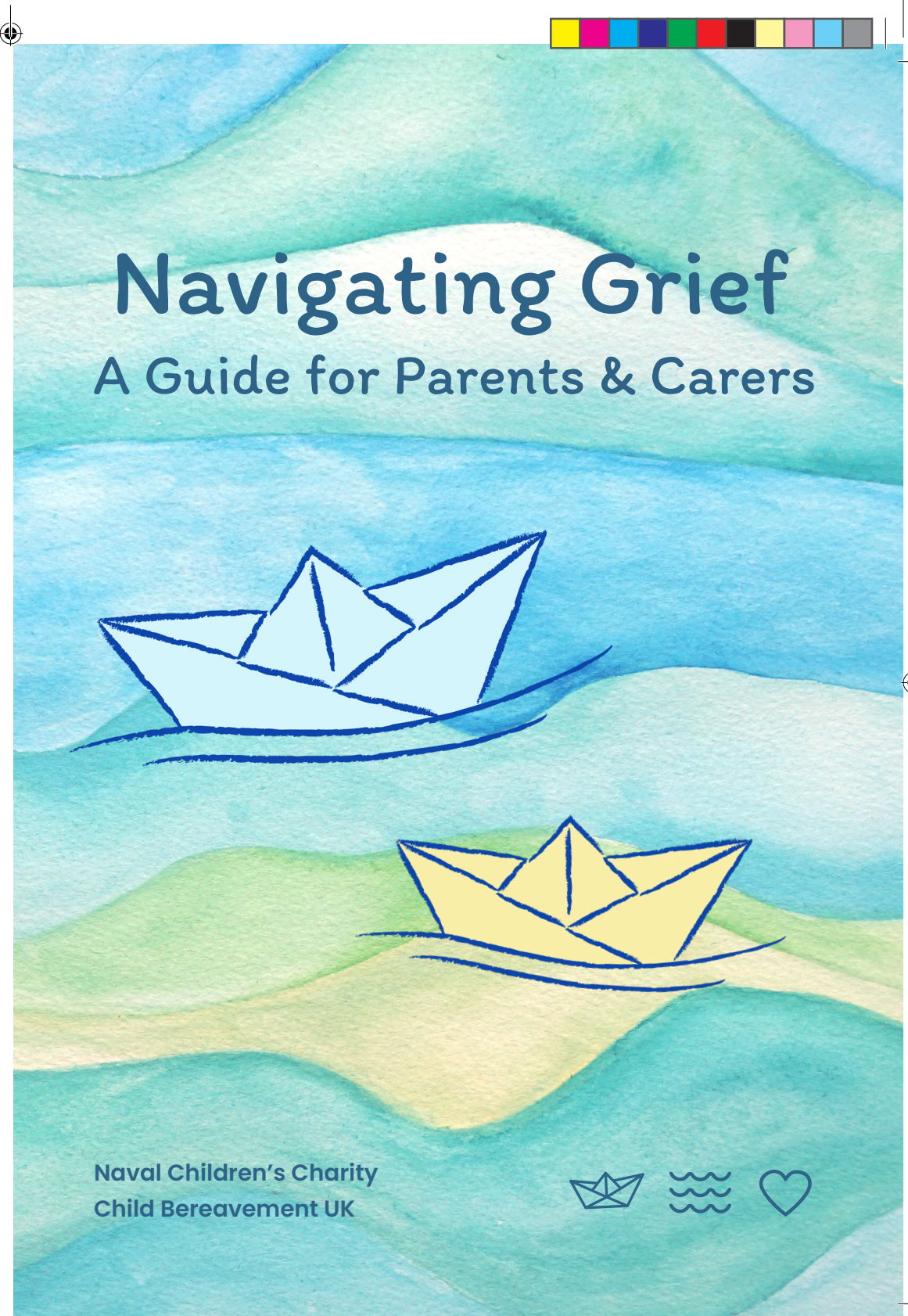




This booklet has been written by **Holly Arkle, Ella Baragwanath, Marcus Besley and Ben Hanby** as bereaved Naval children to help other children and families. They worked as a group over several months with **Sophie Cartwright and Maria Tolley** from Child Bereavement UK.





