

A Guide to the Rainbows Bereavement Programme for Young People & Teenagers - SECONDARY



Young people often grow up in a world assuming that their family will always stay the same.

When there is a death in a family, everyone is affected. Death can have a significant impact.

Young people generally, have a more mature understanding of death than children. However, the teenage world can be shattered by a death. Young people and teenagers are still developing and they do not yet fully understand the adult world – so feelings of upset, confusion, sadness, anger, anxiety, fear, isolation, loneliness and rejection are all very normal and common.

Young people are at a stage of development that is in transition between childhood and adulthood. It is a time of great physical, emotional, social and psychological change.

Physically: low energy, interrupted sleep/eating patterns, unexplained aches and pains, weak muscles, difficulty sleeping, feeling sick, nauseous

Emotionally: shock, fear, anxiety, confusion, anger, sadness, relief, loneliness, guilt, isolation, rejection

Socially: loss of self-esteem and confidence, withdrawal from friends and activities, including school attendance.

Behaviourally: lack of concentration, memory loss, 'acting out', aggression, irritability or regression to a time when younger – mood swings, over sensitive or they can act as if everything is fine, when that may not be the case

Spiritually: Teenagers in particular can begin to question life and the meaning of life following a death. Previous held beliefs may now be challenged and uncertainty can add to the impact of the bereavement

Participating in a support group with others who are experiencing the same emotions and feelings can be very helpful and reduce anxiety.

An average of 3,000 young people and teenagers attend a Rainbows programme every year.

The Rainbows Bereavement programme:

The programme supports young people to be able to share their story about the person that has died. They are supported to talk about what the person meant to them and the part they played in their lives. Most of all, the programme seeks to help young people and teenagers build their memories of the person, things they did together, times they shared, laughed together and special times they may have shared.

Young people also need to be supported if they have regrets about things they may have said or not said and those memories may be troubling. This is very much part of being supported to adjust to the death of someone.

What Rainbows offers:

- Support in a safe place where young people can share their experience of loss through death with others in a similar situation -“I’m not the only one”.
- Support for young people to be able to identify and share their feelings.
- Support to help rebuild self-esteem, trust and self-confidence.
- Support young people to begin to adjust to the changes in their life in a positive and healthy way.

Rainbows cannot offer:

- Professional counselling or therapy.
- Does not give advice or attempt to solve problems.
- Does not give opinions, pass comment, make judgements, take sides or criticise.
- Does not give reports, take notes.
- The Rainbows programme cannot be a first response for young people impacted by death as a result of suicide – a professional support is needed – group support can only be accessed when that professional support has taken place.

Note: It is not permitted that anyone attending another service can attend the Rainbows programme at the same time. Attending two services at the same time can hinder the effectiveness of each service.

Bereavement Groups:

- Groups are formed with other young people of a similar age.
- There are usually 4 – 8 in a group.
- If only two young people are present in any session, the session will be cancelled for that week.
- Siblings are not in the same group.

The boundary of the group:

- Young people are encouraged to share at home what they themselves have talked about and what the Facilitators have said to them, but not to talk about others by name or share what they have said.
- If there is an indication in the course of the programme that anyone is at risk, being harmed, harming themselves or others, Young People Protection procedures, as laid down under Children First Guidelines (2017) will be followed.

Facilitators:

- These are trained volunteers who have completed a recruitment process and undertaken a 4-day training, in order to facilitate the groups each week (they are not trained counsellors or therapists).
- There are two Facilitators with each group.

The Rainbows programme:

- A nine week programme.
- Each session lasts for one hour.

The programme is delivered using a variety of resources:

- Programme activity Journal
- Scenarios
- Discussion Questions
- Relaxation exercises

Key themes/topics in the programme:

Feelings: Young people very often do not have the words or understanding to name or recognise their feelings, particularly at a time of loss and change. Being supported through the programme to recognise, name and express feelings in a safe space can reduce possible confusion, worries and isolation. Recognising that others in a similar situation have the same feelings can be very comforting.

