

# Understanding bereavement and supporting children and young people

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# Outline

- ▶ Context
- ▶ Talking to children about loss and bereavement
- ▶ How children understand death
- ▶ Supporting children with loss and bereavement

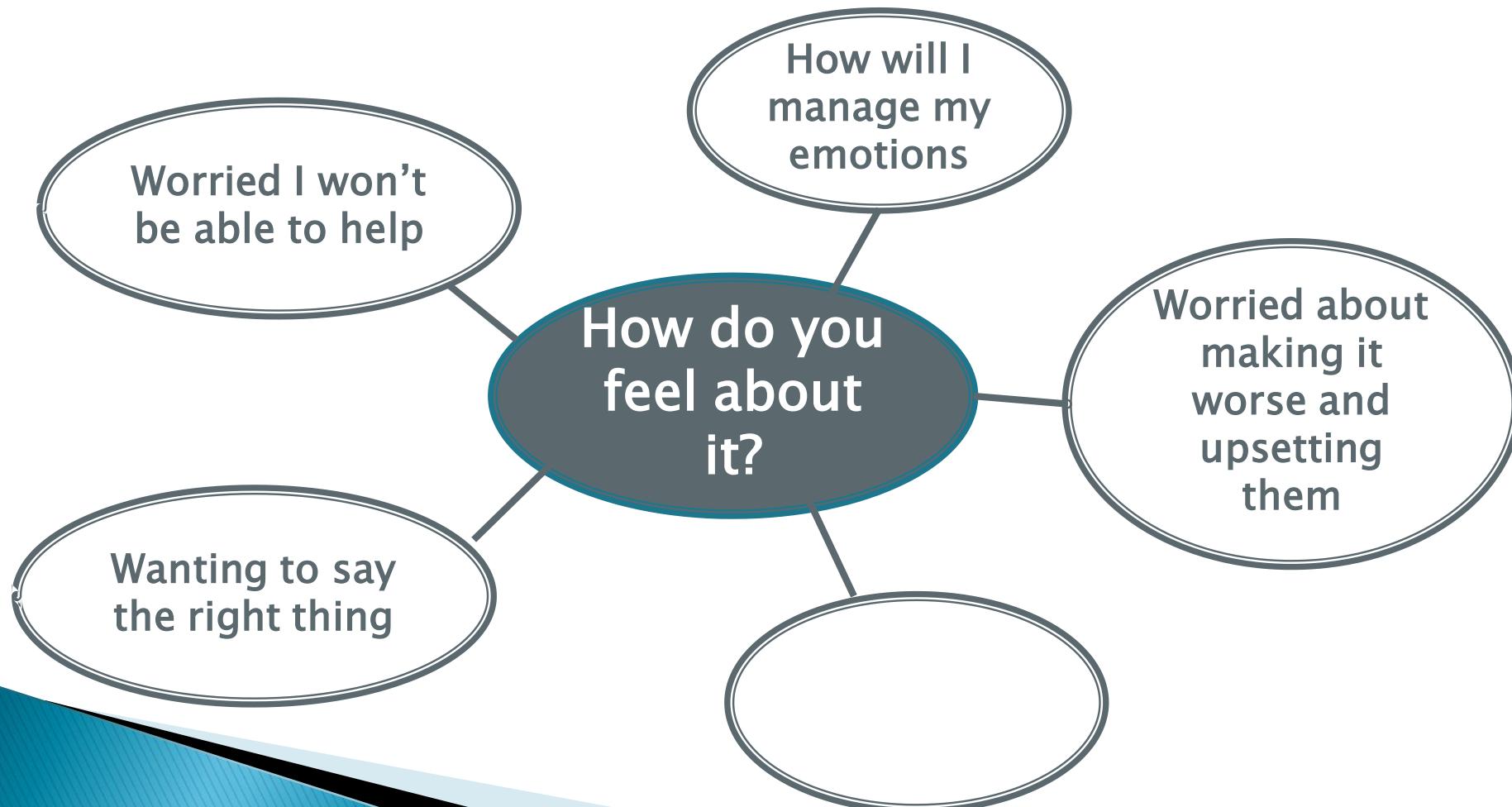
# What is bereavement?

- ▶ It is the *natural response* to death or loss
- ▶ The experience is unique and individual to each person

The experience and ways that bereavement is understood and managed may be different in different cultures.



# Talking to children about loss and bereavement



# Talking to children about loss and bereavement

- ▶ You are the expert in your child
- ▶ What have you already tried?
- ▶ What worked/felt helpful for your children
- ▶ Anything that didn't?
- ▶ What do you need in moments when you are feeling grief, what helps you, what doesn't.
- ▶ What do imagine children and young people might need?

