

Guide to meeting your MP

This year's theme for Children's Grief Awareness Week (16-22 November 2017) is #YoureNotAlone. The Week is an ideal opportunity for you to ask to meet your local MP and raise their awareness of bereaved children's needs and how they can be met.

Preparation is key, so use this handy guide to secure your meeting and make the most of your time.

How can arrange to meet my MP?

The best way of arranging a meeting with your MP is to telephone or email their office and book an appointment at one of their constituency surgeries. This is most likely to be on a Friday, as they are usually in Westminster from Monday to Thursday. You might even be able to secure a meeting for the Friday of Children's Grief Awareness Week: Friday 17 November.

Alternatively, you could invite them to come and visit your premises or come to an event.

To find out who they are and how best to contact them, visit the Parliament website www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps which should have a link to their constituency website.

What should I take with me?

- ➔ A copy of the briefing for MPs (see below)
- ➔ A copy of the Children's Grief Awareness Poster (see below)
- ➔ Information about your service, if you are representing an organisation.

What should I talk about?

Plan your meeting in advance – you probably won't get very long. In the meeting, you need to:

- ➔ tell your story
- ➔ get across some facts about childhood bereavement
- ➔ ask them to do something.

Tell your story

If you are visiting your MP on behalf of a child bereavement organization, you will probably want to cover something about

- ➔ how the organization was set up – what inspired it and how did it get going?
- ➔ the main activities it runs – take along something visual to help you explain, such as a short film clip or some photos on your phone, or a physical object such as a memory jar

- ➔ some numbers – showing how many children you work with each year
- ➔ testimonies from families about the difference your service has made
- ➔ something about how your service uses volunteers or involves the wider community

If you're visiting your MP more to raise awareness of child bereavement more generally, you might want to

- ➔ share your story – you could say something about the person who died, the support you got and what else you would have found helpful

Get across the facts about childhood bereavement

- ➔ share some facts and figures about childhood bereavement, which might include the number of children bereaved each year in your local area. See our maps for help with this <http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/research/local-statistics.aspx>
- ➔ talk about the impact of bereavement on children and young people, and what helps. You could print off the handout on the next page

Ask them to take one or two clear actions. These could be

- ➔ Attending an event you are organizing
- ➔ Tweeting a picture of themselves holding up the Children's Grief Awareness Week poster and tagging your organisation and hashtags #ChildrensGriefAwareness and #YoureNotAlone
- ➔ Featuring your organization on their website
- ➔ Taking up an issue in Parliament that you feel passionate about. You could ask them to write a letter to the relevant minister, ask a Parliamentary Question or even arrange a debate. This could be about
 - The availability of child bereavement services in your local area
 - Training for teachers and other professionals in supporting bereaved pupils
 - Specialist CAMHS services and how these are working for bereaved children and young people in your area
 - The cuts to bereavement benefits that were introduced in April 2017
 - The ineligibility of unmarried partners to bereavement benefits
 - Funeral poverty and how this affects families

You can read more about these topics at

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/campaigns.aspx>

Feel free to put your MP in touch with the Childhood Bereavement Network coordinator Alison Penny if they would like further briefings or information apenny@ncb.org.uk

This briefing has been prepared by the Childhood Bereavement Network on behalf of Children's Grief Awareness Week 2017

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

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Briefing for MPs

- ➔ No official data is collected on the number of children bereaved each year.
- ➔ We estimate around 24,000 parents die leaving dependent children under 18 – that's over 100 newly bereaved children each day
- ➔ Around 1 in 29 children in school have been bereaved of a parent or sibling – roughly 1 per class
- ➔ See the estimates for your area at <http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/research/local-statistics.aspx>

Compared to their non-bereaved peers, children and young people bereaved of a parent are

- ➔ More likely to have physical health symptoms and risky health behaviours
- ➔ One and a half times as likely to have a mental disorder and more likely to attempt suicide
- ➔ 50% more likely to die before middle age
- ➔ Lower scoring at GCSE and less likely to be employed at the age of 30
- ➔ Over-represented in the criminal justice system

Children's Grief Awareness Week (16-22 Nov) #YoureNotAlone

- ➔ All too often, bereaved children feel very alone.
- ➔ It helps them to realise there are others out there like them, going through similar difficult times and learning to live through their loss
- ➔ In many areas, children can meet others through their local child bereavement service. We want that support to be available everywhere
- ➔ Some prefer to connect with others online – specialist websites can help them do that in a safe space
- ➔ Parenting after widowhood or the death of a child can feel very lonely, too.
- ➔ Peer support from organisations like WAY Widowed and Young and The Compassionate Friends can help parents meet others who 'just get it'
- ➔ For teachers, nurses, GPs and other professionals, supporting bereaved children and their families can feel overwhelming. Professionals want to help but worry about making things worse.
- ➔ We want professionals to feel they are part of a network of support for children – knowing when and how to help their families find extra help
- ➔ Training, both face to face and online, helps professionals feel more confident to support families

We would like to see:

- ➔ Better data on the number of children bereaved each year
- ➔ Training on bereavement for school staff and other adults working with children and young people
- ➔ More consistent funding for specialist services so that all children can access the support they need
- ➔ A rethink of the changes to bereavement benefits introduced in April 2017 that are seeing 91% bereaved families supported for a shorter period than under current arrangements
- ➔ Better support for cohabiting partners & kinship carers
- ➔ More parents encouraged to plan ahead www.planif.org.uk
- ➔ Great openness in talking about dying, death and bereavement.