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Change, loss and grief

KS2, years 3-4: How do people manage change and loss?



How do people manage change and loss?

This lesson for pupils in years 3–4 explores different kinds of life changes, how these can affect people, and different responses people might have to grief. Pupils consider who might be best placed to help them with their feelings and learn how to seek appropriate help and support.

No lesson should be taught in isolation, but always as part of a planned, developmental PSHE education programme. This lesson is best used within the context of a unit of work on managing change, or as part of wider learning about mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Learning objective

To learn about the impact of different life changes, and strategies for dealing with grief.

Learning outcomes

Pupils will be able to:

- recognise that life is made up of different stages and that death is when life ends
- describe different situations that may cause someone to grieve
- identify some different responses someone might have to grief
- identify activities, actions and sources of support that can help a person to manage grief

Climate for learning

Make sure you have read the accompanying teacher guidance notes before teaching this lesson. These include guidance on creating a safe learning environment, curriculum links, and additional advice on teaching about change, loss and grief safely.

Resources required

- Box or envelope for questions
- Resource 1: *Life cycle lists* [one per pupil]
- Resource 2: *Feelings and grief* [one per pair]

Key words

change

loss

grief

death

separation

bereavement

Baseline assessment

Introduction (Slides 9-10, 5 mins)

Establish or revisit ground rules. Make sure pupils know that they have the right to pass and that there should be no personal stories. Explain where they can go to talk to someone after the lesson, should the need arise. Remind pupils that if they have worries or questions during or after the lesson that they do not want to raise in front of the class, they can write their question on a piece of paper, anonymously or with their name, and put it in the question box.

Introduce the learning objective and outcomes for the lesson, which focus on understanding the effects of change, loss and grief, how to manage these effects and how to get help and support. Explain that whilst this can be a difficult topic to discuss, it is helpful to recognise what they can do in such situations, and to know when, where and how to get help, should they need it now or in the future.

Baseline assessment activity (Slide 11, 10 mins)

Ask pupils to complete the table in **Resource 1: Life cycle lists**, listing everything they can think of under the three headings: things that are born/germinate, things that grow, things that die. This will help you to find out pupils' existing knowledge and understanding about the life cycle. As pupils record their responses, circulate to see what ideas they are adding (though you should also take whole-class feedback at the end of the activity).

While some pupils may list different specific examples, by the end of the whole-class feedback pupils should be able to recognise that plants, animals and humans all complete the three stages of this life cycle.

Then, ask pupils to discuss in pairs: do plants, animals and people go through the different stages in the same way? For example, do animals and people only die when they have lived for a long time?

Take feedback from the class. Explain that plants, animals and people move through the stages at different times; in the same way that all flowers, plants and trees live to be different ages, people and animals do not only die when they are old, although most do.

Use this baseline assessment to check pupils' understanding of the life cycle and to adapt teaching throughout the lesson. For example, if pupils do not understand that death is a permanent part of the life cycle they may need additional support and time during the 'Grief' activity. Pupils may also need additional time to explore this when discussing grief after a bereavement during the 'Scenarios' activity.

Core activities

Grief (Slides 12-13, 5 mins)

Explain that grief is a natural response to loss and can cause someone to experience a wide range of feelings, emotions or physical reactions. Emphasise that grief might not always be about physical death (experiencing a bereavement) – it can occur in response to other losses too, for example:

injury or illness (experienced by self or others); separation from home or family; changes to family arrangements; change in home/schools.

In small groups, ask pupils how people in these situations might show that they are grieving and/or need some help and support. Gather feedback and use **slide 13** to draw out key learning.

Pupils might suggest:

- *changes in their personality (for example, being sad a lot more often, crying or wanting to cry more, displaying more anger, becoming more withdrawn)*
- *changes in their relationships (for example, not wanting to be away from someone, wanting to be around friends or family more, falling out with friends, not wanting to be alone, wanting to be alone more, not wanting to speak to anyone)*
- *changes in their behaviour (for example, worrying about things more, finding it hard to concentrate at school, not enjoying the things they usually do, experiencing panic or anxiety, not wanting to eat, wanting to eat more, not being able to sleep, sleeping much more)*

Emphasise that these are all completely normal responses when grieving, and that everyone grieves differently and at different times. Additionally, some people do not 'show' that they are feeling sad or grieving. What is most important is that people have time to grieve and can access help and support if needed.



Support: Direct pupils towards the image prompts on **slide 12** to help them come up with ideas.



Challenge: Ask pupils to consider what the most obvious signs are that someone else is grieving, and which ones are more likely to be more hidden.

Scenarios (Slide 14, 15 mins)

Give pairs one of the scenarios in **Resource 2: Feelings and grief**. They should write down their answers to the five questions that follow their scenario.

Then, ask pupils to pass their scenario to the next pair and see if they can add anything else to their new scenario. They should do this twice more, so that every pair has seen, and had the opportunity to add to, all four scenarios. Take feedback from the class once everyone's original sheets have been returned.

