be a feeling that the natural order of things has been turned upside-down. When your child dies you might feel you have lost your role as a parent which is incredibly painful. It's common to struggle to find meaning after such a loss.

Whether the death was expected or sudden, the loss of a child still brings an overwhelming sense of devastation. Families describe their lives as changing forever as they are confronted with loss of the future – the hopes, dreams and potential that will not be fulfilled. They begin a deeply emotional and painful journey of learning to live with their grief.

Each person's journey through bereavement is unique – there's no 'right' way to grieve.

Grief can be painful, exhausting and unpredictable. You might find yourself feeling or thinking things you didn't expect. That's completely normal. We hope the information in this leaflet brings you some understanding and comfort as you navigate this difficult time.



Grieving

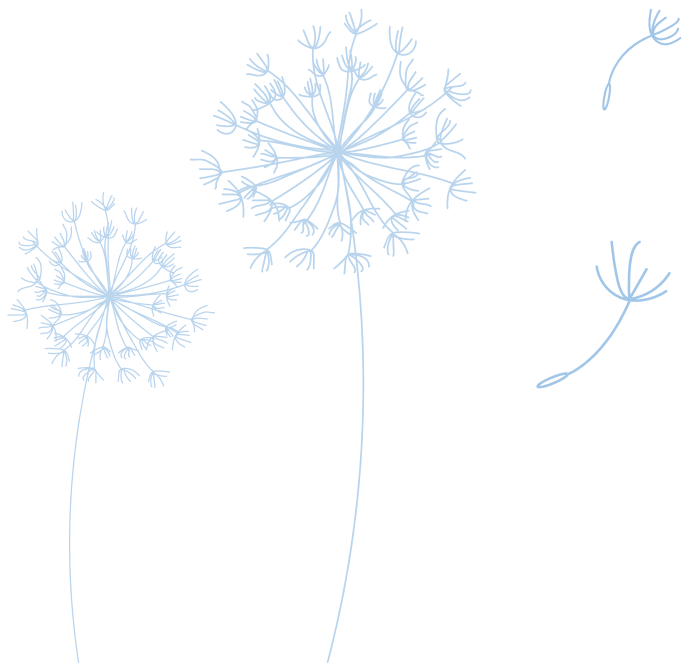


Grieving can feel like the hardest thing you'll ever face. It can seem unreal at first – confusing, frightening, and overwhelming. Grief is a natural response to loss.

Everyone's experience is different, but many people notice similar emotions including disbelief, mixed with flashes of reality too awful to think about. You may feel shocked, numb, enraged, empty, or experience a sense of deep longing. You might feel lost or alone, or even find yourself looking for the person who has died. Many families say they feel guilty, feeling as a parent or grandparent that they should have been able to prevent what happened. Some people say they feel guilty for outliving their child.

Some days you may feel completely overwhelmed, while on other days you might find small moments of calm or normality. That's part of the process. Grief doesn't move in a straight line – your feelings may change from one moment to the next.

When a child dies, life changes forever. In the early days, it may feel impossible to imagine things getting better. But, in time, you will begin to adjust and learn to live with your loss – to hold your memories close while finding new ways to live, love, and hope again.



Feelings, thoughts, and experiences

Grief can bring up many powerful emotions, sometimes all at once. You might feel:

- Deep sadness or loneliness.
- Anxiety or restlessness.
- Anger – perhaps at the situation or even at the person who has died.
- Guilt, regret, or ‘what if’ thoughts.
- Panic or fear about the future.
- Numbness or emptiness.
- Exhaustion, both mentally and physically.
- A loss of confidence or sense of purpose.
- Relief.

Grief can affect us physically. You may find you want to sleep all the time or struggle to sleep at all. You may want to eat a lot or not feel hungry and have an anxious feeling in your stomach. You may have aches and pains that you can't explain. It may feel hard to concentrate. If you're worried about your health, it can help to speak with your GP.

Grief affects our relationships. You may find you want to be closer to the people you love. You may find you distance yourself and seek solitude or are irritable with the people you love. Different family members may grieve differently which can bring tension.

Children grieve too

Children experience grief just as adults do, though they may express it differently. They might show their feelings through play, changes in behaviour, drawings, or stories. It's natural to want to protect them, but talking honestly and including them in what's happening helps them to understand and cope.

If you'd like more advice on supporting children with their grief, please see our leaflet '**Supporting children when a sibling dies**' or contact our team.

For more information on specific issues when grieving, including:

- I've been bereaved of a baby.
- I've been bereaved of a child.
- Supporting someone you know is grieving.

Go to the Child Bereavement UK website. www.childbereavementuk.org

If at any time you feel you need support in your bereavement, the wellbeing team is here to help. Details of the support we offer are in the leaflet '**Bereavement support at EACH**'.

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