

Helping Children Cope with the Death of a Parent

"Every day I think about my mum and I miss her so much and wish she were here. As I've got older I have learned that it is ok to talk about my feelings and remember the happy times that we had. I have begun to understand that her alcohol problem was like an illness. She wouldn't want me to be sad and she did love me." Nicky

"Grieving for her was as much about understanding her alcoholism as it was about coming to terms with losing her." James

Not everyone with a drink problem dies of drink-related issues but, sadly, this can happen. Knowing this can be worrying for family members, particularly for children and young people. The idea of a parent dying is frightening for everyone, and when alcohol is involved it can bring up a range of difficult feelings.

Feelings of abandonment, anger, relief, blame, guilt and many other emotions may be present. Sometimes children feel it would be better if their parent died to end their suffering, but then feel guilty for having these thoughts.

It is important for people supporting children and young people to recognise these emotions. Just being there to listen can help them through this traumatic time. Learning more about bereavement, through training or reading, will help you feel better equipped to support a child who is coping with the death of a parent.

Using age-appropriate language is important when talking about death to children and young people. It may be helpful to keep conversations short. Lots of information at one time can feel overwhelming. Being honest and willing to answer their questions truthfully is important.

When the family is unable to talk openly about issues, it can make it harder for them to support each other at difficult times. The death of a parent with alcohol problems may also create tension for the rest of the family with many unanswered questions. Having a caring adult around at this time is very important, just being there and listening can help. Knowing that there is someone who cares for them and listens will help. Important messages are this is not your fault and you are not alone.

Whether a parent has died from alcohol-related issues, suicide, or something unrelated, we are here to listen. Talking can help, be it with friends and family, with Nacoo's volunteer helpline counsellors or another agency.

It is also important for you to look after yourself. If you want someone to talk to, you can always call Nacoo on 0800 358 3456 or email us on helpline@nacoo.org.uk. You can tell us as much or as little as you want.

Listed below are other organisations offering support for children or young people who have been bereaved. Many of their websites give further information and advice and also suggest books that may be helpful.



For example, Cruse has produced these leaflets:

<http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk/PDFs/DeathofParent.pdf>

<http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk/PDFs/YouthBooklet.pdf>

Bereavement support

Cruse Bereavement Care www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

RD4U (part of Cruse Bereavement Care for young people) www.rd4u.org.uk

Child Bereavement UK www.childbereavement.org.uk

Childhood Bereavement Network www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide www.uk-sobs.org.uk

DrugFAM www.drugfam.co.uk

Winston's Wish www.winstonswish.org.uk

BBC http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/emotional_health/bereavement/

