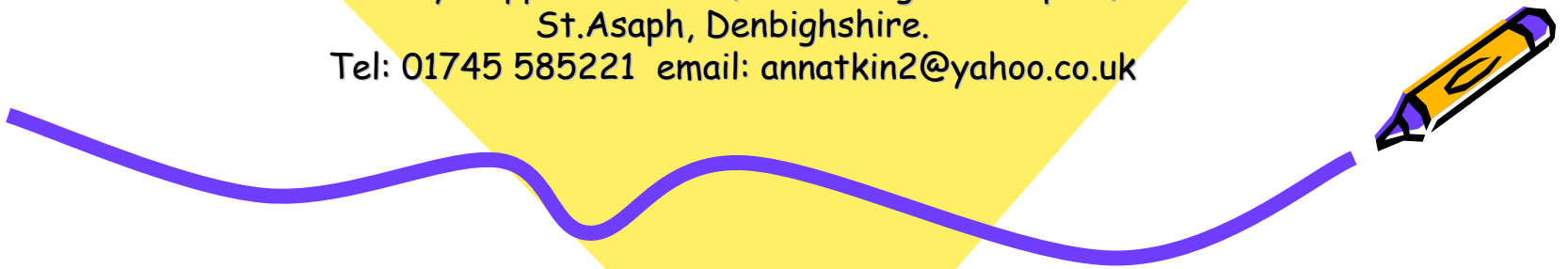
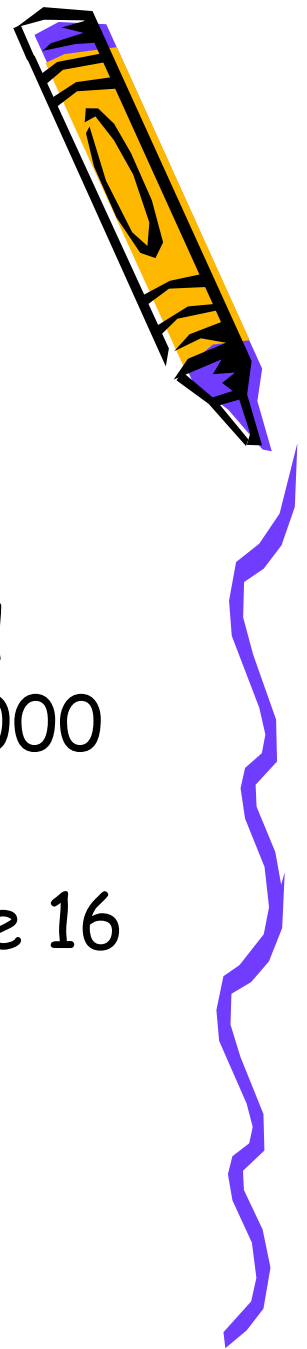




# Loss and grief in children

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- Every 30 minutes in the U.K. a child is bereaved of a parent = 20,000 p.a.
- 3% of 5 -15 year olds have experienced the death of a parent or sibling = 255,000 young people in the U.K.
- Estimated risk of parental death by age 16 is 6% in the U.K



# CHILDHOOD BEREAVEMENT NETWORK



- 'All children have the right to information, guidance and support to enable them to manage the impact of death on their lives'



'A child can live through anything provided they are told the truth and allowed to share the natural feelings people have when they are suffering.'

Eda Le Shan

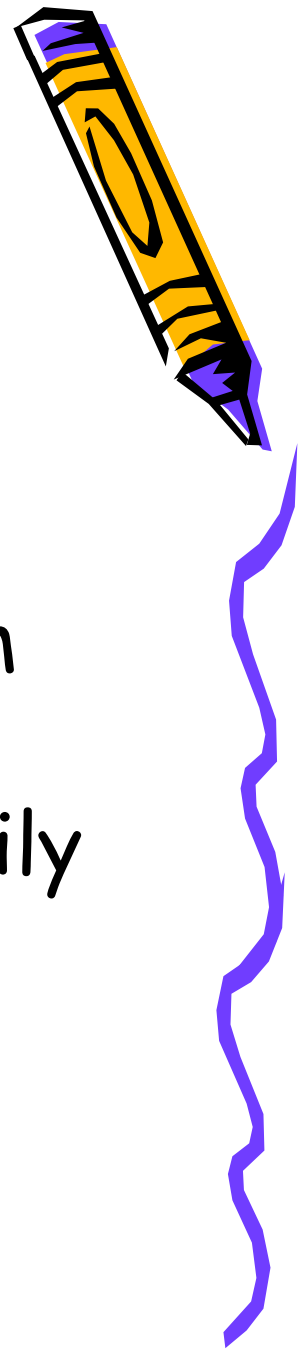


# REALITIES FOR GRIEVING CHILDREN



- ALL children and young people grieve -even babies
- Grieving is a long term process
- Children will revisit their grief through each developmental stage
- Younger children need help in retaining memories





