


Ten Ten's Guidance on Life Cycles – Death and Grief

Last updated: 21st December 2022

3	Introduction
4	What does the DfE Guidance, PSHE Association and the Catholic Model Curriculum say about teaching about death and grief?
6	What does 'Life to the Full' teach about death and grief?
10	Consulting with parents and carers
11	Death and grief tips for staff

Introduction

Teaching about death and grief does not require a Key Decision, because it falls within the remit of the statutory and PSHE Association guidance about life cycles, mental health and wellbeing. However, it is a sensitive topic that requires careful planning from schools to ensure that pupils are fully supported throughout their learning. We recommend that schools only hold this session in the upper year group of each key stage, *e.g. Year 2, Year 4 and Year 6*.

This document provides **guidance on teaching about death and grief**, and a summary of how Ten Ten supports Catholic primary schools in this teaching through our **Life to the Full** programme.

What does the DfE Guidance, PSHE Association and the Catholic Model Curriculum say about teaching about death and grief?

The **Life to the Full** programme fully meets the government statutory Relationships and Health Education guidance for primary schools. See below for specific information about which [DFE](#) and [PSHE Association](#) and criteria from the Catholic Model Curriculum are met (either wholly or partly) through the **Unit 4: Life Cycles** sessions on death and grief:

	Department for Education RHE Guidance	PSHE Association Guidance	PSHE Association Guidance	Catholic Model Curriculum
Broad category description:	By the end of primary school, children will learn:	By the end of KS1, children will learn:	By the end of KS2, children will learn:	By the end of primary school, children will learn:
Knowing a range of emotions	That there is a normal range of emotions (e.g. <i>happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, nervousness</i>) and scale of emotions that all humans experience in relation to different experiences and situations.	H14. how to recognise what others might be feeling. H15. to recognise that not everyone feels the same at the same time, or feels the same about the same things.	H17. to recognise that feelings can change over time and range in intensity. H18. about everyday things that affect feelings and the importance of expressing feelings.	KS2.2.3.10. About changes that can happen in life, e.g. loss, separation, divorce and bereavement and the emotions that can accompany these changes
Identifying and articulating feelings	How to recognise and talk about their emotions, including having a varied vocabulary of words to use	H16. about ways of sharing feelings; a range of words to describe feelings.	H19. a varied vocabulary to use when talking about feelings; about how to express feelings in different ways.	KS1.1.4.2. A language to describe feelings KS2.1.4.2. To extend their vocabulary to deepen their

	when talking about their own and others' feelings.			understanding of the range and intensity of their feelings
Seeking support	Where and how to seek support (including recognising the triggers for seeking support), including whom in school they should speak to if they are worried about their own or someone else's mental wellbeing or ability to control their emotions (including issues arising online).	H19. to recognise when they need help with feelings; that it is important to ask for help with feelings; and how to ask for it	H22. to recognise that anyone can experience mental ill health; that most difficulties can be resolved with help and support; and that it is important to discuss feelings with a trusted adult.	<p>KS1.2.4.6. Who to go to if they are worried or need help</p> <p>KS2.2.4.6. That there are a number of different people and organisations they can go to for help in different situations and how to contact them</p> <p>KS2.2.4.8. To keep asking for help until they are heard</p>
About change, death and grief		H20. about change and loss (including death); to identify feelings associated with this; to recognise what helps people to feel better.	H23. about change and loss, including death, and how these can affect feelings; ways of expressing and managing grief and bereavement.	<p>KS1.1.5.1. That there are life stages from birth to death</p> <p>KS2.1.5.2. To recognise the differences that occur at each stage of a human being's development (including childhood, adolescence, adulthood, older age)</p>

What does 'Life to the Full' teach about death and grief?

In KS1, LKS2 and UKS2, teaching about death and grief is included as part of **Unit 4: Life Cycles** which is part of **Module 1: Created and Loved By God**. An outline of the teaching content is provided below:

Early Years Foundation Stage

EYFS 1.4.1 'Growing Up' helps children compare life cycles of different living things, before exploring the natural human cycle of life, with a focus on what children can remember about their development so far and what they know will happen as they get older. This is underpinned by the religious understanding that growing up is part of God's plan for our lives, and that we are loved by Him at every life stage.

If appropriate for the age and stage of the class, **there is an extension opportunity to describe death as the natural end of a life cycle.**

Key Stage One

KS1 1.4.2 'Beginnings and Endings' builds on learning from EYFS by introducing the beginning and ending points of the human life cycle: birth and death, the latter of which is the main focus of the session. Framed within the Christian understanding of eternal life, pupils will learn to consider and communicate about death in a direct yet gentle way, understand some of the feelings experienced when a person dies (grief), and consider ways to support themselves and others. Experiences and feelings of non-death grief are also explored.

