

Supporting Children Who've
Experienced

Loss & Bereavement

Pooky Knightsmith

@PookyH

pooky@inourhands.com | pookyknightsmith.com



Now, more than
ever, they need
you.

Messy, imperfect,
scared, human
you.



Say it Simply



Say it Simply

Protect?


Some language is designed to protect, but actually confuses

Truth

Children - esp younger & SEND children need the plain truth so they can begin to process it

It's Okay...

Sends a strong message to children: it's okay to talk about this, we're not scared

Three hand-drawn speech bubbles with question marks are arranged vertically on the left side of the image. They are white with black outlines and question marks, set against a pink background.

What phrases should we
avoid when talking about
death with young or SEND
children?

Helpful



Unhelpful

X has died

X is dead

X is dying

passed on

gone away

resting in peace



Make their
world
predictable



Make their world predictable

Control

The death of a loved one can make things feel chaotic or out of control

Familiar

Familiar faces, spaces and routines will bring comfort

Same

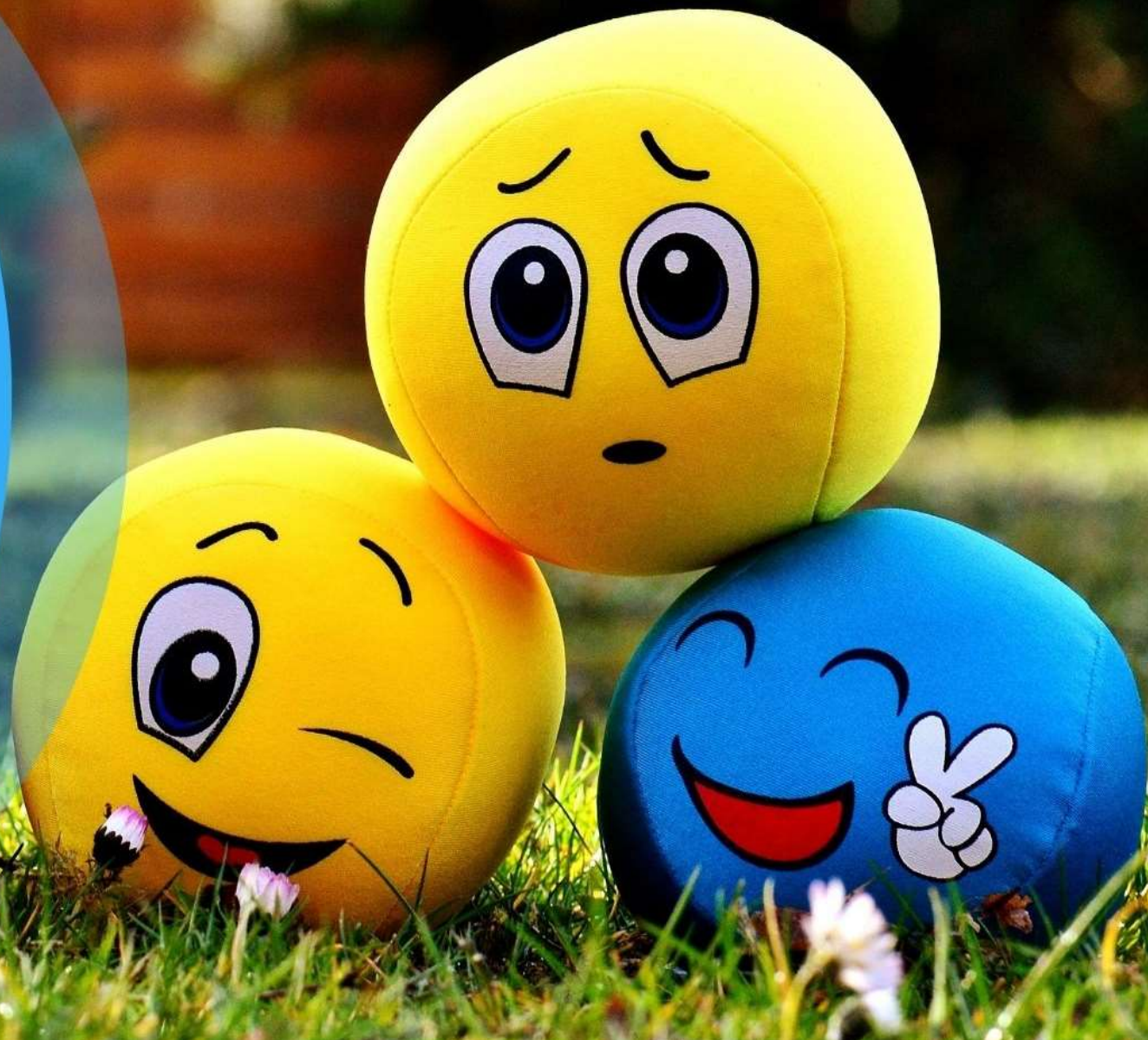
Many things may suddenly change. Look for what stayed the same

