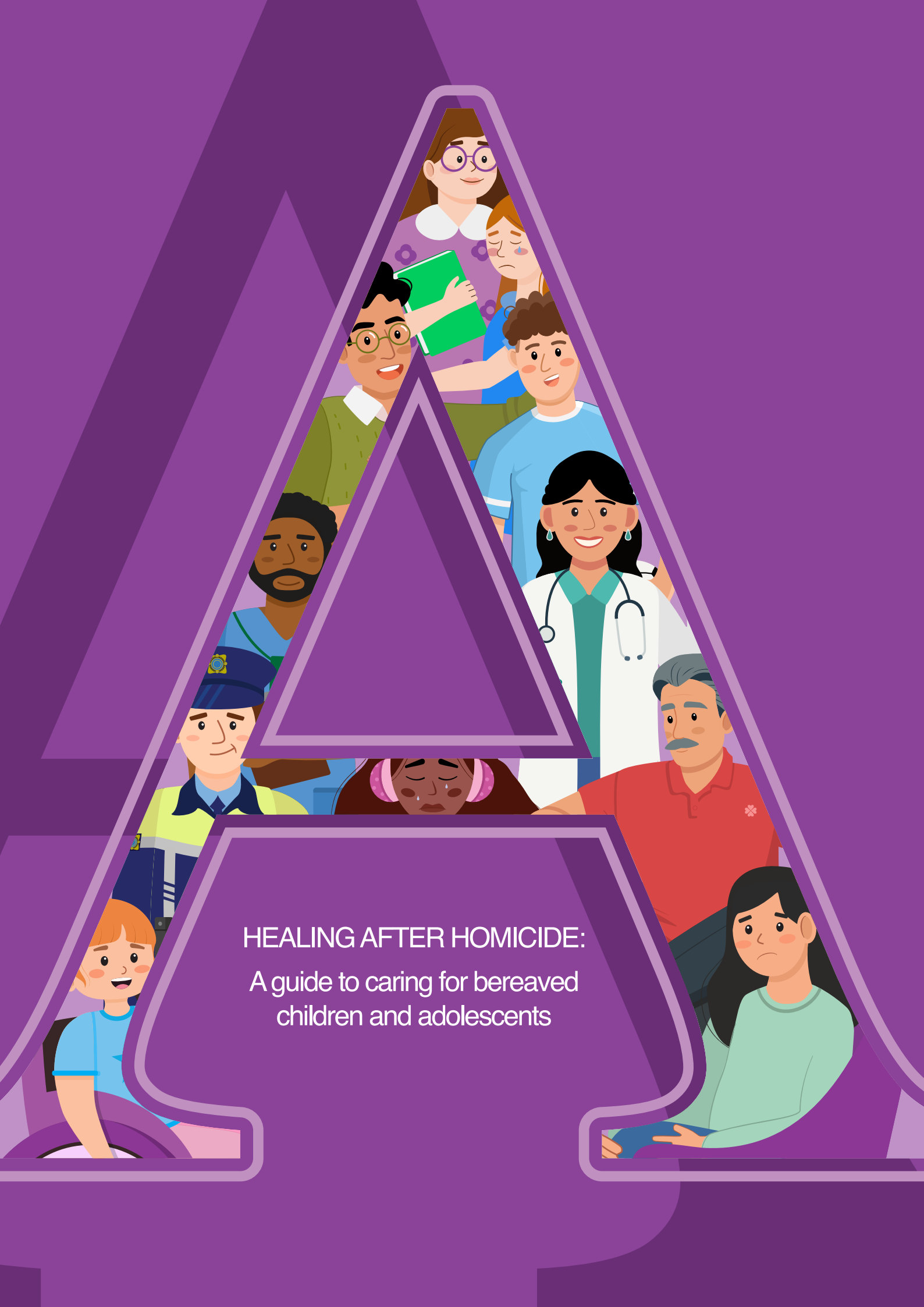


HEALING AFTER HOMICIDE:

A guide to caring for bereaved children and adolescents

AdVIC
advocates for victims of homicide

www.advic.ie

We extend our sincere gratitude to the following organisations

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Department of Justice

RTÉ TOY SHOW APPEAL
Community Foundation Ireland

TUSLA
An Ghníomhaireacht um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

Illustrations by: Sarah Bevan

www.sarahssimulacrum.com

FOREWORD

Losing a loved one to homicide is a tragedy that leaves deep and lasting wounds. For children and teenagers, the grief can be overwhelming, confusing, and profoundly life-changing. The journey of healing is complicated, not only by the pain of loss but also by the violent nature of their loved one's passing. As parents, guardians, and frontline professionals, you are tasked with the delicate responsibility of guiding young people through their grief while managing your own emotional struggles. **This booklet is here to support you in that journey.**

In the aftermath of homicide, children and teenagers experience a unique form of bereavement, often compounded by feelings of fear, anger, guilt, and uncertainty. Their responses to trauma may vary widely depending on their age, developmental stage, and the support systems available to them. Some may withdraw, while others may act out. Some may struggle with nightmares and anxiety, while others may ask painful and difficult questions. Whatever their response, they need compassionate and informed guidance to navigate their emotions and regain a sense of security and hope.

This guide provides practical advice, emotional support, and professional insights for those who care for and work with bereaved children and teenagers. It draws upon expert knowledge in psychology, trauma-informed care, and grief counselling, as well as real-life experiences of families who have walked this difficult path before. **Our aim is to equip you with the tools and understanding necessary to provide the best possible care for grieving young people while also looking after your own well-being.**

The content that follows will explore the impact of traumatic grief at different developmental stages, offer strategies to foster resilience and healing, and provide guidance on talking to children about death, violence, and loss in age-appropriate ways. We will discuss how to recognise signs of prolonged grief and trauma, when to seek professional help, and how to create a safe and nurturing environment that allows children to express their feelings and fears. Additionally, we will address the challenges caregivers face, including managing their own grief and finding balance in the midst of turmoil.