Some key teaching points include:

- Every single living thing has a beginning and an ending; in between is living. **For a human, their beginning is called birth, and their ending is called death. In the middle is their lifetime.** This is all part of God's plan for us! In the Bible it says: **'There is a time to be born and a time to die.'** (Ecclesiastes 3:2)
- To 'die' means to stop living. For humans, for humans, **the heart needs to completely stop** beating and **breathing needs to completely stop** for more than a short while for a person to be dead.

- Although death happens at different times for different people, **death is *always* the ending of human life on earth**. Death is a natural part of the human life cycle, and everyone's life on earth must end, even though this can be very sad.
- Jesus told people that **when they die and their lifetime on earth has ended, they will live with God in Heaven** and know His love for them every moment of every day. Christians believe that death is the beginning of a new stage of our lives that we don't need to be afraid of, because Jesus died and rose again to conquer death!
- When someone dies, the people who knew and loved them and who are still alive, experience something called 'grief', which can be a combination of different feelings which vary over time. **There is no right or wrong way to grieve**, and Jesus knows how we feel, having also experienced grief.
- **When a person is experiencing grief** (whether death or non-death related), **there is nothing we can do to take it away, but there are things which we can do to help them through it**.
- Because of God's great love, **we don't need to be afraid of death** but instead **can look forward with hope! This doesn't take away our grief and sad feelings about people dying, but it does give us hope**.

Lower Key Stage Two

The LKS2 session prior to [LKS2 1.4.2 'A Time for Everything'](#) explored birth and life before it; this session discusses death and life after it.

This session expands on all the key teaching points listed for KS1, including the following key additions:

- Birth and death are situated within a wider timeline of: life before birth; birth; lifetime; death; life after death.
- By our faith in Jesus, we are made ready to **meet God when we die and that this is the beginning of our new life in heaven**. The Bible tells us that, in heaven, God 'will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.' (Revelation 21:4)
- There are various models that can help people know what to expect in terms of a grief journey over time, but these are just ideas – **grief (death related and non-death related) is different for everyone, and there is no right or wrong way to grieve**.

- There are actions we can take to help a grieving person, e.g. *inviting them to share their feelings/memories if they want to*. There are also actions we can take that might hinder a grieving person, e.g. *assuming we know what they need and when they need it*.
- The Bible says a lot about death and grief, and God's promises can prove a source of comfort in grief: 'God heals the broken hearted.' (Psalm 147: 3)
- We can pray for the dead, particularly using the following prayer for those who have died:

**Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine upon them.
May they rest in peace.
Amen**

Upper Key Stage Two

Throughout the 'Paradise Street' series, pupils have seen Siobhan and her Dad navigating life following the death of their Mum/wife. A look back over their experiences is the springboard for this session's discussion of death and grief. Framed within the Christian understanding of eternal life, [UKS2 1.4.4 'Hope Beyond Death'](#) helps pupils to consider and communicate about death in a direct yet gentle way, reflect compassionately on the complexities of grief and consider ways to support themselves and others.

Building on learning from LKS2, some features of this UKS2 session include:

- A class-compiled list of words or phrases they associate with death, which is referred to throughout the session so that children have the opportunity to have their questions heard, and where possible answered.
- An extensive glossary to help support teachers in answering questions concerning the practical things that can happen shortly after a person dies. The listed terms are: *wake, coffin, funeral, inquest, obituary, burial, cremation, gravestone, epitaph, hearse, mourning, interment, urn, grave, deceased, crematorium, life everlasting (heaven, hell, purgatory), Reception of the Body, Requiem Mass, memorial, organ donation, flowers*. Teachers have the option to omit or avoid some of these as best suits the needs of their class.
- Discussion around the mystery of faith that is the resurrection, and how St Paul writes that 'Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.' (1 Corinthians 13: 12)

- A compilation of clips from 'Paradise Street' where Siobhan and her Dad talk about their Mum/wife in different scenarios, *e.g. how proud Siobhan's Mum would be of her, how she had to tell her Dad about wanting a bra as she had no-one else to go with, when her Mum was pregnant with her, how her Mum and Dad came to get married, and discussions about periods.*

Discussion questions and suggested answers about the 'Paradise Street' film, which helps children to learn about and discuss grief in more depth, appreciate the impact that losing a loved one can have on someone, and learn the importance of asking questions and expressing feelings.

Consulting with Parents and Carers

Whilst it is not essential for schools to consult with parents and carers, as this content does not require a Key Decision, **we highly recommend that schools do send a letter home** to notify and prepare parents and carers for any questions or discussion that might arise. Included as **Appendix 2** of each **Life to the Full** session concerning death and grief, you can use the following text, which gives some more information about this **Life to the Full** resource, to copy and paste to your school's letterhead. It is fully editable if you want to add further details.

