

Change, loss and grief

KS2, years 5-6: How do people manage loss and support each other?



How do people manage loss and support each other?

This lesson for pupils in years 5–6 explores the effects of loss and bereavement and ways to manage change, loss or bereavement. Pupils also identify sources of support to help someone who is grieving.

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 loss and bereavement and strategies for dealing with grief.

Learning outcomes

Pupils will be able to:

- explain a range of ways that loss, bereavement and feelings of grief might affect someone
- describe self-help strategies for managing change, loss or bereavement
- identify ways to support someone who is grieving
- describe different sources of support and information available to help someone who is grieving

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
- Flipchart paper and pens
- Resource 1: *Mackenzie's email* [one per pupil]
- Resource 2: *Change and loss scenarios* [one per group]
- Resource 2a: *Responses to loss* [support option – as required]
- Resource 3: *Managing a loss* [one per pair – cut up]
- Resource 4: *Who can help?* [one per group of five]

Key words

change

loss

grief

feelings

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 will focus on understanding the impact of loss and bereavement and strategies for managing grief. Explain that whilst this can be a challenging topic to discuss, it is helpful to have tools to manage such situations, and to know when, where and how to get help and support for themselves or others, should they need it now or in the future.

Baseline assessment activity (Slide 11, 10 mins)

Ask pupils to read **Resource 1: Mackenzie's email** and respond to the questions underneath. As this is a baseline assessment, they should work on their own, without any prompting or examples. Afterwards, gather whole-class feedback to gauge pupils' current knowledge and understanding.

Pupils might suggest that Mackenzie has experienced: a death in the family, parental separation or someone moving away – any of these could be true and all might cause someone to grieve.

Explain that grief is a natural response to change and loss and can cause someone to experience a wide range of feelings, emotions or physical reactions. Although grief is often experienced in response to a bereavement (the death of a family member/friend/loved one), it can occur in response to other losses too, for example: injury or illness (experienced by self or others), separation from home or family, or changes to family arrangements.

Once completed, make sure pupils have added their names to the sheets and put them to one side, as these will be revisited at the end of the lesson to demonstrate progress.

Core activities

Experiencing a loss (Slides 12–13, 10 mins)

Ask pupils to read **Resource 2: Change and loss scenarios**. Then, in small groups, ask them to mind-map all the ways that grief might affect someone, using the characters' responses in the scenarios as a starting point. Pupils should keep the scenarios safe for the 'Support with grief' activity later in the lesson.

Take feedback, ensuring that a range of responses are discussed. Pupils may identify specific responses from the scenarios, including:

- **Hollie and Jakub:** *Jakub is grieving the death of his grandad and feeling very upset; Hollie is upset that her friend is sad, but is also worried about her own family and feeling uncertain and anxious*

about changes/losses that might happen in the future. This is also an opportunity to discuss with pupils that people use lots of different ways of saying someone has died, such as ‘lost’ or ‘passed away’.

- **Daniel and his parents:** *Daniel’s parents are grieving the loss of their child; Daniel may not fully understand how they feel, especially as he did not know his sister. However, he is feeling worried and unsure about how to respond and is being more withdrawn – as a result, he is not discussing it with his parents.*
- **Leah:** *Leah is grieving the death of her pet dog. You may need to explain that ‘put down’ means that, when an animal is very sick and in pain and won’t recover, the vet can give them an injection so they die peacefully and quickly. Leah feels upset and lonely, but also angry that her friends and family do not seem to feel the same way as her about the loss.*
- **Finn:** *Finn is grieving for his uncle who will soon die. He is concerned about his dad and consequently hiding his emotions for fear of upsetting him. He is sad and worried about the future and this is starting to affect his school life.*

Pupils may also suggest that someone might:

- *experience emotions like sadness, numbness, anger, worry, anxiety, confusion, hurt, uncertainty, abandonment (being left behind/left alone)*
- *become more withdrawn, or others more outgoing to hide their feelings*
- *experience feelings in the body or physical responses, such as tiredness or exhaustion, anxiety or panic attacks (heart might go really fast, feeling it is hard to breathe and/or feeling very scared), feeling unwell*
- *blame themselves for the loss (emphasise to pupils that it is not the character’s fault) or feel guilty, or wish they could turn the clock back*
- *refuse to, or find themselves unable to, acknowledge that the loss is real*
- *carry on as normal (and it might help them to do so), while others might need some time to work through some of their feelings and emotions*

