

## ***How Children Respond to Bereavement***

A child who is bereaved will experience a range of emotions in the same way that an adult will - feelings such as shock, denial, anger, despair and guilt. However these feelings may be overwhelming for a child and they may be unable to express them verbally.

As a child develops, their understanding of bereavement increases. Although a young child (even a baby) reacts to the loss of someone close, their understanding and reactions will not be the same as those of an older child. Therefore their needs will change over time.

A change in a child's behaviour maybe the first indication that they are struggling to come to terms with their confused feelings, about what has happened.

- Aggression, both physical and verbal.
- Mood swings (happy one minute, sad the next).
- Problems with getting to sleep, bad dreams, waking at night, being afraid to sleep alone.
- Becoming clingy and withdrawn.
- Regressive behaviour (perhaps to a time when life was safe and predictable).

There may be health problems: a vulnerability to illness, complaining of 'aches and pains' or a fear that they may die too.

Children can react in different ways to school, following a bereavement:

- Fear that something terrible may happen whilst they are at school, leading to refusing to attend.
- Lack of concentration, causing them to fall behind with their work.
- They may also become completely absorbed in their school work as a distraction and to help them 'forget' about their loss.
- Children who have been bereaved are sometimes the targets of bullying.

Other responses to bereavement include:

- Sadness and longing.
- Anxiety.
- Guilt.
- Grieving in cycles - 'puddle jumping' (dipping in and out of grief and everyday events).