- Children express their grief differently from adults
- Children cannot be protected from death
- A child's grief occurs within a family context and will be influenced by significant adults



# Children's understanding of death



- **0-2 YEARS:**

- React emotionally and physically to the disappearance of a significant person in their life.
- Pick up on feelings of grief and change.
- Searching, calling, asking for.
- Protest, despair, detachment.
- Loathe to let other attachment figures out of sight.
- Sadness almost palpable.



# Children's understanding of death



- **2-5 YEARS:**
- Curious about death and will ask questions
- Distressed by strong emotions in an adult
- Confused by explanations such as 'gone to sleep'
- Uninhibited but struggles to find words to express feelings and questions
- May deny or forget that the person has died
- Feels rejection





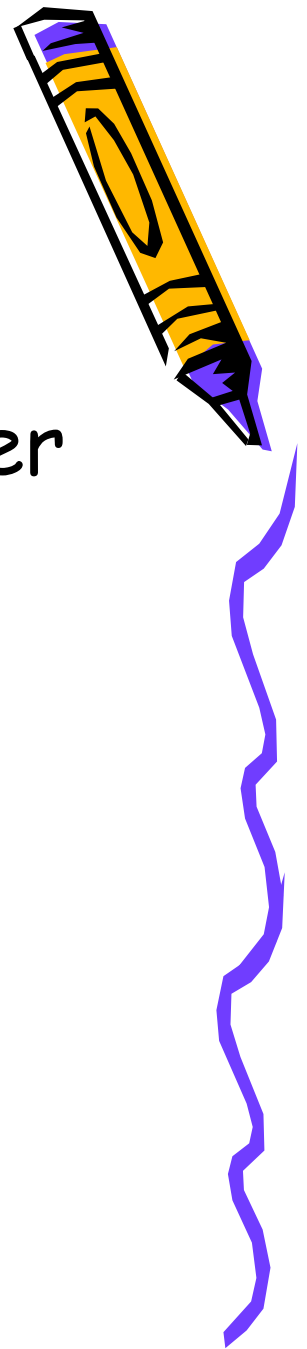
- Do not appreciate the finality of death and may see it as a temporary departure
- See death as a loss of love and protection and may feel abandoned, especially if a parent has died



# Developmental age 5-8

- Assume blame
- Magical thinking -prone to fantasise and make up gaps in information. May confuse death with sleep or forget, or deny, that the person has died.
- Need to be listened to & have their fantasies explained so they can discover they were not the cause of death.
- Will quickly deny their own feelings when difficult to handle (or sense adults cannot manage)





- May not believe that death will ever happen to them
- Curious about the subject
- Develop an appreciation of the different causes of death
- Have a strong sense of injustice

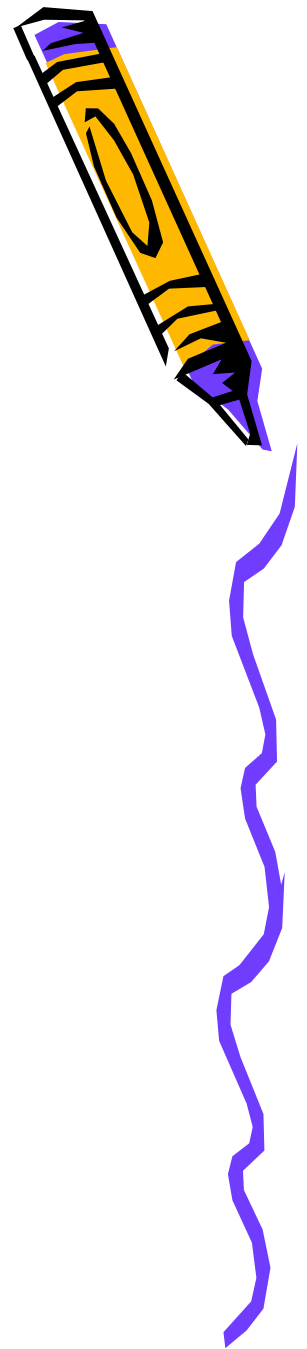




- May see death as a punishment
- Will model their reactions on adults around them



# Developmental age 8-12



- Begin to anticipate death
- May want to know what death and dying will be like
- Need clear explanations
- Can put on a brave face
- Likely to worry if the illness is catching
- catching