Emphasise that grieving is not a linear process, which means that some people do not experience all these different feelings or experience the feelings in a particular order. Feelings can also change from day to day – some days might be better than others. There might be some days when people feel worse than they did in the days before. Often people do not know what to say to someone who is grieving (e.g. Hollie in scenario 1, or Daniel in scenario 2), but just recognising that they are going through a tough time and saying that they are there for the person grieving if they want to talk can be enough – it is better to acknowledge that someone is grieving than to ignore it completely.

Take any feedback from pupils who answered the challenge question, and discuss with the class some of the similarities and differences in emotions the characters have experienced. For example, they have all felt sadness but they have not all felt anger, and they have not all wanted to talk about their feelings.



Support: Ask pupils to match the cards from **Resource 2a: Responses to loss** with the appropriate scenarios.




Challenge: Ask pupils to discuss what similarities and differences there are in the emotions the characters have experienced.


Responses to loss (Slide 14, 10 mins)

Hand out **Resource 3: Managing a loss** and ask pupils to work in pairs to categorise the strategies that might help someone, such as the characters in the scenarios, to manage their grief. They should sort the cards into the following categories:

- Useful immediately after the loss
- Useful in the long term
- Both

Take feedback and stress that there are no right or wrong answers – different strategies might work for different people and at different times, and nobody's response to grief is the same.

 **Support:** Ask pupils to select the strategy that they think is most useful and explain why they have chosen it.

 **Challenge:** Ask pupils to select their top three strategies to help someone manage their grief and be prepared to explain why.

Support with grief (Slide 15, 10 mins)

Emphasise that there are different sources of support to help with grief. Explain that grief can sometimes be difficult to manage and can affect mental health and emotional wellbeing. Family members and friends can be an important source of support when someone is grieving. However, sometimes professional help might be needed from someone whose job it is to support people who are grieving.

Divide the class into groups of five, and give each a pack of cards from **Resource 4: Who can help?** Ask each group to read about the support that each of the helpers in the resource could give (for example, each pupil could read one) and then, as a group, decide which helper(s) could best support each character from **Resource 2: Change and loss scenarios**.

Pupils may have different opinions about which helpers might best support each character. The most important thing is that they recognise that help and support can be given in a variety of ways – face-to-face, online, over the phone, one-to-one, in a group setting, etc. – and that there are lots of different people who can support an individual who is grieving.

Reflection and endpoint assessment

Reflection and endpoint assessment (Slide 16, 10 mins)

Remind pupils of the learning objective and outcomes, and return their copies of **Resource 1: Mackenzie's email** from the start of the lesson. Working on their own, ask them to write a reply, acknowledging how the character might be feeling, suggesting some things they could do that might help them and giving advice about where to get appropriate help and support.

Emphasise that it is common for someone not to know what to say to a friend who is grieving, but just letting the friend know that they have support can be enough – it is better to acknowledge their feelings than to ignore them.

Signposting support

Signposting support (Slide 17, 5 mins)

Ensure that pupils know where they can seek help and advice, both now and in the future, if they are concerned about themselves or someone else who is grieving. Pupils wishing to seek further guidance can:

- speak to a parent/carer, teacher, or other trusted adult in the school
- contact Childline www.childline.org.uk/kids; 0800 1111

Remind pupils that support can be given in a variety of ways – face-to-face, over the phone, online, through information leaflets and booklets, etc. Sources of support include:

- charities/organisations – for example, Winston’s Wish, Macmillan
- support groups – e.g. Macmillan www.macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups, Child Bereavement UK www.childbereavementuk.org/listing/category/support-for-young-people
- counsellors/therapists

Extension activities

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

Grief guide (Slide 18)

Ask pupils to create a mini guide about what grief is and how to get help with grief.

Film review (Slide 18)

Ask pupils to choose a film or show that explores loss or change and write a film review, explaining how characters experience change or loss. Some examples of films could include:

- Up (2009)
- Big Hero 6 (2014)
- Inside Out (2015)

Please note that parents/carers may want to check sources of information such as the BBFC website before choosing a film (www.bbfc.co.uk).