



## Supporting bereaved primary age children

Children at this age begin to develop their understanding that death means they won't see someone again. They also realise that death happens to everyone - including themselves - and this can lead to greater anxiety for their own health and those closest to them.

What you may see:

- Younger children may show 'magical thinking'. Your child may feel they are in some way responsible for the fact that someone has died. For example:

*8 year-old Tom's dad died of a brain tumour. He used to coach Tom's football team until shortly before his death and was quite unwell at the last session. Tom felt it was his fault his dad had died because he had wanted him to come to the coaching session. Tom was able to share this worry and could then be reassured.*

- You may find that your child develops a fascination with death and want lots of details - death is spooky and scary.
- Your child will have strong feelings of loss but may struggle to express this in words. They will need help in finding words and may show their grief through their behaviour - anything from withdrawal to anger and aggression.
- Your child may have a real sense of feeling 'different' from their friends and this can lead them to feeling quite isolated.

What may help:

- Acknowledging with your child that this is really difficult and you find it difficult too.
- Understand they may push at boundaries in terms of their behaviour, but recognise that this is a child's way of saying 'so *what else has changed?*' What they really need is consistency balanced with understanding of their emotional needs.
- Communicate about what is happening with your child's school. Teachers may see very normal behaviour in school because your child is looking for life carrying on as before, but you will find them very supportive if you talk to them about the impact at home.
- Children can often protect a parent from their own feelings - look to your friends and family for your child to talk to. This is not a sign of you failing, it is more about helping your child have an outlet for their thoughts to someone they are not so worried about upsetting.
- It can help to have someone outside the family talk with your child. This is where SeeSaw can help. Our aim is to work with children in the context of the family, to develop communication and openness and ultimately to support a family in developing their new way of family life.