

# Bereavement Support



## Background of Simon Says

Simon Stanley was a 37 year old teacher from Southampton when he died from cancer. His wife Sally found there was no bereavement support locally for their two small children. Their experiences led to the establishment of "Simon Says" as a registered charity.

Research has shown that the Stanleys' experience is not unique and there is a wider need to provide resources and information to children, parents and professionals who work with children and young people eg: teachers, health professionals. It is estimated that approximately 7500 children of school age (5 - 16 yrs) in Hampshire have a parent or sibling who dies<sup>1</sup>. This number does not include the death of other close relatives or friends.

Simon Says was registered as a charity in 2001 with a formal launch in 2002.

Patrons of Simon Says: Sally Taylor, MBE  
Sally Stanley, MSc MInstLM  
Matthew Hayes, DM FRCS (Urol)

<sup>1</sup> Source: Child Bereavement Network

## What does Simon Says offer?

The death of someone important can have a traumatic effect on a child or young person. However, with appropriate support and information, children and young people understand what has happened and are able to rebuild their lives.

Whether the death was sudden or expected, Simon Says works in practical and creative ways to support children and young people in Hampshire when an important person in their life has died or is dying. We do this by:

- Running a telephone support line (023 8064 7550)
- Offering support groups for children (up to age 11 yrs)
- Offering support groups for young people (age 11 – 18 yrs)
- Providing written information and resources
- Recommending counsellors who specialise in child bereavement, if the need arises
- Offering support, training and advice to schools and those professionals working/supporting bereaved children

# A charter for bereaved children and young people

“A child can live through anything provided they are told the truth and allowed to share the natural feelings people have when they are suffering” Eda Le Shan.

Although each bereavement will be unique, bereaved children and young people have key needs:

## 1. Enough Information

Bereaved children/young people need answers to their questions. They need information that clearly explains what has happened, why it happened and what will happen now.

## 2. Being Involved

Bereaved children/young people should be asked if they want to help with important decisions that will affect them (such as planning the funeral, remembering anniversaries).

## 3. Family Involvement

Support for bereaved children/young people should include their parent(s). It should respect each child's confidentiality.

## 4. Meeting Others

Bereaved children/young people can be helped by meeting other children/young people who have had similar experiences.

## 5. Telling the Story

Bereaved children/young people have the right to tell their story. This may be through drawings, letters or puppets. The stories can be heard, read and seen by people important to the child/young person.

## 6. Expressing Feelings

Bereaved children/young people should feel comfortable showing all feelings that go with grief such as anger, sadness, guilt and anxiety. They may need help to find ways to do this.

## 7. Not to Blame

Young bereaved children often feel they are to blame for the death. They may need help to understand this is not true!

## 8. Established Routines

Bereaved children/young people should continue with interests and activities they have enjoyed if they choose.

## 9. School Response

Bereaved children/young people can benefit from a positive response from school or college.

## 10. Remembering

Bereaved children/young people have the right to remember the person who died for the rest of their lives. This may involve reliving memories so that the person becomes a comfortable part of the child's/young person's ongoing life story.

## What can grief feel like?

The death of a special person is always a shock – even if that person was suffering from a terminal illness and the death was expected. No amount of planning can actually prepare anyone for the death of someone they love, and the new reality of living a life without that person.

Because everyone is different, everyone including children experiences grief differently. It is important that the child understands this. Some people may cry a lot and some may not cry at all – it does not mean the person who is not crying is less sad than the person crying a lot – it simply means they are experiencing their grief differently. Other common feelings related to grief include anger, guilt, depression, disbelief, loneliness and relief. It is important to remember that there are no right and wrong feelings. As with many emotions grief is often a new feeling and for this reason can be a very scary experience. People will experience different feelings at different times.



# How much do children and young people understand?

## Younger children 0-8 years

- Children of this age don't know the name for what they are feeling. They just know that the world feels all different and horrible and their tummy feels funny and somehow it comes out as a tantrum in the supermarket.
- They may be clingier than usual, or more scared (of real things or pretend ones like giants and monsters).
- They may behave as though they are younger than they actually are - young children often seem to lose skills that they have mastered so they may go back to wetting themselves or waking often in the night.
- They may 'act out' the story of what happened to the person who died. They may have tummy aches or headaches or their toys may.
- Remember that a lot of the time they will behave as though nothing has happened. This is normal. They will remember too, but not all the time.

### *What can help:*

- Tell them about what they are feeling, comfort them, and help them to feel safe while making sure they know that having a tantrum, thumping their little brother or refusing to stay in bed is not OK.
- Help them to know that it is alright to feel sad, frightened, lonely – and that sometimes you feel that way too.
- Keep routines going, like bed times.
- Don't be afraid to say 'no' if that is what you would always have said in the past. You can add extra cuddles and reassurance, and be a bit flexible when you – or your child – need you to be.
- Make sure they understand what has happened. Use words that others are using (like dead) even if you think they are too young to understand them; they will hear them anyway and it will be reassuring to hear you say them.
- Talk about the person who has died, tell them stories about the person, and remind them what the person was like. Together you can create a memory store, to keep memories alive.
- Children are very supportive of each other; by attending a support group they will have the opportunity to meet others their age who have also been bereaved and they can share experiences and support each other.

