



Part 1: Introduction to Supporting Children and Young People Through Grief and Loss

The Experience of Loss

Loss of a loved person is one of the most intensely painful experiences any human can suffer. And not only is it painful to experience but it is painful to witness ... To the bereaved nothing but the return of the lost person can bring true comfort.

(Bowlby, 1968, *Loss, Sadness and Depression*)

Loss is an experience common to us all as human beings. Every person will experience loss at some point in their lives. These experiences touch and affect all of us as we move through the different stages in our lives from early infancy to old age. Apart from witnessing changes in ourselves, we also encounter changes in significant others via the events of our lives.

Changes for young people may include changing school, transitioning to high school, moving home, or making or losing friends. Each experience can promote a huge variety of emotions. All human beings may well experience many of the following losses during their lives:

- ✿ growing up
- ✿ starting school and being separated from parents or carers
- ✿ changing school or nursery to enter primary or secondary school, such as transitioning, which can involve the loss of familiar surroundings, people, and friends
- ✿ losing the attention of a parent or carer when a younger brother or sister enters the family
- ✿ the death of a brother or sister, which can result in parents being stressed and preoccupied and result in feelings of isolation and rejection
- ✿ parents or carers changing their jobs, resulting in movement to a new area and having to give up familiar places, contexts and friends
- ✿ a child feeling the loss of a parent or carer on their return to work after being home for an extended period of time



- ☼ the loss of a parent or carer through separation, divorce or death
- ☼ the loss experienced by illness or ageing
- ☼ relationships ending as family or friends move away
- ☼ families moving from one country to another on gaining refugee status and losing the access to their own culture and way of life
- ☼ young people being placed in care
- ☼ young people being labelled as having a special educational need, which may result in a loss of self-esteem and status, depending on how others perceive them as a result of having this label
- ☼ redundancy, unemployment or loss of job and the way in which this can lead to a loss of status, money, and self-esteem
- ☼ the loss of home and the experience of homelessness
- ☼ the loss of familiar surroundings if we have to go into hospital for an operation or procedure
- ☼ the loss of innocence and self-esteem when a child is sexually or emotionally abused
- ☼ losses experienced by those with serious illnesses, such as cancer, AIDS, heart disease or Covid, which can ultimately lead to death and involve the processes of harassment, rejection, and isolation along the way
- ☼ losses encountered by those who misuse both legal and illegal drugs
- ☼ the loss of a child through miscarriage or stillbirth
- ☼ the loss experienced by those who are unable to conceive a child
- ☼ the loss of so-called 'normal' body image when surgery has to be undertaken, such as an amputation. This can lead to the flight reaction and result in some form of post-traumatic stress
- ☼ the loss experienced by those whose vision and hearing goes in early or later life
- ☼ the loss experienced when being given a label such as 'disabled'
- ☼ being excluded from school
- ☼ punishments and sanctions,

(Ward, B., 1993, pp17-19)



Activity 1

Saying Goodbye



When we lose someone special it can be hard to let go. How can you say goodbye to a person who meant so much to you? But, unfortunately, we don't have a choice. Sometimes we lose those closest to us. Although it is incredibly sad, this is the reality of the situation. So, finding the right way to say goodbye to them is important. You want to make your farewell memorable and be fitting for that person, showing just how much you cared for them. Having had such an impact on your life means they deserve the best farewell possible.

Some people feel that a good way to mark their loss is by using or formulating their own goodbye quotes.

A moving goodbye quote or farewell message that sums up how you feel about your loved one can help to bring about closure and can also be used in things like funeral readings, eulogies or sympathy cards.

How will you say goodbye? What will you say in your message of farewell?

- ✿ "Even if we can't be together in the end, I'm glad that you were a part of my life." – Unknown
- ✿ "Don't cry because it's over. Smile because it happened." – Dr Seuss
- ✿ "It's sad, but sometimes moving on with the rest of your life starts with goodbye." – Carrie Underwood
- ✿ "Goodbye always makes my throat hurt." – Charlie Brown

What will your message be?



Activity 29

Letting Go



Sometimes when we are experiencing a loss we can be overwhelmed by feelings of anger. It is vital that we learn how to let go of such feelings as, in the longer term, they can become extremely damaging. We know that anger tends to come and go before it's finally resolved. Rather than being held in the caustic grip of prolonged anger, you can choose to release this powerful and negative emotion. If you hang on to it for an extended period of time, it can become a stumbling block to your recovery. Even though it's normal to feel this way, it's important to get these feelings out. However, you don't ever want to take your anger out on another person. There are some things you can do to release these emotions constructively.