Introduction

Clare Scherer, Chief Executive, Naval Children's Charity


The Naval Children's Charity, together with Child Bereavement UK, brought together this group of young people to help us explore bereavement support for our Naval children with an additional focus on understanding how those, bereaved earlier in life, were being supported as they transitioned through into adulthood. We were interested to understand how their experience has formed them and what could be done to help support other bereaved Naval children. In response to our call to action four of our Naval young people agreed to work together and have developed this booklet for families, as well as the accompanying booklet for children from the age of 7+, giving insight into their own experiences and tips on how to cope. We hope that you will find this booklet useful to help you through your own loss.

Ann Chalmers, Chief Executive, Child Bereavement UK

The Naval Children's Charity approached Child Bereavement UK asking if we could establish a pilot group for bereaved young adults they support. We were pleased to help as we have been running facilitated support groups for young people for many years and know that bereaved young people gain a great deal from meeting with others in a similar situation. Together they talk about their feelings and what helps them, and develop tools and strategies to help them become more resilient. This guide developed by the young people supported by the Naval Children's Charity will be enormously helpful to others who have experienced the death of someone important to them, helping them to find ways to cope with their grief and to know that they are not alone.



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Children's understanding of death at different ages...

Children under 2 years of age

Babies and young children have no understanding of the concept of death, but long before they are able to talk, babies are likely to react to upset and changes in their environment brought about by the absence of a significant person who responded to their needs for care and nourishment on a daily basis. They will also be impacted by emotional withdrawal that may happen if a parent or main carer is bereaved.

Up to the age of 6 months, babies will experience a sense of abandonment and insecurity which may result in increased crying and disruption of sleep and feeding. From around the age of 8 months or so, babies begin to develop a 'mental image' of the person who has died and have a sense of 'missing them'. Babies at this age may cry more or become more withdrawn; they may lose interest in toys or food and, as they develop motor skills and language, may call out for or search for the person who has died. You can help by giving lots of reassurance, and by keeping to normal routines as much as possible.



Children aged 2 to 5 years

Young children are interested in the idea of death in birds and animals. They can begin to use the word 'dead' and develop an awareness that this is different to being alive. Children of this age do not understand abstract concepts like 'forever' and cannot grasp that death is permanent. Their limited understanding may lead to an apparent lack of reaction when told about a death, and they may ask many questions about where the person who has died is and when that person will come back.



Children at this age expect the person to return. Young children tend to interpret what they are told in a literal and concrete way; therefore, it is important to avoid offering explanations of death such as 'lost', 'gone away' or 'gone to sleep' that may cause misunderstandings and confusion. Provide honest answers to their questions but do not feel you have to tell them everything in detail or all at once. Information can be built on over time.

Children may have disrupted sleep, altered appetite, less interest in play and may become more anxious about separation even when being left with familiar adults. There may be regression in skills such as language or toilet training.



Children of primary school age

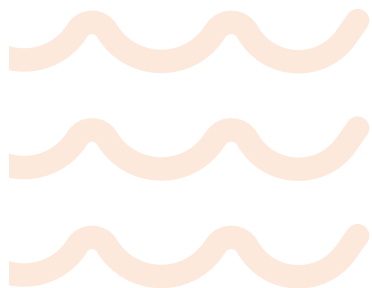
Between the ages of 5 and 7 years, children gradually begin to develop an understanding that death is permanent and irreversible and that the person who has died will not return. Children who have been bereaved when they were younger will have to re-process what has happened as they develop awareness of the finality of death.

Children's imagination and 'magical thinking' at this age can mean that some children may believe that their thoughts or actions caused the death, and they can feel guilty. Not being given sufficient information in age-appropriate language can lead them to make up and fill in the gaps in their knowledge.

