

When should I seek help?

Many people worry about their children and sometimes feel they should seek professional help immediately after the death.

Particularly in the early days after a death, counselling is not usually what children of any age want or need unless the death has been in very traumatic circumstances. The bereaved children that we work with at CancerCare tell us what they need initially is to be with adults who they already know and trust, rather than a stranger with whom they have to spend time building up a relationship. However, in time, needs will change and some children find speaking to a counsellor helpful, but others will not.

Talking about what has happened and feelings about it within the family is really important, as is understanding the changes in their behaviour. Most of these changes will gradually disappear. If they persist or become severe that is the time to seek help.

Get in touch

The minute you pick up the phone or walk through the door, you'll see why CancerCare is the go-to charity for professional and compassionate support across North Lancashire and South Cumbria.

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Grief, Loss and Bereavement

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A child's grief

Many adults feel that childhood is a time when children should be free from difficulties and challenging life events. But the reality of our world, and life itself, makes this impossible. Many parents will wish to protect their children when a death happens. They think that not talking about it will mean the child does not need to worry. However, even young children are sensitive to what is going on around them and they are more likely to worry or blame themselves if things are kept from them.

What should I look out for?

Children will experience a loss differently – but even little babies will notice when someone who used to make them feel safe and cared for is missing. Although they might not yet understand what death is they are never too young to grieve or feel that loss.

A child who is grieving may:

- Cry more than usual.
- Become clingy to the adults who are still around.
- Search for the lost person.
- Express strong emotions of anger, tantrums or become withdrawn.
- Have a change in eating, sleeping and toileting habits.

What things will help?

What sort of things will help?

- Reassurance about who will look after them.
- Explanations in simple concrete terms that are appropriate for their age.
- Keeping routines and boundaries.
- Allowing them to see emotions.
- Participating in family rituals to say goodbye.

Bear in mind that there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Don't be alarmed if children regress and act like younger children. This is a reaction to their grief. Young children may also ask questions which make little sense from an adult's perspective 'If I'm really good will Daddy come back?' 'I know that Mummy died, but will she come to my birthday party?' They may also repeat questions. It can often mean that children need a little more time to make sense of and process the information that they have been given.

Patience may well be required.

