

A death in the family: supporting those left behind

NCC Practice Week

Caroline Aldridge

22nd May 2023



Welcome!



Please be aware that some of the sessions are being recorded for sharing later.

We want people to participate but please use the 'raise hand' facility to ask questions and contribute when others are talking.

Please be considerate to others - together we want to create a safe, open and reflective space to learn.

You can turn on live captions on by clicking on the 3 dots at the top of your screen if you need this.

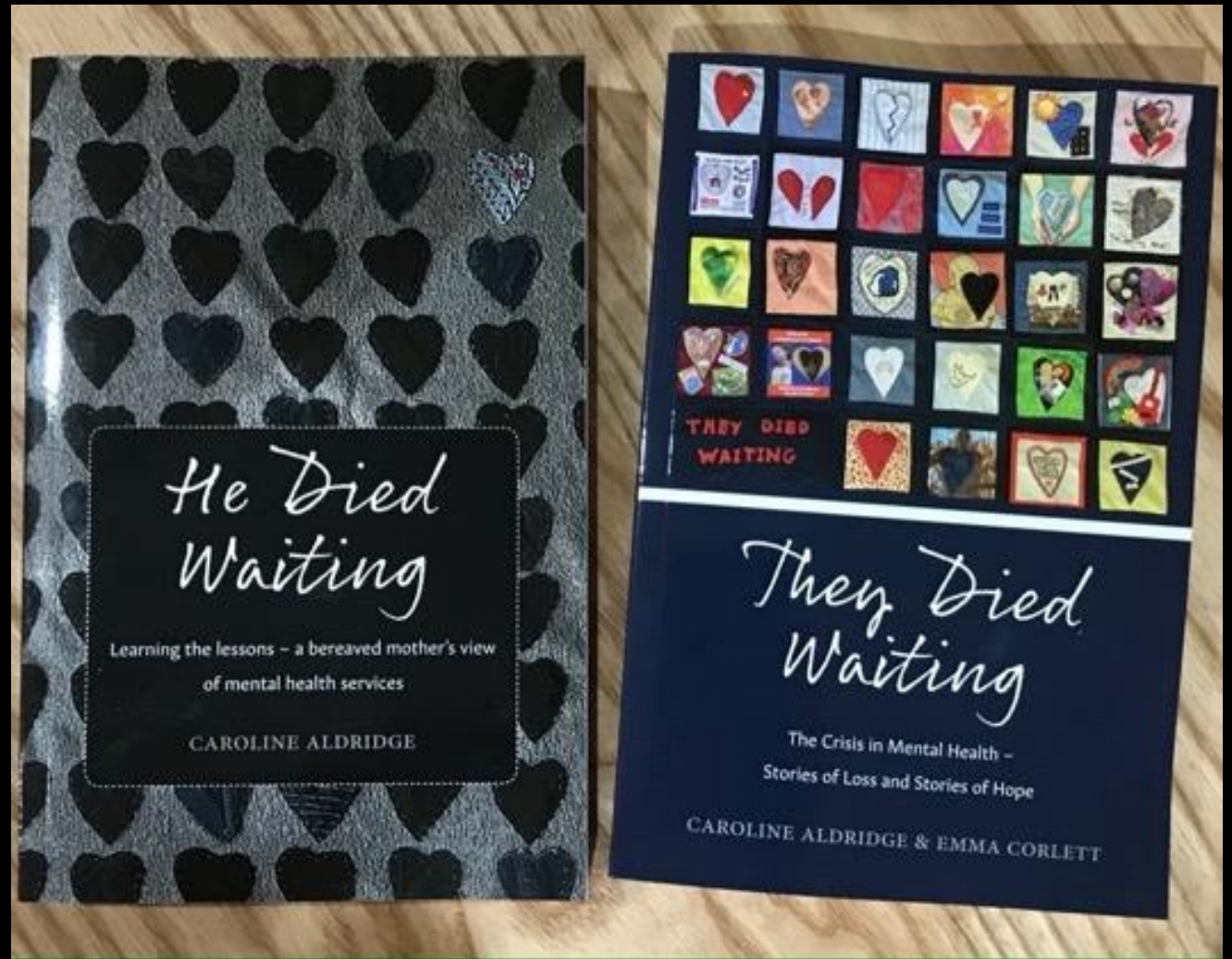
Please do take the time to provide us with some feedback towards the end of the session.