## Older children 8-11 years

- At this age children may know what the feeling is called, but they may not connect it with the death of someone important.
- They are looking for reassurance, comfort and a sense that the adults are still in charge, as well as an acceptance that they too are suffering and struggling.
- Children of this age often try to comfort their parent; they may hide their own distress or act it out at school. They may be unusually well behaved or may show signs of unacceptable behaviour. They may be uncharacteristically clingy or behave as though they are younger than they really are.



## Questions children and young people may ask

Children and Young People can be unpredictable and they will not sit down and discuss a subject the way adults do. They will ask questions that may be difficult to answer, often out of the blue in a very direct way, giving you little or no time to think about a response. They may ask what it feels like to die, why their special person has died, what it's like inside a coffin or if it's dark in the ground. It is helpful to be prepared for questions like these, so a reaction doesn't upset the child and stop them from asking more questions.

### Some typical questions and possible responses:

#### Why do people die?

Explain that death is a natural part of life and everything that lives will eventually die. It is important to reassure them that all living things usually live a long and healthy life. Explain that death happens when things reach the end of their life when bodies wear out and stop working properly. The life cycle of plants, flowers and animals could be used to explain this.

#### Why has my 'special person' died?

It is important to be direct with children and young people, according to their age and understanding of death. Use simple language and avoid using terms to describe the person who has died as 'lost', 'gone' or 'passed away' as these are terms that younger children may find difficult to understand. Explaining that the person is dead or has died is honest and really helps to avoid any confusion.

#### Does dying hurt?

It's helpful to reassure children that dying doesn't usually hurt when someone has been ill for a long time as doctors are able to treat their pain and use medicines to take the pain away.

#### Why couldn't the doctors save my special person?

Explain that sometimes doctors aren't able to save every person but reassure them that everyone involved tried their very best to save them.

### Where do dead people go?

It's useful to ask the child their thoughts on this question before you answer. Explain that everyone has different thoughts and beliefs on this subject. Some people may want to imagine their loved ones as a star in the sky or as a beautiful butterfly. Other families will want to share their religious beliefs. The most important thing is to explain this subject in a way you and the child feels comfortable with.

### Will I see my special person again?

It is important to be honest about this as you wouldn't want to give a child false hope. Let them know they can see their loved one in their head any time they want to, and think about them. Explain that the person will always live on in their hearts because they loved them and they will always have their memories which no-one can take away. You may want to suggest your child keeps a special photograph of their loved one so they can look at it whenever they want to.

### Will I always feel sad?

Be honest – explain that they will probably always feel sad that their loved one has died, but they will not feel sad all the time. Explain to them that the sadness (grief) will come and go. Find something to compare it to, such as the sea – sometimes the sea will be calm with no waves and sometimes the sea will be very choppy with lots of big angry waves – and this is what sadness for a loved one who has died can feel like. It is important to let your child know that it is OK for them to be happy and to laugh – it would make their loved one happy to know they can still laugh and be happy.

### What happens to a body when someone dies?

Turn the question back to your child and ask what they think happens. This allows you to find out what they already think. You can let them know that when the special person dies their eyes will be shut and they will stop breathing and the body will feel cold. Reassure them that the special person is peaceful now and not in any pain or discomfort.

### Was it my fault?

NO! be absolutely clear about this. Explain that death is usually beyond anyone's control and it is just a very sad part of life.

### GROWING AROUND GRIEF

HERE IS A NEW WAY OF THINKING ABOUT GRIEF AND RECOVERY:



THIS CIRCLE REPRESENTS A LIFE THAT IS TOTALLY CONSUMED BY GRIEF.



ONE SHOULD ACCEPT THAT THE GRIEF WILL NEVER ENTIRELY DISAPPEAR, BUT OVER TIME IT WILL BECOME A SMALLER, MORE MANAGEABLE PART OF LIFE.



EVEN THOUGH THE GRIEF IS STILL THERE, A NEW LIFE EXPANDS AROUND IT; ONE IS ABLE TO GROW AROUND GRIEF.

