

Compassionate teaching for bereaved military children

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Plan for today

- Scotty's research in education
- Changes to PHSE curriculum in England
- Outline of the ITT materials and 'Scottyslearning' website
- Delivery of some of the ITT content
- 'Next steps' in supporting bereaved military children

Introductions

- Scotty's Little Soldiers
- The STRIDES programme
- The Scotty's Council
- Behind the Uniform
- Jenny Fogarty Anglia Ruskin University

YOUNG PEOPLES' STORIES





- 1,200 children and young people experience the death of a parent who served in the British Armed Forces every year (Scotty's Little Soldiers, 2024)
- On average, every week, 23 children or young people will walk into a classroom for the first time having experienced the death of their parent who served in the British Forces

Scotty's research in Education

- Scotty's has undertaken a short research project to better understand the school life of children who have experienced the death of a parent who served in the British Armed Forces.
- The research draws on qualitative data collected via surveys completed in October 2024 (n=190) by families who have accessed support from Scotty's Little Soldiers, along with in depth interviews with children and young people (n= 20).

Scotty's research in Education

Headline findings indicated that:

- Over three quarters (77%) of bereaved CYP had experienced at least one lesson where they covered content that directly related to the cause of death of their parent, or otherwise explicitly reminded them of their bereavement.
- Over half of the CYP (52%) had multiple experiences of potentially traumatic content in lessons related to their bereavement.
- One in six children had experienced 'a lot' of lessons which were upsetting to participate in as they directly related to or reminded them of their bereavement.



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Scotty's research in Education

- The subject most likely to have unsettling content was PSHE/RSE, where 28% of families had reported having difficult lessons.
- PSHE/RSE was closely followed by History (26%) and English (24%) as being most likely to have content that related to a child's bereavement.



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- *“[There was a] recent essay in RMPS (RE) about organ donation looking at the pros and cons of the ethical debate. My husband died following planned organ transplant surgery. My daughter did the essay but struggled with the content.”*
- -Parent/Carer

“[My child] was asked to study and perform’ war poetry as part of an English syllabus during the weeks leading up to Remembrance Sunday. All of the poems were very descriptive about soldiers falling in the battlefield, injuries and ‘dropping down dead’ in front of each other. It was utterly debilitating to her and she stood in front of the whole class with tears streaming down her face[...]. She immediately wanted to ‘drop’ the subject and it left her with lasting anxiety entering his classroom.”

-Parent/Carer



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Scotty's research in Education



- Bereaved military children are not identifiable in the National Pupil Database and so it is not possible to comment on the impact of such questions on final grades.
- However, in interviews children and young people spoke of:
 - receiving grades that were lower than predicted in examinations with upsetting questions,
 - appeals under special circumstances policies (which were upheld although JCQ rules limit any adjustment to 5% and requires deaths to be very recent)
 - lower-than-predicted grades resulting in students unable to attend their preferred further education institutions.



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Changes to the RSHE 2026 Curriculum

The revised curriculum will address the following areas:

- **Different ways of grieving:** Recognising that each person processes loss in their own manner and timeframe.
- **Supporting the bereaved:** Equipping pupils with the understanding and skills necessary to support peers who are experiencing grief.
- **Accessing support:** Providing information on where children and young people can seek assistance if they are affected by bereavement.
- **Cultural variations:** Exploring the diverse cultural perspectives and customs relating to death and mourning.



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What does this mean for teachers?

- How do we implement curriculum change with the required training?
- How do we bring the whole school community with us?
- What do we need to know to teach this well?
- What are the implications for teachers of different phases and different ages? – Subject specialist vs Generalist



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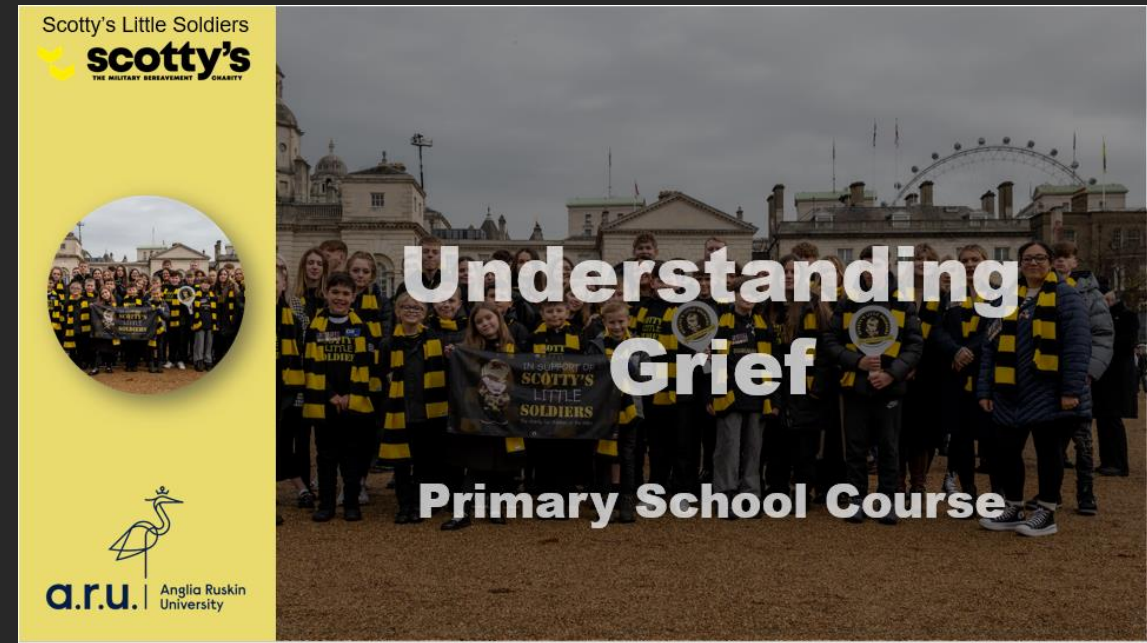


