



**St Margaret of Scotland Hospice**

**Caritas  
Children, Young People &  
Loss**

# Children, Young People & Loss

St Margaret of Scotland Hospice has been caring for people living with life limiting illness and their families since 1950. Within the Hospice we have a team of qualified, experienced and highly trained professionals who can assist with the support of children and young people, if those caring for them are having difficulty.

All of us face an enormous challenge when someone close to us is seriously ill or dies. During these times it can be very hard to know how best to support children and young people affected by loss and change.

Many adults try to protect children when a death occurs. Often we may hope that by not talking about it we will in some way protect them from hurt, sadness or pain. Being so overwhelmed by our own feelings of grief can make us anxious about making things worse for the child or young person by doing or saying the wrong thing.

## Support

In situations when something so important is happening to a child they in some way seem to find out. Often if we have not taken the opportunity to check out what they know and understand, we can contribute to them feeling left out, angry or hurt. Attempts to leave children out through trying to protect them will usually leave them feeling confused and alone with unanswered questions, fears, powerful feelings and imagination...

Whilst we cannot prevent children or young people from feeling sad or hurt, we can talk with them and explore how they feel, what they think is happening and what would make them feel better. We can give them our support and understanding.

Just like adults, children react to death in different ways and at different times. Loss and change, especially the death of someone they love will affect their feelings, behaviour and interactions. In fact it may appear as though they don't care at all. Loss and change can affect their concentration at nursery, school or home. They may experience changes or difficulties with their eating or sleeping pattern and could feel guilty or anxious.

Managing their behaviour and their questions may present difficulties and dealing with these issues on your own can be daunting. You may feel you need some help.

The Hospice Psychosocial Team including an Art Therapist and Counsellors may be of help to you. This could be through listening to your story of what is happening and identifying what you need help with or sharing resources. We have many books, worksheets and practical suggestions of ways to explore how a child or young person is feeling.

If you would like the opportunity to speak to or meet with a member of the Psychosocial Team, please do not hesitate to alert a member of the Clinical Team caring for you or your loved one.

Children and Young People facing loss need:

- Information about what is happening, why it is happening and what may happen next
- Reassurance that they are not to blame for what has happened and that they will be cared for
- An opportunity to express their feelings and thoughts and make choices in their involvement when the person has died, for example attending the funeral
- Strategies to help them cope with changing circumstances
- Adults who can share their feelings, even cry and allow children to offer comfort as well as receive it.

Help provided to a child as loss and change is occurring, especially in bereavement, can prevent serious problems later on in life.

There are lots of ways to support children. We should all try to do what we feel most comfortable with, and as we will never be perfect human beings, it is important to acknowledge sometimes we will get it wrong. When we say sorry, children and young people will forgive our mistakes. They can survive the pain of loss and change and discover that whilst it may not feel like it at the time, life will continue and can still be fun.

## Asking for Help

During this time of uncertainty, please consider sharing what is happening at home with your Health Visitor, Nursery Leader or child's Teacher.

## Further Information

- For further information on accessing support from the Hospice Psychosocial Team, please speak with a member of the clinical team caring for you or your loved one.
- To access resources via the internet, please visit the following websites
  - [www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)
  - [www.childbereavement.org](http://www.childbereavement.org)

## How you can help us improve our service

We welcome comments regarding the service we provide, and use them to help improve our service. If you have any comments or are unhappy with the service please let us know.

We can put it right.

Address any comments or suggestions to

Director of Clinical Services  
St Margaret of Scotland Hospice  
East Barns Street  
Clydebank  
G81 1EG  
Tele: 0141 952 1141

Should you complain, we will:

- Reply to your complaint within seven working days of receiving it
- Inform you if we cannot deal fully with your complaint within seven working days, explaining why and indicating when you may expect a full reply

If you are not satisfied with the response to your complaint, you can telephone or write to the Hospice Administrator or Sister Rita, Chief Executive, at the address above.

We will regularly ask you what you think of our service and will encourage you to evaluate your session to ensure you are firstly able to identify small change occurring, and will occasionally ask a sample of clients to complete a satisfaction questionnaire and act on what they tell us.

## Regulation of Care

If you are dissatisfied with the service you or your family member has received, you may complain directly to:

Tracy Birch, Programme Manager, Independent Healthcare,  
Healthcare Improvement Scotland, Gyle Square, 1 South Gyle  
Crescent, Edinburgh, EH12 9EB

Email: [tracy.birch@nhs.net](mailto:tracy.birch@nhs.net)

Telephone: 0131 623 4701