

Supporting Children & Young People After Suicide

Losing someone to suicide is an overwhelming experience. Children and young people process grief differently from adults, and they need clear, compassionate support that fits their stage of development, communication style, and individual needs.

1. Use Age-Appropriate Language

Avoid confusing or euphemistic terms such as ‘ gone to sleep ’ . Be direct but gentle. For example: “ They died. Their brain and body stopped working. ” Adjust the level of detail to the child ’ s age and maturity.

2. Example Phrases

- “ It wasn ’ t your fault. Nothing you did or didn ’ t do made this happen. ”
- “ Sometimes people feel so much pain inside that they believe death is the only way to stop it. ”
- “ Even though they died, our love and memories of them continue. ”

3. Common Questions Children Ask

Children may ask the same questions repeatedly as they try to understand. Questions can include: ‘ Why did they do it? ’ , ‘ Where are they now? ’ , or ‘ Will it happen to me or you? ’ Answer with honesty, consistency, and reassurance.

4. School and Community Support

Inform teachers and trusted adults so they can provide additional support. Children may show grief through behaviour changes such as irritability, withdrawal, or difficulty concentrating. Schools can help by offering a safe space, flexible expectations, and a consistent adult who checks in regularly.

5. Neurodiverse Children

Autistic and neurodivergent children may need grief explained in very literal, concrete terms. They might prefer written scripts, visuals, or routines to help process changes. Predictability and sensory regulation strategies (weighted blankets, quiet space, sensory tools) can make conversations safer and more manageable.

6. When to Seek Extra Help

If a child shows ongoing nightmares, extreme withdrawal, or talks about wanting to die, seek urgent support from your GP or emergency services. Specialist bereavement charities can provide tailored counselling for young people.

7. Helpful Resources (UK)

- Winston 's Wish – childhood bereavement support (www.winstonswish.org)
- Child Bereavement UK (www.childbereavementuk.org)
- Papyrus HOPELINE247 (0800 068 4141) for young people at risk of suicide
- Samaritans (116 123, free, 24/7)