

FIRSTLIGHT NEWSLETTER



*As I gaze at the snow,
And the lights of the tree
I know in my soul,
You are here with me*

MESSAGE FROM FIRSTLIGHT CEO

Dear friends and supporters of FirstLight,

This Newsletter has a particular focus on supporting children who have experienced bereavement in childhood. I was recently taken aback by the fact that two in every one hundred 9-year-olds in Ireland have lost a parent. A large number of children, therefore, experience bereavement in childhood. It is important that we acknowledge that children grieve too, though in a manner different to adults.

When a family member or friend dies, it is very natural for parents to worry about their children and want to protect them. However, the best thing is, to be honest, give age-appropriate information about a death, and for the news to be broken by someone who knows the child really well. As children understand the world through other people, family mainly, but also carers, teachers, extended family, and friends, support from all these people is very helpful.

But this is all very daunting. How do you open a difficult conversation with a child about death. What language should you use. How will the child react and how should you respond?

Help is at hand. Delivering on its vision that all children and young people, together with the adults in their lives, can easily access high-quality information, guidance, and support to enable them to manage the impact of death on their lives, the Irish Childhood Bereavement Network (ICBN) has organised a series of events across the country, week commencing November 15th, to highlight bereaved children's needs and provide a voice for them to be heard. Its website (www.childhoodbereavement.ie) includes useful resources for families, teachers, and professionals seeking to support a bereaved child. Some pointers offered by the ICBN are included in this edition.

We are conscious that the approaching Christmas season is very challenging for bereaved parents and are including also in this edition some suggestions that we hope will help grieving parents and their family and friends through this time.

As we come towards the end of 2021 I want to thank, from the bottom of my heart, all who have enabled FirstLight, notwithstanding Covid-19 restrictions, provide crisis intervention and professional bereavement support to a very large number of families across the country, in fact, the highest number in any year to date since the organisation was founded. This would not have been possible without the creativity, flexibility, and dedication of FirstLight's executive team; the professionalism and support provided by FirstLight's talented and caring counsellors and psychotherapists; the unstinting guidance and support of FirstLight's Council; and the trust and generosity of FirstLight's many donors and funders. Thank you all most sincerely.

I would like to wish you all a safe and peaceful Christmas,

Yours faithfully,
Fionnuala Sheehan, CEO, FirstLight

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CHRISTMAS GIFT
SHOP NOW OPEN**

**NEW
National
24-Hour
Helpline
Number
1800 391 391**

FirstLight
Supporting Suddenly Bereaved Parents & Families

CHILDREN GRIEVE TOO



Every November, the Irish Childhood Bereavement Network (ICBN) organises a series of events across Ireland to highlight bereaved children's needs and provide a voice for them to be heard. A large number of children experience bereavement in childhood; for example, two in every one hundred 9-year-olds in Ireland have lost a parent. However, the loss of a parent is only one example of children's loss that encompasses the death of any important person in their lives, be that a sibling, friend, grandparent, uncle or aunt, or another person who is significant to them.

CHILDREN'S GRIEF

- Unlike adults, children dip in and out of grief. It can be intermittent and intense but also can pass quickly, distracted by friends and activities.
- Children tend to protect parents from their pain and upset. This often leaves their grief unrecognised.
- Grief in childhood and teens makes the young person feel different from their peers.
- Children try to control their grief holding it in and pretending nothing has happened. This can be isolating.
- Each child in a family grieves differently due to their personality, age, gender, and the relationship they had with the person who has died.
- Death can be frightening for children especially without the information to help understand what is happening.
- Children's grief is not a once-off occurrence but affects them at milestone times in life e.g. going into a new school, graduating, getting married, etc.

WHAT HELPS?

- Acknowledge their loss otherwise, a child can feel excluded.
- Age-appropriate information to help them understand – an adolescent's experience is very different from a five-year-olds.
- Taking part in the funerals/goodbye rituals and even making something (e.g., a picture) or having a part to play gives a sense of control – but only if they wish to do so.
- Children need time to express feelings - even anger, which can be an expression of the deep hurt and unfairness they are feeling.
- They need time to remember the person who has died and share the stories of their relationship with them.
- They need to know that they are not to blame for a death and that their thoughts or things they say do not cause death to occur.
- Meeting other bereaved children can help them understand that they are not alone in what has happened.

WHEN TO BE CONCERNED

- When a child shows persistent anxiety about the loss and life in general.
- When a child is persistently aggressive.
- When a child socially withdraws from friends and activities.
- When a child carries self-blame and guilt about the death.
- Self-destructive behaviour and risk-taking.
- Self-harming.
- Suicidal behaviour.

The above behaviours indicate more complicated grieving and require more specialised intervention.

MY WAY OF DEALING WITH LOSS MAY BE DIFFERENT TO YOURS



CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH

0-2 Years After a death in the family it is common for a baby to become withdrawn or display outbursts of loud crying and angry tears. Although infants do not understand death, they know when things have changed and may react to a person's absence. This may show in clinginess and distress. Maintaining the child's routine and making them feel secure are the most important ways to support children of this age.

2-5 Years Children still do not fully understand death at this age. They don't realise that death is permanent and is something that happens to everyone at some time. They need to know the person who died cannot return and that they are not simply asleep. They worry that something they said or did may have caused the death and need reassurance to know that it is not their fault. Children should be encouraged to ask questions which should be answered openly and simply. Children often ask the same questions over and over again. Answering these questions patiently will help them and give them reassurance.

