

Two white paper origami flowers are positioned on the right side of the image. The top flower is slightly higher and further to the right than the bottom flower. Both flowers have five petals and are made of a textured white paper. The background is a light, neutral color with a subtle gradient.

Supporting students who have experienced
bereavement and loss



Before we begin...

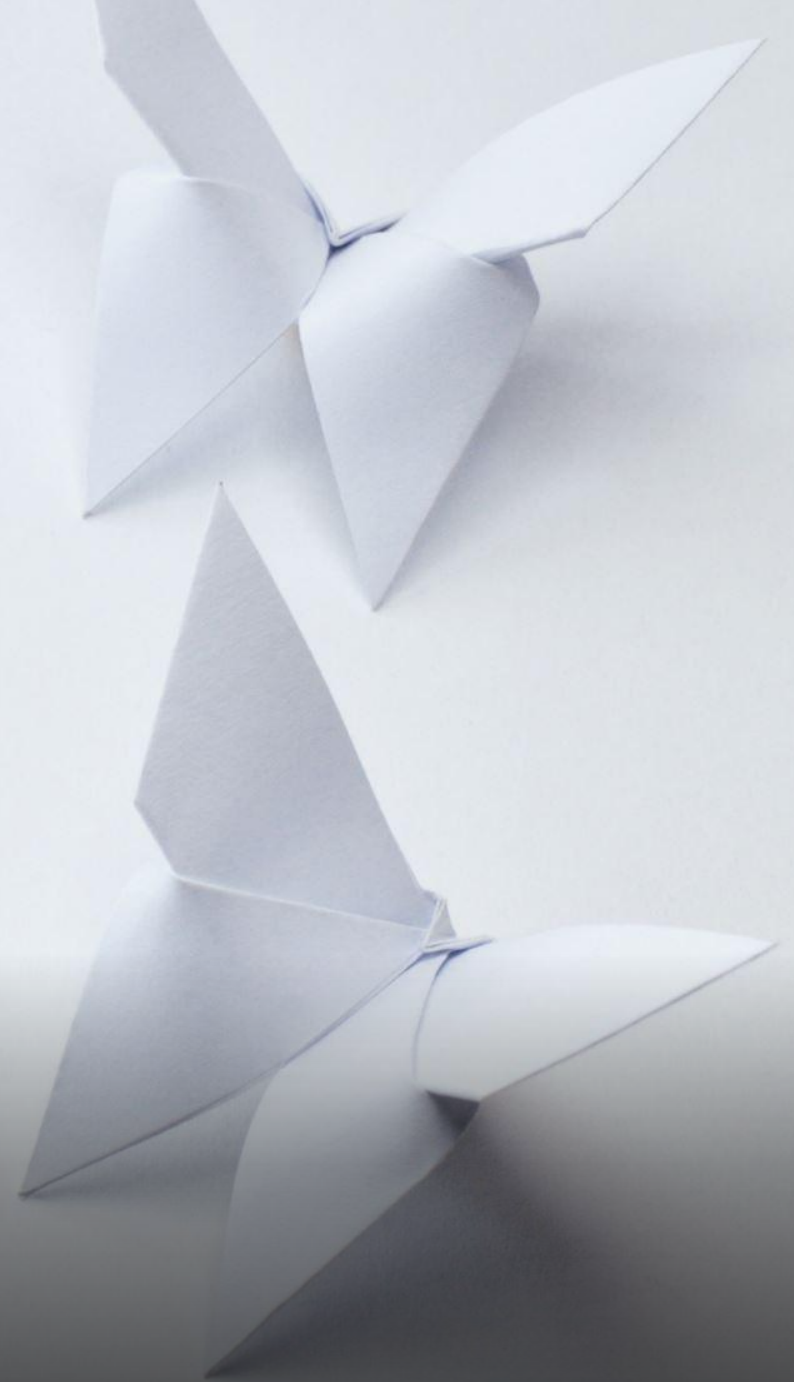
Loss, trauma, illness, bereavement and
pandemics!

- This presentation is mostly about bereavement but when I started to think about loss..I felt it needed to be acknowledged the massive loss we have ALL suffered due to this pandemic



Loss and trauma at school

- We know that some of our families have been living in exceptional circumstances not just having suffered a bereavement but with domestic violence, care proceedings, drug and alcohol abuse, serious financial hardship, job loss, illness and a significant number of students and parents have contacted us with concerns about their mental health
- This is the more extreme end of the scale, but we can guess lots of our students will have been impacted by the last few months and this needs to be acknowledged in September
- School is going to look and feel different for all of us
- We are going to need to reassure students that school has always been a safe place for them, and that routine, support and familiarity will help them (and us) to recover from this



