

# Time to Talk

## Consultation Response Form

The closing date for this consultation is: 19  
October 2007

Your comments must reach us by that date.

department for  
**children, schools and families**

**THIS FORM IS NOT INTERACTIVE. If you wish to respond electronically please use the online or offline response facility available on the Department for Children, Schools and Families e-consultation website (<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations>).**

The information you provide in your response will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations, which allow public access to information held by the Department. This does not necessarily mean that your response can be made available to the public as there are exemptions relating to information provided in confidence and information to which the Data Protection Act 1998 applies. You may request confidentiality by ticking the box provided, but you should note that neither this, nor an automatically-generated e-mail confidentiality statement, will necessarily exclude the public right of access.

**Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.**

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If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation please telephone the Department's national enquiry line on 0870 000 2288 or email [info@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:info@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk)

If you have a query relating to the consultation process you can contact the Consultation Unit on:

Telephone: 01928 794888  
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e-mail: [consultation.unit@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:consultation.unit@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk)

Please select the category that best describes you.

<input type="checkbox"/> Parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Work with children and young people	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
<input type="checkbox"/> Parent/Work with children and young people	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent/Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> Work with children and young people/Other (please specify)

The **Childhood Bereavement Network** (CBN) is the national, multi-professional network of organisations and individuals working in the field of childhood bereavement. CBN promotes the interests of bereaved children, young people and their families and encourages the development of quality support for them. We have over 300 subscribers across the UK including all the major bereavement care providers.

## 1 What have been your best experiences of support for children, young people and their families?

Children and young people who took part in our Video Talkshops project between 2002 and 2005 talked about the support they had received after the death of someone close. They talked about support from friends, family, teachers, specialist childhood bereavement services and others.

*My mum helped me because she always was open to talk about when it happened and when my dad was ill she told us everything that happened. Some of my mum's friends said she was too open with us and she shouldn't tell us as much.* Girl, 6-12

*During that time my friends were sort of really helpful. They tried to take my mind off of it so to speak and even now, sometimes when I get sad about my dad dying, they're like 'are you all right?'* Boy, 13-18

*In Year 2 I had a teacher ... and she was nice because her parents had died so she helped me. Then when [people in my class] picked on me I'd just go up to her and she would just tell me something and make me better.* Boy, 6-12

*When my little sister died I went to [a service] and we had special days out where we made memory boxes and went to a bowling alley and that helped me to cope.* Girl, 13-18

*As time went on I found it easier to deal with it because I went to counselling and they told me it was all right to laugh and cry and I found different ways to get rid of my stress and emotions and things like that. Now I feel a lot happier, well, yes, happier, but I still miss my mum but I think it's got easier.* Girl, 13-18

Good support for bereaved children, young people and their families involves

- Information and education to understand death and what it means to them
- Communication to be encouraged to talk honestly with one another
- Opportunities to understand and express their feelings and thoughts of grief
- Opportunities to meet others and share similar experiences
- Opportunities to remember the person who has died for as long as they choose

Responsibility for providing these opportunities is shared between families, communities, statutory children's services and the voluntary and community sector. Under the Every Child Matters framework, all those working with children and young people have a part to play in ensuring that those who have been bereaved get the support they want and need.

## 2 What would you stop or improve about support for children, young people and families?

The Childhood Bereavement Network received over 900 responses to its recent survey of public attitudes to bereavement in childhood. We asked respondents for one suggestion to improve the lives of bereaved children and young people in the UK. Most popular was someone who would love and care for them, listen properly, acknowledge that something important had happened in the child's life, and make time for them:

*Having a trusted adult that they can turn to without any time limits.* Member of the children's workforce.

*Ensuring there is someone there for them at all times - so they know they are not alone.* Member of the public

*Encourage adults to talk to children in a normal, everyday way about the dead person and what happened, and how the child feels.* Parent of bereaved child

Second was the availability of accessible services:

*Bereavement Workshops to help them feel less isolated and teach them coping strategies* Parent of bereaved child

*Having somewhere more well known to go and get support if they feel they need it.* Member of the general public

*Access to a choice of support options.* Bereavement care provider

Almost as popular was the opportunity to meet other children and young people in the same circumstances:

*Having a network of other children/young adults who have experienced the loss of someone close to them. This may encourage them to speak out and open up without being judged by parents or adults.* Parent of bereaved child

*Somewhere to go to talk to people their age that understand.* Member of the general public

Many respondents felt that society needed to be more open and acknowledging of death and children's grief:

*It should not be a taboo subject amongst society. It is sadly a natural part of life.* Member of the general public

And many wanted to see training for those working with children and young people:

*I believe there should be funding available for training and supervision in every area, so that any adult coming into contact with a bereaved child or young person and their family can feel confident in providing some level of appropriate support as and when it is needed.* Bereavement care provider.

