

Bereavement by Suicide

How Child Bereavement UK (CBUK) Helped Me

When my husband took his own life by carbon monoxide poisoning, my primary concern was looking after my three-year-old daughter. How was I to tell her what had happened and help her understand in a way that would not be too difficult and painful for her? How could I help her to have good memories about her father despite the shocking and hurtful way in which he died?

The immediate challenge was not knowing who to ask for advice. Suicide was outside the normal experience of friends and family – the very people whom one would normally go to to talk things through – and in any case, although supportive, were struggling with their own grief and shock.

For us, CBUK was a lifeline. Their approach was sympathetic, non-judgemental and objective, yet supportive and encouraging. They acknowledged the awfulness of what had happened but gave reassurance that there was a way through and beyond. They gave clear, specific, straightforward advice but at the same time allowed room for personal choice – what was right for us and the way that our family worked. They reassured me that the feelings and experiences that we were going through were “normal” in the circumstances.

Having someone else acknowledge what had happened, actually saying the words, gave us “permission” to do the same. My discussions with CBUK provided a framework of language around which we could build our own way of talking about what had happened and of telling others.

The best advice I was given was to tell the truth, even though my initial feeling was that this is not a protective thing to do.

Children naturally assume (trust) that their parents will always be there. The death of a parent brings insecurity and especially so when the trust is broken by that parent apparently choosing to “leave” the child and the family.

But telling the truth creates trust and with trust comes security. So, using language and amounts of information that are appropriate for the age and level of understanding of each child, along with expressions of love and affection that work for them, telling the truth helps them to feel safe in a very scary environment. It protects them from fear of the unknown and the shock and hurt of finding out in an unsafe way.