Family: Young people can think following a death, that they are no longer a family. Through the programme, young people are guided to understand that they are still part of a family even though their family may have changed significantly.

Change: Young people assume that their family will always stay the same. When something significant happens in a family, everyone is affected. The change following a death, can be overwhelming for young people. Through the programme, young

people are supported to begin to make sense of what has happened.

Anger: Anger is a normal, healthy emotion. It is very common that young people can be angry and frustrated. The programme focuses on the anger that they may be experiencing and how they may express anger in a safe and healthy way.

Difficult feelings: Young people regularly blame themselves and feel guilty when someone dies. Feelings of confusion, worry, fear, loneliness and sadness can be common at times.

Coping and adjusting: Simple coping techniques are introduced in the programme to build confidence and to support young people and teenagers to begin to adjust and adapt to life after the death in their family.

Details Parents need to know:

The Rainbows programme is a free service funded by Tusla.

Every programme has a Coordinator who manages the programme and the groups. It is important that it is the Coordinator you contact with any questions before or during the programme.

- A Rainbows Bereavement Enrolment Form is required to be completed for every young person attending the programme. Forms are available at the programme centre or by making contact with the Coordinator.
- It is important to understand that the Rainbows programme may not meet the needs of all young people and teenagers. Some bereavements of a more traumatic nature will need a more professional support. We ask that you consult in advance of enrolment by emailing support@rainbowsireland.ie or you can phone in confidence **087 3510898**.
- Young people and teenagers whose bereavement is a result of suicide need professional support before attending the group support of the Rainbows programme.
- **It is important to be aware that group support is not always suitable for everyone. It can happen at times that a group member may leave the programme. This will be discussed with parents if this situation arises and every effort will be made to signpost you to another support service.**
- If the number in the group is below three at any given time, the group is postponed as two group members is not peer group support.

Programme materials:

The programme materials are kept in a secure place by the Coordinators for the duration of the programme. No one has access to the materials.

The materials are designed to support young people begin to understand their feelings in relation to their loss experience. It is the group process itself, using the materials of the programme that fosters understanding, so that young people may begin to adapt and adjust to what has happened in their lives.

The programme material is not a diagnostic or analytical resource to form any analysis on a young person coping.

The programme material is designed for the group context only. Young people and teenagers may take their journal home or they may leave it to be shredded.

It is important that the journal remains the property of the young person. When taken out of the format of the group context in the particular programme, the programme material can or may be interpreted in a way that was not intended.

We would ask that you respect your son's/daughter's wishes regarding the sensitive nature of this process.

Feedback:

The Rainbows programme provides a space for young people and teenagers to be supported to begin to understand, talk about and adapt to the changes in their life.

The support provided by Facilitators in the group is not a diagnostic or therapeutic process.

The policy of Rainbows Ireland is not to give specific feedback on any group member taking part in the programme.

As parents and guardians, it is generally you that will observe and notice any positive impact that the programme may have had on your son/daughter, on a day to day basis and over time.

Parents generally identify outcomes such as: reduced conflict among siblings, improved sleeping patterns, improved communication with parents, feelings of being more adjusted to the situation, more able and willing to talk to parents, smiling a bit more, being more relaxed.

Introducing the programme to a young person/teenager:

- It is important to talk to your son/daughter about attending the programme in advance and that he/she agrees to take part.
- It would help to give an outline of the programme, including the number of weeks, how the groups are formed and some of the topics that are covered.
- It can be helpful to say that others in a similar situation will be in the group.
- Give reassurance that there is no pressure put on them to have to talk in the group.

What some parents say about their son or daughter after the programme:

In general, over the years, parents say that they notice their son/daughter, on completion of the programme and in the weeks and months ahead are:

- More at ease
- Not as quick to be frustrated or angry
- Less anxious/worried
- Look forward to things more
- More able to open up
- Less stressed in the family

We deeply acknowledge the large number of parents and guardians who recognise the need to allow young people and teenagers the space to talk openly without fear of upsetting family members.

Being in a group process, with others of a shared experience of loss, can begin to support young people to come to terms and adjust in a positive way to the significant change in their life.