



Supporting children in Primary school when a family member is dying

- Don't avoid the topic of death. Remember that when a child asks a question it's a good thing. Try not to be scared. It is ok to not know the answer to a question and to be honest about it as death and dying is about the unknown.
- Try to build a rapport with the family and have a contact for you to keep in touch with. Check in with this person and find out what information they have given and how much they have told the child; what words, phrases imagery have they used. It is important for the child to have consistency with their information. Use age appropriate language.
- It's important to emphasize to the child that it's their choice if they want to talk about it or not. It would be helpful to allocate one member of staff to the child so they know who they can speak to and how to access them.
- A child may need to take time out of class or an activity if feelings overwhelm them (especially during the illness or days and weeks after the death). You could have a designated person, area to go to, box of toys for them to use, a card to show to the teacher to indicate time out is needed as the child may find telling them what is wrong may be too hard at that time as well as not wanting attention drawn to them.
- It's good to encourage the family to keep to normal routines. Sometimes school is the safe consistent place for the child although the family may be struggling to get them there and pick them up. Check out these things as support may be able to be put in place for them with transport etc. (has financial setting change – could the child have free school dinners for now?)
- Try to be as flexible as you can with the child, their concentration and behaviour may lapse. You may need to repeat instructions more than usual.
- Changes in circumstances in the school (new teachers, timetables etc) and transitions into new classes or schools can be hard for children who are having to cope with many unwanted changes at home.
- Children may experience; guilt, anger, low self-esteem, desire for attention
- Learning may be affected; it can become hard to process information, they often feel tired, emotional, withdrawn, anxious and overwhelmed. Worried about what might be happening at home to their loved one. These feelings may increase towards home time.
- It can help to have some story books, information leaflets which look at the topic of dying, death and loss for them to look through.
- It can be very helpful for the child to have some space each week with a counsellor or mentor in order to explore their difficult feelings. A regular safe space.
- Think about the topics you may be covering in class as there are certain subjects that could provoke emotions such as: topic around things being alive or not alive, biology around breath and organs, religious conversations, the war and people dying, certain pieces of music being used. Mother's day/father's day/ Christmas cards being made. You may want to prepare the children for these sessions of have an alternative for them to do.