# Importance of addressing bereavement

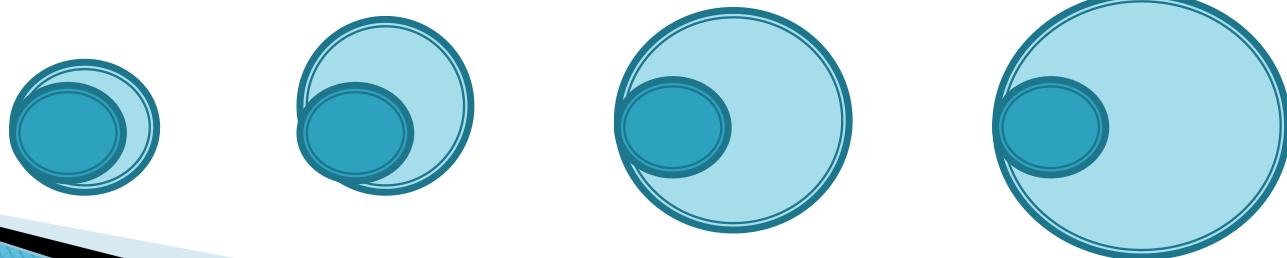
Children have a limited ability to put feelings, thoughts and memories into words and tend to 'act out' with behaviours rather than express themselves verbally. They will gradually gain the language of feelings by listening to words that you use. Showing your grief will encourage them to express theirs. Their behaviour is your guide to how they are feeling. This is as true for a very young child as it is for a teenager.

# Children's understanding of death

- ▶ Younger children (below 5) may not understand death but may still exhibit distress
- ▶ 5–7 years olds may begin to understand the concept of death but perhaps not the finality or permanence of it
- ▶ 7–11 more of a concept, may have more questions, will really differ in how understand permanency

# Mourning

- ▶ Many different ideas about the task of mourning. These may relate to cultural, religious, family beliefs, societal ideas.
- ▶ ‘Task of mourning’ (Worden, 2009)
  - To accept, to process, to adjust, to find ‘*enduring connection*’
- ▶ ‘Growing around grief’ (Tonkin, 1996)
  - Building a life around grief
  - Letting Go vs Staying Connected



# What does bereavement or grieving look like for children?

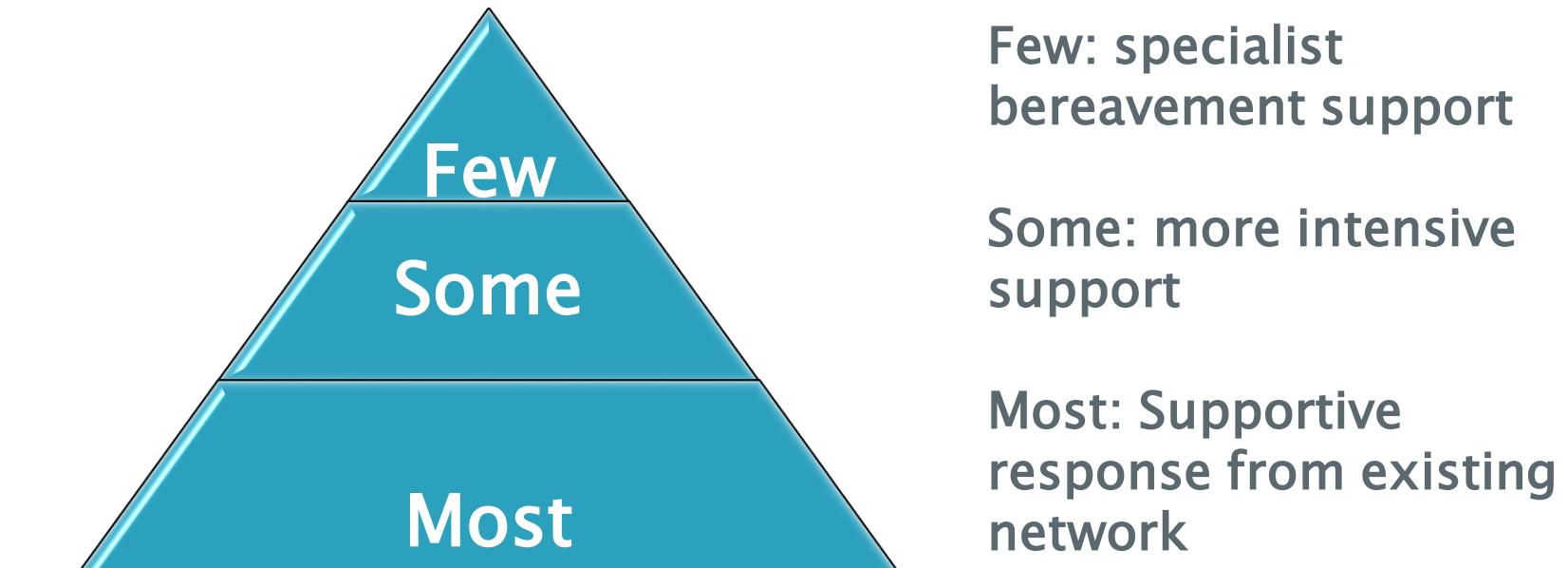
- ▶ Different for everyone
- ▶ Age dependent
  - Regression (toileting, bed-wetting, tantrums, behaviour changes, guilt)
- ▶ Observe, notice behaviour change
- ▶ Puddle jumping



