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Supporting a **BEREAVED** young person

BEREAVEMENT
INFORMATION PACK
FOR PARENTS AND
CAREGIVERS





**THIS RESOURCE PACK IS AIMED
AT PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS
OF A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON
THAT HAS EXPERIENCED A
BEREAVEMENT OF SOMEONE
CLOSE TO THEM.**

Our aim is to empower individuals to talk more openly about death and dying to further support people in their grief journey. It is often considered to be a taboo subject but as with anything, the more we talk about it the easier it gets.



BLGC Bereavement Support Service
For Young People Aged 8-18yrs
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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE GRIEF JUST LIKE ADULTS BUT MAY SHOW IT IN SOME DIFFERENT WAYS. THEY OFTEN RELY ON ADULTS WITHIN THEIR CURRENT SUPPORT NETWORK TO PROVIDE THEM WITH THE SUPPORT THEY NEED TO PROCESS THEIR GRIEF. WE HOPE THAT THIS GUIDE WILL HELP YOU FURTHER UNDERSTAND GRIEF FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A YOUNG PERSON TO ENABLE YOU TO HAVE CONVERSATIONS AROUND DEATH IN ORDER TO HELP A CHILD PROCESS THEIR EMOTIONS AND EXPERIENCES.



AGE & UNDERSTANDING

Firstly, it is important to acknowledge that children of different ages will likely experience grief differently and their understanding of death and dying will depend on their age.

2-5 Years

Young children may be beginning to understand the concept of death, but do not appreciate its finality. Some may not appreciate that death is permanent asking things like 'when is mummy coming back?'. It is important that we are honest and don't use euphemisms for death such as 'passed away' or 'gone to sleep' as this is likely to confuse young children.

Children of this age may require repeated explanations of what has happened. As their thinking is very much centred on themselves, they may consider that something they did or said caused the death.

5-8 Years

At about five years of age most children are beginning to realise that dead people are different from those who are alive, that they do not feel, they cannot hear, see, smell or speak and they do not need to eat or drink. At around seven years of age the majority of children accept that death is permanent and that it can happen to anyone. This can result in fear others will also die. They are better-able to express their thoughts and feelings but may conceal them and appear unaffected. Give them an opportunity to ask questions and give as much information as possible to allow them to adjust.

8-12 Years

At this age children's understanding of death almost matches that of an adult, although they find it difficult to grasp abstract concepts (like heaven or paradise). An important factor is their realisation of the inevitability of death and an increasing awareness of their own mortality. This can result in fear and insecurity which may present as anxiety. Their desire to know details continues, and they will seek answers to very specific questions.

Adolescence

The struggle for independence at this age may cause bereaved teenagers to challenge the beliefs and expectations of others as to how they should be feeling or behaving. Death increases anxieties about the future, and they may question the meaning of life and experience depression. Teenagers may find it easier to discuss their feelings with a sympathetic friend or adult than with a close family member. They may be having difficulty coming to terms with their own mortality and that of those close to them; they may cope with this by refusing to contemplate the possibility of death presenting as denial of the truth. Anger makes up a large part of their grief, often with a sense of injustice.

This is not an exact representation of every child, but is a good representation of how children of different ages may present when grieving. One of the most important things is to be open and honest to young people about death. Children often have a surprising capacity to deal with the truth, if given information in simple, straightforward language, appropriate for their age they are likely to accept and understand this. Young children tend to make up what they do not know which is often worse than the reality. Teenagers will resent a lack of honesty in the adults around them and the resultant loss of trust may be difficult to regain.



AS YOU CAN IMAGINE CHILDREN FEEL A LOT OF THE SAME THINGS THAT ADULTS DO WHEN THEY ARE GRIEVING, INCLUDING SADNESS, ANGER, EMPTINESS, ANXIETY, RELIEF, GUILT AND MORE. THESE MAY PRESENT THEMSELVES IN FAMILIAR WAYS BUT THEY ALSO MIGHT CONCEAL THESE EMOTIONS. SOMETIMES THIS IS BECAUSE THEY FEEL THEY ARE EXPERIENCING GRIEF 'WRONG' OR THAT THEY SHOULDN'T FEEL THE WAY THEY DO E.G. THEY ARE NOT SAD ENOUGH OR THEY SHOULDN'T FEEL RELIEVED AFTER THE DEATH OF SOMEONE VERY ILL.



EMOTIONS

However, these are natural responses to death and are accepted as part of the emotional presentation of grief. They may also try to hide their emotions to protect those around them – perhaps a younger sibling, or even a parent that is also grieving.