FOREWORD

Grief is a deeply personal journey, but no one should have to walk it alone. It is our hope that this booklet will serve as a source of comfort, knowledge, and strength, helping you to support the children and teenagers in your care with empathy, patience, and understanding. Together, we can help them find a way forward, honouring their loved ones while embracing life with hope.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those whose dedication, expertise, and compassion made this book possible. In particular, **I wish to thank Susan Dowling, Niamh Crowley, Noirin Hennessey**, and **Marie Percival** for their invaluable contributions. Their commitment to supporting bereaved children, young people, and families is reflected throughout these pages, and their collective efforts have helped create a resource that will offer guidance, understanding, and hope to many.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the talented illustrator **Sarah Bevan**, whose creativity and thoughtful artwork have brought warmth and sensitivity to this book. Her illustrations enhance the message of the book and help make it accessible and engaging for readers of all ages.



AdVIC are here to support you, so please get in touch if you would like to know more about our adult and child counselling services.

Barbara Clinton, Chairperson
AdVIC,
Advocates for Victims of Homicide

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CARING FOR CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE AFTER A TRAUMATIC AND SUDDEN DEATH OF A LOVED ONE

We know that sudden death is confusing for everyone and is considered to be one of the most stressful life events, particularly when the sudden death is caused by homicide. The information that follows is a guide to help you and for you to know that ***you and your family are not alone.***

When a homicide happens, you are not just dealing with a sudden death, you are also dealing with the way it happened and what happens after the death. Such an event is especially distressing on children and teenagers. The impact of any death and more particularly homicide will vary depending on their age and developmental stage of the child. Therefore, they will need your help and the help of responsible others in their lives to support them to adapt to the new situation they find themselves in.

This can be challenging, as you may see changes in your child emotionally, behaviourally and psychologically as they struggle to understand what has happened. All of this when you are also dealing with your own overwhelming emotions.

Due to the suddenness of such a death, it can have a three-fold impact,

- dealing with the shock and unexpectedness of the death.
- dealing with what and how it happened i.e. a crime has been committed.
- dealing with trying to support yourself and your child and/or teenager.

This may feel overwhelmed at times, you may experience wide ranging emotions: shock, numbness, despair, anger, disbelief, guilt, shame, fear and anxiety. While this can be hard to navigate, please remember that children are resilient and can adapt with the right support from you and others around them. Knowing what to do, what to say and what to expect can help during this difficult time. Just knowing that being the best you can be on any one day is good enough. So before we discuss how to support your child, we must first look at how you can support yourself.

SUPPORTING YOU

It is really important that you slow down and learn how to take one step at a time.

Having **support** through this time is vital, particularly on the difficult days, when you feel anger, worry or despair.

Reach out to that someone you trust or to the service you know will support you best to get through it. They may only be a phone call away. **Establish a routine**, it really helps, as consistency is important when things are difficult.

Remember you are not alone.

On any sad and difficult day,

Where you feel you have lost your way,

Try to remember the feeling will pass.

Children and teenagers are **naturally curious** and they will want to know what has happened. **Being prepared** for questions they may ask, will help you stay on top of things, as it is emotional for you too. **Write down** what you want to say, as it will make it easier on you. **Keep what you say factual and truthful.**

It is normal for you and them to cry. Seeing you crying gives them permission to cry too. You do not need to be afraid to cry with them, its okay to let them see how it affects you and that it may come in waves and that **it starts and it also stops.**

Have a look at the section below on what to say and how to say what needs to be said. The words you use will depend on their age and developmental ability.

What you say to a 5 year old child will differ significantly to what you tell a 10 year old or a teenager.

WHY TELL A CHILD/YOUNG PERSON THE TRUTH?

When a child does not have the full story about what happened, they can stay in a high state of alert i.e. they can be wary of everyone and everything. Without **full age-appropriate information** about what has happened, they will make up a story that makes sense of the situation and compensates for what they do not know.

We need to help children to correct these fantasies, as they can overthink and replay them repeatedly which can be intrusive throughout their day. This can cause them to worry and they may start to believe or **blame themselves for what has happened**. They may also worry about what will happen to them if someone else dies. All or any of this can be frightening for any child/teenager because the fantasies may become embedded as a false account of the reality.

So it is vital that, with the help of you or another responsible adult, the thoughts/ beliefs are corrected as often as needed to **help eliminate this unnecessary anxiety**.

You may notice your child has bigger than usual feelings like worry, fear, anger or rage. or maybe they are not sleeping or getting into trouble with you or in school/creche. You may find this particularly difficult, because you are going through a difficult time yourself, however this is where you need to notice their worry and distress, not their behaviour, which can be really challenging without some support.

THIS IS A TIME WHERE CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS NEED **LOTS OF REASSURANCE** FROM YOU AND THE OTHER SUPPORTIVE ADULT IN THEIR LIVES. TO HELP THEM FULLY UNDERSTAND WHAT HAS HAPPENED AND VITALLY THAT **THERE WAS NOTHING THAT THEY DID TO MAKE IT HAPPEN**.



WHAT DOES YOUR CHILD NEED TO HEAR ABOUT WHAT HAS HAPPENED?

We know as a parent/guardian, it is normal to want to protect your child from the details of such a terrible tragedy, however research tells us **it is vital for all children and young people to be given honest age-appropriate information about the death**.