Thank you!

Introductions

See

www.learningsocialworker.com
for books and resources



Plan:

- *They Died Waiting* – a resource for practitioners
- ‘Special deaths’
- The impact of bereavement on the whole family
- What bereaved relatives need from professionals
- Supporting children and their networks
- Sharing some practice tools



Social media

Twitter: @waiting_he
Instagram: @hediedwaiting
LinkedIn: Caroline Aldridge

This session will be experiential, reflexive, and seek to integrate our personal and professional experiences.

Let's share gently

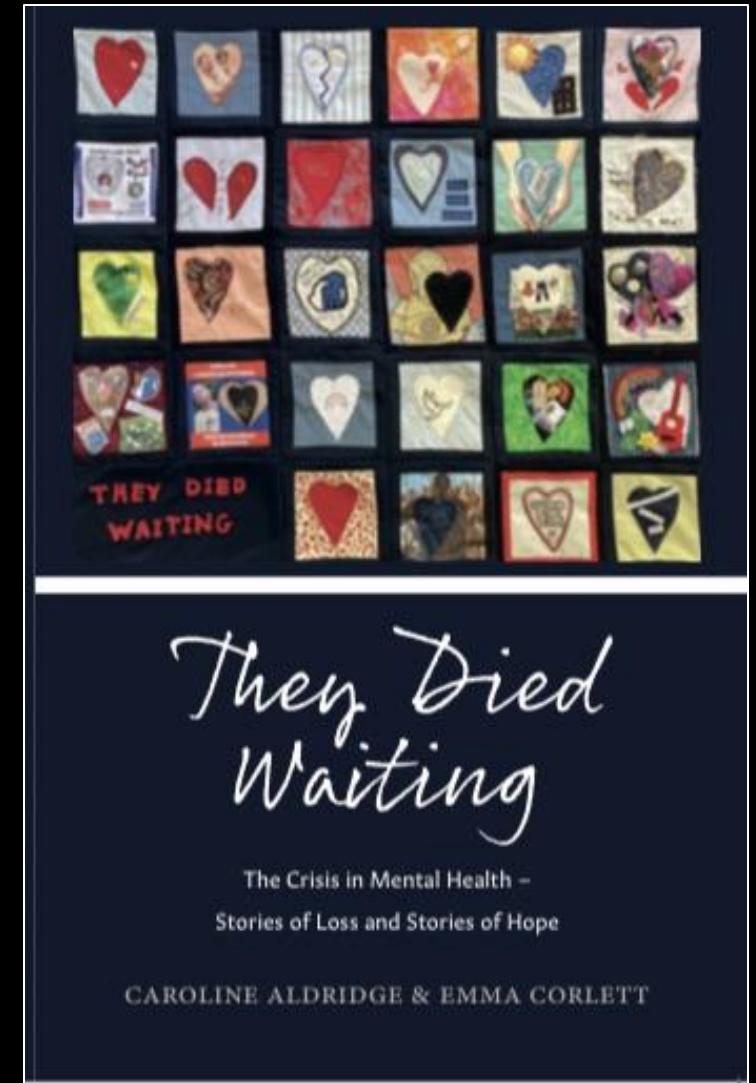
How can you be fully present today?

Trigger warning



They Died Waiting (Aldridge and Corlett, 2023)

- Stories of loss and hope
- Bursting with lived experience
- People shared their stories in creative ways
- Draw on examples and illustrate with memorial hearts
- The book and postcards are a resource for practitioners



A 'special death' in the family – stories of loss



Unexpected deaths: Traumatic bereavement

- Premature death
- Circumstances of death can be traumatic for all involved
- Prompt defensive and insensitive processes and responses
- Brutal and retraumatizing processes
- Delayed/complicated/disenfranchised grief (Doka, 2002)
- Impact on mental health



'Special deaths' (Holloway, 2004; Guy and Holloway 2007)

- Deaths due to suicide, drugs/alcohol, homicide, mental illness, negligence etc
- Traumatic
- Socially stigmatizing
- Existentially problematic
- Disenfranchised grief



“Sudden deaths are traumatic losses. They are unexpected life punctuations. When the bereavement is a socially unacceptable death, of someone perceived to be of low value, mourners are expected to keep silent”

(Aldridge, 2020)

How does this fit with your experiences?