- By the age of 16 at least one child in every classroom (1 in 29) will have experienced the death of a parent or sibling (Penny and Stubbs, 2015)
- Due to Covid19 this figure may have increased for some of our students
- All children will have questions about the virus but for those who are bereaved feelings and anxieties can be heightened. Sadly, the coronavirus restrictions have put further complications on normal methods of support with social distancing isolating children from other family members, friends and networks that would normally have provided these support systems



The charity Winston's Wish have identified some risk factors for young people (YP) linked to the death of a close family member (these risk factors would also fit with those affected by trauma):

- Lower academic attainment
- Lower aspirations for continued learning
- Increases in physical health complaints
- More risk-taking behaviours
- Higher levels of anxiety and depression (into adulthood)
- Increased risk of school exclusion and youth offending



- Talking about death is difficult and it can make all of us feel uncomfortable but...
- grief produces complicated feelings and children rely on the adults in their life to support them and show them how to express it
- It is always better to say something rather than nothing when a child is hurting
- Try to simple language. Be clear with children that their special person is sadly dying or has died. Be honest and use the words dying, and death. Try not to use euphemisms for example, 'sleeping', 'lost', 'gone / past-away' because these can be really confusing (particularly to an autistic child)

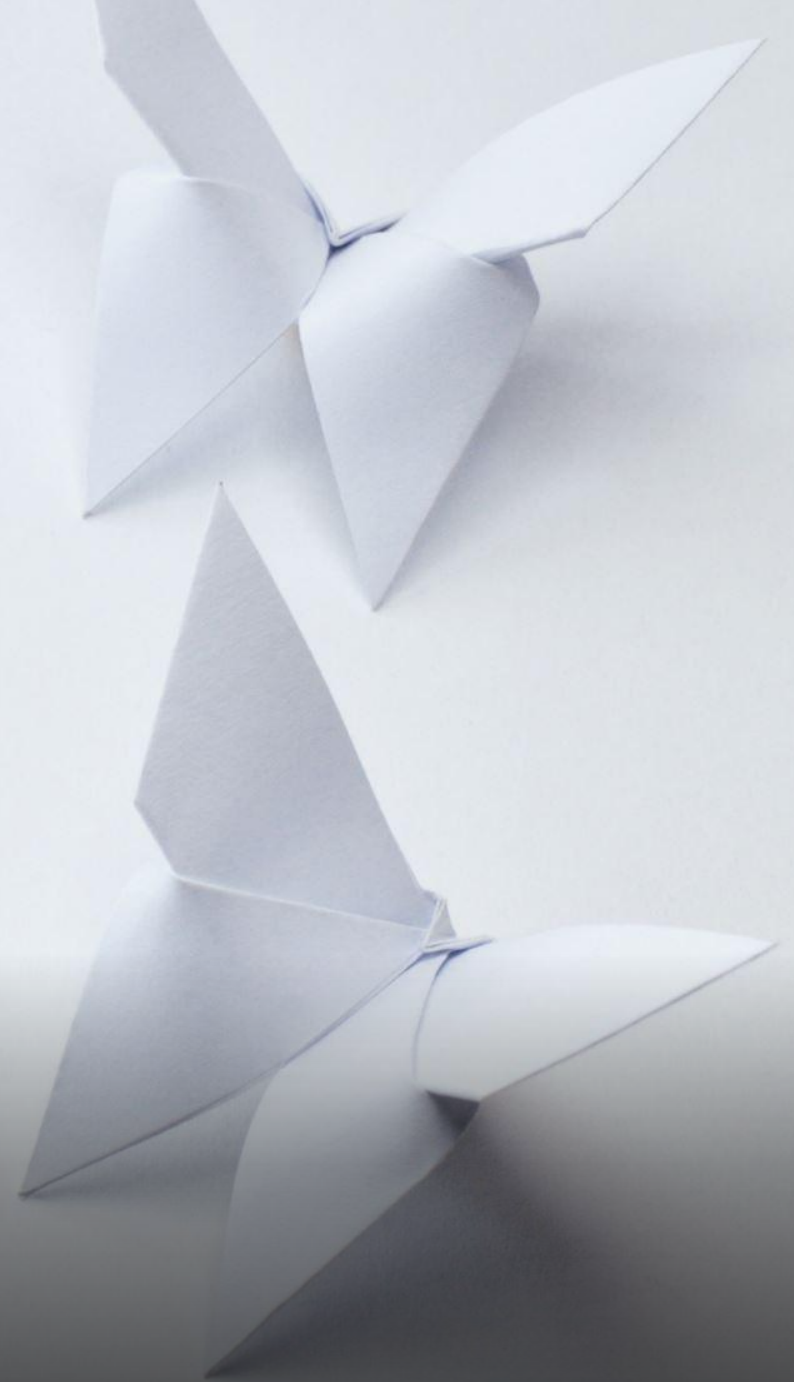


- If a relative is ill with Covid19 or another illness explain what is happening and how their loved one is being cared for. Answer their questions and concerns – be led by the student
- If they are asking questions, they are trying to understand and process and what is happening. Do not be afraid to use the words Coronavirus, Cancer
- Be prepared to repeat the same information as the student may need lots of opportunities to hear and process what they are being told
- These are difficult times for everyone, be patient and know it's ok not to have all the answers
- In being able to have these conversations we become the 'safe' adult in the student's life. The adult who is unafraid of difficult topics, the safe person for a student who is hurting (all our responsibility)