Sometimes you or your child may have been told about the homicide by someone or maybe you or your child witnessed it. Regardless of how you or they found out, it is important to help your child understand the full story. This is particularly important when it comes to media coverage of such sudden deaths. **It can be very difficult to protect them fully, but if they know they can go to you or another responsible adult to hear the truth, it will help enormously.**

Children can be really good at covering up their feelings. Some are less able to hide them, either way, **it will take time and patience to help them through it**. With the right resources they will feel supported and begin to adapt to their new reality.



Be aware, that the story may need to be visited over and over many times and sometimes they may have difficult questions, but remember you don't need to know all the answers, it is okay to let them know you will find out and come back to them (but you do need to go back to them when you work it out). Repeating the story is particularly important to children with different abilities which we will discuss later.

Remember you know your child really well, so each child will take the time they need to understand what has happened fully.

WHO TELLS YOUR CHILD?

You or a responsible adult that they trust would be the best one to tell them what has happened, the best way you can, keeping in mind the advice earlier.

Choose a comfortable place and time to speak to your children i.e. a time when you are not rushed or you or your child is not tired if you can.

It is more complex in cases like…. if you or your child witnessed the death or if the death occurred in your home, or if one family member kills another family member or if a friend is killed, but when the time is right you or a trusting responsible adult will need to speak to them as best you can, about what has happened or what they witnessed to help them understand it.

If you decide to speak to your children, it may be wise to do this with another adult present, someone that you can trust and rely on, so you don't become too overwhelmed yourself. **You can write down what you would like to say to help keep yourself on track**.

Explain the role of the people who are helping you or the deceased i.e. Ambulance, Doctors, or Gardai where appropriate. **It is important that a child knows who's who when it comes to helpers** looking after their loved one or looking into the crime which has been committed.



WHAT TO TELL YOUR CHIlD

Keep it factual, be careful about the language used around them, i.e.
avoid describing the person as 'passed' or 'asleep" as it can be confusing for some children.
So clear, easy to understand language is very important.

For all children speak about ….'When people die it means we can't see them anymore'. **Note the next section in this document you will find specific age or developmental related information that may also help.**



AGES AND WHAT IT MIGHT HELP TO KNOW ABOUT WHAT THEY UNDERSTAND ABOUT DEATH:

The age of each child and their developmental ability, alongside significant other stages of life or cultural or religious beliefs, coupled with the relationship your child had with the deceased person all contribute to a child's ability to understand and cope with such bad news.

You may notice:

- Bigger than normal displays of confusion, distress, anxiety, worry, fear, anger, rage, clinginess or irritability.
- They may not be eating or sleeping well, which can make it difficult to concentrate in school or you may notice changes their mood.
- They may be in trouble with you more or in school/creche.
- They may fall out with friends, family members at this time, which can result in them not socialising or maybe going out too much.

The following are broad guidelines by age that give some guidance to help you understand what you may see in your child.



BABIES (0 TO 2 YEARS)



Babies of this age do not understand death or its finality.

They may be are aware that something has changed or missing.

They may not react well to the remaining parent or guardian because they are unsure.

You may notice:

They may become **more clingy. They cry more.** They may be off their food or sleep.

This is particularly true if the child had a strong emotional connection to the person who has died.

What helps this age group?

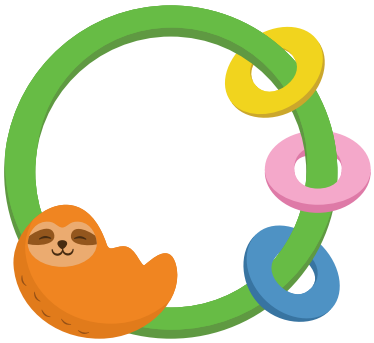
- **Routine** – Keep a routine as much as possible. This builds stability and safety for the infant.
- **Baby Talk/ Cuddles/ Rocking/ Eye Contact** - soothe and comfort an infant and brings a sense of closeness to you if they are in your arms.
- **Reassurance** that you are still there and that you will take care of them, which serves to comfort an infant.

Remember you know your baby really well already and you will know when they are feeling differently. So the responses above should go some way to helping your child, but in the end you know best.

TODDLERS (3 TO 5 YEARS)

Children of this age do not get the full understanding of what has happened and that they will not see the deceased person again. They may ask when the deceased person is coming home. They may look for the person who died which can be distressing on you, so knowing what to do is important to reduce your stress around this. **Let them know it is okay to feel happy, to relax, to play with toys just like before.**







What helps this age group?

- **Routine** - Keep a routine as much as possible. This builds stability and safety for the child.
- **Cuddles/Rocking** - soothes and comforts a child and brings a sense of closeness to you if they are in your arms.
- **Play**, can be more effective than words with children, **read stories** together particularly around bedtime. **Nature** is good for this age group, so get out into a park or green space if you can with them and let them explore.
- **Talk about the person who has tragically died.** Encourage the child to ask questions whenever they need to. Prepare a consistent truthful story that you tell the child to reaffirm their reality in a comforting manner. You may need to repeat this many times.
- **Reassurance** – Let them know how family life will be going forward, that it is not their fault someone has died and that you are still there and that you will take care of them.

CHILDREN (6 TO 8 YEARS)

Around this age, children are starting to form the concept of death. It is important that they know the person who died will not return. Behaviours and emotions may change and they will need lots of reassurance on your part to help them. **They may believe that it was their fault and they may worry about others dying** i.e. 'what happens to me if you die'. Some children in this age range will ask difficult questions as they try to grasp an understanding of what has happened.



What helps this age group?

- **Routine** - Keep a routine as much as possible. This builds stability and safety for the child.
- **Cuddles/Hugs** - soothes and comforts a child and brings a sense of closeness to you if they are in your arms.
- **Play**, can be more effective than words with children, **read stories** together particularly around bedtime. Nature is good for this age group, so get out into a park or green space if you can with them and let them explore.
- **Support the child to express and talk about their feelings.** It is okay to cry together. **Name simple feelings** like 'angry, or sad', to give the child the language to express themselves more fully.
- **Talk about the person who has tragically died.** Encourage the child to ask questions whenever they need to. Prepare a consistent truthful story that you tell the child to reaffirm their reality in a comforting manner. Make sure you include answers to 'what happens to me if you die'. You may need to repeat this many times.
- **Reassurance -** Let them know how family life will be going forward, that it is not their fault someone has died and that you are still there and that you will take care of them.