Children increasingly become aware that death is an inevitable part of life that happens to all living things. As a result, they can become anxious about their own, and others', health and safety.

Children at this age need honest answers to their questions that can be built on over time, and opportunities to express their feelings.

They can need reassurance that nothing they said or thought caused the death.



Teenagers

Adolescence is a time of great change and grief impacts on the developmental task of moving from dependence to independence. Young people are moving from familial ties to increased involvement with peers. It can be difficult to ask for support while trying to demonstrate independence. Young people do not like to feel different from their peers in any way and being a bereaved young person can be extremely isolating. The support of peers with similar experiences can be very powerful.

Teenagers will have an adult understanding of the concept of death but often have their own beliefs and strongly held views, and may challenge the beliefs and explanations offered by others.

Some young people may respond to a death by becoming more withdrawn, some may 'act out' their distress while others cope with the awareness of their own mortality through risk-taking behaviour in an attempt to get back some control where life feels out of control for them. Others may take on adult responsibilities and become 'the carer' for those around them. Keeping to the usual boundaries of acceptable behaviour can be reassuring for bereaved young people.

Young people who have been bereaved at an earlier age may need to re-process their grief as they think about and plan for their future and fully understand the impact of life without the person who died.





What we would like parents/carers to know

The child will often be able to sense what is going on and perhaps know or understand more than you realise. Children often fill in their gaps of knowledge using their imagination, this can sometimes be much worse than the reality. Be open and honest in an age appropriate way.

Remember grief is a normal, natural process and it is ok to show your emotions and for your young person to see you expressing emotion. This lets them know it is ok for them to express their emotions too.

You might notice your young people change; they may mature more quickly and try to take on lots of extra responsibilities or you may notice regressive behaviours such as bedwetting or separation anxiety. It is often very helpful to talk to your child or young person about any changes you have noticed.

Make time for yourself to grieve too. It's ok to reach out and ask for support from those around you.

Although it may be very hard to talk about the person who died, it can be very helpful for children and young people to have the opportunity to talk about and remember them. Often saying something is better than saying nothing. For a young person this helps reassure them it's ok to talk about them.

Putting things aside for a young person to have when they are older can include personal items belonging to the person who died, such as a watch or favourite jumper, but could also be things such as cards and messages of support which may include other people's memories.

Be mindful that some changes and life events may be more challenging for bereaved young people and may cause them to re-visit their grief. Moving schools, puberty, passing their driving test or getting married are all examples of when a young person may feel the absence of their person more strongly.

