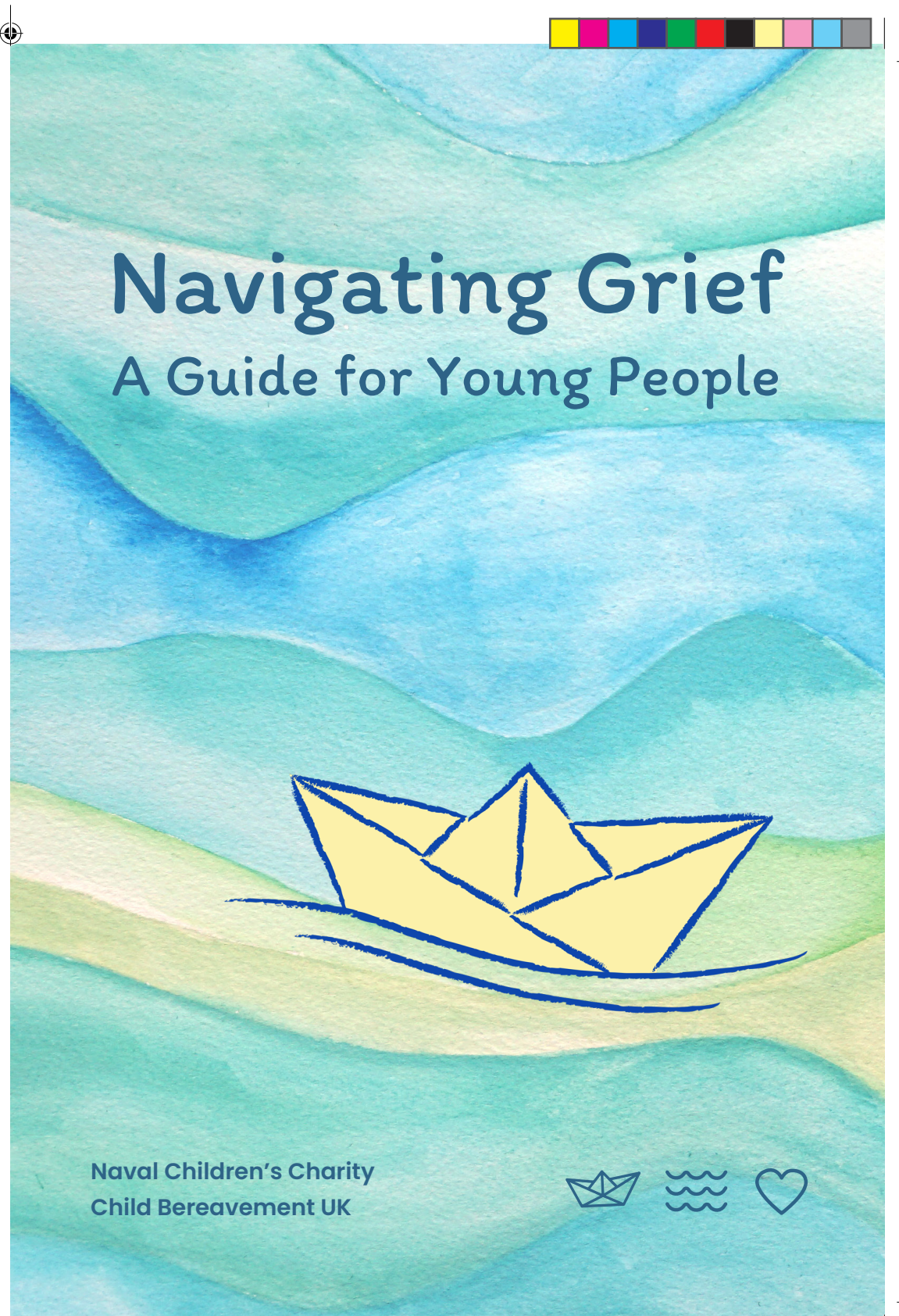




This booklet has been written by **Holly Arkle, Ella Baragwanath, Marcus Besley and Ben Hanby** as bereaved Naval children to help other children and families. They worked as a group over several months with **Sophie Cartwright and Maria Tolley** from Child Bereavement UK.