PRE-TEENS (9 TO 12 YEARS)

It is at this age that the finality of death starts to make most sense. They may also understand that a crime has been committed as they know the difference between right and wrong. Behaviours here may be challenging. You may also find if you have multiple children, that one of them feels they need to step up and fill the void of the person who has died. This is where language is very important. It is important to reassure them to alleviate these pressures and fears. Let them know it is okay to feel happy, to relax, to talk and play with their friends just like before.

Let them know it is okay to feel happy and to relax just like before.



PRE-TEENS (9 TO 12 YEARS)



What helps this age group?

- **Routine** - Keep a routine as much as possible. This builds stability and safety for the child.
- **Hugs** – calm, soothe and comfort the child which brings a sense of closeness to you, particularly if they are sitting close to you or your arms.
- **Join an activity after school** if possible so they can play with others.
- **Support the child to express and talk** about their feelings. It is okay to cry together. **Name simple feelings** like 'angry or sad' give the child the language to express themselves more fully.
- **Talk about the person who has tragically died.** Encourage the child to ask questions whenever they need to. Prepare a consistent truthful story that you tell the child to reaffirm their reality in a comforting manner. Make sure you include answers to 'what happens to me if you die'. You may need to repeat this many times.
- **Answer the questions** you can honestly and it's okay not to know all the answers, but do find out and go back to the child with the new information you received. This is particularly important because they know right from wrong at this developmental stage.
- Reassurance – Let them know how family life will be going forward, that it is not their fault **someone has died** and that you are still there and that you will take care of them.

TEENAGERS (13 - 18 YEARS)

Teenage years, are a time of great change, as young people try to work out where they fit into the world, grappling with peers, school pressures, trying to be independent, finding relationships and maybe questioning their gender identity etc. So, **supporting your teenager to express themselves** and talk about their feelings is really Important, but it can be difficult.

Speak to them about it being **okay for them to cry** and also **okay for you to cry**. Crying does not mean anyone is falling apart, it just means what is happening is very sad. **Teenagers may resent the disruption in their lives and then feel guilty for feeling that**, so it can get quite muddled at times. They need lots of reassurance from you and supportive others. Let them know that **you do not need them to fill the shoes of the person who has died** or take on any more responsibilities. Help them see that this will bring change for every one but will do you best to keep them informed when you can. **Let them know it is okay to feel happy, to relax with their friends just like before.**

At this stage, teenagers understand fully what has happened
and that a crime has been committed.



TEENAGERS (13 - 18 YEARS)

They need to understand the events like what has happened, who is investigating the death, where the dead person is now and what happens to them after that i.e. how this will evolve as much as you know at the time.

- **Involve them in the funeral arrangements** if they want to. Ask them if they would like to be involved with saying goodbye.
- **Support them to express and talk about their feelings.** It is okay to cry together. They may worry about you, so let them know that you will be okay.
- **Talk about the person who has tragically died.** Encourage them to ask questions whenever they need to. Be as consistent as you can to reaffirm their reality of the situation.
- **Answer the questions you can honestly** and **it's okay not to know all the answers**, but do find out and go back to the child with the new information you received.
- **Reassurance** – Let them know how family life will be going forward, and that you are still there and that you will take care of them. Let them know they do not need to step up and fill the void of the person who has died



HAVING ANOTHER TRUSTED ADULT THAT THE TEENAGER CAN TALK THINGS THROUGH WITH MAY BE HELPFUL E.G. SUPPORTIVE RELATIVE, A SPORTS COACH OR KIND TEACHER.

MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA

If you notice your child or teenager struggling, you may need to seek out professional support, which is available through AdVIC.



Dealing with the media and social media can be especially tricky, as **reporters and news pops up in all sorts of places** and can invade you and your children's lives any time of day. Try as much as possible to **minimise exposure to social media and the news.** Helping children/teenagers understand that details of their loved ones deaths may be in papers, on social media, on the news or talked about in school. and if they are worried or upset by anything they see, read or hear, that you are there for them to talk. You may encounter **mood swings**, emotions, rage, difficulties with sleep or eating.



CHILDREN WITH DIFFERENT ABILITIES

Each child's development is individual and unique, therefore they all understand differently. When your child has special needs and/or an intellectual disability, **they may only take in the information they can bear at the time**. How children understand the world may be key to providing the very unique support that your child requires to help them cope with the very different and difficult circumstances they find themselves in.

More concrete descriptions, visual representations and images of what has happened and what to expect may help.

They may understand death or they may be aware someone is missing or maybe aware of changes in their own life as a result of a death, so it will vary for each child/teenager. **Remember you know them really well and will know what they need more than anyone else**. **You may need you to explain things several times**, so having something written down will be vital for you to help keep track of what you have said or need to say. **It may also be useful to avail of your child/ teenagers normal support structure i.e. clinical team, school or creche. to discuss how they can best support your child at this difficult time.**



HOW TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WHO ARE BEREAVED

Grief affects children deeply and over a prolonged period of time, just as it does for adults. However it manifests differently with children depending on their age and understanding of death. Children can experience grief in waves, moving between getting on with their day to day lives and huge emotional outpourings.