Dear Parents and Carers,

Life to the Full – Session about Death and Grief

As part of your child's RE and RHE learning, we will be completing a lesson on _____ which introduces children to the topics of death and grief in a sensitive, age-appropriate way from a Catholic faith perspective.

In the session, your child will learn:

- What 'death' means
- About some feelings often connected with grief
- What the Christian faith says about death and eternal life
- Some ways to support themselves and others when they are grieving.

The most important way you can support your child's learning is to be willing to have open, honest conversations about death and perhaps share your own experiences of death and grief if you feel able to.

You may like to pray with your child and as well as praying the following traditional prayer for those who have died, you might like to name any family and friends who have died and ask that they would rest in peace.

Prayer for Those Who Have Died

**Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine upon them.**

May they rest in peace.

Amen

If you have any queries about the lesson, don't hesitate to get in touch with your child's class teacher.

Death and Grief Tips for Staff

Included as **Appendix 1** of each **Life to the Full** session concerning death and grief, the following document has been created to help adults prepare for speaking about death and grief with children. Speaking and thinking about death and grief can be hard and difficult to navigate for all of us, so teaching about it and discussing it with children can be hard and painful for everyone – adults included.

There are many excellent resources to support adults who are grieving - if this topic raises difficult emotions and thoughts for you and you're looking for some support, a good starting place might be this document from [Cruse](#), or the website of the organisation [The Art of Dying Well](#).

Speaking about death elicits very different responses in people – it is important not to judge someone's response (whether an adult or a child) and to allow space for whatever they are experiencing - from numbness to anger, from tears to awkward joking.

During Conversations with Children

- Listen carefully so you know exactly what the child has said and means. If you don't know an answer, say so.
 - When speaking about death in particular, it's really important not to use euphemisms with children, e.g. *'grandad has gone to another room'*, *'she's flown to heaven'*, *'now she's an angel'*, *'grandma went to sleep and woke up in heaven'* etc. Even *'passed away'* rather than *'died'* can be confusing. Be as direct as possible, because children understand words very literally, especially with something so hard to comprehend as death.
 - Do your best not to be daunted by direct questions and comments: “When will I die?” “Will my grandma die first because she's old?” “My dad keeps getting a bad back - does that mean he's going to die soon?” “What's it like inside a coffin?” “What does a dead body look like?” “Will I be a ghost when I die?” and so on, as children are expressing their natural curiosity about something that many adults have grown accustomed to avoiding or are too embarrassed to ask themselves!
 - It's OK for children to see if you're sad - you don't need to keep your tears hidden. It can help children to see and learn how to express and regulate emotions, as well as realising that sadness and tears don't last forever.
-

- If a child is grieving and shares their feelings and experience, encourage others not to offer platitudes such as phrases beginning with 'at least...' *For example, "at least it was quick", "at least they had someone with them" etc.* Phrases such as this can minimise people's experiences of grief and are important to avoid.
- Be aware that some of the symptoms of grief which are more common in children include responses such as: regressive behaviour (e.g. 'babyish' behaviour, bedwetting), changes in the way they play/behave, clinginess including fear of abandonment, difficulty focussing on tasks/work, sleep problems etc.

An Important Clarification

One common remark in our culture is about people becoming an angel after death. This point isn't explicitly addressed in the resource but it's very important to clarify that humans and angels are two distinct types of creature. Humans categorically do not become angels after death - we remain human and will do for all eternity.

Resources to support schools and children

If you subscribe to Ten Ten's **Collective Worship** programme, you can access the '**Because of Jesus**', an assembly intended for use after a bereavement in the school community, and also '**Jesus, Remember Me**' a Remembrance Day resource that speaks about grief, loss and death.

Diocesan websites often have grief resources aimed at schools e.g. [Westminster Diocese](#). The **YouCat for Kids** (by [YOUCAT Foundation](#) available to buy from the [Catholic Truth Society](#)) is also a good reference for adults to use to support faith-based explanations about death (p.97 paragraphs 58 and 59) and heaven (p.97 paragraphs 60 - 62).

Organisations To Help

- [Children Bereavement UK](#)
- [Winston's Wish](#) - resources and advice especially for children and families

Book Lists

There are many excellent books to help children understand death and grief - too many to list here and other organisations have created excellent book lists themselves. Here are a few helpful links:

- [Child Bereavement UK - Booklist](#)
- [Book Trust - Grief and Loss Booklist](#)
- [Haven's Hospices - Booklist](#)