

SECTION 1:

The impact of loss, change and bereavement

- **Young people's understanding of grief**
- **Young people's grief responses**
 - Anger
 - Denial and disbelief
 - Disturbed sleep
 - Sadness and longing
- **Young people who may need specialised professional support**
 - Complicated grief
 - Anticipatory grief
 - Young people anticipating a parent's death
 - The young person with a life-limiting illness
 - The dying sibling
 - Sudden death
 - Implications for the school/college
- **Breaking bad news**
- **Using the confidential record and assessment charts**
 - Individual assessment sheet
 - Individual assessment charts
- **Meeting individual secular and religious needs**
 - Death and dying in world religions
 - Buddhism
 - The Christian Community
 - The Hindu Community
 - The Jewish Community
 - The Muslim Community
 - The Sikh Community
 - Chinese religions
 - Burial and cremation in the United Kingdom according to the Christian tradition
 - Headstones and memorials
 - Traveller funerals
 - Religious rites and rituals surrounding death
 - Christianity
 - Judaism
 - Islam
 - Hinduism
 - Sikhism
 - Buddhism
 - Participation in funerals and rituals
 - How can adults help a young person at a funeral/ritual?
 - How can adults help a young person after a funeral/ritual?
 - Secular burials and other alternative options
 - Secular burials
 - Donation of a body to medical science
 - Cryomation
 - Burial at sea
 - People who have been buried at sea
 - Contact details for religious and secular communities



Who am I?

- **Young people in other stressful situations**
 - breakdown of friendships or relationships
 - self-harm
 - eating disorders
 - with a disability
 - domestic abuse
- **Young people with complex health needs or life-limiting conditions**
- **Looked after young people**
- **Young people who are adopted**
- **Young people with an imprisoned family member**
- **Young people with a family member in the armed forces**
- **Young people in travelling communities**
- **Case studies/exemplars:**
 - HMS Heroes
 - Army Welfare Service (AWS), Catterick
 - Army Welfare Service: The Community Support Team
 - The Army Families Federation
 - The Anglo-European School, Essex
 - Portsmouth High School: The School Counsellor
 - PACT
 - The National Information Centre on Children of Offenders (NICCO)
 - Gaisce: The President's Award in Ireland

SECTION 3:

Activities - Introduction starters for ten

- **Activity 1: Talking about feelings**
- **Activity 2: Thinking about loss**
- **Activity 3: If that happened I would feel...**
- **Activity 4: Help! I need somebody**
- **Activity 5: Earthquake in Nepal 2015**
- **Activity 6: Charity begins at home? So what about the refugees?**
- **Activity 7: You're a long time dead!**
- **Activity 8: Racial justice**
- **Activity 9: Young people in stressful situations**
- **Activity 10: Young people and the breakdown of a friendship or relationship**
- **Activity 11: Young people with a family member in the armed forces**
- **Activity 12: Young people with complex health needs or life-limiting conditions**
- **Activity 13: Young people living with a family member with dementia**
- **Activity 14: Young people living with domestic abuse**
- **Activity 15: Young travellers**
- **Activity 16: Planning a funeral**
- **Activity 17: Write your own epitaph**



Children's faces in tents

SECTION 2:

Young people's responses to adverse life changing events

- **Young people and trauma**
- **Young people and resilience**
- **Young Carers**
- **Young refugees**
- **Young people and divorce**
- **Young people and suicide**
- **Young people living with a family member with dementia**



SECTION 4:

A school response

- **Professionals taking responsibility for themselves**
- **Managing a critical incident**
- **Including the topic of loss, change and bereavement across the curriculum**
- **Young adult fiction**
- **National organisations offering advice and support**
- **Local organisations offering advice and support**



Introduction

Throughout our lives everyone will at some time or another experience loss, change and bereavement. This may include family breakdown, the death of a relative or friend or a stressful situation that changes an individual's life forever. Some adverse experiences may have both immediate and longer term consequences. Grief is a human response to loss and incorporates a myriad of emotional, behavioural and cognitive manifestations. Whatever the circumstances, the death of a person is not only a loss, it is a change and a turning point: the young person's world will never be the same again. Loss, change and bereavement may affect the mental health and wellbeing of a young person.