Younger children may regress, they may start bedwetting and being very clingy with one parent. Older children may display behavioural issues such as arguing, being defiant, or they may become withdrawn and refuse to talk about the person who has died. Teenagers may become irritable, short tempered, develop low self-esteem, **become withdrawn and isolated, even from their friends.**



Children need adult help in learning to understand and eventually to cope with the many emotions of grief. **Parents and family members can help children through grief by being supportive and understanding**, assuring the child that what they are feeling is normal and that they can cope

Mention any example in the child's life where they experienced difficulty or loss, no matter how small, and that they got through it. Remind them of their resilience and strength. **Help them to express the emotions as they arise.**

After a death a child might ask a lot of questions. **It's important that you answer their questions with age-appropriate answers.** Answer exactly what they ask and no more. This might be all a child needs to hear for now.

HOW TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WHO ARE BEREAVED

When someone dies suddenly, especially because of violence, it is shocking and deeply upsetting for everyone. **A parent's natural instinct is often to shield the child from the truth of the situation.** Unfortunately, if there is mystery and unanswered questions, a child will fill in the blanks with their imagination. **This can lead to your child imagining very frightening scenarios as well as developing feelings of guilt and self-blame.** The death may appear in the news or on social media.

Try to talk to your children and teenagers about what really happened. Children need to be given real information, appropriate to their age. It's better to use clear unambiguous words such as died, instead of passed away or gone to sleep. Don't make up things. If a loved one has been killed violently, you could use phrases such as, "Someone hurt them and sadly they died." in an appropriate tone for their age

An older teenager will be able for more detailed information. If you don't know the answer to a child's question, or you don't have all of the information, it's ok to say "I don't know."

There are sometimes questions that we will never know the answer to. Accepting this uncertainty is an important step in processing our grief. **Assure the child that you will support them through the uncertainty. Being involved in the goodbye rituals in an age-appropriate way is important for children.** A younger child might want to draw a picture or write a card that can be placed in the coffin. Older children and teenagers might want to see the body and have a role in the funeral service. **All of these actions will help the child to accept and process their loss.**

When something big like this happens, **the child picks up on all of the feelings of the parent, and other family members, expressed and unexpressed.**



The response of parents and other significant people in the child's life is the most important influence on how the child copes with bereavement. Sometimes the child feels they can't let their parents know how bad they feel. **They can see how hard life is for their parent since the death, so they don't want to give them anything else to worry about.** They might see their parent being stressed by financial worries, household duties and grief.

HOW TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WHO ARE BEREAVED

A child's behaviour can change. **They can act out** testing if you can still tolerate and love them even when they are being troublesome. Or they can become extra good, helping more, doing nice things for you. Both of these scenarios are signs that a child needs to know that the parent is still able to look after them despite this terrible thing that has happened in the family. **They need to know you are ok and that you can take care of them while they experience all the big emotions of grief.**

Talk to your child about your own feelings of grief and what helps you. **Assure the child that although you are in pain right now, you know that you will be better in the future.** Think about what supports you have for yourself. Looking after yourself at this time is a crucial part your own wellbeing and of your children's wellbeing. Talk to someone close about what you're experiencing. **Reach out to family, friends and community organisations for any practical help you may need.** Consider counselling for yourself.

SUPPORTING TEENAGERS THROUGH HOMICIDE

Adolescence is a time of great change. As teenagers try to bridge the gap between childhood and adulthood, they struggle with issues of identity and independence. Losing someone at this time can make life very difficult. A sudden death is extremely difficult, a sudden death by homicide is unparalleled. It has many layers, involves complex and difficult challenges including engaging with the criminal justice system and the media. It is a crime and becomes public interest. People often have strong opinions and voice them and make comments online which are often upsetting.

Life as it was changes in an instant and often can never return to how it was. In some cases, teenagers can manage and learn to live with their grief with the appropriate support from their family and key adults in their lives. However, this is based on the premise that the adults surrounding the child have accurate and up to-date information on the impact of childhood bereavement. Often, however, families are unable to provide this support as they are so overwhelmed themselves and trying to come to terms with what has happened. In these cases, families will need to turn to support outside the family.

HOW DO WE SUPPORT A TEENAGER THROUGH THEIR EXPERIENCE OF HOMICIDE?

WHO CAN SUPPORT A TEENAGER AFTER HOMICIDE?

Adults who are willing and able to listen to them, who accept their feelings as real and important, and who model openness in discussing issues of life and death. Teenagers have been consulted on some on the following headings and their feedback is important.

It is very important that the situation and facts are explained to them, age appropriately. They listen to adults talking and they often overhear conversations, and **they may get confused in their and get anxious as a result.**

They can get quite angry and hurt when they are not involved in conversations. Often adults feel that by sheltering them we are doing the right thing; this may not be so.

Explain to them how **the media and social media may misreport such horrific events** and to encourage them to avoid the internet. This is often difficult, and they may see a lot on social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok

It is important that adults educate them about how the media can misrepresent things at times. Listen to them, not to fix, just to be present and hear them and their concerns.

Check in with them. Often, they avoid the home or conversations and find the distraction with friends and escaping into video games helpful. **Shoulder to shoulder conversations are helpful**, and the car is often a common place to talk. Or even a walk side by side.

The community plays a large role in helping adolescents and children in grief. The Children Bereavement Services National Survey (2023) stated that 33% of their needs are met in the community, these include the likes of sports groups, youth clubs, and family resource centres etc. The report also stated that 21% of their bereavement needs are being met in school.

It is most important for those working in these areas to be grief informed and have someone in the organisation who is a key contact.



IN SUMMARY

HOLDING THE SMALLEST HEARTS AFTER VIOLENT LOSS

When a child loses someone they love to homicide, the world does not simply change—it fractures. For children under ten, that fracture is especially profound. Their understanding of death is still forming. Their belief in safety rests almost entirely in the hands of the adults around them.

