



WHEN SOMEONE DIES

PROVIDING EARLY SUPPORT TO A RECENTLY BEREAVED CHILD

**Nelson's
Journey**
bringing back smiles to bereaved children

INTRODUCTION

WHEN SOMEONE DIES: EARLY SUPPORT FOR BEREAVED CHILDREN

The early days and weeks after a death of a significant person can be a particularly confusing and unsettling time for a young child, as well as being a distressing time for the child's family.

Nelson's Journey regularly receives calls and enquiries from families after a recent death with common questions asked of our bereavement support workers such as *'how can I explain what dead means to a young child?'* and *'should I involve my child in the funeral?'*.

The purpose of this booklet is to help adults who are caring for recently bereaved children to talk to them about the questions that they may have, and to help them to make more sense of what has happened using child-friendly language. Some of the issues inside may be relevant before and after a funeral has happened.

We'd encourage adults to read through this booklet and then to share with a child to look through and talk about together. When talking with a child, we'd encourage direct language to be used such as 'died' instead of 'gone to sleep' as is more likely to avoid confusion for the child.

Some cultures, religions, and personal preferences will mean that everything may be followed as laid out in this booklet, and these differences can be discussed with the child before the funeral.

We'd also encourage those caring for a bereaved child to read our other booklet *'At a time of bereavement'* and explore our other resources, all of which are available to download for free on our website **www.nelsonsjourney.org.uk**



SHOULD I
INVOLVE MY
CHILD IN THE
FUNERAL?



HOW DO I
EXPLAIN WHAT
'DEAD' MEANS?

PAGE 4

WHAT DOES 'DEAD' MEAN?

PAGE 5

SEEING THE BODY OF SOMEONE WHO HAS DIED

PAGE 7

WHAT IS A COFFIN?

PAGE 9

WHAT HAPPENS AT A FUNERAL?

PAGE 11

WHAT HAPPENS AT CREMATIONS AND BURIALS?

PAGE 13

WHAT HAPPENS AT A FUNERAL RECEPTION OR WAKE?

PAGE 15

RESOURCES THAT YOU CAN USE TOGETHER

CONTENTS

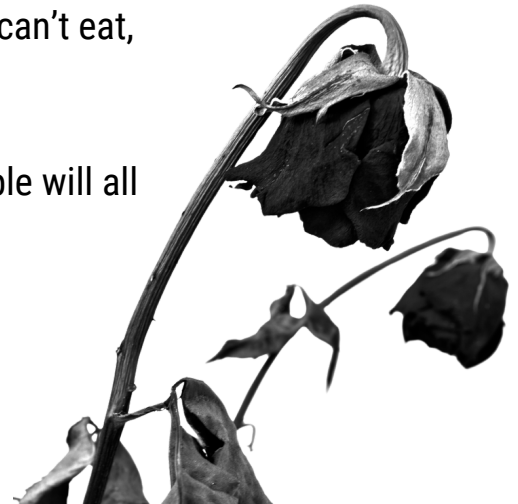
WHAT DOES 'DEAD' MEAN?

When someone is dead, it means that their body has stopped working. It can't be fixed. When someone has died, they can never come back.

People who knew that person may feel very sad and may cry.

Someone who has died cannot talk or play anymore. They can't eat, drink or breathe, and they can't feel any pain.

All living things will die. Insects, animals, flowers and people will all die one day. Usually, people are very old when they die.



SEEING THE BODY OF SOMEONE WHO HAS DIED

The body of someone who has died is usually looked after by someone who is called a **funeral director**.

Sometimes the funeral director will let people see the body of their special person.



VIEWING THE BODY

Some people might want to see the body, and some people don't want to because it might feel difficult for them.

The body of someone who has died can look different. The skin might have changed colour and shape. The body will feel cold.

WHAT IS A COFFIN?

A coffin is a big box which a body is kept in after a person has died. A coffin can be made out of all sorts of different materials such as wood, wicker, metal or cardboard. Sometimes they are plain, and sometimes they might be painted or decorated.

You could draw a picture or write a letter that can go in the coffin.

Sometimes, a **shroud** might be used instead of a coffin. This is a long piece of cloth that is wrapped around the body.



THE HEARSE

A coffin is taken to a funeral in a special car called a **hearse**.