# 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 children giving insight into their own experiences and tips on how to cope, together with an accompanying booklet for their parents/carers. We hope that you will find this booklet useful to help you through your own loss.

## **Ann Chalmers, Chief Executive, Child Bereavement UK**

When someone important to you dies, it's normal to experience a range of confusing emotions and to feel as if no-one understands what you're going through. Bereaved children and young people supported by Child Bereavement UK tell us that talking to others in a similar situation helps them cope with their grief. This book has been written by young people supported by the Naval Children's Charity who attended one of our groups for bereaved young people. We hope you'll find lots of useful information to help you talk about your feelings, find ways to help yourself and know that you are not alone.

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#



Dear Young Person,

If you are reading this, then I can only assume you've lost someone very close to you. I want to start by saying I am so sorry and will try my best to offer you some comfort and advice in this letter. I am writing this letter because I too lost someone when I was young; my dad, Steve, passed away when I was 5 years old. I remember feeling quite alone and thinking that nobody understood or knew how it felt. I wanted some advice and I wanted to hear from someone who had been through something similar. So I will try to share my experience with you and reassure you that you can grow around your grief and begin to enjoy life again. It may seem far away now, but just take it one step at a time; these things have no time limit on them.



me that it must've been really hard, but it's difficult to imagine anything else as it's all I've ever known. Sometimes I dare to think about having two parents, but normally don't get very far. I look at my life choices and wonder what my dad would think. I say things and wonder if he would find that funny. Would he agree with what I said? What would he say if he was here? So try not to worry too much about forgetting about them as they aren't usually very far from your thoughts.

My first piece of advice to you would be to hold onto any of your loved one's possessions that you wish to keep and make a memory box. It's been 20 years since my dad died and I'm so grateful to have little reminders of him that I can visit whenever I need to.

I remember feeling very angry when I was growing up, wondering why this had happened to me when none of my friends had experienced loss. I would sometimes take it out on those around me and looking back now I wish I was kinder to my mum as I have grown to appreciate what a difficult situation she was in now that I'm older. So if you ever feel angry or resentful to those around you, I'm sure that they are doing their best. Never underestimate the impact that grieving with others who also loved your special person can have and it makes you feel less alone.



I would also advise you to not be afraid of being selfish when it comes to dealing with grief. You need to do what you need to do to keep going, so make sure that you look after yourself and take time to grieve. Talk to someone whenever you're upset and don't feel bad for leaning on people. I never spoke about my dad much growing up as I didn't want to make people feel uncomfortable. But now I feel guilty for not talking about such a special person in my life. So share your stories with others, especially as you grow older and meet new people so that your special person is involved in every area of your life as you grow. It helps me to feel connected to my dad and it feels like he's part of the things he's missing out on. I think one of the hardest parts of losing someone when you're young is that they miss out on so many life events. It can make those events feel just a little bit less special. But just know that you're not alone in that and many of us share that heavy feeling.

I want to end on a more positive note. I miss my dad every single day and I wish my circumstances were different, but I have a wonderful life. There are so many things that this experience has taught me and ways in which it's made me a better person. It has made me more resilient and more caring. It has made me appreciate the smaller things in life and made me so grateful for the family I do have. As you grow, you begin to meet more people, achieve more things and become so much more than your grief, whilst never forgetting how your loved one has shaped you as a person and knowing they'll always have such an impact on your life.



So take your time, talk to those around you, and never apologise for how you're feeling.

All the best,  
Holly

Scan & listen here





## Hello,

So you & I are similar we have lost someone who was very close and meant a lot to us. My father passed away in 2006, I was 9 at the time. He had been ill for 2 years, despite the surgery and chemotherapy he still passed due to cancer.

In the early years after his passing, I was often sad and probably a bit envious of all my friends, not jealous of their dads but jealous that mine was unable to be there. In hindsight, during this time I was very selfish, I owe a lot to my mother and sister who not only dealt with their grief but ensured my day-to-day life went as undisrupted as possible.

Often growing up people would treat me differently after they heard about my father passing, this is not intentionally but they do not know how to handle the situation and it can make you feel deflated knowing people treat you differently because of this. Although through dozens of these awkward encounters, you will realise you are in control of this situation and that being sharp, blunt, or using humour can cut through the awkwardness making everyone more comfortable.