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Our solution: A unique Scotty's and ARU collaboration



- Frame it within the existing discourse on inclusive practice
- Develop an open education resource for all ITT providers
- Work within the existing processes
- NASEN Quality Assurance
- Start with trainees – resources piloted at ARU before further development and dissemination





ACCESSIBILITY: Use the Dark Mode icon at the top on the right to toggle dark mode, or fully customise the site using the Accessibility Menu at the bottom of the page on the right



Training

Understanding Grief - Primary School Course

This session takes approximately 90 minutes to deliver, covering issues related ...

Last updated on 04 Oct, 2025



Training

Understanding Grief - Secondary School Course

This session takes approximately 90 minutes to deliver, covering issues related ...

Last updated on 04 Oct, 2025



Training

Understanding Grief: Theory in Practice

This session takes approximately 60 minutes to deliver, covering theory and meth...

Last updated on 04 Oct, 2025



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What did the pilot teach us?



Trainee Teachers Feedback

- I feel I have a greater understanding of grief. I feel more confident.
- I understand what emotions and behaviours to notice in a pupil suffering and that just being there to listen is what a child needs.
- I feel well equipped to have a conversation with a child surrounding grief if needed.
- I now realise that I don't need to be a grief expert, I just need to be present and take the child's lead when approaching discussions about bereavement. This session has helped me understand that.



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TYPICAL EXPRESSIONS OF GRIEF



Sadness

Anger

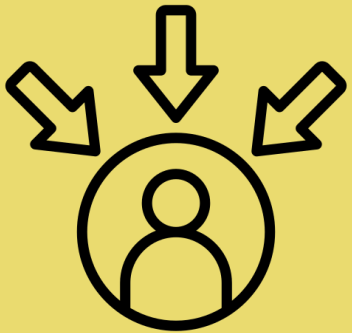
Withdrawal

Loss of focus

Problems with friendships

Changes to appetite and sleep

A BEREAVED CHILD NEEDS...



Information

Companionship

Emotional expression

Time to remember...



CASE STUDY



Nabil (8)

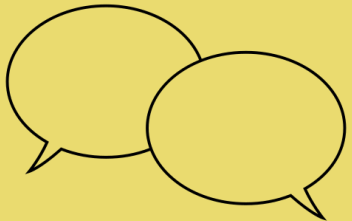
During literacy, Nabil approaches you to tell you about his dad who died last year.

He doesn't seem upset.

What next steps would you take?



TALKING WITH BEREAVED CHILDREN



Listen

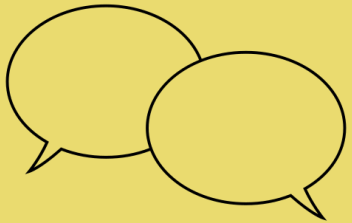
Show understanding

Name the feelings

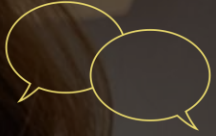
Keep life 'normal'

Ask if they want to talk again

TALKING WITH BEREAVED CHILDREN



Useful sentence starters



I'm sorry you're feeling sad today about your grandad dying.



Its usual to feel worried before a funeral, is there anything particularly you are worried about?



You know I'm always here to listen.



Its really hard when you miss someone who was special to you.



That's a great question but really tricky for me to answer. What do you think?



Why don't we talk to [school mentor] about this together?

CASE STUDY REVIEW



Nabil (8)

After sharing his memories of Dad, Nabil returns to his learning.

The following week you notice he is distracted during the same lesson.

What do you do next?



How to access the resources



- Teacher training providers contact strides@scottyslittlesoldiers.co.uk
- Provided with login details
- Login to <https://www.scottyslearning.com/>
- Download materials and resources to integrate into initial teacher training courses



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Next Steps

- Dissemination – 179 accredited providers across the country, Teacher Education Advancement Network, Universities Council of the Education of Teachers, National Association of School Based Teacher Trainers
- Evaluation with Scotty's and ARU – who is using the resources, how, what's the impact, how do we know? Mixed methods study
- Future open access resources



Thank you

Any questions

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<https://www.scottyslittlesoldiers.co.uk/media/pages/downloadable-assets/5d2889590a-1742230623/sls-document.pdf>

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