How might 'special deaths' differ from deaths that are expected and/or natural?

Can you think of examples from your practice of 'special deaths'?

What impact on the family have you noticed when a death is traumatic, unexpected, or stigmatised?

Grief and loss

- Personal: relevant to us all
- We need to recognise and manage our own experiences
- There is 'no right way' (Lloyd, 2018)



Pause for reflection

Take a 10 minute break from the computer and reflect on your own experiences of bereavement.

How did you respond to, manage and process your grief?

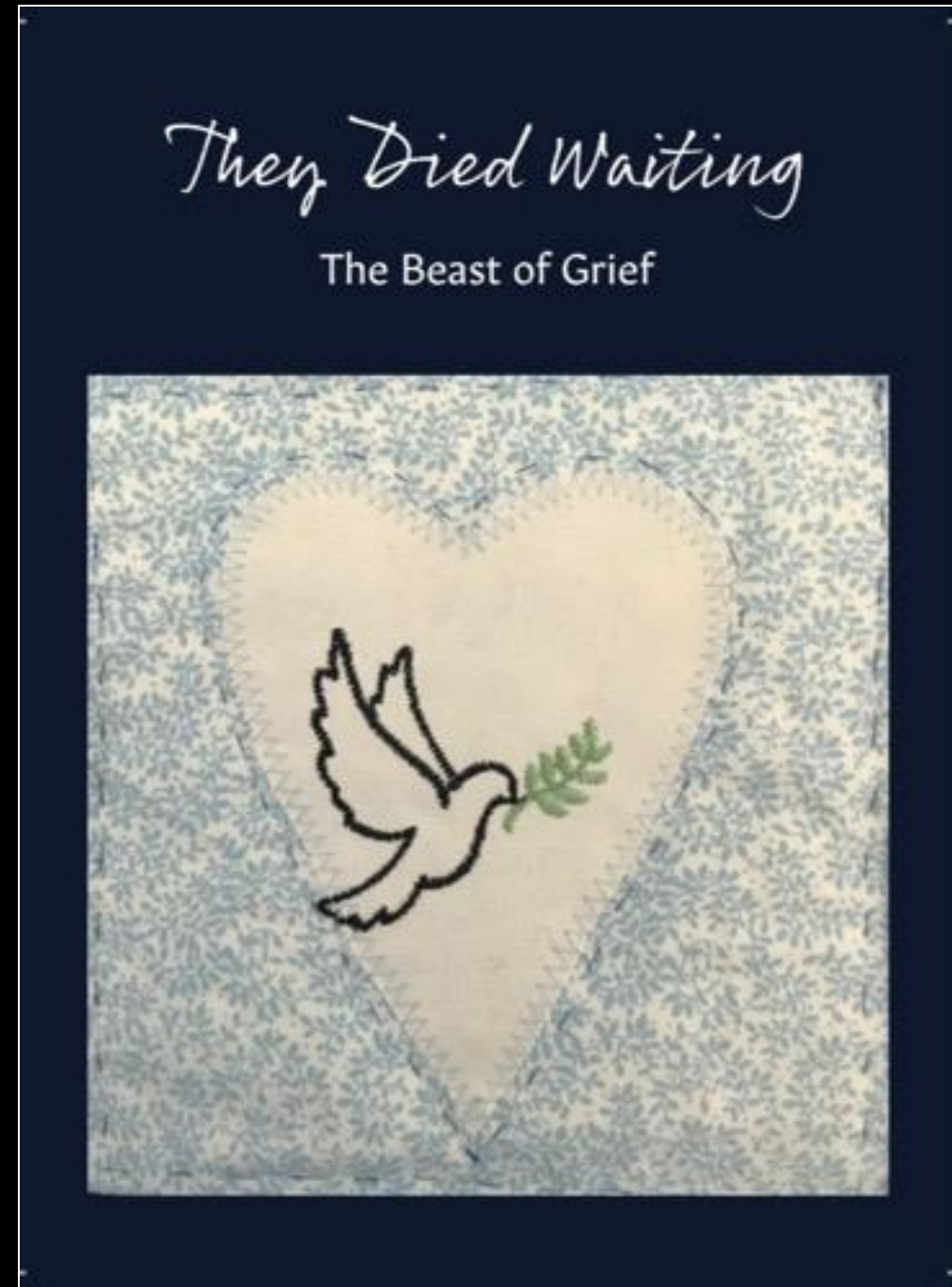
How might your experiences and ways of coping influence your practice?