Now 10+ years since passing day to day I am ok, I can talk about him and discuss memories with anyone, but there are still moments that will get me down, my graduation, never buying him a beer, birth of my nieces (one day my children possibly). This is where I find, as you grow older you learn to live with the loss every day, it is something that is walking beside you, rather than you carrying around this huge grief. It will never go away but the weight of it dragging you down, does not seem so heavy anymore.

Marcus and his Dad



In a weird way, you find some relief in the fact this has happened to you and not to other people. As I now know, I was strong enough and had the resilience to go through this, having ended up "OK" enjoying life with people I love, whereas there is no guarantee if the situation were to have happened to others that I care about that it would be the same outcome.

Lastly I would like to say, life is not going to be straight forward from this point and it is ok to grieve. Just remember that your special person did not choose to leave you, they love you and they will be watching you and guiding you through these difficult times.

## Marcus



Scan to listen



Dear young person,

It's quite difficult to know how to start writing this letter. There's so much I would love to tell you and talk about, but, unusually for me, I've decided to keep it all quite brief. To start, here is a little bit of context about me: I'm Ella, I'm 21, and my mum died when I was twelve, after suffering with Motor Neurone Disease for seven years.

Due to the fact you're reading this, I'm really sorry to assume that you've probably been through something similar to me, and have lost someone very close to you. Of course, we both know how horrendous this is, and whatever stage you're at in your grief journey, I know how hard life is. But, I also know how well you're doing, and how time really does change how you feel. That's what I've decided I want to focus on in this letter.

The horrible sadness you are feeling goes without saying. There's no need to sugar coat anything – this pain will be carried throughout your entire life. But, I hope my frankness encourages you to believe me when I say that it really does get better and easier. As you grow, so will the feelings of fondness and happy nostalgia when you remember the person you have lost.

I'm often reminded of my mum and how much I miss her. Little memories can come

from anywhere, like when friends talk about their parents, or Christmas, or family holidays. It can be really hard sometimes, especially when it takes you by surprise, but eventually, it does get easier. Now, it makes me feel happy to remember her.

Losing my mum has been the biggest and most defining thing that has ever happened in my life. It's made me into who I am, and although that has brought a lot of tears and sadness, weirdly, it has also given me the very best things in my life too. The relationship I have with both my little brothers, for example, is incredible. They are my absolute best friends, and this certainly comes from having shared the same experience losing our mum.

Although the absence of your special person aches and aches and is carried for your whole life (any now bereaved adult who once was once a child can tell you that), it also offers a little parcel of magic. Once out of the thick fog of immediate grief, as you learn and grow into adulthood, in a funny kind of way, you are awarded a second childhood.

A chance to experience and enjoy all the things you missed the first time round, but with a wiser and adult perspective. You can feel the joy of laughter, of eating, of dancing and forming close relationships with new people.



Ella Aged 21



Ella's mum Sarah on the left & Ella on the right



Your enjoyment can't operate in a vacuum, away from your grief, but it is this that makes it all so much more important. You know that happiness and life is never guaranteed, so when it hangs around its almost overwhelmingly amazing.

What I'm trying to say, in a nutshell, is that there's no getting away from the fact that your parent has died. Unfortunately, you are part of our club, but, there's lots of us out here. It's actually quite amazing: when you meet other people like you there is an immediate connection. It's the loveliest reminder that you're not on your own. As hard as it is right now, your life can and will get better, even better than you ever

thought it could be. When I was younger, I truly believed that I would never be happy and that I would wake up every day feeling left out of the world. I promise you, this is not true. Trust me, I've got first hand knowledge.

Well, that's it from me. Like I said, I could go on, but I just thought I'd give a little reminder that everything will be ok in the end. Carry all your courage with you, and make sure to remember that your parent would want you to make the most of every minute, being happy. I hope you're doing ok, and I truly send all my best wishes and happiness to you, for the rest of your life.



Take care, Ella



Hello,

Well, firstly if you are reading this then all I can say is that I am so sorry.

It's one of the worst parts of this, people will say that to you every time that it gets brought up. You've lost someone important and the worst part is that nothing can bring them back. I'll say that it gets easier with time but only because I know from experience that it does. You'll have to take my word on that for the moment, but trust me, it really does.