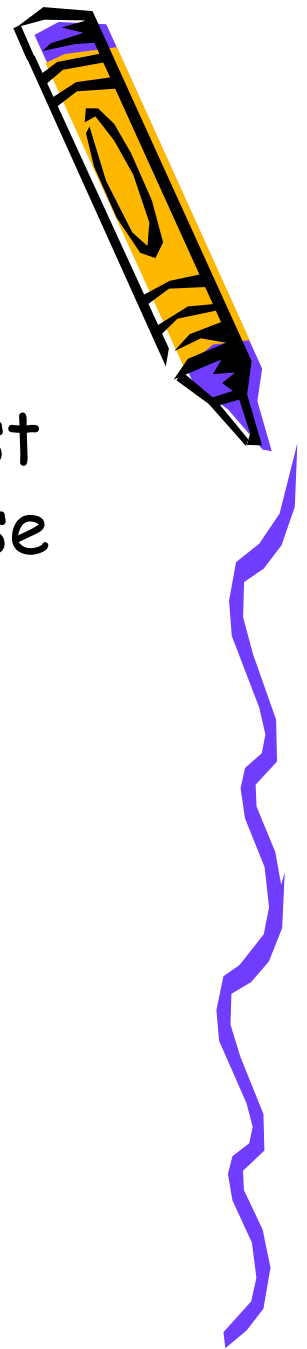




- Magical thinking begins to diminish
- May show outwardly coping behaviour but deny feelings on inside
- Symbolic behaviour e.g. Obsession with dead persons belongings
- Often identifies with same sex parent - can be particularly affected if that parent dies or leaves.
- Begin to realise their own mortality

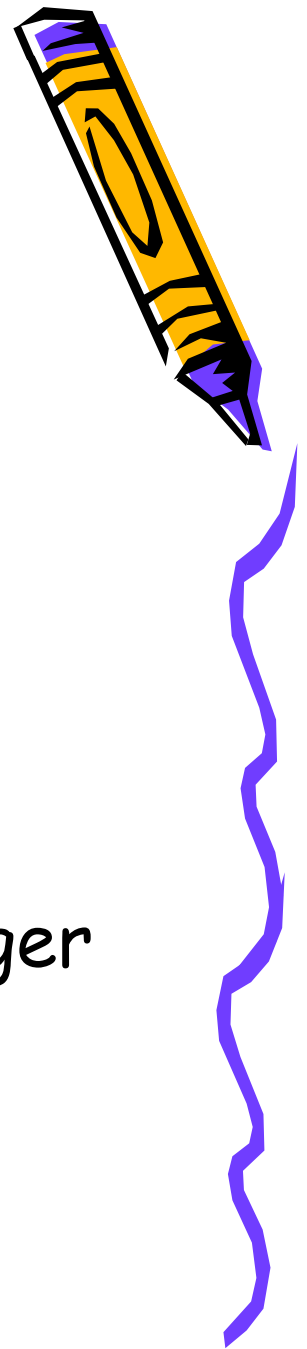


# Adolescents understanding of terminal illness and death



- Have adult understanding but may resist the idea of their own death and of those close to them
- Consider themselves immortal and may react strongly to facing their own mortality
- The struggle for independence can result in them challenging beliefs and explanations





- A period of loss as well as gain
- Already much upheaval in establishing relationships with peers and parents
- Powerful feelings and mood swings exacerbated by hormonal changes
- Risk taking and pushing boundaries , anger and depression can accompany grieving

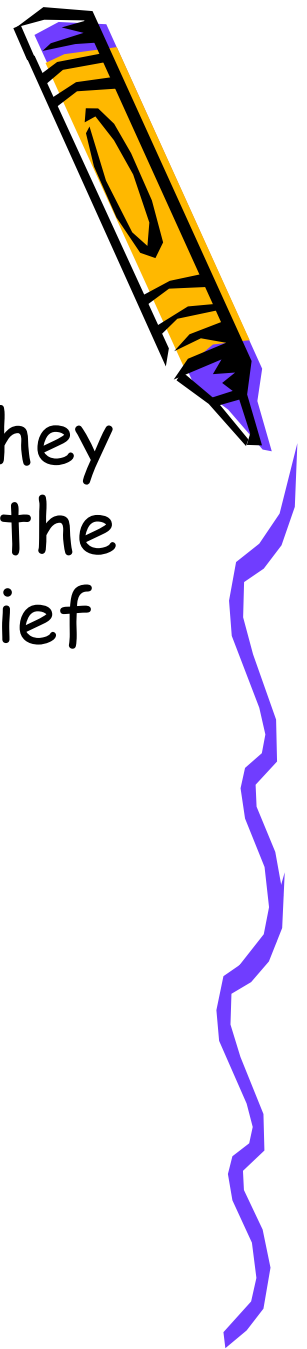


# Key concepts useful when working with bereaved people



- Grief is a process, not an event
- Grieving takes time - usually longer than expected
- Grief is energy consuming and exhausting





- Bereaved individuals need times when they grieve and times when they can look to the future. Both too much and too little grief can be harmful.