Pupils might suggest:

- **Scenario 1:** *Jemal is grieving the loss of his home (his country, family and friends); he is acting differently to normal – he has become less outgoing; he might be feeling sad, worried about the future, unsure how he will adapt to his new life, angry that he has had to leave his old life behind; with time, these feelings might ease as he settles into his new home and new school, and makes more friends; he could speak to his parents or another family member about his feelings, or speak to a teacher or another adult at school (who can then provide additional help and support if necessary).*
- **Scenario 2:** *Tara is grieving the loss of her family unit and the loss of her father's presence in the family home; she was behaving in a way that she thought her parents would approve of, but is now arguing with her mum and acting aggressively; she may be blaming herself for their separation, especially as she thought adapting her behaviour would ensure her parents remained together (it is important to emphasise to pupils here that the separation of parents is never the fault of their child/children), she is upset and angry about what has happened; with time, these feelings might ease as she adapts to a new routine and gets used to the 'new normal'; she could speak to her mum or dad when she is feeling calmer, or speak to another family member, trusted adult or teacher.*

- **Scenario 3:** *Andrea is grieving the death of her guinea pig; she is very upset and is thinking about the time that she did not spend with her pet, rather than all the time she did; she is feeling guilty and may be blaming herself for what has happened – she might think that she is being ‘punished’ for not playing with the guinea pig over the weekend; after some time has passed, she may be able to manage her grief better and recognise that what has happened was not her fault, nor is she being punished; she should talk to her mum or another family member about how she is feeling, and she might consider having a memorial for her pet or creating something to remember her pet by.*
- **Scenario 4:** *Nathan is grieving the loss of his Auntie – although she has not died yet, he knows that things are permanently changing; he is unsure how to react to what is happening and feels numbness, rather than the sadness his family feel; he is also confused about why the hospital cannot make her better; his grief may intensify before it gets better, as Nora will die in the near future; in a year’s time, however, he may understand his feelings more and have a better grasp on what has happened; he could speak to his family about his feelings, or speak to a teacher or trusted adult.*

Reiterate that grief is something that most people will experience at some point in their lives, but that over time feelings of grief can become much more manageable. Feelings can also change from day to day – some days might be better than others, and it is important to understand that it is ok to not be sad all of the time. Grief, for example after the death of a loved one, may not go away completely, but feelings will change over time and can feel less intense.



Support: Ask pupils to identify who Jemal, Andrea, Nathan or Tara could talk to, to help them feel better.



Challenge: Ask pupils to consider what a friend of Jemal, Andrea, Nathan or Tara could do to support them.

Managing grief (Slides 15-16, 10 mins)

Ask the class if they can think of anything that might help people who are experiencing grief. For example, pupils might suggest: *collecting photos and putting them in an album, creating a display or collage of happy memories about what they have lost, writing in a diary, writing letters, drawing pictures, speaking to someone about their loss e.g. family, friends or another trusted adult.*

Using **slide 16**, tell pupils that some people like to create a memory box to help them manage their grief. This could contain anything at all that they associate with the thing/person/place they have lost. Ask pairs to discuss what Jemal and/or Andrea might put into their memory box and take some feedback.

Pairs might suggest: *photos, maps of places they have been, drawings of their memories, items that remind the character of what they have lost, reflections on happy moments, creating something as a family, writing a song, drawing pictures, creating collages.* Reiterate to pupils that everyone reacts differently to grief, and there is no one ‘right’ way to either express grief or manage it.

Signposting support

Signposting support (Slide 17, 5 mins)

Ask pupils where the characters could get help and support. Emphasise that the feelings associated with grief can be very difficult to manage. However, it is really important to tell an adult if they or

someone they know is struggling to manage their feelings, so that appropriate help and support can be put in place. For example, they might speak to:

- a parent/carer
- a teacher or another adult in school
- another trusted adult or family friend

Reflection and endpoint assessment

Reflection and endpoint assessment (Slide 18, 10 mins)

Remind pupils of the learning outcomes for this lesson:

We will be able to:

- *recognise that life is made up of different stages and that death is when life ends*
- *describe different situations that may cause someone to grieve*
- *identify some different responses someone might have to grief*
- *identify activities, actions and sources of support that can help a person to manage grief*

Reflecting on these outcomes, ask pupils to independently write down on post-it notes what they think are the top three most important things that someone could do to help them manage their grief (one per post-it), and stick these on the board.

Briefly review and summarise these for the class. This is an opportunity to gather evidence of the learning that has taken place and to inform planning for future lessons.

Extension activity

Note that this extension activity is to be used in the classroom only, and not set as a homework task.

Agony aunt (Slide 19)

Ask pupils to write a supportive message to one of the people in the scenarios, outlining some ideas to help them manage their grief.