Seeing adults also expressing their emotion can give a child of any age 'permission' to do the same, if they feel they want to. Hearing how you are feeling may help them to consider their own feelings., however, it is important to give them the space to share their feelings without being over shadowed by the feelings of others. Be ready to listen but don't expect your child to always want to talk. They usually talk when they are ready, and often to people who are not immediate family. One way to create opportunities for sharing thoughts and memories is with a joint activity. Young people especially, tend to talk when they do not feel under pressure to do so.



You may notice some of the following which are all a normal part of the grieving process:

- Change in behaviour, perhaps becoming unnaturally quiet and withdrawn or unusually aggressive.
- Anger is a common response at all ages and may be directed at people or events which have no connection to the death.
- Disturbed sleep and bad dreams.
- Anxiety demonstrated by clingy behaviour and a reluctance to be separated from parents or carers. Older children may express this in more practical ways, for example by expressing concerns over issues that adults may perceive as insensitive or unimportant.
- Being easily upset by events that would normally be trivial to them.
- Difficulty concentrating, being forgetful. This makes school work particularly difficult and academic performance may suffer. Older children may feel that there is no point in working hard at school and they might lose a general sense of purpose in their lives.
- Physical complaints, such as headaches, stomach aches and a general tendency to be run down and prone to minor illness.



TALKING TO SOMEONE ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS IS EASIER SAID THAN DONE, EVEN AS ADULTS. IT CAN OFTEN FEEL DIFFICULT TO TALK TO SOMEONE WHO HAS BEEN BEREAVED OF A PERSON CLOSE TO THEM – MANY PEOPLE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY OR ARE WORRIED THEY'LL SAY THE WRONG THING AND SO AVOID THE TOPIC ALTOGETHER.



TALKING ABOUT GRIEF

Depending on the circumstances of the death of a loved one, for example when a death is considered to be more traumatic such as homicide or suicide, there may be more things to consider when talking about this with a child or young person.

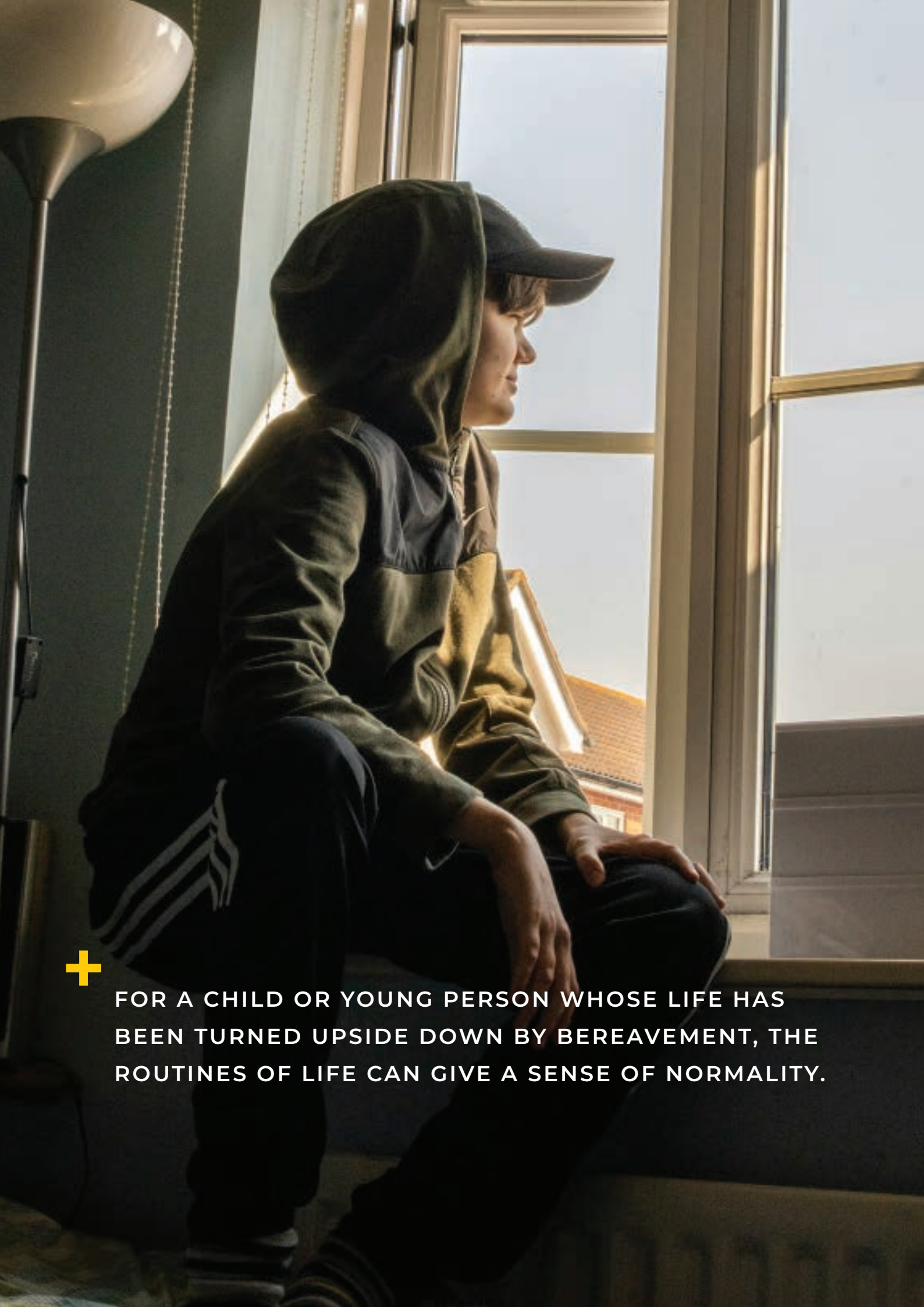
Homicide – we often want to protect children from violent details of a death however there is usually police and media attention and will therefore be more likely to become public knowledge. Parents and caregivers are usually the best person to tell a child the difficult news. This should still be age appropriate and sometimes might be appropriate to revisit this conversation when the child is older and their understanding has developed.