So when violence enters their world, they are not only grieving—they are trying to make sense of something that feels senseless. They are trying to answer questions they do not yet have the language to ask. What they need from us in this space is not perfection. They need presence, truth, and consistency.

TELL THE TRUTH GENTLY, CLEARLY IN WAYS THEY CAN HOLD



Children cope better with truth than with confusion. Even when the truth is painful, it gives them something solid to stand on.

Avoid the soft disguises adults often reach for: "Daddy/ Mummy went to sleep."

Sleep is something a child expects to wake from.

When we blur those lines, we create fear—not comfort.

Instead, speak plainly: "Daddy died. "

When death comes through violence, the instinct to shield children from the reality can be powerful. And yet, invented explanations—however well intentioned—have a way of unravelling later, taking trust with them.

What matters is not detail, but clarity.

- For younger children: "Someone hurt Mummy very badly, and she died."
- For older children: "A person chose to hurt Mummy. The Gardai and other adults are working to keep people safe."

Truth, held carefully, builds trust that will carry them forward with a sense of safety and confidence.

SAY YOU ARE SAFE MORE TIMES THAN YOU THINK IS NECESSARY



After homicide, fear can take hold quickly and deeply.
Children begin to ask, silently or aloud:
Will it happen again?
Will someone take you too?
Will I be next?
One answer is never enough.
Reassurance must be repeated again and again.

You might say:

- "What happened was very unusual."
- "The person who did this cannot hurt us now."
- "There are many adults working to keep people safe."
- "I am here with you."

Avoid the impossible promise: Nothing bad will ever happen. Instead, offer what is realistic "I will do everything I can to keep you safe." **Safety is rebuilt not through certainty, but through consistency & reassurance.**

UNDERSTAND THAT GRIEF RARELY LOOKS LIKE GRIEF

Adults often express tears and we can see visible sadness.
Children, especially the very young, may express grief differently.
You may see:

- Irritability or anger
- Clinginess that feels sudden and overwhelming
- Regression—bedwetting, baby talk, fear of being alone
- Trouble sleeping
- Physical complaints with no clear cause
- Bursts of play followed by bursts of despair

A child might laugh one moment and be in tears the next.
This is not confusion—it is self-protection. Children take grief in small, manageable doses - this is a protective way of dealing with overwhelming feelings.

LET PLAY BECOME THEIR LANGUAGE

When words fail, play steps in. Through drawing, storytelling, puppets, and imaginary worlds, children tell us what they are trying to understand.

You might notice themes repeating:

- Someone being rescued
- Good versus bad, in imaginary play, where good characters win over bad ones
- Separation and reunion
- Death that can somehow be undone
- Rather than redirecting, stay close and curious:
    - "I see the little bear is looking for his mummy " or "That story feels very sad."

You are not required to interpret or fix the play. Your role is to witness it. In that witnessing, children begin to process what feels unmanageable.

KEEP THE CONNECTION TO THE PERSON WHO DIED ALIVE

Grief is no longer understood as something we "move on" from. Especially for children, love doesn't end with death.

But they often need permission to continue the relationship. You might:

- Look at photos together
- Tell stories about the person
- Celebrate birthdays or anniversaries
- Create a memory box
- Write letters to the person who died
- Speak their name in everyday conversation

A simple truth can anchor a child: "They died, but we still love them. We can always remember them." Children often fear forgetting. Memory becomes a form of safety.



GENTLY UNTANGLE THE STORIES THEY MAY CREATE

CHILDREN ARE MEANING-MAKERS.

When something unimaginable happens, they will try to understand what happened, even with limited emotional vocabulary.

Without guidance, their explanations can turn inward:

It was my fault.

I made this happen.

If I had been better…

These beliefs can take root quietly and deeply.
Speak into that silence:

"Nothing you did, thought, or said caused this."

"You are not responsible."

"Adults are responsible for what happened."

These words must be repeated, and believed, over time.

CARE FOR THE CHILD BY CARING FOR THE CAREGIVER

For young children, the most powerful source of healing is not a technique—it is a person.

When a caregiver remains emotionally available, even through their own grief, the child has a place to return to.

You do not need to hide your sadness.

In fact, children learn something essential when they see it:

"I'm crying because I miss him."

"I feel very sad—and I'm okay. We will get through this together."

This teaches them that grief, while painful, is survivable. What matters is not being unbreakable, but being present.



KNOW WHEN EXTRA SUPPORT IS NEEDED

Some children carry more than they can process on their own.

Seek professional support if you notice:

Persistent, intense nightmares

Severe fear of separation

Repeated intrusive images or reenactments

Strong avoidance of reminders

Ongoing belief the person will return

Deep or lasting guilt

Significant disruption to daily functioning

Trauma-informed therapies, particularly those designed for children, can make a profound difference.

HELP THEM REBUILD THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

One of the most invisible losses after homicide is the loss of beliefs and assumptions.

Before the death of a loved one: Adults keep me safe. Home is safe. Families stay together.

After: Maybe nowhere is safe. Maybe everyone can disappear.

The goal is not to convince a child that the world is perfect. It is to help them understand that the world can be a safe place and good things happen too and will happen in the future.

Slowly, gently, over time, their beliefs can shift:

- From no one is safe → most people are safe, and many people protect others
- From everyone I love will die → people usually live a long time, and I am still loved

This change does not happen in a single conversation.

It is built through mornings that begin the same way, through meals shared, through bedtime routines, through hugs, and by being present - again and again.