Do One Thing

Identify trigger moments in
their regular routine which
are highly impacted and
introduce a new routine
asap



Validate
ALL feelings



Validate ALL feelings



Natural

Children are naturally good at grieving until society conditions them

Notice

Notice how a child is feeling and encourage a range of feelings

Flux

Children may rapidly move between different feelings; that's okay

Sing

Draw how you feel

Talk to a person or pet

Notice and name feelings

Imagine how your favourite character would feel

Make a playlist of songs that sound how you feel

Exploring Feelings





Playlist

These songs reflect how I feel right now

1-

2-

3-

4-

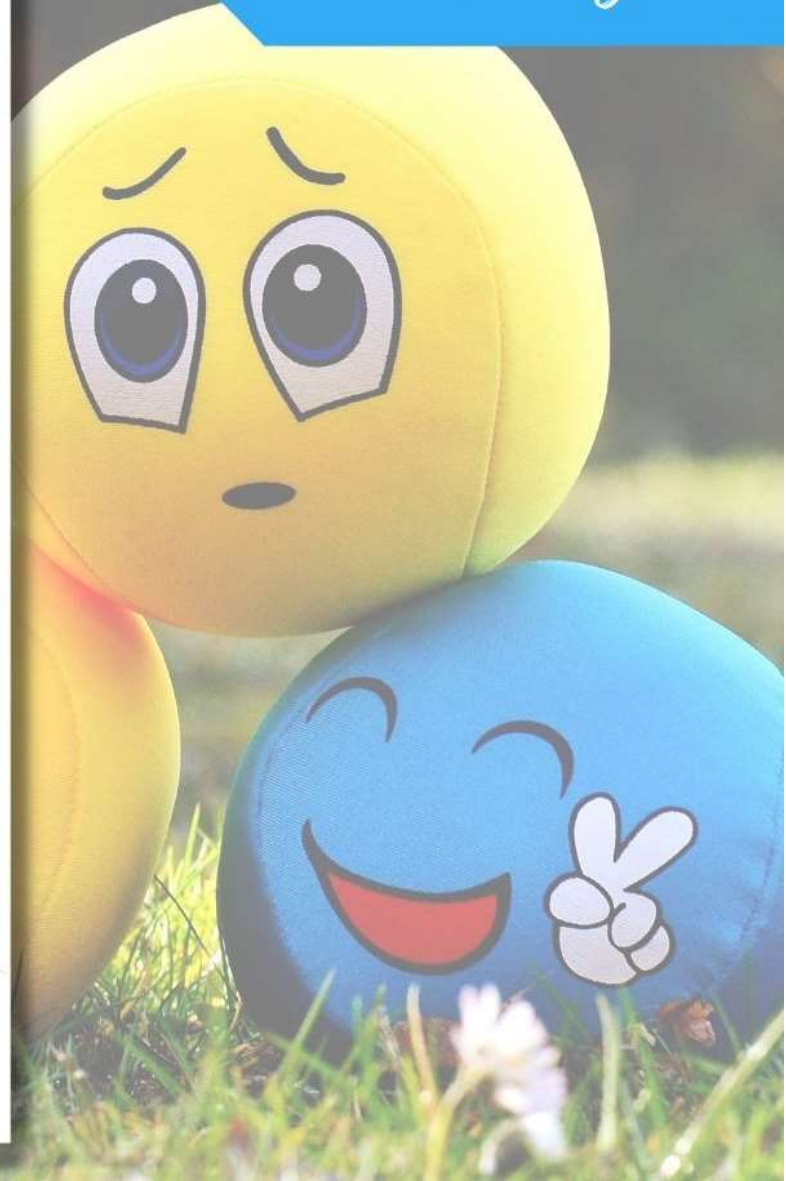
5-

6-

7-



Playlist



Use these prompts to help you explore your feelings today

I AM _____

I FEEL _____

I HOPE _____

I WISH _____

anything else... _____

Journaling



Accept
Anger



Accept Anger