School communities often have to support young people who have faced or are facing loss, change or bereavement. Teachers and support staff are often the ones that the young person will turn to in such a situation. There is an increasingly wide range of resources available to support schools and professionals with the help that they may offer young people in loss, change and bereavement circumstances. There is, however, a paucity of resources that address both a proactive school approach and a reactive school approach to loss, change and bereavement that provides guidance on strategies whereby schools and professionals may help young people in such circumstances. This resource adopts such an approach.

The Mental Health Foundation states that *'mental health problems affect about 1 in 10 children and young people. They include depression, anxiety and conduct disorder, and are often a direct response to what is happening in their lives. However, 70% of children and young people who experience a mental health problem have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age. The emotional wellbeing of children is just as important as their physical health. Good mental health allows children and young people to develop the resilience to cope with whatever life throws at them and grow into well-rounded, healthy adults.*

Things that can help keep children and young people mentally well include:

- *being in good physical health, eating a balanced diet and getting regular exercise*
- *having time and the freedom to play, indoors and outdoors*
- *being part of a family that gets along well most of the time*

- ***going to a school that looks after the wellbeing of all its pupils***
- *taking part in local activities for young people.*

Other factors are also important, including:

- *feeling loved, trusted, understood, valued and safe*
- *being interested in life and having opportunities to enjoy themselves*
- *being hopeful and optimistic*
- *being able to learn and having opportunities to succeed*
- *accepting who they are and recognising what they are good at*
- ***having a sense of belonging in their family, school and community***
- ***feeling they have some control over their own life***
- *having the strength to cope when something is wrong (resilience) and the ability to solve problems.*

Most children grow up mentally healthy, but surveys suggest that more children and young people have problems with their mental health today than 30 years ago. That's probably because of changes in the way we live now and how that affects the experience of growing up' (www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

This resource aims to provide:

- An insight into the impact of loss, change and bereavement on a young person and young people's developmental understanding of bereavement and how they grieve
- Schools and professionals with ideas for adopting a proactive approach to loss, change and bereavement, in myriad forms, within the curriculum
- Schools and professionals with reactive approaches and strategies for helping bereaved young people and those undergoing loss and change in a variety of circumstances
- A springboard for discussion so that school communities can develop their own policy and practice matched to the individual needs of the young people and their families.

Life Changes 2 is divided into four sections:

SECTION 1

The impact of loss, change and bereavement in the lives of young people describes young people's experiences, understanding and responses to loss and grief and how schools and professionals may support them both proactively and reactively. This section offers guidance on how schools may break bad news to a young person. In addition there are individual assessment sheets that may be used to track a young person's emotional, physical, cognitive and behavioural responses to a loss, change or bereavement event. It also provides information about individual secular and religious needs, examines death and dying in a variety of world religions and religious rites and rituals surrounding death and burial.

SECTION 2

Young people's responses to adverse life changing events examines how young people may be affected by a variety of loss, change and bereavement events including family breakdown, suicide and domestic violence as well as young people with a family member imprisoned or away serving in the armed forces. Each event offers suggestions for both proactive and reactive strategies for supporting a young person. There are Case Studies illustrating how a variety of organisations provide practical support for young people in loss, change and bereavement situations.

SECTION 3

Activities that provide teachers with a range of ideas that may be used both proactively and reactively to focus attention upon a variety of loss, change and bereavement situations.

SECTION 4

A school response provides advice and potential strategies for schools to manage a critical incident. It contains a section that focusses upon developing an approach to loss, change and bereavement across the curriculum. In addition, there are suggestions for young people's fiction on the subject matter and information about some key national organisations offering advice and support for professionals and young people.

Trialling the materials:

The draft materials were trialled in a variety of secondary schools and other organisations in order to inform the final version. The comments received were all extremely positive, including:

"This is a good whole school resource. It gives a good insight into the many aspects of loss. The activities are well set out and easy to follow and are relevant to the type of support we offer within student welfare."

Lindsay Butler, Neale-Wade Academy, March, Cambridgeshire

"Have to say from the outset that I was really impressed with this resource. I think that Life Changes 2 is very good. It has clearly been put together by experts and the amount of information and lesson ideas in the pack is very good. It is an excellent resource."

Michael Oxenham, Gordano School, Bristol

"An excellent resource. Very positive response from the young people trialling the activities. Thank you for this resource. The Promoting Resilience has been particularly helpful for adopted children, which has led to some interesting discussion."

