

Ways that professionals can support children and young people

If you work in a nursery, school or any other setting where you come into regular contact with children and young people, you may encounter children who are affected by the serious illness of somebody close to them.

A child can often find it helpful to open up to someone outside of the family about what is happening. They may start talking to you about it without any prompting. If this is not the case, it may be helpful for you to let them know you are aware of their situation and let them know that they can talk to you if they want to.

It can be distressing to see a child or young person in this situation. You may feel unsure about how you can help. Whilst you cannot do anything to change the fact that someone they care about is seriously ill or may be going to die, there are a number of things, depending on your role and relationship with them, which you can do to help.

Always make sure you know what the child's family have told them about what is happening; it is important that you do not give conflicting information.

- Consider what systems your organisation has in place to support children who are affected by the serious illness of someone close to them
- Identify the most appropriate person to give support. Recognise if you do not feel emotionally strong enough to give support, e.g. if you are going through similar difficulties or have recently been bereaved
- Acknowledge the situation and give children opportunities to talk about how they feel, or express any worries that they have. Listening helps, even if you can't always make things better
- Use language that is appropriate for their age group
- Resist making platitudes or imposing your own beliefs

- Understand that their situation may make it hard for them to cope at times and that their behaviour may change
- Be observant - notice if a child's behaviour changes or they appear to be struggling. Remember that a child who may be outwardly coping may still need support
- Help children to find solutions to difficulties e.g. what to do when they feel upset or angry
- Liaise with the child's family on an on-going basis if possible
- Keep other relevant professionals informed, if the family permits you to do so
- Provide opportunities for children to have fun
- Get advice or support for yourself if needed, to help you to support the children

Frequently asked questions

How do I respond to difficult questions?

Children may ask questions that you are not able to answer. It is okay to say that you do not have the answer. In some cases it may be appropriate to help the children to find answers to their questions or to direct them to someone who can give the answers. In other cases it may be enough to acknowledge how difficult it can be when we don't have answers to our questions.

What happens if the parents tell us not to discuss it with their children but the children ask us questions?

It is important to respect parents' wishes. However if children ask you direct questions these need to be acknowledged. In some cases it might be helpful to put the question back to them.

Question: "Do you think my Dad is going to die?"

Answer: "That's a really important question, tell me what you think"

This allows you to establish what the child's understanding is. You may then need to go back to the parents to discuss the situation. Alternatively, when there are conflicting needs, you can contact Daisy's Dream and speak to a Therapeutic Practitioner for advice.

Should we treat children in this situation differently?

Call us: 0118 934 2604

Email us: info@daisysdream.org.uk

www.daisysdream.org.uk

Some children regard school as an escape from their situation and throw themselves into their work. They find the school routine very helpful and do not want to be treated any differently.

Other children find it hard to be at school. They may be worrying about the person who is ill and find it hard to concentrate on lessons. Their behaviour may become disruptive in class and they may have fights with their friends. These children do need special understanding but teachers have to balance the needs of the individual with the needs of the class. It may be helpful to identify the best person to talk to them about what is happening and help them to find coping strategies. In some cases it is helpful if they are given a 'get out of class pass.'

What happens if I get upset?

It can be upsetting to listen to a child describing their situation or their feelings

However, children often talk to somebody because they feel they cannot talk at home without someone becoming upset. If you are not able to listen without becoming emotional then it would be more helpful to the child for you to identify another person for them to talk to. You might find that your emotions are close to the surface if you are experiencing difficulties in your own life or have had a recent bereavement.

Are there resources we can use?

There are a number of books available which children may find helpful to read, and there is also lots of information available online which teenagers may find more suitable.

We have collated a list of books and websites that we find useful, which you can find in the Serious Illness section of our website.

Very young children may find it helpful to express their feelings through play using puppets, playmobil figures or a doctor's kit.

How do I make a referral to Daisy's Dream?

If you know of a family that might benefit from our support or you would like some advice on how best to support a child, you can contact Daisy's Dream to discuss the situation with one of our Therapeutic Practitioners.

Please note that you will need to have the family's consent in order for us to contact them.

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