I'm going to give some advice and it is the kind of thing that I needed when I was in your situation. My dad died and I didn't really know how to handle it. For a while I got very worried and scared about something happening to someone else that I loved. Rest assured that it is okay to worry, but make sure that you tell someone. Don't keep the worry and fear all to yourself because it doesn't work out very well. Speak to someone, whoever you want to. If you need to be sad then go for it. Emotions are very big things that can take up more of you than you'd like. If you keep them in then they just get bigger and bigger until you can't keep them in anymore. They spill out at times and places that you really don't want them to come out. It's a lot easier to cry if you need to, or talk, or scream and shout, or go and run around. Make sure that you tell someone and say so that they know too.

You sometimes might feel like you want to disappear and have everyone pretend that you never existed but this doesn't help. There are other people who will feel the same way you do right now, and they will be close to you. Take some time to be with them. Sit and just be next to someone if you need. Hugs and time make things better, sometimes you don't want to admit it, but they really do help a lot.



Ben aged 22 and his mum Elaine

Ben, his dad Kevin and sister Jessica



If someone asks about your person, you can say whatever you'd like to about them. Lots of people will say that they are sorry, and that you must be very brave. The truth of the matter is that you really are. Honestly, this will probably be the hardest thing that you have to deal with in your life. And that is not very comforting but it's true. You will be one of the strongest people that anyone will know. You will make it through this. Please remember that.

Don't worry if someone else comes along to join your family. You might be a bit angry at first, but remember that they are here for you too. Bringing someone new in is always different and no two people are the same, but if they are there then let them talk to you. Don't shut yourself away and separate yourself. It can be nice to have someone else to talk to, or just have someone else around the house. It can be very strange at first but you do get used to it.

Please remember that you are never, ever alone in this. There are so many people to talk to or things for you to use that can really help. It is hard at first, but with time and the right people around you it gets easier. Grief doesn't ever go away, but it does get lighter. It used to feel like a big heavy stone in my chest, I would struggle to breathe and not want to do anything. But with a lot of time and patience it gets smaller. Now I carry a small pebble with me, it's still there and if I need to be sad I can be.

You've got this, and you will grow into something magnificent. I promise that this does get easier.

Ben



Scan to listen



# Worrying

When someone dies, your sense of safety is rocked and the world can feel much more uncertain. Many children and young people notice they worry more about bad things happening after someone has died. Here are some things which other bereaved children and young people have been worried about and what helped them cope with these.

Will we have enough money now?

What if I have to move home or school?

Who will look after me now?



## What Helps

- Notice what you can and can't control. Focus on what is within your control. Think about who does the worry belong to? Is it someone else's?
- Write worries down, this makes it easier to get them out of your mind and gives you perspective. This could be using pen and paper, notes on a phone or even drawing.
- Talk to someone you trust – it often helps to share worry thoughts or feelings.
- Allow and plan in time for yourself to think about your worries, acknowledge, accept and sit with them for a while. Easier said than done! It may take practice but this really helps.
- Challenge the worry, how likely is it to happen? Is it a fact or an opinion? Look for evidence to disprove the worry or the end result.



# Reminders

When someone important has died, special occasions, hearing their name or a memory of them can feel hard to manage. We know you are not likely to forget the person who has died but some reminders may feel more difficult than others. Here are some that may come up and some tips on dealing with these.

Videos and Photos

Special Occasions

Songs

Smells



What Helps?

## What Helps

- Accepting these may happen unexpectedly and take your breath away, it's ok to feel like this. Recognise there are times that are likely to be difficult and be gentle with yourself.
- Reminders of the person can be comforting and reassuring too.
- Communicate with people around you about what you need from them.
- Plan time for a quiet moment alone or a way to remember the person. It may feel important to be there for others but make time for what you need too.
- Give yourself permission to do something you might enjoy, this does not mean you are grieving any less.