Janet Smith, former Practice Manager, Adoption Support, Families for Children

"I wish I'd had this resource years ago! It really is excellent in so many ways."

Lion Jean Langmead, South West Lions District

Section 1

The impact of loss, change and bereavement

Young people's understanding of grief

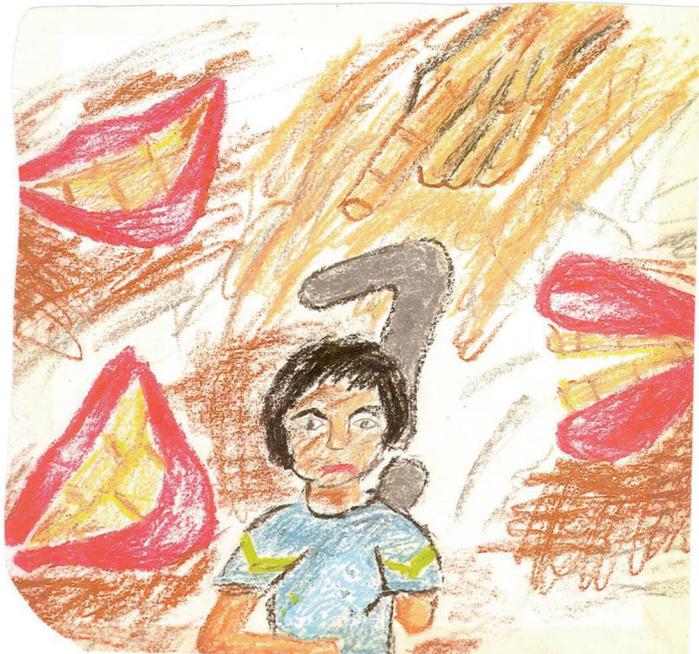
All young people and their families are unique and they will have different experiences of loss and life events. Studies undertaken suggest that young people experience a range of emotional and behavioural responses to bereavement, with a particular focus on anxiety because of their growing awareness of their own mortality (Downdney, 2000; Haine et al 2008).

Discomfort at being around bereaved people seems much more the norm than openness and compassion to their situation (Balk, 2000). Therefore, for young people, bereavement can be a very isolating experience. When young people turn to their friends for support they may realise that their peers are unable to help them because they have not yet encountered a significant loss and, therefore, have a limited capacity to demonstrate empathy.

Grief that is not acknowledged is referred to as *'disenfranchised grief'* because, although young people may have a grief response to what has happened, others do not validate their right to mourn. In the context of a school or a college, *'disenfranchised grief'* may relate either to self or to others.

Self:

Individuals can disenfranchise their own grief if they do not acknowledge their emotions. There may be several reasons for denial of grief, including embarrassment or shame about the imagined views of others (Kauffman, 1989). The consequences of self-disenfranchisement are likely to be isolating.



Who am I?

'When it happened it was as if I was in a goldfish bowl looking out at what was happening but that I was too upset to be part of it. Nobody could reach me from the outside and they couldn't help me in the way I needed them to.'

(Year 11 Student)

Other people:

The beliefs and values of a school/college community can shape young people's behaviour. This can include gender and role expectations and written and unwritten policies. The families of young people may also impose rules and expectations with respect to grief responses.

A young person's growing self-awareness and awareness of other's distress results in a greater capacity to offer empathy. However, in order to be able to empathise fully with others a young person needs to be able to manage their own emotions, a process known as emotional intelligence/emotional literacy (Goleman, 1995; Weare, 2004).

Grief work is hard work – it takes time. The greater the opportunity to reflect, process and attain a sense of closure, the more likely it is that the young person will incorporate the experience into their life and develop coping strategies and resilience. Many young people respond to loss with a ‘flight’ or ‘fight’ reaction, either withdrawing from their feelings or acting them out. Young people will not ‘get over their grief’ but, given time and support, most will learn to live with it.

Grief is physically and emotionally exhausting. Young people are particularly at risk emotionally because emotional responses are often characterised by low mood, withdrawal or feelings of exuberance. Like their younger counterparts, young people may communicate their anxiety about death through their behaviour. They can feel completely overwhelmed by powerful feelings and emotions that they do not understand or expect. When it seems that their world has fallen apart they need familiar boundaries and continuity.