# Managing our own feelings

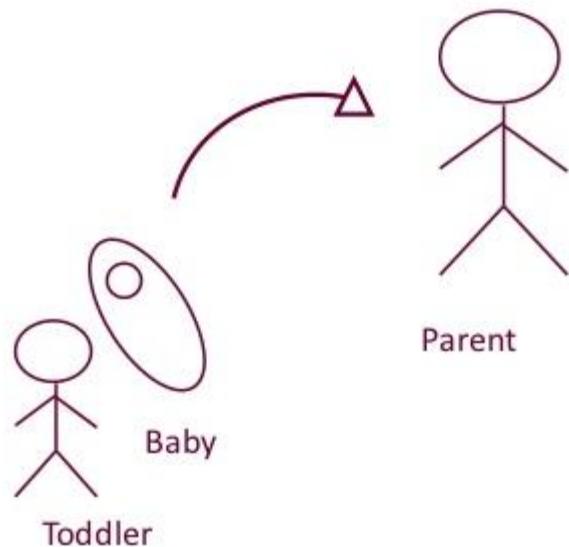
- ▶ It is ok for you child to know that you are also sad, upset, angry.....
- ▶ Modelling to them that there are big feelings, but that these do not last forever.

# What support do children require?

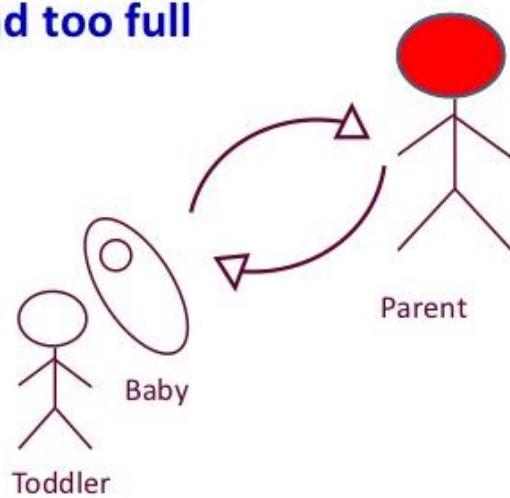


# Containment

- What do we mean by containment?



**Parent's head too full**



# What does this do?

- Child learns that their emotion is normal, manageable and understandable
- Child develops verbal skills to express emotion, so they don't need to use behaviour as much
- Over time, child learns how to manage difficult emotions themselves (self-soothing)





Tolerate Silences

Reassure about the normality of grief reactions

Accept you cannot make them feel better but you are helping

Do not take anger personally

Encourage pupils to talk

Stick to familiar routines

Answer questions honestly

Be familiar with your own feelings



The Prince & Princess of Wales Hospice



# Remembering

- ▶ Creating an enduring connection via remembering Practices
- ▶ Any cultural/family practice in your family?
- ▶ Memory box, or book (attached resources), pictures.
- ▶ Conversations about how the person who has died may have seen/appreciated/loved, and how to hold onto some of the ways that person may have seen you.
- ▶ Remembering day/days

# Thank you

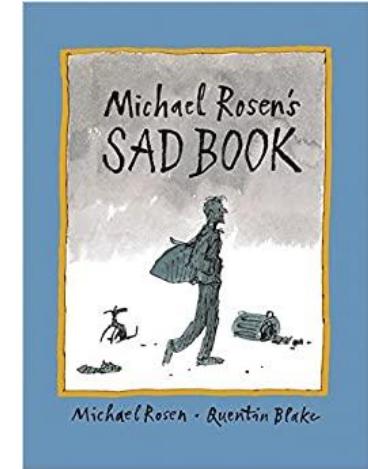
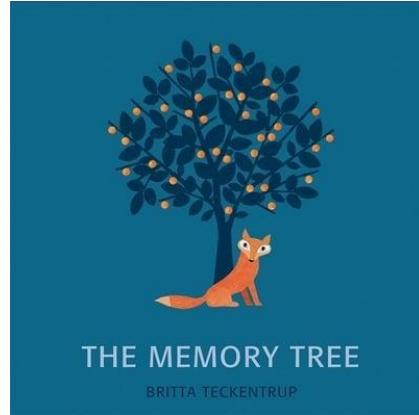
- ▶ Any questions/comments/feedback?



# Support

- ▶ Contact Liz Malpass, school WAHM's clinician
- ▶ Child Bereavement UK
  - [www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org) (live chat, helpline, resources)
- ▶ Winston's Wish
  - <https://www.winstonswish.org/> (live chat, helpline, resources)
- ▶ St Josephs Hospice Hackney
  - <https://www.stjh.org.uk/>
  - 0300 30 30 400.

# Books



- ▶ The memory tree by Britta Teckentrup
- ▶ When someone very special dies by Marge Heedgaard
- ▶ Sad book by Michael Rosen
- ▶ Muddles and puddles and sunshine by Diana Crossley