# What can help.

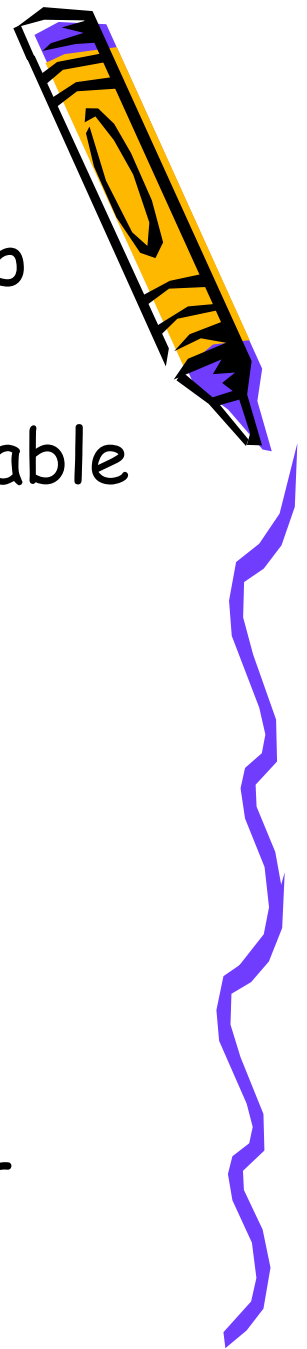


- Do:
- Let your genuine concern and caring show
- Be available to listen actively
- Help them identify what is secure
- Let them tell their story
- Help them face the reality of what is lost
- Help them identify and express emotions

Help them make sense of their experience



# Don't:

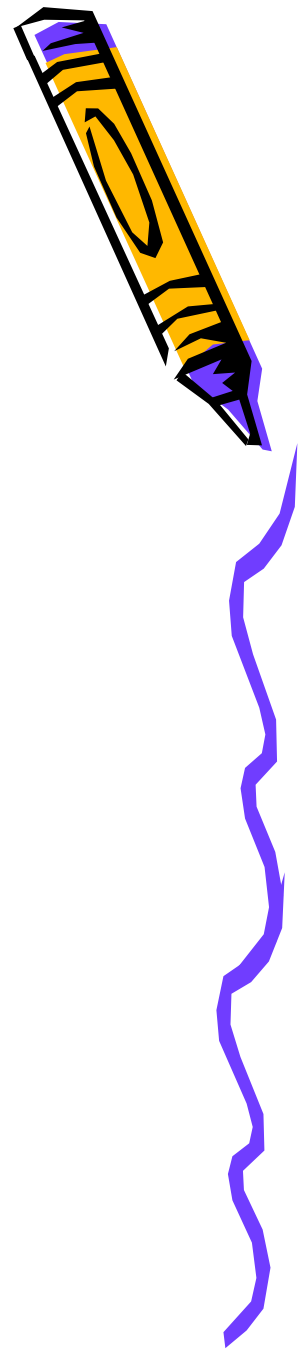


- Let your own sense of helplessness keep you from reaching out
- Avoid them because you are uncomfortable
- Say you know how they feel
- Say anything which makes a judgement about their feelings
- Tell them what they should feel or do
- Change the subject when they mention their loss



Try to find something positive about their loss

# Bereaved children and young people need:



- INFORMATION
- REASSURANCE
- CARING ADULTS
- RESPECT
- Remember to start at their
- starting point



# INFORMATION

- Use clear, simple words like 'dead' and 'dying'
- Be clear with the child or young person that this means the body of the person who died is no longer working and does not feel pain
- Be prepared to explain repeatedly and answer questions again and again
- Ask them what is their biggest worry
- Ask them what they think is happening



# REASSURANCE

- About their own health and that of others in the family
- About guilt/responsibility
- About what will remain consistent in their lives, who will look after them, take them to school etc.
- About their future - where they will live etc.



# CARING ADULTS

- Who offer opportunities to express feelings safely
- Who encourage them to participate in mourning rituals alongside others
- Who offer opportunities for remembering the loved one
- Who respect their feelings and way of mourning



# Contact details for 'Seasons for Growth'

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