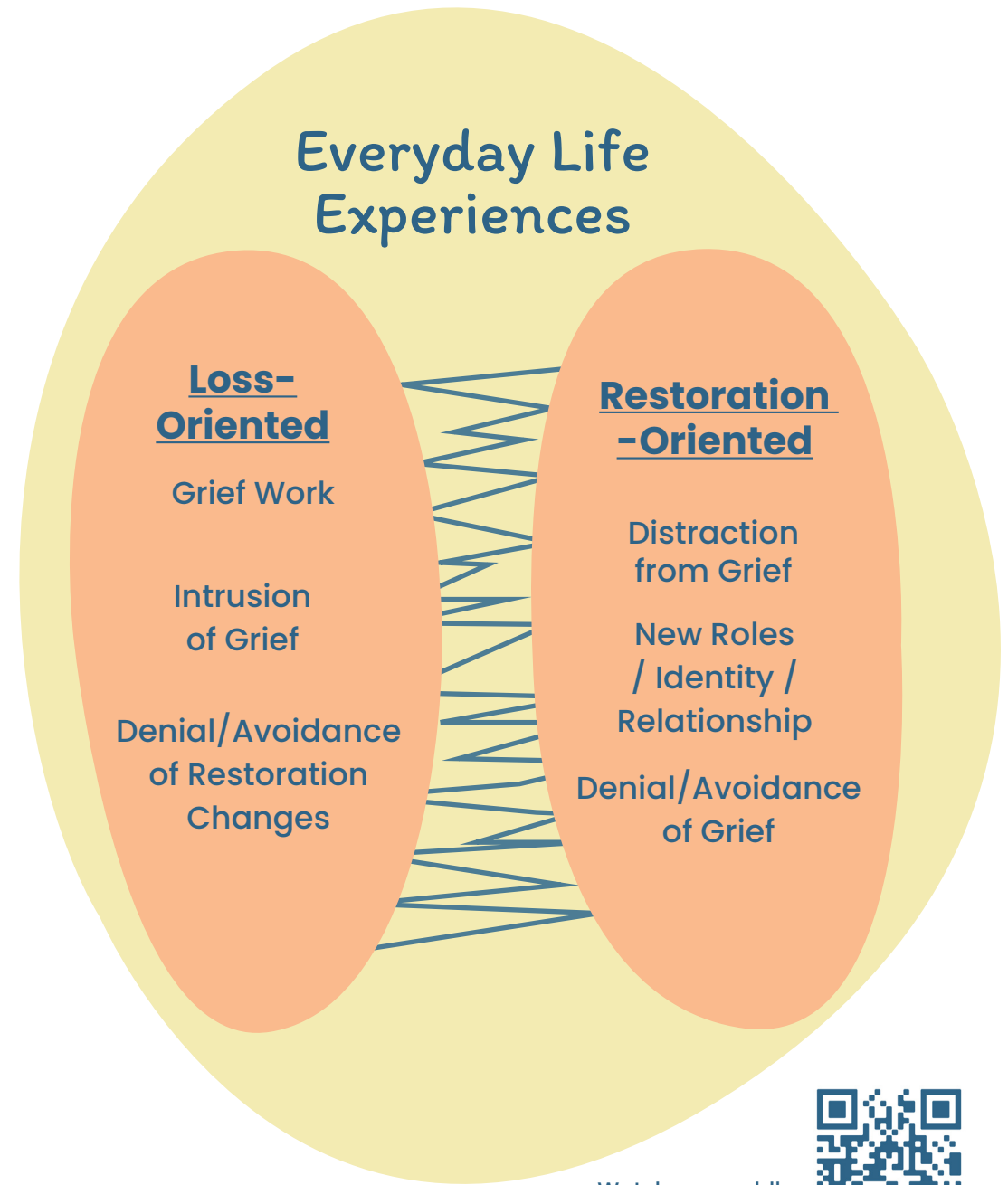


Grief - Dual process model

This model of grief at first looks a little complicated but the 2 orange blobs represent the two extremes of grief, loss-oriented on the left which focuses on grieving and remembering the person who died, whilst the restoration phase on the other side focuses on distraction, avoidance and getting on with life.

The zig-zag line between the two represents that as we grieve, we move between the two; for example getting on with life and keeping busy, then crying and feeling desperately sad, then distracting ourselves with other things. Children and young people are very good at doing this and they naturally 'jump' between the two - we call this 'puddle jumping'. We often find that the younger a child is, the faster they will move between each side. Unfortunately, this is often misunderstood as when we see a child playing outside and seemingly happy, we might think they are 'OK' or 'better' and if a few minutes later they are in floods of tears, we are confused. Yet this is just part of their grieving process.

Young children cannot sustain long periods of sadness and will naturally 'jump' between the two.



Watch our puddle jumping video





Supporting children whose parents serve or have served in the Naval Service.

We help children with a wide range of needs especially at times of a family crisis. If you think you may need some help you can contact us in the office, visit our website for more information or go through RN FPS (Royal Navy Family and People Support)

www.navalchildrenscharity.org.uk
Call our Helpline 023 9263 9534



Child Bereavement UK helps families to rebuild their lives when a child grieves or when a child dies. We support children and young people (up to the age of 25) when someone important to them has died or is not expected to live, and parents and the wider family when a baby or child of any age dies or is dying. We offer free, confidential bereavement support by telephone, video or instant messenger, as well as face to face from a number of locations across the UK.

www.childbereavementuk.org
Call our Helpline 0800 02 888 40

