

# life changes

loss, change and bereavement  
for children aged 3-11 years old



# Contents

- 04 **Introduction**
- 06 **Acknowledgements**

## SECTION 1:

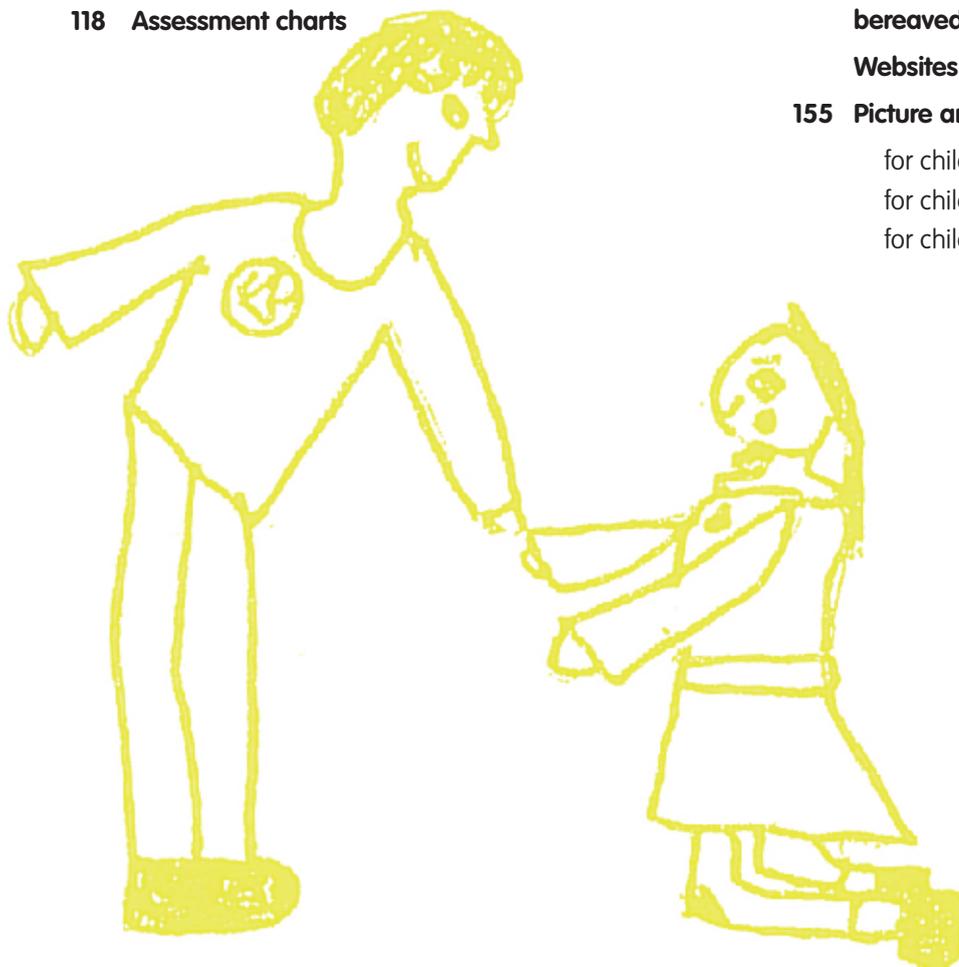
- 08 **The impact of loss, change and bereavement in the lives of children**
- 10 **Children's understanding of loss and grief**
- 15 **Children's questions about death and dying**
- 17 **Telling sad things and breaking bad news**
- 18 **School scenarios**
  - A three year old child
  - A four year old child
  - A five year old child
  - A six year old child
  - A seven year old child
  - An eight year old child
  - A nine year old child
  - A ten/eleven year old child
- 25 **Participating in funerals and rituals**
- 27 **Children's grief responses**
  - Children anticipating a parent's death
  - Children anticipating a grandparent's death
  - Talking about a parent or grandparent who is dying
  - The death of a teacher
  - The dying child
  - The dying sibling
  - Sudden death
- 38 **Using the confidential record and assessment charts**
- 44 **Death and dying in faith and secular contexts**
  - The Buddhist Community
  - The Christian Community
  - The Hindu Community
  - The Jewish Community
  - The Muslim Community
  - The Sikh Community
  - Secular Perspectives
- 48 **Contact details for religious and secular communities**

