

# **Advice and support for parents**



**St Andrew's Infant and Junior Schools**

**How to tell a child or young person  
someone has died from Coronavirus**

At St Andrew's Infant and Junior Schools we are committed to supporting the emotional wellbeing of your child/children.

The following information has been taken from Winston's Wish and maybe of use to you at this difficult time.

## Talking to children about the death of someone close

When talking to a child about the death of someone close, the language used, and the child's need for information and understanding, will vary according to their age and developmental stage and the specific cause of the death. However, the child's basic needs will always remain the same.

Although COVID-19 is a shocking new situation, our **general** guidance on talking to children about the death of someone close holds true.

Put simply this would be:

- Use simple, direct language appropriate to their level of understanding
- Use the terms 'died', 'dead', and 'death' - euphemisms such as 'we've lost Grandpa' or 'Grandma has gone to another place' are confusing. Children are helped to understand by hearing the language that fits this new experience
- Keep children informed about what has happened and what will happen (e.g. about the funeral)
- Check how much they have understood
- Answer questions openly. If you don't know an answer, say you will find out and come back to them. If you feel the answer is too difficult for them to hear, explain that honestly
- Repeat explanations more than once
- Reassure them that they are not to blame

- Allow and encourage the safe sharing of feelings and thoughts
- Listen to their feelings, worries, memories.

## Ways to explain to a child that someone has died

Some suggested words:

*"We know that all living things will die someday. Flowers, animals, trees, butterflies, people all die eventually..."*

*"... however, the great majority of people will die when they are very old."*

*"Occasionally, someone will die before they are old because, for example, of an accident or serious illness."*

*"When someone dies, their body stops working and they are no longer able to do the things they could when they were alive, such as move or talk or hug or play."*

*"Sadly, [name] has died. Everyone wishes they had not died and had lived for many more years. However, their body was not able to keep working and so they died. Their heart stopped beating, their lungs stopped breathing and their brain stopped thinking, and so they died."*

*"We are very healthy and we're going to do all we can to keep that way, because I want to be around to [play with my great grandchildren/travel to Mars/celebrate the year 2100]."*

## Telling a child or young person that someone they know has died through coronavirus

*"I have something very sad and difficult to tell you. [Name] died. You remember I told you that s/he had this illness called 'coronavirus' and that everyone was doing all they could to make them better? Sadly, despite all that [name] and the doctors and nurses did, the illness became too strong and their body could not get better. Their lungs stopped working and their heart stopped beating and they died."*

# Explaining that someone has died through coronavirus

There are some complicating factors about deaths from COVID-19 that may affect children

- **Unpredictability:** It's not only very old, very frail people who are dying. The person they know may have been a little frail before they contracted the virus or they may have appeared perfectly well.
- **Suddenness:** People may sicken and die quite rapidly; children will have little time to adjust to a rapidly changing future.
- **Distance:** Children won't be able to spend time with their dying relative, won't be able to touch or hug them or even be in the same room.
- **Fear:** People may react to the news that this person had died with instinctive fear rather than instinctive comfort.
- **Separation:** Children and young people will be physically distant from those who might support them - friends, teachers, wider family.
- **Support structures:** The current disruption of normal routine may mean children and young people have fewer places in which to switch off and focus on something else: for example, school, sports club, etc.
- **Anger:** Children and young people may feel angry about things they perceive to have contributed to this death: people being slow to self-isolate, lack of ventilators etc.
- **Anxiety:** While children and young people will worry about other family members dying after any death, in the present situation, such anxiety is sharper and less easy to soothe.
- **Lack of 'specialness':** More and more people will be or will know someone affected by a death due to coronavirus. The death of a child's important person won't receive as much attention as before this crisis.
- **Constantly reminded:** It will be hard for children to avoid hearing other stories of people affected by coronavirus.
- **Absence of rituals:** With heavy restrictions on funerals, children and young people will have less chance to 'say goodbye' in a formal sense

Some of these factors can make it more complicated to talk about. For example, it will be harder to explain why their special person died, (when perhaps someone else with similar symptoms didn't) as there is much still unknown about how the

virus works. It may also feel harder to assure children that other people they know won't die yet.

## Look after yourself

Super-parents or super-carers don't really exist. Simply doing the best you can at this time is all that your children need. Take time to look after yourself too.

### Useful Websites and further information:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/children-and-bereavement/>

- [Child Bereavement UK](#) - call [0800 028 8840](tel:0800 028 8840) Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, or email [support@childbereavement.org](mailto:support@childbereavement.org)
- [Cruse Bereavement Care](#) - call [0808 808 1677](tel:0808 808 1677) Monday and Friday, 9.30am to 5pm, and Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday 9.30am to 8pm, or email [info@cruse.org.uk](mailto:info@cruse.org.uk)
- [Grief Encounter](#) - call [0808 802 0111](tel:0808 802 0111) Monday to Friday, 9am to 9pm, or email [contact@griefencounter.org.uk](mailto:contact@griefencounter.org.uk)
- [Hope Again](#) - call [0808 808 1677](tel:0808 808 1677) Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 5pm, or email [hopeagain@cruse.org.uk](mailto:hopeagain@cruse.org.uk)
- [Winston's Wish](#) - call [0808 802 0021](tel:0808 802 0021) Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, or email [info@winstonswish.org](mailto:info@winstonswish.org)
- [Childhood Bereavement Network](#)
- [How to say goodbye when a funeral isn't possible](#), from Winston's Wish
- [Guidance for families around funerals](#), from Nelson's Journey
- <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/coronavirus-supporting-children> - A short film