Suicide – open and honest communication from a parent/caregiver is best to convey to a young person that a person has taken their own life. It may need more thought on how to word this, as most suicides are a result of mental illness you may say something like 'he had a disease called depression and he died because of it.' Explaining that the person was very sad and felt like they didn't believe anyone could help, but encouraging the child that talking about their feelings with other people can help is really important.



Some tips to help guide the conversation with a young person who is grieving:

- Sometimes it can be helpful if you're the one who brings what's happened up in conversation as this shows the other person that it's OK to talk about it. However, young people, and specifically teenagers, can find it really difficult to talk to someone about how they're feeling. It can be important to give them this opportunity to open up but also not to force it. As long as an open line of communication is established, usually when they are ready to talk, they will let you know.
- We can often be surprised and caught off guard by children asking questions about a deceased loved one. A child may ask a question around the death at what we may consider as adults as 'inappropriate' times. If this happens, the main thing is that we acknowledge their question, it is ok to respond with something like 'that is an important question, let me think about and we can talk about it later.' But please do revisit this.
- Create opportunity for sharing thoughts in a joint activity. Often whilst driving or walking can allow more communication as eye contact is significantly reduced and therefore it can take some of the pressure away from the conversation.



FOR A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON WHOSE LIFE HAS BEEN TURNED UPSIDE DOWN BY BEREAVEMENT, THE ROUTINES OF LIFE CAN GIVE A SENSE OF NORMALITY.

ROUTINE

Going Back to School

For a child or young person whose life has been turned upside down by bereavement, the routines of life can give a sense of normality. Everything else may feel like it has fallen apart but school or college and the people within it can offer a sense of security and continuity. For young children and adolescents, school can give relief from an emotionally charged atmosphere at home. They may feel overwhelmed by a grieving family. There may be a constant stream of visitors expressing their own grief. Children and young people can find this difficult to deal with. School may offer an escape and the opportunity to be a child.

It is important that parents and caregivers inform school that a young person has been bereaved. We should always listen and hear the young person's wishes about when and how to inform school, they might identify a particular teacher they would like to know first and offer support. In some instances, it may require the teacher to inform the rest of the class to not ask questions about the bereavement, or to offer support to the young person if they see them struggling. We aim to reduce the taboo-ness of the topic of death and bereavement, so open communication is really important. Also, the more people that know about the bereavement, the more people there are available to offer check in and support to the child.



Engaging in Activities

Similarly, it can be important to do the same activities that they are used to, whether this is after school clubs, family dinners or hanging out with friends. Each child will work to their own time scale following a bereavement, so they might need some time off from these usual activities or it could be just the thing they need in order to create routine in their life and do things they enjoy.

