SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

WORKING TOGETHER TO KEEP OUR YOUNG PEOPLE SAFE

Primary | July 2025

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Helping children understand loss

At some point in life, most children experience the death of someone they know—whether it's a grandparent, a family friend, a beloved pet or another important figure in their life.

Bereavement can be confusing, sad and sometimes frightening for children, especially if they don't fully understand what's happening. As parents and carers, your support can make all the difference in helping your child feel safe, heard and comforted during this difficult time.

Understanding how children grieve

Grief in children can look very different from grief in adults. Young children may move in and out of sadness quickly- one minute playing happily, the next asking a difficult question about death.

Here are some common ways children might react:

- asking the same questions repeatedly
- showing changes in behaviour (clinginess, anger, quietness)
- worrying about others dying too
- having trouble sleeping or concentrating
- acting out emotions through play.

Practical ways to support your child

- **Keep routines going** – children feel safer with predictable routines such as school, mealtimes and bedtime.
- **Create space to remember** – light a candle, draw pictures, make a memory box or photo album together.
- **Give choices**– if there's a funeral or memorial, ask your child if they'd like to attend or do something else to say goodbye.
- **Use stories**– reading books about loss can help children talk about their own feelings.

Here are some trusted organisations that offer specialist support for bereaved children and families:

Winston's Wish – www.winstonswish.org

Child Bereavement UK – www.childbereavementuk.org

Cruse Bereavement Support – www.cruse.org.uk

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Using WhatsApp safely

As children begin exploring ways to connect with friends online, many are using apps such as WhatsApp to message and share with others. While these platforms can offer positive social interaction, they also come with risks that children may not yet fully understand.

WhatsApp's age rating is 13+, so if your primary-aged child is using it, they'll need close parental support and clear guidance. It is important to note that age 13 does not reflect the content children may be able to view on WhatsApp; it does not have moderators previewing what users send to each other and therefore, the content may not be appropriate for a child.

Keeping your child safe on WhatsApp

Here are some key steps you can take to help your child use WhatsApp responsibly and safely:

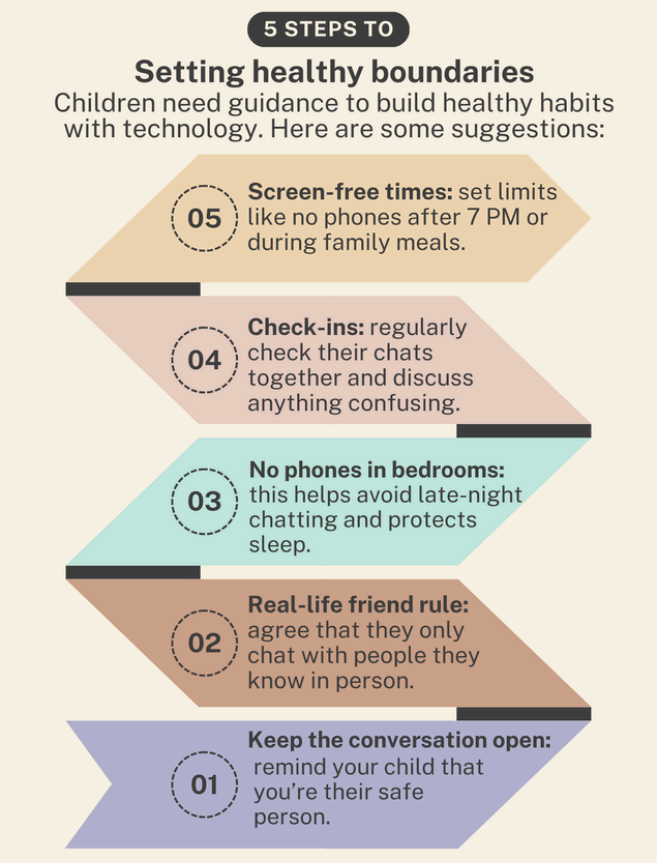
1. **Set strong privacy settings**

- **Last seen, Profile photo, About Info:** set these to 'My Contacts' or 'Nobody' to prevent strangers from seeing their information.
- **Status updates:** limit who can see their status to trusted contacts.
- **Blocked contacts:** encourage your child to block anyone who makes them feel uncomfortable or is unkind.
- **Read receipts:** you can turn off read receipts (blue ticks) to help reduce pressure to respond immediately.

2. **Turn off disappearing messages**

WhatsApp allows users to send messages that vanish after a set time, which can hide evidence of bullying or inappropriate content.

- **To check this setting:** Open a chat → Tap the person or group's name → Tap 'Disappearing Messages' → Set to 'Off'.
- **Talk to your child** about why it's important to keep a record of conversations and why messages shouldn't 'disappear'.



3. **Encourage kind and respectful messaging**

Digital communication can sometimes feel less personal, which makes it easier to say things we wouldn't say face to face. Help your child develop empathy and kindness in their messages:

- **Think before you send:** encourage your child to pause and ask, "Would I say this in person?"
- **Use kind words:** compliments, encouragement, and friendly emojis can make a big difference.
- **Avoid teasing or excluding:** group chats can become a place where some children feel left out-talk about how to make everyone feel included.
- **Don't forward hurtful messages or images:** even sharing something as a 'joke' can really upset someone else.

4. **Know how to report and block**

- Show your child how to **block contacts, report** harmful messages, and l**eave group chats** if they feel uncomfortable.