Normal

It is normal to feel angry when someone dies, children need to know this

Hear it

Anger needs to be heard, otherwise it will make itself heard when we least expect it

Rules

Introducing anger rules (at a time of calm) can help to keep everyone safe



How could a child safely
express their anger?



Hearing Anger

Talk about it

Draw how you feel

Call a helpline (like childline)

Write a letter expressing your anger

List ten things you wish you could change

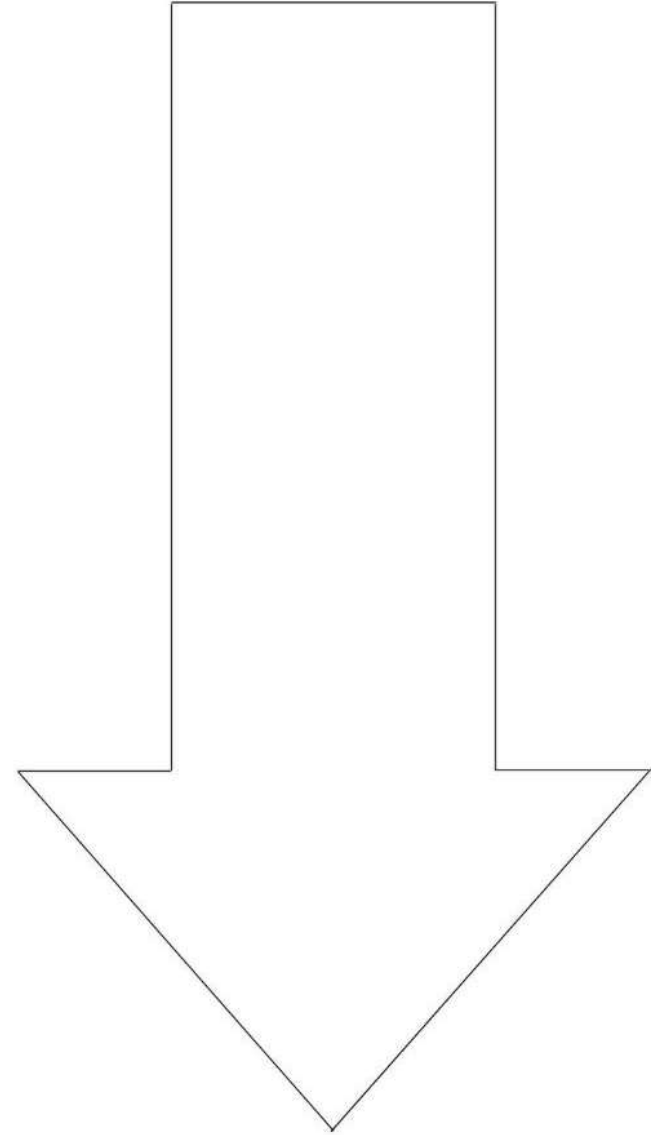
Journal using 'what's weighing me down' as a prompt

Things I wish I could change

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Rate each statement, 1 to 10 where 1 is not at all and 10 is absolutely

What's weighing me down...



Do One Thing

Discuss anger rules at a time of calm to keep everyone safe at times of anger



Anger Rules



It's okay to be
angry but it's
not okay to..