## SECTION 2:

- 50 **Classroom activities, children's sayings, stories and poems, and assemblies**
- 51 **Classroom activities**
  - 1 Silly Billy
  - 2 The rainbow of feelings
  - 3 Talking about feelings
  - 4 The ball of emotion
  - 5 Teddy bear masks
  - 6 The first aid kit
  - 7 My family tree
  - 8 Paper chains
  - 9 A little box of big thoughts
  - 10 Salt jar
  - 11 Windows into the future
  - 12 The parachute
  - 13 Snakes and ladders
  - 14 The puzzle person
  - 15 With love
  - 16 Things that I dream about at night
  - 17 Sweet memories (for 3 – 7 year olds)
  - 18 Saying 'goodbye' (for 7 – 11 year olds)
  - 19 A card to remember
  - 20 Media coverage
  - 21 Writing a letter
  - 22 Explaining loss and change in a story
- 84 **Children's sayings, stories and poems**
  - Children's sayings: what happens when you die?
  - Story: Knowing my dad died
  - Story: God? My mum died
  - Child's poem: Feelings
  - Child's poem: The leaf
  - Child's poem: Sadness
- 92 **Assemblies**
  - 1: Change
  - 2: Memories
  - 3: Saying 'goodbye'
  - 4: Caring for others

## SECTION 3:

- 98 **Children's responses to adverse life changing events**
- 100 Children and trauma
- 102 Divorce
- 104 Suicide
- 106 The children of prisoners
- 109 Young carers
- 111 Refugee children
- 114 Children of parents/carers in the armed forces
- 116 Talking to children about disasters
- 118 Assessment charts



My teacher helped me when I was upset  
(Parvin, aged 9)

## SECTION 4:

- 124 **Life changes – a school response**
- 126 Managing a critical incident in school
- 134 Bereavement Case Study:  
Westbury Leigh C of E Primary School
- 136 Responding to sad events in school
- 138 Staff self awareness workshop: John's story
- 140 Staff curriculum workshop: Including the topic of life changes across the curriculum
- 152 Teachers' resources
- 154 National organisations offering support for bereaved children
- Websites for schools
- 155 **Picture and story books**
  - for children aged 3 – 5 years old
  - for children aged 5 – 7 years old
  - for children aged 9 – 11 years old

# Introduction

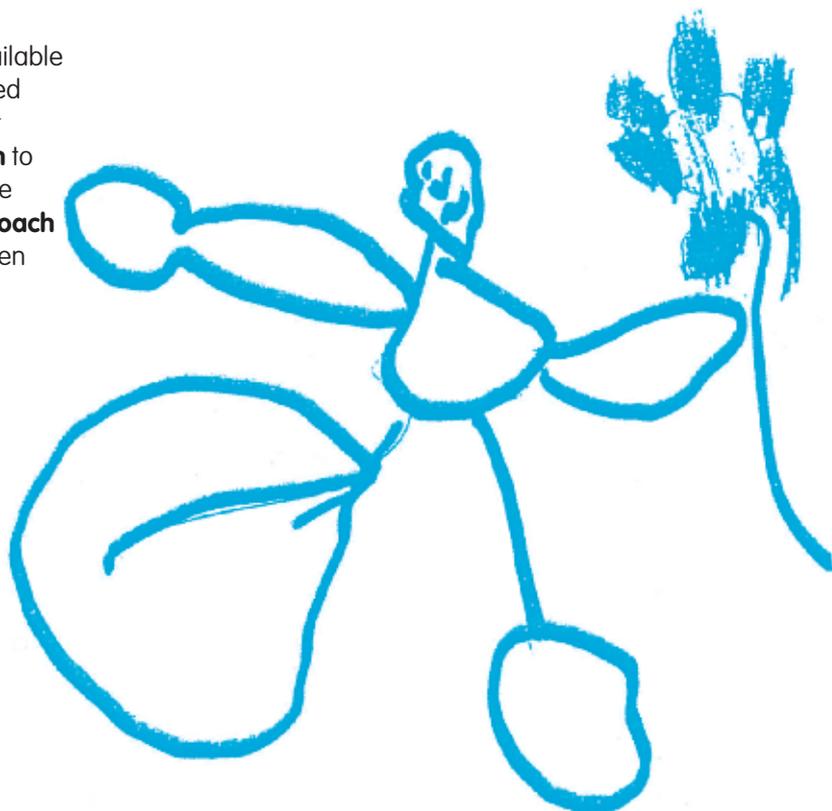
Everyone will experience aspects of loss and change throughout their life, but there are some loss and change experiences which do not happen to everyone. These may be called 'circumstantial losses' and include situations such as family breakdown, homelessness, the death of a relative or friend, imprisonment and serious illness or injury. Some adverse experiences can have both immediate and long-term consequences, particularly for children. Grief is a human response to loss, and mourning is the way in which grief is expressed. Grief incorporates a myriad of emotional, behavioural (affective) and cognitive manifestations, both in adults and in children. Whatever the circumstances, the death of the person is not only a loss, it is a change and a turning point: the world will never be the same again.