You might want to write your thoughts down or capture them in a creative way.

Q. Following a bereavement how did you behave?

Q. Having thought about your own experiences of bereavement, how comfortable are you right now?

Pause and take note of your body and mind.



Managing our own emotions

- We have all had different experiences of loss and bereavement
- We all have different needs and responses
- Awareness of our triggers, attitudes, assumptions, behaviours
- Need emotionally healthy culture/teams
- Need chains of containment
- Need healthy strategies



We need to talk about death and dying

Denise Turner (2014): researched experiences of parents whose child had died at home – The ‘most sensitive and least defensive’ professionals were funeral directors.

“Familiarity with death allows a calm competence that brings welcome relief” (Siegal 2017 p 123).

It is important to acknowledge how difficult it can be for us



- Frances is a bereavement counsellor father died when she was a child and she lost a partner to cancer.
- Her chapter is wise and full of practical advice
- In ordinary families any kind of bereavement can have a massive impact. Reading -p144-145

They Died Waiting

We Need to Talk About Death and Dying



Medical v social model

A social perspective. Need to understand the multi-cultural societal constructs of death.

Grief is pathologicalised. 'Abnormal grief reactions' (Prolonged Grief Disorder, Persistent Complex Grief Disorder are in DSM-5 (2013)).



The impact on the whole family

Lisbeth and Rose

Death by suicide can be particularly hard

Making sense through story-telling

Changed relationships and roles

Reading – page 70



Attachment Theory

Most bereavement phases theories are based on Bowlby's Euro-centric Attachment Theory:

“Commonly, practitioners are ill-at-ease with the theory but desperately cling to some guide, lest they also flounder in the chaos and despair of the other person's loss” (Lloyd cited in Thompson, 2002 p 210).

Continuing bonds (Klass, Silverman and Nickman, 1996) are healthy. They can be expressed in many public and private ways.

