

For families with school age children this time of the year can be hectic. There are often sports days, end of year shows, parents' evenings, proms and graduations. So much to fit in! The long summer break can seem like an oasis, a chance to relax, have a break from the usual routines, maybe go away or have days out.

Some of the families we work with tell us they enjoy this time of year as it can give them a period of respite from their grief – permission to have some fun or to rest; however, the summer can be difficult for others. Families where someone is dying may find it difficult to take a break; either because treatment or illness makes it impossible, because they need to stay close by or because they would feel guilty if they did.

The lack of a school routine can mean that some children feel adrift; unstructured time provides more opportunities to think and sad thoughts they have been keeping at a distance through busy routines can crowd in.

For some children the move from one year group to the next may be a source of anxiety over the summer and for others the transition from primary to secondary school overshadows their summer. Bereaved or grieving children can find change difficult to manage. It can trigger feelings of grief as a change usually involves some type of loss (friendship groups, a favourite teacher, a school) and this is then a reminder of other losses.

If you find yourself in this situation we have some suggestions for how to manage the summer break:

Try and establish a routine

Children find routines helpful as they can feel more safe and secure. Even if your routine over the summer is to spend the morning at home and go to the park in the afternoon this can be helpful.

Give permission for fun

When someone is dying or has died it is helpful to remind children that they can still be children. Living is important and it is good to encourage guilt free fun for all the family.

Be aware of any changes in behaviour

It can be hard to know sometimes if changes in children's behaviour are due to grief or are because of other things. Keep an eye out for signs your child may be struggling; look out for changes in sleeping or eating patterns, taking risks, becoming withdrawn or uncommunicative, appearing fearful and anxious.

Acknowledge changes

It can be very helpful for children to know that you have noticed what is going on for them. Simply acknowledging that there have been changes, whatever they are, and that changes can be hard to manage may make a big difference. You can then explore together what might make the changes easier to handle.

Look after yourself

Grief is exhausting. As a parent you may be managing your own grief as well as supporting your children with their grief. Make sure you have the support you need and opportunities for respite – that could be an hour with coffee and a favourite TV programme or a night out with friends. Whatever helps you to cope.