‘Grief is like an electric current – it gives me shock waves at unexpected times.’ (Year 7 Student)

Re-occurrence of grief reactions long after a bereavement does not necessarily indicate that an adverse life event has had a negative impact on a young person or that the event has not been integrated into their life. Rather, it may demonstrate the ongoing nature of grief and the development of meaning about the loss and that new dimensions of the loss have surfaced.

There is some evidence that parentally bereaved young people are more likely to have poor educational outcomes in comparison with their non-bereaved peers (Haine et al, 2008; Abdelnoor and Hollins, 2004). In both these studies the examination results of young people around the age of twelve years were significantly affected. Curriculum subjects that require high levels of concentration are likely to pose the greatest problems for young people. Reasons for this may include lack of motivation, intrusive memories, slowing of cognitive pace due to low mood or depression and lack of support from parents, peers and teachers (Akerman and Stratham, 2011). There is also some evidence that parental death may affect the long-term employment chances of some young people (Kiernan 1992). Conversely, some young people appear to increase their level of achievement following the death of a parent (Dowdney, 2000).

Most young people will look to their peers and teachers for support to help them define their loss, to help them express their feelings and to enable them to integrate their experience of loss and change into their lives.

Environments are needed that validate the many ways of expressing grief and acknowledging the grief biographies of everyone within a community. This includes supporting young people both individually and in groups.

Young people say they want:

- People who will listen to their concerns
- Age appropriate discussions
- Opportunities to carry on being a young person.

‘I remember hearing my mum crying and thinking that I was the one who now had responsibility for taking my sister to school, taking her to ballet, collecting her from her friend’s house and all the things that my mum was now incapable of doing. In all honesty, I didn’t have time to think about my dad having died or about how my mum was feeling. My head was full of other things.’ (Year 11 Student)

Facts:

- Bereavement is an individual life event
- Young people may endeavour to make sense of loss and bereavement within the context of their life experience
- The emotions experienced by bereaved young people may be overwhelming in their intensity
- Bereavement in childhood may have long-term implications for young people
- Young people may feel very isolated in their grief within their peer group, family and society at large.

Implications for practice:

- It is important to recognise the manifold experiences of loss that can occur in a college or a school community
- Where loss and adverse change occurs in a school or a college community, grief needs to be recognised and acknowledged
- Teaching about loss, change and bereavement (a proactive approach) can help young people understand peer experiences
- Environments need to be established that validate diversity in the expression of grief.

The Land Where I do Not Wish to Dwell

My misty world is very wet with sadness
And the past is just a foggy silhouette.
If I concentrate really hard
I can recognise the present moment
But it is a strange land where
I do not wish to dwell.

Justine aged 15
Grief response

The Holiday

I wanted to take you combing for starfish on the beach.
I wanted to show you treasures, so many things to teach.

But time was cruel and we were robbed of holidays on the sand.
No buckets and spades for you and me, no jumping waves hand in hand.

I wanted to take you camping, sleeping in a tent,
I wanted to give you memories, of happy hours spent.

But time was cruel and we were robbed of camping under trees.
No playing scouts for you and me, no grubby hands and knees.

I wanted to take you fishing with rods and floats and nets.
I wanted to hear you squealing, "please sis, go on, let's".

But time was cruel and we were robbed of sitting on the rocks.
No fish to catch for you and me, no splashing or wet socks.

I wanted to buy you ice cream, flip flops and candy floss.
I wanted to buy you sunglasses and a T-shirt with I'M THE BOSS!

But time was cruel and we were robbed of walking on the pier.
No paddling pools for you and me, no jumping in without fear.

I wanted to do all the things a brother and sister should do.
I wanted to take you to the park, to the monkey house at the zoo.

But time was cruel and we were robbed of all the normal things.
No outings now for you and me, no roundabout and swings.

I wanted to take you to places you'd never been before.
I wanted to open up your world, like sunshine through a door.

But time was cruel and all too short, our adventures far too few.
So little time for everything, and so many things to do.

Wahida, 15

Sibling whose brother died of muscular dystrophy

Section 3

Activities

9 The tree of loss, change and bereavement:

On a large sheet of paper, draw a tree and place it on the wall. Provide the students with cut out leaves. Each student is to write on a leaf one loss, change or bereavement event that has affected them in some way at some time. This can be done anonymously. Collect in and, in turn, ask the students to pick up a leaf, read it out and place it on a branch of the tree. Tell the students that, only if they wish to, they can 'own' the leaf and give a short explanation to the others about the event.