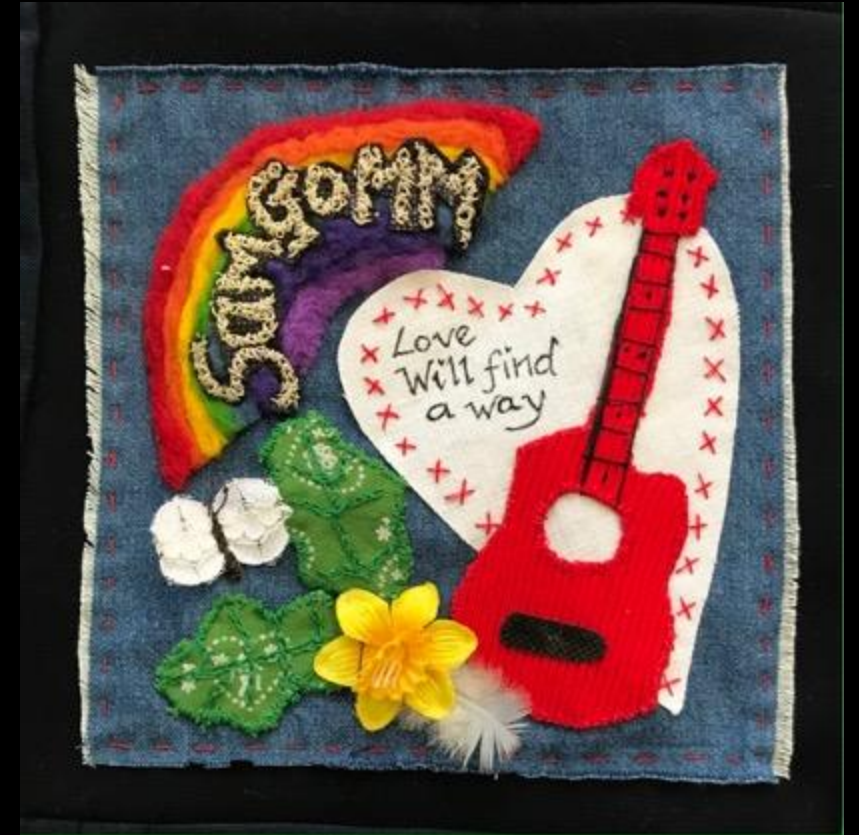


The impact on wider family

- Siblings and extended family often get overlooked
- The ripples can rock generations via secondary or intergenerational trauma

“Writing about Sam’s life was cathartic ... The book has given us back a sense of purpose and an outlet to continue our love for him.” (Heidi)

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Heart made by Sam’s Mum, Karen.

- Professionals can be impatient and judgemental towards bereaved people who struggle to function or demonstrate anger.



Reading from Rebecca's 'Angry of Bury' (p255)

- Parents, particularly mothers, can be blamed if they are not fully focused on their children's needs.
- Family members might have competing and conflicting needs.

Reading from Billy's "If only we knew..."
pages 136-137



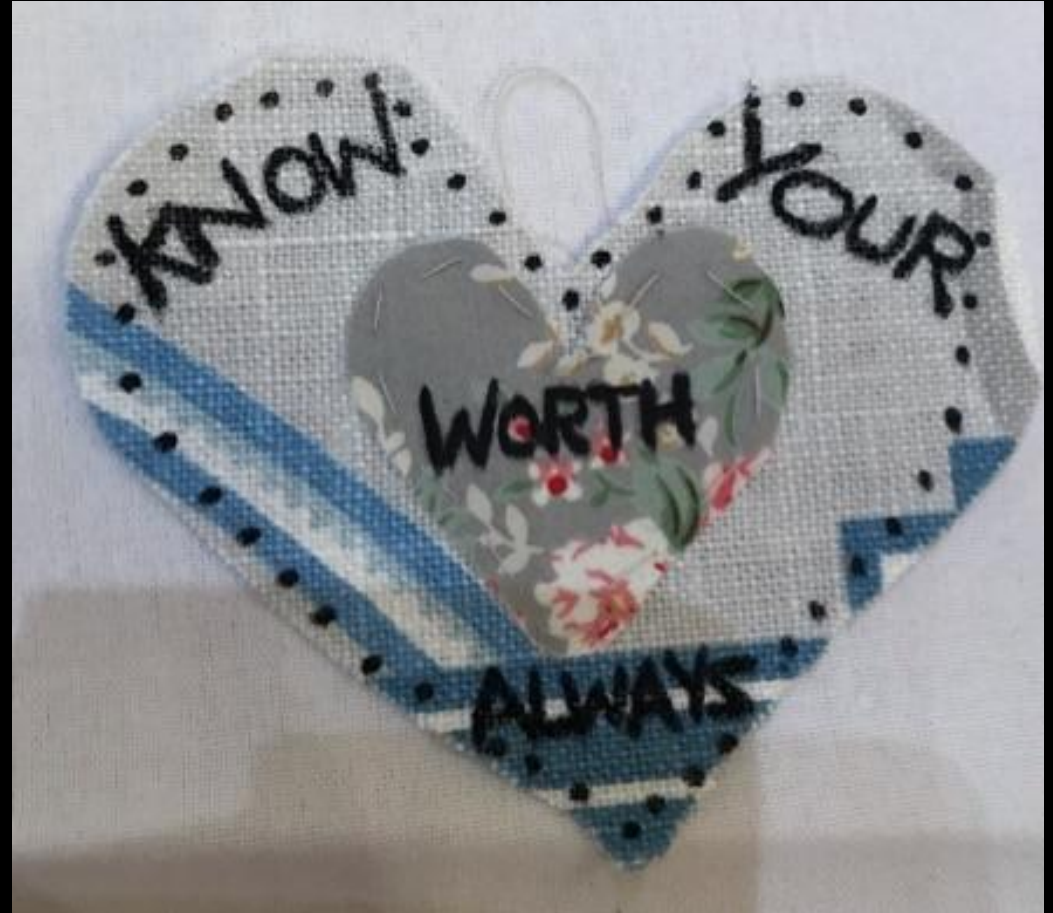
What bereaved people need from professionals

