



“It was an outlet to talk about and remember Daddy without feeling guilty” – Lucy and Livvy’s experience of bereavement and the support that helped them

Livvy was 4 years old when her dad Sacha died from Lymphoma in 2007. Now 13 years old, Livvy, along with her mum Lucy, talked to us about their experience and the support they received from the charity Child Bereavement UK after Sacha’s death. From calling their national helpline, to attending individual and group bereavement support sessions, the family has accessed a variety of support at different times in their journey. Lucy said:

“Livvy knew that her daddy was unwell and that he needed help because of the lumps in his tummy. There were a lot of visits to the hospital, but she didn’t realise exactly what was happening until nearer the end.

“We always told her the truth when she asked questions, but kept the answers age appropriate.

“When Livvy saw her dad for the last time, we thought it was too late. He had been unconscious for 3 days and hadn’t spoken, but then there was a thunderstorm. All of a sudden he jumped out of bed, picked Livvy up and got back into bed with her.”

Immediately after Sacha died, Lucy and Livvy were introduced to Christine at Iain Rennie Hospice with whom they had a support session. Livvy has little memory of this time, but remembers playing with Playmobil whilst talking to Christine and said, *“From what mum has told me, I seem to have found it really helpful.”*

A year after the initial support session, Lucy felt that Livvy would benefit from additional support and was directed to Child Bereavement UK where Christine now worked as a Bereavement Support Practitioner. After a couple of individual support sessions, it was suggested that the mother and daughter attend Child Bereavement UK’s Family Support Group. These groups, for children aged 4-11 years old and their parent or carer, offer opportunities to meet with other families and express their feelings through facilitated play and creative activities.

Before she attended these Family Groups, Livvy said *“I’d always felt so different and that no-one else at school was like me. I soon realised I wasn’t on my own. Everyone there was in the same boat and we always had lots of fun. I remember activities like the memory box, felt making and the family tree.”*

Lucy, as a parent, also found the group sessions helpful and maintains *“They aren’t just for children. I remember sitting down with a cup of tea and the other adults. It was like a therapy session and I felt so much better afterwards.*

"I think the group helped us remember the fun times. It was an outlet to talk about and remember Daddy but without feeling guilty about life moving on."

Lucy thinks that even as a 4 year old, her daughter felt a degree of guilt when behaving normally or being happy, and that she often didn't know how to deal with her feelings. *"She would come up to me and nip me or hit me so that I would tell her off. It gave her an excuse to cry. I think even at that age she wanted to be strong for me."*

Livvy said *"You just want people to tell you they're there for you and that you can talk if you want to. I'd go into the groups not feeling my best but would come out relieved and a little bit hyper. You need to talk and get it out of your system. Don't bottle it up."*

Lucy said, *"Other people didn't know what to say. It was such a desperately sad time and people wanted to help, but didn't know how to. Grief is a lonely little place and people feel awkward."*



Mum Lucy, with Livvy, 13

When Livvy was 10 years old and Lucy was due to re-marry her new partner, now husband, Clive, they returned to Child Bereavement UK for a couple more sessions. Lucy said about this time: *"Bereavement Support Practitioners Christine and Pam were absolutely fantastic. Livvy adored them and they helped her realise that it's ok to be happy. Clive noticed a big difference too and finally felt that Livvy had accepted him."*

In 2015 after attending a fundraising event held by the charity and speaking with a member of staff, Livvy decided to attend Child Bereavement UK's YPAG (Young People's Advisory Group) for 11-25 year olds and said:

"YPAG was more about helping other bereaved young people and the younger children. I know what it's like to have someone special die and I felt useful, like I was giving something back and thinking forwards. We gave ideas about what activities could be done at the Family Groups and re-vamped the young people's section of the website. At the end of each term we did something fun and played loads of games. Last time we wrapped each other up in toilet roll and our team won!"

When asked what she would say to a young person thinking about attending the charity's groups for children or young people, Livvy said:

"Just do it even if you don't think you need to. You may think you can do it alone, but it will still help. I've definitely come out of my shell and am a lot more confident."

Mum, Lucy, said of the support they have received:

"We're big fans of Child Bereavement UK and it means a lot to us. It has picked us up out of some dark places and it's nice to know people are there for you."