WHAT HAPPENS AT A FUNERAL?



Lots of people who knew the person who died come together to say goodbye at a funeral. The people who come together are called **mourners**.

The funeral is a chance for everyone to remember different things about that special person's life. A funeral can happen in lots of different places such as at a crematorium, a church, or at another special place. Mourners will often wear very smart clothes and some people might wear black clothes.

You may be given an '*Order of Service*' at the start of a funeral. This tells you what will happen during the service and when, and is something you can keep as a memory.

WHAT WILL PEOPLE BE DOING AT THE FUNERAL?

The coffin may be carried into the funeral by people called **pall bearers**. The coffin will rest on their shoulders as they walk together.

The person's favourite music might be played at a funeral, hymns might be sung together, and poems might be read out.

Often someone will talk about the life of the person who died. This is called a **eulogy**.

Lots of people may be feeling sad and crying because they won't see the special person again. Flowers might be put on the coffin.

After the funeral, the coffin containing the person's body is either **buried** or **cremated**. The family chooses which they would prefer.



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A COFFIN IS CREMATED?

A coffin is **cremated** at a crematorium. At the end of the funeral, a curtain might be drawn in front of the coffin. After the service the coffin is put into a very hot machine which turns the coffin into ashes. The body inside the coffin cannot feel any heat or pain.

The ashes are collected into a container called an urn or a casket. Sometimes, the family of the person who died may take away the ashes. The family might choose to **scatter** or **bury** the ashes in a special place important to the person who died. Some families may choose to keep the ashes at home.



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A COFFIN IS BURIED?

A coffin is **buried** at a graveyard or cemetery. The coffin is lowered into a deep hole in the ground which is called a grave. The grave is dug specially for the coffin to fit. The coffin will be covered in soil, and grass will begin to grow over it.

Flowers can be left at a grave, sometimes with a note or memory about the person who died.

Later, a Gravestone may be placed at the grave. This is a stone which tells people about the person who died so everyone will know who is buried there.



WHAT HAPPENS AT A FUNERAL RECEPTION OR WAKE?

A funeral **reception** or **wake** usually happens after a funeral, but sometimes it can be before the funeral starts.

It's a time for people who knew the person who died to talk about their memories and share their stories and memories of that person's life. Some people will talk about happy times that they remember and laugh about funny things that happened. Some people may cry too. It is ok to be sad and happy.

People may have photos to show each other. Some photos might be very old and show what the person was like when they were very young.

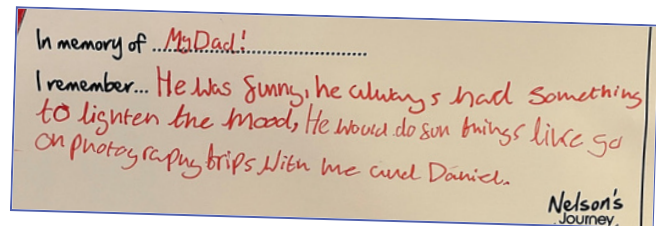
What memories or stories might you want to tell someone to remember the person who died?

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

When the funeral is over and everyone has gone home, there may still be times that you want to remember your special person.

You may want to think of different ways of writing down the memories of the person who died. Maybe you can keep a box of items and photos that remind you of that person, or maybe you can write them a letter on special occasions. Look at the Nelson's Journey website for activities that you can do, such as writing on 'memory bricks'.

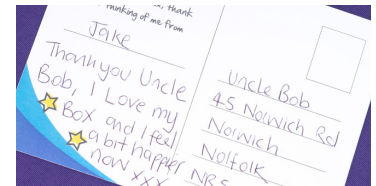
Sometimes, families and friends visit the grave, or where the ashes were scattered or buried. Not everyone does this and it is something you can talk about as a family.



RESOURCES THAT YOU CAN USE TOGETHER

Nelson's Journey provides resources and activities that you can look at together. Some of these can be printed from our website, and others can be ordered. Take a look at www.nelsonsjourney.org.uk to find our latest activities and suggestions.

Our Smiles & Tears Gift Box contains helpful information, activities and treats carefully chosen by our young volunteers to help bring comfort to bereaved children at a very challenging time, and can be purchased through our website.





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