

Bereavement in Childhood: Not Nice – But Normal.

“ We like to think of childhood as the kingdom where nobody dies”.

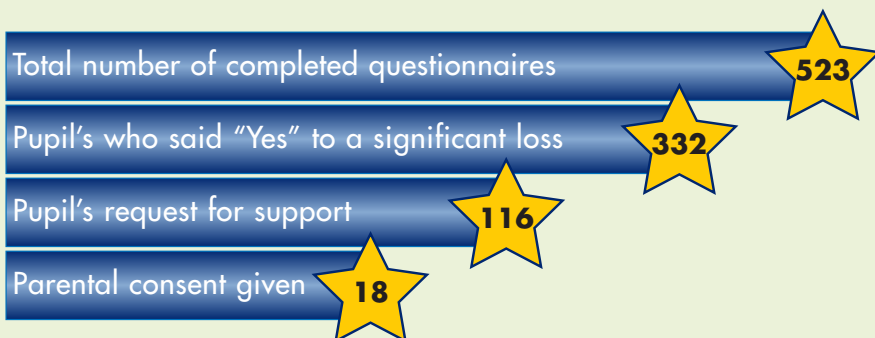
Kastenbalm (1972)

Unfortunately, this is not the case...

Statistical data from two full year groups in a local secondary school revealed a high prevalence of bereaved children.

This data also revealed large numbers of children who wanted to take part, but didn't have consent from their parents.

Statistical Information



Children's Views

Before attending the groups

- ✘ Uncomfortable talking about their own difficulties
- ✘ Little understanding of the link between loss, feelings and behaviour.
- ✘ Felt isolated and misunderstood.

After attending the groups

- ✓ More comfortable to talk about death in general, as well as sharing their own experiences.
- ✓ Developed a better understanding about loss and how this had affected them emotionally.
- ✓ Enjoyed meeting other people like themselves.

The Benefits

- ✓ Raised awareness and helped to normalise the experience of bereavement.
- ✓ Improvement of attitudes towards bereaved children from both teachers and parents
- ✓ Helped children develop life skills to deal with loss.

...We then asked the questions...

How are the views of adults and children different when thinking about childhood loss?

Is the impact of childhood loss helped at all, by running support groups within the school setting?

Teacher's & Parent's Views

Before the groups were run

- ✘ Teachers – many were unable to make a link between loss and changes in children's feelings and behaviours.
- ✘ Parents – many appeared uncomfortable and anxious when talking about death and experienced a strong sense of "not knowing what to do".

After the groups were run

- ✓ An improved atmosphere in school, with staff talking more freely with children about death related issues.
- ✓ An on-going commitment from the school to run more groups.
- ✓ In house training has since occurred on issues relating to loss.
- ✓ Outcomes with parents were hard to determine, due to difficulties in accessing them. Results were however, very positive overall.

Outcomes – It's Good To Talk

- ✓ This study highlights that the child's views of how they experience bereavement is often different to that of both teachers and parents.
- ✓ Children talk of the benefits of sharing and having their experiences acknowledged whilst as adults; we often try to protect children from experiencing death and see the topic as a "taboo" subject.
- ✓ Adult's views and attitudes towards childhood bereavement are of critical importance in the process of supporting children through bereavement.
- ✓ This study favours an approach which helps children develop life skills, in order to adapt to changes brought about through loss. This type of learning needs to take place both within families and through the delivery of child friendly services, where children have the opportunity to learn about the experience of loss and how to develop new ways of coping.