Some wanted greater awareness of services that were in existence:

*More coverage in the press and media to let them know where the support can be found if they want it.* Parent of bereaved child

Others wanted support to be available in schools. Some also talked about the

importance of education about death and bereavement:

*Teachers and other people should know where such children can get extra help - although sometimes children just want to go to school as this is a kind of normality in an otherwise stressful time. There perhaps should be one teacher or adult in each school that can be there should a child need to talk. Different families deal with the subject in different ways.* Member of the general public

*I think as with the other stages of life death should be on the timetable at school with opportunities for young people to take things further eventually in terms of studying death and dying.... They will all die at some point - and they will know someone who will die – let's take the mystery out of it.* Member of the children's workforce

Other respondents mentioned the importance of services specifically for parents, funding for specialist services, availability of information and resources, websites and helplines for young people, and strategies and systems in place in schools and other settings.

Aware that some bereaved children, young people and their families struggle to get the help and support they want and need, the Childhood Bereavement Network's *Grief Matters for Children* campaign calls for appropriate support to be available to all, wherever they live and however they have been bereaved. To help this to happen, we want

1. Parents and carers of bereaved children to be offered information and appropriate support for their parenting or caring role
2. More training and support for the children's workforce, to give them the skills and confidence to address bereaved children's diverse needs
3. A better understanding of the diverse cultural, spiritual, language and access needs of bereaved children, young people and their families, in order to develop more appropriate support and services
4. More childhood bereavement services, with reliable financial and human resources to sustain them and robust evaluation to show the difference they make
5. Support for bereaved children and young people to be included in local plans and commissioning
6. Inspection frameworks for children's services to examine how bereavement support is provided
7. Plans for individual children who are already vulnerable (eg those looked after by the local authority and those in custody) to include the provision of bereavement support
8. Government to monitor and report on the number of children and young people bereaved annually of a parent or sibling, in order to plan policy and practice development.

### 3 What needs to happen so that support is tailored to meet the needs of individual children and young people?

Grief is a personal reaction to the loss of a particular person. Each child or young person's personality and experience is unique to them, and following a bereavement, their reactions will vary. The meaning which the lost relationship had for them is very important (Ribbens McCarthy and Jessop, 2005). Many other factors within the family and the community - and around the death itself - affect how a child or young person responds. These include whether they expected the death to happen, whether they feel responsible for the death, how their surviving parent(s) or carers manage to look after them, and how much support is available to them and their family following the death.

The death of a parent or sibling is often followed by a series of further changes within the family, such as moving house, changing roles, new routines and new financial constraints, which can be very significant to the child or young person (Worden, 1996). Bereavement can be particularly difficult in the lives of children and young people who are already disadvantaged, or who have experienced multiple losses (Ribbens McCarthy and Jessop, 2005). Some deaths such as suicide, murder and drug overdose can be particularly difficult to deal with. Traumatic bereavements may cause a variety of traumatic stress reactions among children and young people which can complicate their experiences of bereavement (Yule, 2005).

Given the factors impacting on bereavement, children, young people and their families need to be involved in determining appropriate support. This can include

- schools making a plan with a child or young person and their family about how they will manage the return to class following the death of someone close. The plan needs to allow flexibility for needs to change over time
- effective referral pathways between universal services, targeted support and specialist childhood bereavement service so that responding to bereavement support needs is seen as a shared responsibility
- bereavement support needs being included in the CAF and in assessments when children and young people come into care or are in contact with a youth offending team
- information being made available to children, young people and their families about the range of services available to them.

### 4 What do you think your role is and what more could you do for children to be happy, healthy and safe?

Subscribers to the Childhood Bereavement Network share a vision in which *'all children and young people in the UK, together with their families and other caregivers, 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'*. All subscribers to CBN have a role to play in realising this vision. CBN's own aims are to

- raise awareness of the needs of bereaved children, and the services available to them,
- support our network of subscribers in their development and delivery of a range of high quality, accessible childhood bereavement services,
- influence national, regional and local policy in the interests of bereaved children, young people, their families and other caregivers,
- extend the capacity of the children's workforce to respond to the needs of bereaved children.

5 What is the role of parents – mums, dads, carers - and what more support do they need?

Parents and other relatives play the crucial role in helping children and young people to manage the impact of death on their lives. A US community based study of children and young people indicated that the way the surviving parent functioned was the most powerful predictor of how a child adjusted to the death of a parent (Worden 1996).

Children and young people value the practical and emotional support they receive from family members:

*'[My mum] makes the same decisions as my dad used to do and she does it with the family'* Boy, 13-16

*'When we were going through a bereavement my brother was really good. He's not a domestic kind of person but he likes to do the washing up and he cooked meals for us and made tea and he was really nice to me, which is unusual!'* Girl, 13-16

This study found that family factors associated with children doing better (ie having fewer emotional and behavioural difficulties) included continued routines, the surviving parent being physically and emotionally available, consistent discipline, a parent who perceived the child's needs and behaviour in similar way to how the child perceived it, and active coping strategies.