Giving young people things to look forward to can help them to feel better, it allows us to think about things that we can and will enjoy in the future. This can be short term, offering activities on the weekends or it can be more long term goals to meet their needs and excite them about life. This reminds young people that not everything changes when someone dies, our life can still expand around our experiences of grief.

A young person should be asked when they would like to return to school, for some people this is immediately to gain back their 'normality' and for others they may need some days or weeks to process their loss. This is often dependent on the trauma associated with the death and their relationship to the deceased. We should follow the young person's lead on when they feel ready to return to school with some encouragement if needed.



+ KEY MESSAGES

+ USE CLEAR AND AGE-APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE, DO NOT USE EUPHEMISMS AROUND BEREAVEMENT.

+ ALLOW A YOUNG PERSON TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THEIR LOVED ONE AND ANSWER AND HONESTLY AS YOU CAN.

+ CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE A RANGE OF EMOTIONS, MOST OF WHICH IS EXPECTED AND A FOLLOWING THE NORMAL PROCESSES OF GRIEF.

+ BE LEAD BY THE YOUNG PERSON AROUND ENGAGING IN THEIR USUAL ROUTINES AND ENCOURAGE THIS IF NEEDED.

+ WE SHOULD ALL BE HONEST ABOUT DEATH AND DYING TO ENCOURAGE AN OPEN LINE OF COMMUNICATION ABOUT A YOUNG PERSON'S EMOTIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF BEREAVEMENT.

+ CREATE OPEN LINES OF COMMUNICATION WITH OTHER SERVICE PROVIDERS INVOLVED SUCH AS SCHOOL OR SOCIAL SERVICES.

+ FURTHER RESOURCES & SIGNPOSTING

There are many ways in which children, young people and adults would like to remember their loved ones. These activities are things that can be done at school, with family or some may wish to do them on their own. Some things to think about could be:-creating a memory box

- writing a letter to them about how you're feeling or when something happens that you want to tell them about
- reading a book about bereavement

We also have a resource pack designed specifically for children and young people with many activities to remember their loved one and help them to process their grief. If it is a young person's first experience of grief it can provide much needed education around their emotions and reactions to the bereavement, as well as highlighting coping strategies to manage their grief proactively.

It may be useful to check out some books to give to your child or read with them, some book recommendations are:

5-11yrs

- Remembering by Dianne Leutner
- Badger's Parting Gifts by Susan Varley
- Always and Forever by Alan Durant
- Am I like my daddy? By Marcy Blesy
- Muddles, puddles and sunshine by Winston's Wish
- The Invisible String by Patrica Karst

11-18yrs

- What on earth do you do when someone dies? By Trevor Romaine & Elizabeth Verdick
- Sometimes life sucks by Molly Carlile
- A Monster Calls by Patrick Ness

Useful Websites and Contacts:

Winston's Wish: Supports bereaves children, young people and their families.

www.winstonswish.org

Contact: 08088 020 021

Hope Again: Hope Again is the youth website of Cruse Bereavement Care. It is a safe place where you can learn from other young people, how to cope with grief, and feel less alone.

www.hopeagain.org.uk

Contact: 0808 808 1677

Child Bereavement UK: Help children and young people (up to age 25), parents, and families, to rebuild their lives when a child grieves or when a child dies.

www.childbereavementuk.org

Contact: 0800 02 888 40

+ BLGC BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

Most young people do not require specific bereavement support, they follow their natural grieving process and are able to utilise their current networks of support.

Please enquire using the email below if you would like access to our resource pack designed specifically for young people and/or the activity booklet.

If you require further information on anything discussed within this resource pack please enquire using the email below for further advice and signposting around talking to children about death and the grieving process, support to talk to school following a bereavement or any concerns you have about a child or young person.

If you feel as though a young person is not utilising their current networks of support, are coping well with the death of a loved one, is presenting with challenging behaviours or has expressed a desire to reach out and

talk about their bereavement it may be appropriate to seek more help.

Bolton Lads and Girls Club Bereavement service offers group workshops as well as, a 1:1 listening service from experienced professionals, who can offer a safe place without judgement for young people to express themselves and talk openly about their loss. They can provide education around death and grief whilst guiding young people through their emotions and offering practical advice or activities to ease their pain.

If this is something that may be of benefit to a bereaved young person please get in touch via telephone or email and complete our referral form that can be found on our website. Please scan the QR code below to visit the website.



BLGC Bereavement Support Service For Young People Aged 8-18yrs

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+ ENRICHING YOUNG LIVES

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