- To be listened to
- Trauma-sensitive
- Authenticity, kindness and compassion
- Honesty/transparency
- Relational v process driven responses
- Individualised
- Accept and work with anger
- Practical support



Initial responses
are very important

Walter et al (2015),
research people
bereaved due to
drugs/alcohol 'stand
out finding': kindness



The importance of hope

Reading from 'Holding on to hope' (p123)



Supporting bereaved people

- Bereavement support is patchy and often inaccessible.
- Think whole family
- Some excellent resources are on Scotland's Support After Death website <http://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk/>
- For local resources look at At a Loss or NCC's websites



“How did I know they genuinely cared? I saw it in their eyes, I felt it in the squeeze of a hand, or in a fleeting touch on the arm ... Compassion is a subtle thing, it’s nuanced and difficult to fake.”

(Aldridge, 2020)

Q. What tools and resources do you use to support bereaved children and their families?



Creativity

- Many forms
- Non-verbal can be inclusive
- Uses different part of our brains
- Process not product
- Sensory soothing/trauma sensitive
- Support story telling and meaning-making
- Reflection tool
- Our own attitude/confidence has an impact



Stitching in bereavement

A coping strategy

A form of expression-
Speaking the unspeakable

Rebecca Jackson – Speak
Their Name quilt



Supporting bereaved people using textiles

Using textile art to help process feelings and receive comfort

- Memory cushions or quilts
 - Memory bears
 - Memory boxes
 - Fidget stars
- Blog: <https://www.learningsocialworker.com/single-post/2019/01/06/fabric-feelings-and-fidget-stars-personal-and-professional-reflections-on-the-emotional-u>



Reflective activity

Using whatever you have to hand - paper, pens, craft material, computer, photos – create a memorial heart for someone.

This could be for someone you have loved and lost or it could be for someone you know who would benefit from knowing they are in your thoughts and their loved one is remembered.

You can use words, images or a combination.

You might want to put it where you can see it or send it to someone.



You might be interested in ...

- NSFT Working with bereaved families project for those whose loved one received mental health services from the trust

Caroline.Aldridge@nsft.nhs.uk

- Remembering Together Group – looking at ways of supporting people bereaved due to mental illness. Steering group and events.

RememberingTogetherGroup@gmail.com





If you know someone
experiencing grief
please offer them your
love and kindness

Norfolk Multi-agency Practice Week



Feedback can be provided through the QR code on the left or through this link which will be shared in the chat:

<https://forms.office.com/e/EM5kEwrFLJ>



Thank you to each of you for
your engagement and for the
work you do.

Any questions?



Books available from www.learningsocialworker.com

They Died Waiting: The Crisis in Mental Health – Stories of Loss and Stories of Hope (2023) by Caroline Aldridge and Emma Corlett

Also available is *He Died Waiting: Learning the Lessons – A Bereaved Mother's View of Mental Health Services* (2020) by Caroline Aldridge and supporting resources

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Contacts:

Additional resources shared within the session:

['The death of a school friend - how young people cope'](#)

Sibling Support can support siblings after a death and have some great resources

<https://www.siblingsupport.co.uk/>

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk>

<https://www.cruse.org.uk>

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

Children's bereavement support books that people might find useful. They are based on the sudden death of a mum and the books are written from the perspectives of the 3 children of the family, i.e. same parental death but from different ages and stages. There are many Q&A sections in each book that cover ways to answer tricky questions around the death. There are also accompanying worksheets for adults to work with children and young people. You can find out more details on my website www.lornavyse.com

<https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/births-ceremonies-and-deaths/deaths/bereavement-support/bereavement-support-for-children-young-people-and-parents>

How do you help a grieving friend? This is a great little video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2zLCCRT-nE>

[You Are Not Alone by Cariad Lloyd | Waterstones](#)

Podcasts that you might find helpful <https://www.scottyslittlesoldiers.co.uk/news/help-me-im-grieving>

Relaxed conversations about death [Death Cafe](#)