However, while adults are mourning themselves, it can be an enormous struggle to manage new responsibilities and financial constraints and maintain availability to the children. Parents say they want information about bereavement in childhood to help them understand children's grief, and about local and national sources of support which they can access easily for themselves and their children. Parents in one study talked about why they accessed specialist childhood bereavement support: to meet their own emotional needs and support their parenting, to meet the needs of a particular child, and to help family unit. They all saw benefits to their involvement with a service. including being helped to manage their own pain and grief. and supported

and reassured in their care for their children (Rolls, 2007).

Many children and young people in public care have experienced the death of a close family member or friend. Foster carers and residential workers caring for these children face particular challenges in supporting them through bereavement. They may not know the person who has died or the circumstances of the death, so it can be difficult to help a child understand what has happened and help them with memories of the person. They may be unprepared for the behaviour of a young person following the death of someone close, or reminded of their own losses and vulnerabilities. Placement instability can mean that children and young people lose 'potentially supportive ongoing relationships with professionals' (CBN, 2007). Foster carers and residential workers need training and support in caring for bereaved children and young people, and to be part of a wider network of support with input from education, health and specialist childhood bereavement services.

We want all parents and carers of bereaved children to have access to appropriate information and support to help them in their caring role.

## 6 What is the role of the local community and what more could they do?

Local communities play an important role in supporting bereaved children, young people and their families directly. Their contribution to specialist, community based childhood bereavement services through volunteering, fundraising and other support is also of tremendous value. 82% childhood bereavement services receive donations and legacies, and 79% receive income from fundraising activities (Rolls and Payne, 2003).

Many respondents in our survey of attitudes to bereavement in childhood talked of the need for a general shift in the way that society thinks about death and bereavement. They felt the following could help:

*Society to be comfortable talking about death.* Parent of a bereaved child

*Educating other people about the effects of bereavement on children so that they feel understood and supported rather than different and avoided because of fear on the part of those who deal with them in and out of school.* Bereavement care provider

*A recognition throughout society that children deserve respect and understanding in all aspects of their lives and - consequently - consideration at times of particular pain or difficulty.* Member of the general public

This cultural change is a shared responsibility between individuals and communities.

## 7 What is the role of Government and what more could they do?

The needs of bereaved children are currently overlooked at a national level. While pockets of excellent practice and service delivery exist locally, without national recognition and responsibility this will remain patchy. To help ensure that all bereaved children, young people and their families have access to support, wherever they live and however they have been bereaved, we are currently asking the Government to commit to five simple measures

- a duty to be placed on all children's services authorities to demonstrate how they meet bereaved children's needs
- training on bereavement in childhood to become part of standard training for teachers, with courses made available to existing school staff
- responsibility for bereavement issues to be taken by a senior manager in every school and early years setting
- information on bereavement and sources of support to be available to parents, carers, professionals, children and young people
- data on the number and ethnicity of children and young people bereaved of a parent or sibling to be collected and reported upon each year.

## 8 What more needs to happen to keep children and young people out of trouble?

Some studies suggest higher rates of aggressive or disruptive behaviours among parentally bereaved children and young people than among the general population (Ribbens McCarthy, 2005). Others have shown young people bereaved of a parent to be over-represented among those supervised by their local Youth Offending Team (Youth Justice Trust, 2004) and among those convicted of the gravest crimes (Boswell, 1996). This is not evidence of a causal link between bereavement and offending: nevertheless support following the death of a close person can help to equip children and young people with ways of coping which minimise risk to themselves and their communities.

## 9 Do you have any further comments?

Comments:

10 Please let us have your views on responding to this consultation (e.g. the number and type of questions, whether it was easy to find, understand and complete etc.).

Comments:

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

**Please acknowledge this reply**

Here at the Department for Children, Schools and Families we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, would it be alright if we were to contact you again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

X Yes

No

All UK national public consultations are required to conform to the following standards:

1. Consult widely throughout the process, allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultation at least once during the development of the policy.
2. Be clear about what your proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.
3. Ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.
4. Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation process influenced the policy.
5. Monitor your department's effectiveness at consultation, including through the use of a designated consultation co-ordinator.
6. Ensure your consultation follows better regulation best practice, including carrying out a Regulatory Impact Assessment if appropriate.

Further information on the Code of Practice can be accessed through the Cabinet Office Website: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/regulation/consultation-guidance/content/introduction/index.asp>

**Thank you for taking time to respond to this consultation.**

Completed questionnaires and other responses should be sent to the address shown below by 19 October 2007

Send by post to:  
Consultation Unit - Area 1A

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