..hurt yourself

..hurt other people

..hurt property or things

Tricky Moments Plan



Tricky Moments Plan

Helpful

Plan ahead for tricky moments and explore with a child what is helpful. Explore; don't assume

Unhelpful

Sometimes people accidentally make things worse. Avoid this with planning

Who?

Who needs to know about a child's tricky moments plan? Share it with their consent

Name: _____

Tricky Moments Plan

If I'm feeling overwhelmed you might notice

WARNING SIGNS

These things sometimes help me

WHAT HELPS

Please don't do or say these things as they can make it feel worse

PLEASE DON'T

If these things don't help, please support me to

WHAT NEXT



Generate Joy



Generate Joy

Respite

It's okay not to be sad all the time, encourage children to take a break from feeling sad

Permission

May need permission to laugh and smile. Often feel they 'should be sad'

Lean in

Lean into moments of joy and laughter as they occur



Cathartic Crying



Cathartic Crying

A person is sitting on the ground, leaning against a wall, with their head buried in their knees, suggesting they are crying or in a state of emotional distress. The background is a textured wall with horizontal bands of different colors.

It's okay..

children often
get praised for
being strong, but
it's okay to cry
too

Natural

A good cry is a
healthy and
natural way to
begin to process
big feelings

Facilitate

Encourage a
good cry by e.g.
looking at
photos or
listening to
music

Do One Thing

Talk to them about crying and when you've found it helpful. Give them permission to cry and provide a safe-space to let go



Work with Worries





Share it

Shelf it

Shout it

Shed it

Working with Worries

Share it

Talk, write or draw about your worries. Get them out of your head and into the world.

Shelf it

If now is not a good time for exploring a worry, shelf it for later – make an appointment with worry.

Shout it

Sometimes we need to run, jump, shout or scream to try and get rid of the fizzing, bubbling worry feelings.

Shed it

Some worries are not yours to carry. Pass adult worries onto an adult to worry about. It's their job

What Was Left Unsaid?



What was left unsaid?

Too Late?

There are often things we want to tell the person who has died, but it feels too late

Better Said

Write to or talk to the person who has died and imagine the response they need

It's Okay

Imagined conversations with dead loved ones can bring great comfort and clarity



Write them a letter



Talk to their picture



Play a song they liked and
imagine them talking to you

Writing to reach you

Write a letter to the person who died. Tell them anything you wish you'd said whilst they were still alive, or just update them on your life...




A kind reply

Write a letter to yourself as if from the person who's died. Imagine what they'd say to you when they were in their kindest, most loving mood.



Keep and
Make
Memories



Three hand-drawn speech bubbles, each containing a large black question mark, are arranged vertically on the left side of the image. The bubbles are white with black outlines and are set against a solid pink background. The top bubble is slightly tilted to the right, the middle one is more upright, and the bottom one is tilted to the left.

How could a child keep
memories of their loved
one?

Keeping Memories

The background of the slide is a soft-focus photograph. It shows a light-colored corkboard. A clear glass jar is partially visible, with a cork stopper. A blue pen or pencil is also visible, resting on the board. The overall tone is warm and nostalgic.

Scrapbook

Jar of memory notes

Box of momentos

Voice record special moments

Write a journal using memory prompts

Paint pebbles with memories, put them in special places



When I think of you,
these things come to mind

These things always make me think of you:

When I SEE

When I SMELL

When I HEAR

When I TASTE

anything else...

You cannot
make this
journey for
them, but
you can
prevent them
making it
alone



To Learn More You Could...

- Read -

Helping
you to help
your child

Grief and Loss Journal Prompts

Journal prompts to help children and adults
understand and respond to school anxiety

patreon.com/pookyh

- Watch -

BEREAVEMENT

3 activities for
supporting
children

BEREAVEMENT

Advice and
ideas from the
Northampton
bereavement
support team

youtube.com/pookyh

- Read -

Helping
you to help
your child

How to Support Your Child When Someone Dies

Simple, actionable ideas for parents, carers
and other supporting adults

patreon.com/pookyh

All this
and more
here

