

‘How to Mend a Friend’

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A specially designed mini unit of work to support children following a bereavement or other difficult time in their life. It can also be used with classmates to support their understanding of how to care for a friend who has faced difficult times.

The unit combines The Marfleet Foundation’s and The Story Project’s years of experience in the classroom, research in using stories to support difficult experiences and lived experience of bereavement.

We have used this story to help children understand how to support themselves and/or a friend during a difficult time. It could also be used for a number of tricky experiences that children may need support with.

Feel free to adapt this resource to suit the need of your children.



What children will learn in this unit

Lesson 1:

I can explain how I like to be supported during difficult times

Lesson 2:

I can tell you how I would support a friend during difficult times

Lesson 3:

I can explain what my strengths are and how they make me a good friend

Sensitive Content in This Story

While the story does not mention bereavement, the activities and discussions linked to the book may be a sensitive subject area for some children. The author wrote this book while receiving treatment for cancer, which may also be a difficult subject for some children.

The first session explores how children like to be supported during times when life feels hard, while the second and third sessions focus on the ways they can support others. What feels difficult will be different for each child and may include experiences of change, loss and grief.

Supporting a bereaved child, or child facing difficult times, can be hard. It is important for your own mental health and your ongoing development as a practitioner to take time to reflect on the sessions.

Bereaved children will have a specific point of reference for these sessions. Aim to hold space and time for reflection and be open to allowing them to explore things that worked for them, things that didn't, and things they'd like to try.

Encourage a discussion on how the different ways to help a friend feel for them – learning *from* the book. The discussion will naturally turn to talking about how everyone likes to be supported differently and that's ok.



Bereaved children may share their experiences of how others offered support to them or their special person before they died. Children who have been bereaved through illness may have more to share than those bereaved through sudden death. All children sharing their experiences will need acknowledgement and reassurance.

Top Tips for talking about Grief, Loss or Bereavement

- If a child has very recently experienced a bereavement, it may feel too raw to have this conversation straight away. See if you can look at delivering the lesson at a later date so the child can fully participate.
- If a child has been away from school for a long time due to a bereavement, talk to the family about how the child would like to transition back to school. They may find it helpful to have you talk to the rest of the class before the child returns.
- Try to avoid euphemisms such as 'passed away' which can lead to misunderstanding.
- If the discussion is following a death in the community, discuss with children some ways you can positively honour and remember their life.
- Children will have different experiences of loss, with some children experiencing very painful losses in their lives. Other children may have experienced the loss of a pet or a favourite teddy, for example. Care should be taken to ensure all children's feelings are validated, while ensuring that children understand different losses are not comparable.
- Establish ground rules at the start so that children feel safe to speak openly.

Further Resources

Books on similar topics:

- Badger's Parting Gift by Susan Varley
- Grief is an Elephant by Tamara Ellis Smith
- When I'm Gone by Marguerite McLaren
- Hare Shaped Hole by John Dougherty

Further support can be found at the following organisations:

- Child Bereavement UK
- Winston's Wish
- [The Marfleet Foundation](#)
- [The Story Project](#)



RSHE skill links

Through this unit children will explore the following RSHE statutory (s) wellbeing objectives.

General Wellbeing (S):	Caring Friendships (S):
How to recognise feelings and use varied vocabulary to talk about their own and others' feelings. (Lesson 1, 2, 3) That change and loss, including bereavement, can provoke a range of feelings, that grief is a natural response to bereavement, and that everyone grieves differently. (Lesson 1, 2)	How important friendships are in making us feel happy and secure, and how people choose and make friends. (Lesson 1, 2) The characteristics of friendships that lead to happiness and security, including mutual respect, honesty, trustworthiness, loyalty, kindness, generosity, trust, sharing interests and experiences, and support with problems and difficulties. (Lesson 2, 3)
Respectful, Kind Relationships (S):	
How to pay attention to the needs and preferences of others, including in families and friendships. Pupils should be encouraged to discuss how we balance the needs and wishes of different people in relationships and why this can be complicated. (Lesson 2) Practical steps they can take and skills they can develop in a range of different contexts to improve or support their relationships. (Lesson 2, 3)	

Lesson Content

All the lesson plans in this unit follow our STORY structure



- S** **Settle:** Start your session with a settling activity to encourage children to be in the right frame of mind for listening and learning about their wellbeing.



- T** **Training:** Keep children's emotional literacy updated by spending a couple of minutes looking at a picture from the book and discussing the different emotions the characters are feeling.



- O** **Objective:** Introduce a wellbeing objective for children to focus on when they are listening to the story



- R** **Read:** Read the story and discuss the following guided reading questions as a class.



- Y** **You:** To finish the session children have the opportunity to reflect on the book and to relate the book to themselves.

SUPPORTING BEREAVED CHILDREN IN A LESSON: A PLANNING TOOL

ACKNOWLEDGE THEM:

- **Consider ways to do this**
Can be non-verbal, non-direct
It validates their feelings

REASSURE THEM:

- **They are doing well**
It shows them that they are safe, and
you have thought of them

USE DIRECT LANGUAGE:

- **Model words and phrases**
Supports their developing
understanding of how to express their
feelings

OFFER A LIFELINE:



- **Lesson's learning objective**
Learning about or learning from?
- **Lesson's task/activity**
How will the child feel?
- **Prepare them beforehand**
Share resources, talk to the surviving
parent, no surprises
- **Plan to offer time and space**
Consider where to timetable the lesson
- **Safe environment**
Establish at the beginning by revisiting
class ground rules and expectations of
behaviour
- **Extra adult support**
Consider having an extra eye or an
opportunity for small group support
- **Right to pass**
Who? Where? How?
Why? Because it is overwhelming

How will you close the lesson?

Consider how all
the children may
feel