[bereavement-trust.org.uk](http://bereavement-trust.org.uk)

## Do's and don'ts for adults

- DO express your emotions and let your children share your grief
- DO make time for your own grief
- DO take every opportunity to review the experience
- DO allow yourself to be part of a group of people who care
- DO take time out to sleep, rest, think and be with your close family and friends
- DO express your needs clearly and honestly to the family, friends and officials
- DO try and keep your life as normal as possible after the acute grief
- DO let children and young people talk about their emotions and express themselves in games and drawings
- DO send your child(ren) back to school and let them keep up with their activities
- DO make sure that the child's teachers know what has happened
- DO drive more carefully
- DO be more careful around the home
- DON'T avoid talking about what has happened
- DON'T expect the memories to go away, the feelings will stay with you for a long time to come
- DON'T forget that children experience similar feelings but they may be displayed differently
- DON'T bottle up your feelings



## Suggested Book Lists

### Age 5 and under

#### Goodbye Mousie

By Robie H. Harris  
ISBN: 978-0689871344

#### Fred

By Posy Simmonds  
ISBN: 0099264129

#### The Sunshine Cat

By Miriam Moss  
ISBN: 9781841215679

#### Is Daddy Coming Back In a Minute?

By Elke Barber, Nov 2012

ISBN: 0957474504

#### Missing Mummy

By Rebecca Cobb, April 2012  
ISBN: 0230749518

#### Are You Sad Little Bear?

By Rachel Rivett  
May 2013 (reprint)  
ISBN: 9780745964300

#### Understanding...A Place In My Heart By Annette Aubry

2008 (Under 5s)  
ISBN: 9781848350045

#### Honey Bear Died

By Jennifer E Melvin, May 2011  
ISBN: 978-1613350218

#### Always and Forever

By Debi Gliori & Alan Durant  
ISBN: 978-0-552-56765-7

#### The Elephant in the Room

By Amanda Edwards & Leslie Ponciano  
ISBN: 9781492793243

\*Please note some of the books contain religious content.

### Age 5 - 8 years

#### Sad Isn't Bad

By Michaelene Mundy  
ISBN: 0870293214

#### When Dinosaurs Die

By Laurie Krasny  
ISBN: 0316119555

#### Badger's Parting Gifts

By Susan Varley, 2013  
ISBN: 0006643175

#### Muddles Puddles and Sunshine

By Diana Crossley  
ISBN: 1869890582

#### When Uncle Bob Died (Talking It Through)

By Althea  
ISBN: 9781903285084

#### The Heart and the Bottle

By Oliver Jeffers  
ISBN: 978-0007182343

#### The Scar

By Charlotte Moundlic  
ISBN: 978-1406344158

#### Beyond the Rough Rock

By Di Stubbs & Julie Stokes: Winston's Wish  
ISBN: 9780953912377

#### A Birthday Present for Daniel

By Juliet Rothman

ISBN: 9781573929462

#### What On Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies?

By Trevor Romain  
ISBN13: 978-1-57542-055-4

#### When Your Grandparent Dies

By Victoria Ryan  
ISBN: 978-0-87029-364-1

#### The Elephant in the Room

By Amanda Edwards & Leslie Ponciano  
ISBN: 9781492793243

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## Helpful websites

<a href="http://simonsays.org.uk">simonsays.org.uk</a>	Child/Adolescent Bereavement Support.
<a href="http://winstonswish.org.uk">winstonswish.org.uk</a>	Help for grieving children and their families.
<a href="http://childhoodbereavementuk.org">childhoodbereavementuk.org</a>	Childhood bereavement
<a href="http://hopeagain.org.uk">hopeagain.org.uk</a>	Specifically for young people aged 12-18. Information and interactive.
<a href="http://cruse.org.uk">cruse.org.uk</a>	All aspects of bereavement. Some information for children.
<a href="http://childline.org.uk">childline.org.uk</a>	Free national telephone helpline for children and young people. Information on bereavement.
<a href="http://griefencounter.com">griefencounter.com</a>	Helps bereaved children & young people rebuild their lives after a death.
<a href="http://papyrus-uk.org">papyrus-uk.org</a>	Provides resources & support for those dealing with suicide, depression or distress – particularly teenagers & young adults.
<a href="http://riprap.org.uk">riprap.org.uk</a>	Helps children who have a parent with cancer.
<a href="http://uk-sobs.org.uk">uk-sobs.org.uk</a>	Those who are left behind after a suicide can be helped by talking to others who have experienced a similar loss.
<a href="http://supportline.org.uk">supportline.org.uk</a>	Confidential emotional support for children, young people & adults.
<a href="http://teenissues.co.uk">teenissues.co.uk</a>	Internet based unique reference point for teenagers to find answers to commonly experienced issues.
<a href="http://tcsiblingsupport.org.uk">tcsiblingsupport.org.uk</a>	Support and information for siblings after a death. Pen-pal link for over 16's.
<a href="http://childbereavementuk.org">childbereavementuk.org</a>	Support, information & training when a baby or child dies, or when a child is bereaved.
<a href="http://seesaw.org.uk">seesaw.org.uk</a>	Grief support service for children and young people in Oxford. Support for schools.
<a href="http://mosaicfamilysupport.org.uk">mosaicfamilysupport.org.uk</a>	Individual, family and group bereavement support - Dorset.
<a href="http://daisysdream.org.uk">daisysdream.org.uk</a>	Child bereavement support - Berkshire.

Please see the Simon Says website for a list of useful books and up to date information. Follow us on:



Simon Says Child Bereavement Support



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