Routine is key for a student who has suffered a bereavement or trauma:

- How can we (school) help to make their world predictable?
- In terms of returning in September this links well with the positive climate for learning and the recovery plan "all staff will meet students and reassure them at the door"
- In reducing uncertainties will help to reduce anxieties
- Can we create a sense of calm and predictability in the chaos of losing a loved one?
- Many children want to return to school quite soon after a bereavement because it offers a sense of normality
- This routine is important because it promotes security and enables the student to accept the reality of life continuing and the potential for future achievements



Additional routines / check in

- P.1 will offer pastoral opportunity, and this is where it will be possible to offer some extra support to a student
- Positive climate for learning - "support students...build up trusting relationships with staff"
- This could include a quick chat about their day, or you could use emoji cards to help the student express how they are feeling. This will help encourage the student's emotional literacy and help you gauge how they are coping
- SAF and myself will offer more ideas



Validate the student's feelings

- It is important for the student to know a whole range of different feelings not just sad or angry are all okay
- As we know grief produces complicated feelings and some children don't have the vocabulary to name or describe them
- We could say for example, it is normal to feel... lost, confused, alone, anxious, bereft, unable to focus, exhausted, guilty or to be suffering with physical complaints (internal distress can be expressed physically or may even mirror the deceased symptoms)

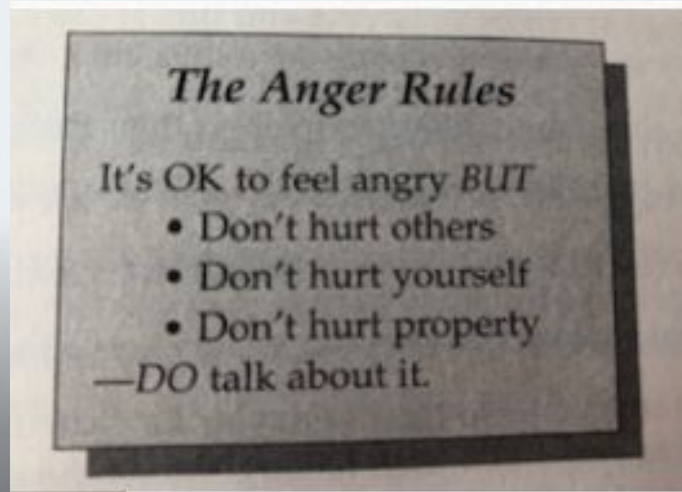


- The charity Cruse say:

It is not uncommon for some bereaved children and young people to feel like they are going mad as the process of grieving takes its toll. It is essential for school staff to reassure the bereaved child or young person that they are not going mad and that the feelings they are experiencing are a very normal and natural reaction to the death of someone close.



- Accept anger - it is inevitable
- A student might feel guilty about expressing this emotion.
- Anger needs to be heard and explored in a safe space.
- Ultimately it needs to be accepted.
- It is useful to explore the anger rules with the student:

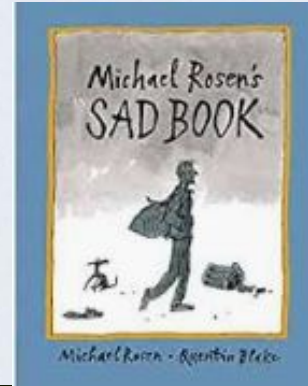


'Pick me up prompt'

- Consider 'time out' strategies that suit the student and the setting. Time out cards, signals or signs can help them to exit the room quickly if they are feeling vulnerable or emotional. Make sure they have a safe place to exit to. It might be useful to work the student on some techniques that might help them when they are feeling distressed (breathing / grounding techniques)
- This offers the student the autonomy to choose how they would like to be treated and cared for



Supporting young people to express and work through difficult emotions



Further Information:

Cruse have a fantastic section of their website for young people called 'Hope Again'

<https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/>

Winston's Wish is a charity that gives hope to grieving children

<https://www.winstonswish.org/>

Simon Says – Charity supporting child bereavement

<https://www.simonsays.org.uk/>

Finally...

A message from Young Minds

[If you're grieving, this is for you](#)