WHAT MATTERS MOST

If all of this feels like too much, come back to the essentials.
Children under ten need to hear and feel these truths, over and over:

The death was not your fault
Your feelings make sense
You can ask anything
We will remember the person who died
You still have people who care for you
You are safe right now

These messages, carried through your words, your routines, your tone, and your presence, become the quiet scaffolding that helps a child rebuild their lives and their sense of security. **In time, often slowly, sometimes unevenly, that scaffolding becomes something stronger: A life that can hold both love and loss.**

TEENAGERS: WHEN A WORLD BREAKS AND WHAT COMES AFTER

There is a quiet truth every parent or guardian comes to after the noise fades, after the visitors are gone, after the legal words and paperwork begin to recede:

There is no single way through this. Not for you. And not for your teenager.

After homicide, grief is not just grief. It is something more layered, more complicated, more relentless. Your teenager is not only mourning a person they loved. They are also carrying the shock of how that person died… and what that death seems to say about the world.

- If we are to understand what they are facing, we must hold several realities at once:
- They are living with trauma—the violent rupture that shattered their sense of safety.

They are living with grief, the aching absence, the longing, the love that has nowhere to go. And they are living with a world that suddenly no longer makes sense.
This is what we call traumatic bereavement. And it changes everything.

THERE IS NO SINGLE FIX
ONLY A PATH THAT MUST BE WALKED ON SEVERAL FRONTS

You may have been told, gently or casually, that your teenager "just needs to grieve."

But research tell us something different. Your child does not need only to grieve.

They need help processing what they saw, what they imagined, what they now fear.
They need help telling the story of what happened in a way that does not overwhelm them.
They need help untangling guilt, anger, revenge, and questions that have no answers.

Healing, in this context, is not one thing. It is many things, woven together carefully:

- Learning how trauma affects the mind and body
- Finding ways to regulate overwhelming emotions
- Returning, again and again, to the story—at a pace they can bear
- Challenging the harsh beliefs that take root: I should have stopped it. I should have known.
- Keeping a meaningful connection to the person who died
- Slowly stepping back into school, friendships, and the fragile idea of a future

For many teenagers, therapies that address both trauma and grief together offer the strongest support—not because they erase pain, but because they make it survivable.



YOU ARE STILL THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THEIR HEALING

During this time, having a reliable trusted adult available is essential for teenagers, they often appear distant in grief. They may withdraw, shut doors, not speak at all. You may feel pushed away at the very moment they need you most. **But beneath that distance, research and experience agree on something simple and powerful:**

Your presence still matters more than almost anything else. Not perfect words. Not perfect responses. Presence. What helps most is not fixing, but by being available.

Listening without rushing to solve:

- Allowing the person who died to remain part of conversation
- Letting anger exist without fear of it
- Holding boundaries while allowing flexibility
- Showing your own grief, without asking them to carry it

They need to know that their emotions, no matter how complicated, do not drive you away. And they need to see that grief, while painful, does not destroy you.

THEIR WORLD HAS BEEN SHATTERED
DO NOT RUSH TO REBUILD IT TOO QUICKLY

Before the homicide, your teenager likely carried assumptions they were not aware of:
That the world is mostly safe. That people are mostly good. That their family would remain intact. That life would unfold in a certain direction.

Homicide does not simply challenge these beliefs—it shatters them.

Your teenager may now believe:
People cannot be trusted. Nothing is safe. Life is fragile and cruel.
Your instinct may be to reassure them, to restore what was lost.

Instead, what emerges over time is something more complex, more durable:
A belief that acknowledges both truth and possibility. That terrible things can happen, and yet, there are still people we can trust. That loss is real, but we can find ways to continue our bond with our loved one. That life has changed, and can still hold meaning. **This rebuilding cannot be rushed. It is not a conversation. It is a process that unfolds quietly, over months and years, through lived experience.**

THE QUESTION "WHY?" MAY NEVER LEAVE AND THAT IS OKAY

After homicide, one question echoes louder than all others:

Why? Why this person? Why this moment? Why didn't I stop it? Why would someone do this?

You may feel pressure to answer, to soothe, to make sense of something that resists meaning.

But one of the hardest truths, and one of the most important, is this:

Healing does not always come from finding answers.

Sometimes, it comes from learning how to live without them.

You can help your teenager shift, gently, from needing resolution to building meaning:

- Remembering the fullness of the person's life—not just their death
- Carrying forward their values, their humour, their ways of loving
- Creating rituals, memorials, actions that keep the relationship ongoing
- Finding purpose in helping others, if and when they are ready

The death should never be allowed to become the only story.

DO NOT BE AFRAID OF THEIR ANGER

Homicide brings with it emotions that can feel frightening, even to witness.

Rage. Hatred. A longing for revenge. Fear that violence will return.

These are not signs that something is wrong with your teenager.

They are signs that something terrible has happened.

Silencing these emotions does not make them disappear. It only drives them inward.

Instead, help your teenager bring them into the open:

Talk about the difference between justice and revenge.

Name anger without judgment.

- Create space for it without allowing it to cause harm.
- The goal is not to make anger vanish.
- The goal is to help your teenager carry it without being consumed by it.

THEY MAY FEEL ALONE EVEN WHEN SURROUNDED BY PEOPLE

Adolescence is already a time of belonging and comparison.

After traumatic loss, many teenagers feel abruptly set apart.

They may feel older than their peers. More burdened. Less understood.

Friends often do not know what to say, and sometimes say nothing at all.

This silence can deepen isolation.

Connection with others who understand, even a little, can be profoundly healing.

Whether through peer groups, structured support, or simply meeting others who have lived through violent loss, your teenager may begin to feel something they have been missing:

I am not the only one.

HELP THEM IMAGINE A FUTURE AGAIN

One of the quietest casualties of traumatic loss is the future itself.

Your teenager may begin to think:

- What's the point?
- Anyone can be taken at any time.
- *I might not even be here long enough for plans to matter.*

This is where healing begins to look forward again.

Not all at once. Not with pressure. But with small, deliberate steps:

Returning to school. Reinvesting in friendships. Exploring identity.

