



Merry Hill Infant School & Ashfield Junior School



17th June 2021

Dear Parents/Carers,

Recently, families within our Merry Hill and Ashfield community have experienced grief and loss. The death of someone important to us can cause great distress and confusion at any time of our lives. A bereavement during childhood can feel overwhelming for children and difficult to manage, especially if it was a parent or sibling. Young children don't always have the words to tell us how they are feeling and can show their sadness and distress through their behaviour.

Children are naturally curious and events in our community may affect the children in different ways. Death is very much part of our lives and children have already been exposed to death on many different levels such as dead insects, birds and animals, through fairy tales and cartoons. If we allow children to talk to us about death, we can give them information, prepare them for a crisis and help them when they are upset. We can make it easier for them to talk if we are open and honest and at ease with our own feelings.

Attached to this letter, are some ideas to aid conversations about death as well as some children's books to help children comprehend the notion of death.

Ashfield and Merry Hill are setting up a 'Go Fund Me' page in honour of some of the members of our community who have died. The money raised will purchase a public access defibrillator that will be located at Merry Hill. Less than 1 in 10 people in the UK survive an out of hospital cardiac arrest and we hope that having one located on School Lane will play an important part in saving people's lives. Please find the link here: <https://gofund.me/badf3773>

If you or your family has been affected by grief and you require further support, we are able to signpost you to the relevant agencies. We are here to support our community and willing to provide help in any way we can.

Best wishes,

Ashfield Junior School and Merry Hill Infant School

Below are suggested ideas on how to talk to your child/ren about death.

Young children need brief and simple explanations. Using concrete and familiar examples may help. For example, death may be made more clear by explaining it in terms of the absence of familiar life functions – when people die they do not breathe, eat, talk, think, or feel any more; when dogs die they do not bark or run anymore; dead flowers do not grow or bloom any more. Children learn through repetition so they may need to go over this quite a few times. A child may immediately ask more questions, others may be silent, then wish to revisit the subject again later. Children sometimes get confused with what they hear so it is important you check their understanding by revisiting the subject at appropriate times. It may take time for a child to comprehend fully the ramifications of death and its emotional implications.

There are also moments when we have trouble “understanding” what children are asking us. A question that may seem thoughtless to an adult may be a child’s request for reassurance. For instance, a question such as, “When will you die?” needs to be heard with the realisation that the young child perceives death as temporary. While the permanency of death is not yet fully understood, a child may think that death means separation, and separation from parents and the loss of care involved are frightening. Being cared for is a realistic and practical concern, and a child needs to be reassured. Possibly the best way to answer a question is by asking a clarifying question in return: “Are you worried that I won’t be here to take care of you?” If that is the case, the reassuring and appropriate answer would be something like, “I don’t expect to die for a long time. I expect to be here to take care of you as long as you need me, but if I did die, there are lots of people to take care of you. There’s Daddy, Aunt Laura and Uncle John or Nan.”

It is important to check which words you use when discussing death with your children. Some children confuse death with sleep, particularly if they hear adults refer to death with one of the many euphemisms for sleep – “they died in their sleep”, “eternal rest”, “rest in peace.” Resulting from this confusion, a child may be afraid of going to bed, in case they don’t wake up either! Similarly, if children are told that someone who died “went away”, brief separations may begin to worry them. Grandpa “went away” and hasn’t come back yet. Maybe Mummy won’t come back from the shops or from work. Therefore, it is important to avoid such words as “sleep”, “rest”, or “went away” when talking to a child about death. To avoid confusion with young children, it helps to explain that only very serious illness may cause death. When they hear that sickness was the cause of death, we don’t want them to assume that minor ailments are a cause for major concern. When a child associates death only with old age, they can become very confused when they learn that young people can die too. It is important to explain that most people live a long time, but some don’t. However we do expect that we will live a very long time (always reassure them)!

Books for children:

I Miss You by Pat Thomas

Badger’s Parting Gifts by Susan Varley

Grandpa’s Slide Show by Deborah Gould

Grandpa by John Burningham

Gran’s Grave by Wendy Green

I Feel Sad by Brian Moses

I’ll Always Love You by Hans Wilhem

Life’s End by Denise Chaplin & Lynne Broadbent

Love You Forever by Robert Munsch

Scrumpy by Elizabeth Dale

When Mum Died published by Hollins & Sireling

Will my Rabbit go to Heaven? by Jeremy Hughes