Arguably the most damaging situations are those which are harmful to the child-family relationship, but there are numerous events in children's lives which may have potentially damaging physical, social and emotional consequences. School communities often have to support children who are facing loss. Teachers are naturally concerned to develop good practice.

There is an increasingly wide range of resources available to support schools in the help they may offer bereaved children. There is, however, a paucity of material that addresses both a **proactive whole school approach** to loss and change in children's lives (teaching about life experience of loss and change) and a **reactive approach** that gives guidance on how best to help children when sad things happen.

## This Toolkit aims to:

- Provide adults with an insight into children's developmental understanding of death and how they grieve;
- Support schools in a proactive approach to including the subject of loss and change, in myriad forms, in the curriculum;
- Suggest reactive approaches and strategies for caring for bereaved children and those undergoing loss and change in a variety of circumstances;
- Provide a springboard for discussion, so that school communities can develop their own policy and practice matched to the individual needs of children and their families.



*My teacher made the colours come in my insides again  
Matthew aged 3 years 6 months*

## Life changes is divided into four sections:

### SECTION 1:

**The impact of loss, change and bereavement in the lives of children** describes children's experiences and understanding of loss and grief, and how schools may support them proactively and reactively. Schools are offered advice and support about how to break bad news to a child and children's questions about death and dying are explored. Rites and rituals surrounding death are described with references to help teachers to access information from faith communities so that a family's cultural needs are met. The end of the section provides a framework for assessing children's emotional, physical, cognitive and behavioural responses to loss and change.

### SECTION 2:

**Classroom activities** provides school staff with a range of 'tried and trusted' classroom activities that may be used both proactively and reactively to focus discussion upon loss and change.

### Section 3:

**Children's responses to adverse life changing events** considers how children are likely to be affected by different types of loss, including traumatic events such as parental suicide, family breakdown or being a young carer. Each event illustrated is supported by scenarios and both proactive and reactive ways of supporting children are suggested. An assessment sheet is included for teachers to record a child's emotional, physical, cognitive and behavioural responses.

### SECTION 4:

**Life changes – a school response** provides advice and potential strategies for schools to manage a critical incident and respond to sad events. It contains two workshops intended to allow schools both to raise staff awareness and to develop a whole school approach to life changes through the curriculum. A list of recommended teacher's resources, information about organisations offering support to bereaved children and a list of picture and story books for 3 – 11 year olds about bereavement, grief, loss and change is provided in this section.

**Life changes** is not intended to provide guidance in the theory of counselling children. It is first and foremost a practical resource with practical ideas. Talking about loss, change and grief is a complex task. Schools have an enormously important role in supporting children and equipping them for later life as adults in a fast changing world.

## Trialling the draft materials

The draft materials were trialled in a number of primary schools in order to inform the final draft version. The comments received were extremely positive, including:

**'I think it is a very full and comprehensive resource that would be a very useful addition to any school'**

Jackie Millier,

Worlebury St Paul's C of E Primary School

**'Very impressive! Very user-friendly'** Bruce Dale,  
Mendip Green First School

**'1st – well done to all who have worked on this excellent resource! Completely user-friendly. Very informative – extremely useful'** Tricia Oates,

Healthy Schools Coordinator,  
Bexley

**'Comprehensive package. Up to date ideas. Really liked the draft copy – lots of hard work gone into it'**

Andrea Davis,

St Mark's VA Primary School

**'The variety of situations covered is wonderful and very helpful in terms of looking at things from a child's perspective'**

Sarah Timms,

Locking Primary School

**'Will really be useful for schools as I haven't seen anything similar with practical ideas built into it'**

Naomi Anstice,

Frodsham Manor House Primary School

**'Brilliant! It's so informative!'**

Suzy Cahill,

Becket Primary School