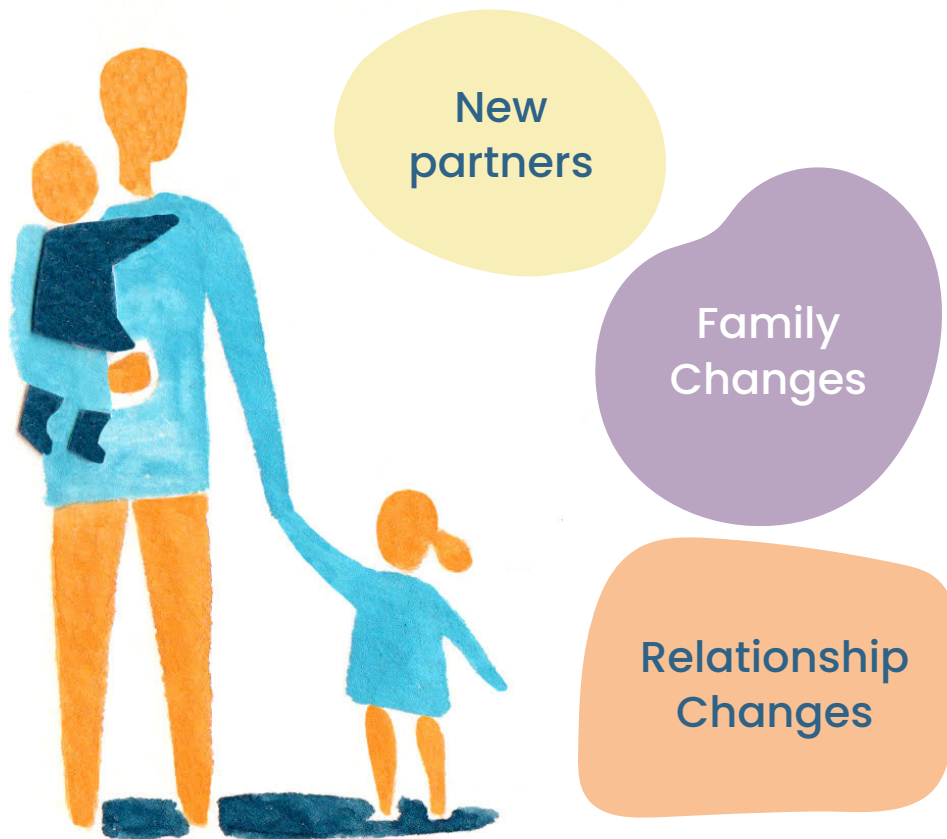
Tips from bereaved young people based on their own experiences 13





# Relationships

After someone dies you may feel defensive of your family and try to look after your important adults and siblings. You may also feel protective over the person who has died and their role in your family. New relationships such as someone joining a family can be a worry for many children and young people. Here are some things that others who have been bereaved have worried about and what helped them in these new relationships.



## What Helps

- Talk to your parent/carer and share how you feel.
- A new partner is not there to replace or forget about the person who died, but may be someone new who can support you and your family.
- Remember the remaining parent/carer is still an individual and deserves love and happiness.
- Acknowledge this is going to feel strange, change can be another feeling of loss.
- A new person coming into the family may feel nervous too, find something in common with this person, films, tv, favourite food etc.

# Remembering

Grief is not about forgetting the person who died but finding ways of remembering them. What you talk about, who you talk to and when is your choice. Here are some helpful ideas from other bereaved young people.



## What Helps

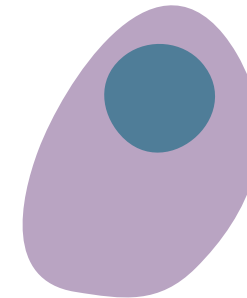
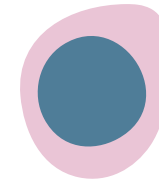
- Practice what to say, have a couple of sentences ready that help you feel in control of the conversation if someone asks about the person who died. You decide how much to share and with who.
- Be honest, acknowledge that past experiences make you who you are today.
- Lots of feelings may come up when you talk about the person who died, it is ok to feel whatever you feel, all emotions are ok.
- Don't be afraid to upset others, their response and reaction is their responsibility not yours.

# Growing Around Grief

This model is useful to help you visualise your grief.

We used to think that grief got smaller as time went on, but we now think it is more accurate to say that the grief stays the same but we develop a life around it.

The navy blue circle on the right represents our grief when someone dies, we can feel that our grief overwhelms us and it consumes our whole life. As time goes on, we gradually build a life around our grief. The grief is still there but as we start to do more things we build on this life without the person there.



Life around  
grief

