

Let's talk about Suicide *by Isabelle*

Isabelle is a 9-year-old school girl. This article was shortlisted for the age 8-9 category of the Learn2Think young journalist competition.

6,188 suicides were registered in the UK in 2017 (Samaritans, 2017) and 1 in 20 children will have experienced bereavement of a parent by the age of 16 (Parsons, 2011). Despite this, 6% of adults in Britain think that you shouldn't talk to children about death (YouGov survey by Child Bereavement UK, 2016). In my opinion, talking about death (including suicide) is extremely important.

If you don't talk about it, you bottle up your feelings and that feels terrible. All your emotions get mixed up and you don't know what you are feeling anymore. This can increase your risk of suicide. Children of parents that have died by suicide are more at risk of doing this themselves, but talking about it can help to reduce this risk and make you more resilient.

One thing that makes it hard to talk about a parent dying by suicide is how people react to your grief. People react differently when you say a parent died by suicide, rather than if they died by a natural cause (like cancer or illness). I think this is because some people are uncomfortable talking about death, especially when it comes to suicide. It is also because people can be surprised, not know what to say, or because they don't want you to become upset. Sometimes other children don't know what suicide is at all.

Other times, people don't acknowledge that a parent has died or that something might be upsetting or difficult for you. This can be emotionally unsafe because it hurts your feelings and makes you more upset without giving you the opportunity to deal with those feelings. It is important for people to know that they can talk about it and that they can ask questions. I want to talk about the person that died and how I'm feeling, not ignore it. Not talking about it creates stigma.

Something that could be helpful is schools acknowledging that a parent has died and understanding what to say and what not to say. A recent YouGov survey by Child Bereavement UK (2016) found that only 1 in 10 adults think that their children's school was supportive when it came to experiencing a bereavement. You spend a lot of time at school and what

happens at school can affect your life in many ways. You don't just grieve when you are at home, you also grieve when you are at school and this can impact your learning. Sometimes it can affect your concentration, how you behave and the quality of your work. Schools should receive training about bereavement, especially suicide. This will also help schools to offer children more support in the classroom. Schools might not think about how the death of a parent might affect someone unless they have had training. After all, one child in every classroom has lost a parent or a sibling (1 in 29 schoolchildren, Child Bereavement UK, 2017), making this an important topic.