



*The Irish Childhood
Bereavement Network*

Factsheet: Helping bereaved children to cope with Mother's Day

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Any day can be difficult for a grieving child, but special days such as Mother's Day can be additionally challenging. Children may be bombarded with Mother's Day Cards and gifts in the shops, their friends may be planning how they will celebrate or the class are making something special for their Mums: all of this in the run up to Mother's Day can leave a child whose mother has died feeling sad, alone and unsure about what to do.

There are some things we as adults can do to help children but it is most important to remember that grief is very individual to each child, so what helps one child may not be helpful to another. Children should always have a choice in what they do.

Grieving children may feel particularly sad on Mother's Day, missing their Mum's presence. We should not try to take these feelings away, or to distract children. It can be helpful to acknowledge their often strong emotions and to listen to how things are for the child.

Although their Mother is no longer with them, children often want to think about them, talk about the person and remember them. This can help children to feel that their special person has not been forgotten.

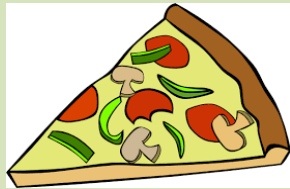
Here are some suggestions of activities you could do with your child to help them to remember their Mum:



Visit the grave



Go for a walk in a place they liked



Have their favourite meal



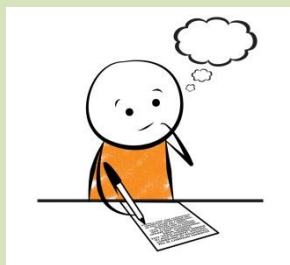
Bake a cake



Talk about Mum



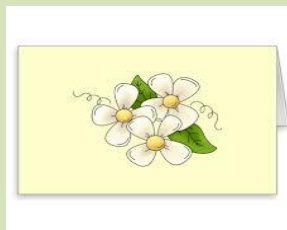
Release a balloon with a message tied to it



Write down favourite memories



Plant bulbs to flower in Summer



Buy or make a Mother's Day card



Light a candle



Say a prayer



Make time to think about Mum

These are some ideas of things you can do together to remember the person who has died. Children may have their own ideas or perhaps you could make a few suggestions to your child and allow them to decide the activity they would like to do.

It can help if other adults who are involved in your child's life are kept informed about changes in the family, such as the death of a close family member, for example, crèche manager or school teacher. This will enable them to approach occasions such as Mother's Day with greater sensitivity.

Thoughts for teachers:

Making a Mother's Day card in class can be an enjoyable activity for many children and indeed it may be for some children who are grieving the death of their mother, but it does require a very sensitive approach. If you are thinking about doing an activity to celebrate Mother's Day, have a quiet word with a bereaved child and their parent or guardian to let them know what will be happening. Doing this about a week beforehand will give them some time to think. Invite them to decide if they would like to be part of the class activity or not. If they do not wish to participate, respect their decision and perhaps offer them an alternate enjoyable activity. It is also valuable to allow siblings in the same class to make different choices about this.

If a child decides to participate, it is generally helpful not to focus too much on them, they will already be feeling different from their peers and will not welcome too much extra attention. Be mindful for a child who may become upset while doing this activity, a kind and gentle response will normally help the child with the emotion that has come to the surface. Remember that grief is an ongoing journey for bereaved children, so these issues are relevant to them for many years after the death. The most important thing is to always give children a choice.

For further information see: www.childhoodbereavement.ie

Supported by



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