

WORKING WITH BEREAVED CHILDREN: A GUIDE

BACKGROUND TO THE GUIDE

This guide was produced as part of the "Assisting Bereaved Children in St. Petersburg" Project, run by the Children's Legal Centre, Colchester, UK, and the Institute of Special Pedagogics and Psychology, St. Petersburg, Russia. The project was funded by the Department for International Development (UK) through the Health and Social Care Partnerships Scheme.

The 17-month project focussed on the problems facing children, whose parents were being provided with care by one of the eight hospices in St. Petersburg. It was found that the majority of children and their families are not receiving the practical and psychological assistance that they need. The absence of such assistance inevitably leads to a high frequency of family breakdown and the institutionalisation of children.

It was also found that the majority of staff and volunteers at the hospices do not receive training in how to work with bereaved children to address their psychological and emotional needs. However, the lack of training on bereavement is not confined to Hospice workers but exists in all sectors that work directly with children. The guide seeks to plug this gap in knowledge and provide staff and volunteers working with bereaved children with a good understanding of the process of grief.

The guide details how to assist children cope with bereavement and support them through their experience in a way that is sensitive, individual and validating rather than in a way that pathologises a child's experience. The guide also explains how to develop appropriate support and services.

WHO IS THE GUIDE FOR?

The guide is aimed at all staff and volunteers (also referred to as 'helpers' and 'workers' in the guide) working with and coming into contact with children who have been bereaved. The guide is not intended to be definitive but aims to provide clear and accessible information, and practical assistance.

The guide is divided into four chapters:

Chapter 1 - Attachment and Emotional Resilience provides basic information on child development, attachment theory and emotional resilience

Chapter 2 - Understanding Loss and Reaction to Death focuses on models of grief, the different reactions in adults and children to grief, and complicated grief reaction

Chapter 3 - What You Can Do provides the reader with practical advice on how to approach and work with children pre and post bereavement both individually and in groups, and how to work with parents, families and schools

Chapter 4 - Grief Support Programmes outlines the principles behind structured programmes to assist children in dealing with their grief, and sets out how to establish, run and staff grief support programmes

Annexes – provide additional detailed information to assist in engaging in practical work with bereaved children:

- Annex 1 - Emotional resilience checklist
- Annex 2 - Information sheets for supporting bereaved children
- Annex 3 - What you can do – practical ideas
- Annex 4 - Case studies
- Annex 5 - Grief Support Programme
- Annex 6 - Different levels of intervention

AUTHORS

Maureen Bunce is the Service Manager for Child and Adolescent Mental Health for Essex County Council, UK, and a psychotherapist.

Anna Rickards is a Family Support Social Worker at St. Helena Hospice in Colchester, Essex, UK and has been providing individual support and assisting in running Family Grief Support Programmes for four years.

The guide was edited by Rachel Harvey, Programme Manager of the 'Assisting Bereaved Children in St. Petersburg' project and Assistant Director of International Policy and Programmes at the Children's Legal Centre.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Children's Legal Centre would like to thank Maureen Bunce and Anna Rickards for all the time, effort and energy that they have put into the project in their role as consultants and trainers, and into making this guide a reality. The Centre would also like to express its gratitude to Essex County Council, St. Helena Hospice and the staff at Health and Life Sciences Partnership (HLSP) for their support throughout this project. Finally, the Centre is very grateful to the Ministry of Education in Russia for organising the production of the guide and its distribution throughout Russia.

CONTACT DETAILS

Rachel Harvey
 Assistant Director, International Policy and Programmes
 Children's Legal Centre
 University of Essex
 Wivenhoe Park
 Colchester
 Essex CO4 3SQ
 UK
 Tel: 0044 1206 87 3483
 Fax: 0044 1206 87 4026
 Email: armedcon@essex.ac.uk