Setting goals, tentatively at first. Hope, in this context, is not optimism.

It is the willingness to imagine that life can still unfold.

WHAT REMAINS

If all of this feels overwhelming, come back to what matters most.

Your teenager does not need you to fix this.



They need you to walk beside them as they:

- Face what happened
- Mourn who they lost
- Slowly rebuild a life with meaning.

The research, the clinical wisdom, the countless lived experiences all lead us to this:

- Healing after homicide is not about moving on.
- It is about learning how to carry what cannot be changed, and still finding a way to live.

Perhaps, in time, your teenager will come to discover something quiet but powerful:

That even in a world that has shown its worst, they are still capable of building something meaningful, connected, and real. And you as a parent, guardian or caregiver - simply by your presence —are part of how that becomes possible.

A GENTLE UNDERSTANDING OF "GRIEF IN DOSES"

Teenagers rarely grieve in a steady, continuous way. Instead, their experience often comes in waves—intense, overwhelming moments of sadness followed by periods that look surprisingly ordinary. One moment they may be grieving deeply; the next, they are laughing with friends, focusing on school, or returning to familiar routines.

This pattern is sometimes described as grieving in "doses."

Although J. William Worden, a leading voice in grief theory, did not formally use the term, his work recognises this natural rhythm—particularly in children and teenagers. Grief, for them, is not something they can sustain all at once. It is something they approach gradually, in manageable pieces, stepping in and out as they are able.

A GENTLE UNDERSTANDING OF "GRIEF IN DOSES"

Worden's Tasks of Mourning offer a helpful framework for understanding this process.

Teenagers, like adults, are working—often unevenly—through four essential tasks:

1. Accepting the reality of the loss
2. Processing the pain of grief
3. Adjusting to a world without the person who died
4. Maintaining a lasting connection while continuing with life

For teenagers, these tasks are not completed in a straight line. Instead, they move back and forth between them, often returning to earlier stages as new experiences, milestones, or anniversaries bring fresh waves of feeling.

What this can look like in everyday life:

- Deep sadness that appears suddenly, then fades
- Engagement in normal activities as a natural break from grief
- Periods of silence about the loss, followed by a need to talk
- Grief resurfacing at birthdays, anniversaries, or key life moments



This "dosing" is not avoidance or denial.

It is a form of protection.

It allows teenagers to face something overwhelming without being consumed by it, taking in just enough at a time to survive, to adapt, and slowly, to heal.

SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

As this booklet draws to a close, AdVIC are here to support you and your family. There are also other organisations that offer different types of support and care.

Anam Cara

Supports bereaved parents and extended families that have lost a child, by offering information, resources, practical advice and updates on community based events around Ireland.

ROI: +353 1 4045378 **NI:** +44 028 95213120

Email: info@anamcara.ie **Website:** www.anamcara.ie

Barnardos Bereavement Service

Offers specialist support for bereaved children, young people, and families, as well as information and resources on childhood grief. Supported by Tusla and by the Victims of Crime, department of Justice.

Children's Bereavement Helpline ROI: +353 1 473 2110 Mon - Thur 10am to 12pm

Dublin Office: +353 1 8134100 **Cork Office:** +353 21 4357679

Email: bereavement@barnardos.ie **Website:** www.barnardos.ie

Childline (ISPCC)

Provides a free, private and confidential 24-hour listening service for children and young people up to 18 years of age, covering topics like bullying, abuse, online safety, emotions and mental health and more.

Childline (ISPCC) **Phone:** 1800 66 66 66 **Website:** www.childline.ie

The Irish Childhood Bereavement Network

The ICBN is a member organisation. Members share a vision that all children and young people, together with the adults in their lives, can easily access a choice of high quality local and national information, guidance and support to enable them to manage the impact of death on their lives.

Phone: +353 1 679 3188

Email: icbn@hospicefoundation.ie **Website:** www.childhoodbereavement.ie

SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

Play Therapy Ireland

They are dedicated to promoting the use of play and creative arts therapies as ways of enabling children to reach their full potential. Ireland's only level 9 Play Therapy courses.

Email: supervision@ptukorg.com **Website:** www.playtherapy.ie

Rainbows Ireland

Provides peer group support for children and young people experiencing grief due to bereavement, parental separation, or family breakdown. Their groups create a safe, compassionate space where children and young people can feel free to talk about difficult things.

Phone: +353 1 473 4175 **Parent Support:** ask@rainbowsireland.ie

Other Queries: admin@rainbowsireland.ie **Website:** www.rainbowsireland.ie

Samaritans

Samaritans provides a lifeline and offers emotional support at any time for anyone who is struggling to cope or who needs someone to listen without judgement.

Freecall: 116 123

Email: jo@samaritans.ie **Website:** www.samaritans.org

Support After Homicide

This is a free confidential service provided by trained volunteers, which provides emotional support and practical information to people in the ROI whose lives have been affected by homicide.

ROI: 087 983 7322

Email: support@supportafterhomicide.ie **Website:** www.supportafterhomicide.ie

Widow.ie

This is an online information and self-help resource and community for widows, widowers and bereaved life partners in Ireland.

Phone: 083 438 8035 **Website:** www.widow.ie

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NOTES :

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AdVIC
advocates for victims of homicide

Helping families and friends to survive the trauma of homicide by providing one to one free counselling service and homicide bereavement support groups.

TEL: 1800 852 000

Many families reported that their trauma was exacerbated by the fact that they did not know their rights, or understand the system. One of our objectives was to help families' access relevant information. We at AdVIC have tried to collate as much of this information as possible in one location, on this website.

www.advic.ie

Even in the saddest goodbyes,

hope grows where love remains.

TUSLA
An Ghníomhaireacht um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

RTÉ TOY SHOW APPEAL
Community Foundation Ireland

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Department of Justice