5-8 Years Children gradually learn that death is final and that all people will die at some time. This may make them worry that other people close to them will also die. It can help children to talk about these fears. We can't promise children that no one will ever die in the family but we can help them to feel safe by telling them that they will always be looked after. It can help children if they are encouraged to talk about and express their feelings, no matter what the feelings are. More curious children in this age group often ask direct questions about what has happened to the body as they are trying to understand. They may blame themselves in some way for the death and can engage in 'magical thinking', filling the gaps when information has not been given to them.

8-12 Years They understand that death is irreversible, universal, and has a cause. Grief can express itself through physical aches and pains and challenging behaviour. It is important not to place unnecessary responsibility on children of this age especially eldest children who may feel responsible for younger siblings, or boys who lose their father and take on the role of 'man of the house'. Support the child by reassuring them about changes in lifestyle (such as household income and the family home).

As the child moves into adolescence they face a time of great change. As teenagers try to bridge the gap between childhood and adulthood, they struggle with issues of identity and independence. Losing someone at this time can make life very difficult. There is a marked difference in the grieving styles of Early (12-14 years) and Late (15-18 years).

For more detailed information about adolescent loss visit www.childhoodbereavement.ie

CHRISTMAS AFTER THE DEATH OF A CHILD

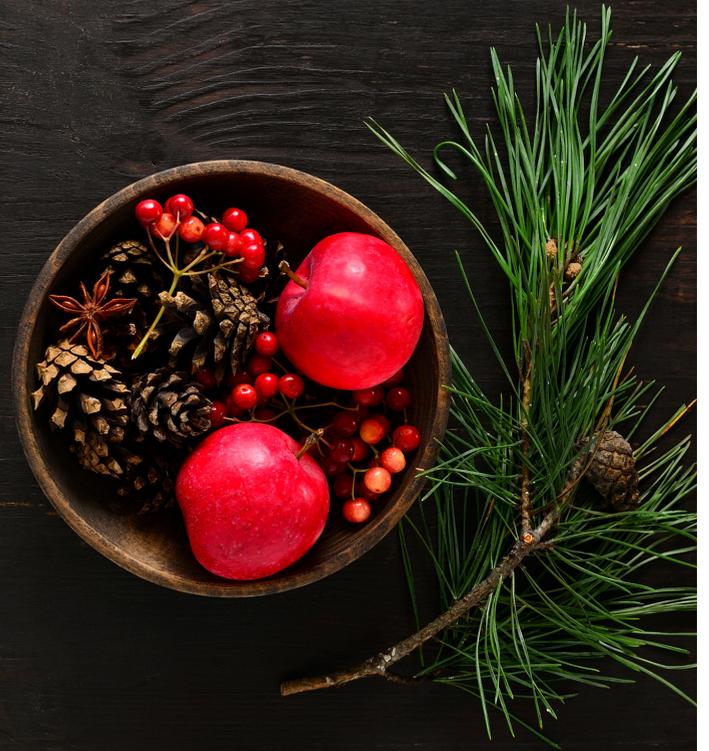
The perfect winter scene
Is painted by the snow
Holiday decorations
Seem each day to grow

The trappings of the season
Do not help me be bright
Someone is still missing
The world just isn't right

So how will I make it
How to be bright and merry
When the coming days
Loom dark and scary
I will remember and share
The memories that abound
I will talk of the love
With everyone around

As I gaze at the snow
And the lights of the tree
I know in my soul
You are here with me

By Tanya Lord of the Grief Tree



While the first Christmas is particularly poignant, each Christmas without the child who has died will have its own challenges. It is important that parents suffering the loss of their child remind themselves they are grieving and are gentle with themselves.

Be kind to yourself: Go slow. You don't have to do the things you don't want to do. Do what's best for you. Don't take on the Christmas dinner and the presents and so on if you don't feel like it. Be kind to yourself.

Do whatever works: Parents who have lost a child shouldn't feel guilty for living life, bereaved parents often think they shouldn't be laughing because my child died ... but you have to experience these things. If you repress them, then it makes you angry and you lose those moments of joy. It changes who you are and who you can be.

Keep the memory. One of a bereaved parent's biggest fears is that their child will be forgotten. Parents want to hear stories about their child, have other people share photos of their child, and know others are thinking about their child. These stories and photos are meaningful gifts for those who are grieving.

Family and friends: It's not about you. Avoid relating to the death by recalling a personal experience. That makes the bereaved parent feel like they should comfort you. Also, it's not the same.

Trust yourself. It's OK to have difficult days. They can come when you least expect it. Grief is individualised. There is no right or wrong way to experience it. Allow yourself to feel those feelings and have those days. Everyone else being happy doesn't mean you have to be.

FIRSTLIGHT NOMINATED FOR THE LORD MAYOR'S CHARITY BALL 2022



Are you currently looking for the ideal Christmas/Valentine's Gift for 2022 or perhaps your employer is requesting submissions for charities to support in 2022? Then perhaps you might consider the Dublin Lord Mayor's Charity Ball 2022. FirstLight is delighted to have been nominated as one of three charities for the Dublin Lord Mayor's Charity Ball 2022. The Ball will take place on Saturday, February 12th, 2022, in the Round Room in the Mansion House. The three charities for 2022 are FirstLight, Aoibhneas, and Ruhama. FirstLight has been nominated by Larry and Nora Murrin proprietors of The Round Room at the Mansion House and FIRE Restaurant. Their son Larry died in 1990 from SIDS and following his death, they received support from ISIDA and our founder Eimear Berry.

The Lord Mayor's Ball dates back to 1715. It originally took place in the Oak Room, the Mansion House on St. Stephen's night (26th December) and the principal invited guests were the city's 24 Aldermen and their wives. Proceeds went towards the support of poor boys at the Blue-Coat School in Blackhall Place.

From 1975 to 1997 it was held in the Burlington Hotel on St. Patrick's Day in aid of the Central Remedial Clinic. Its latest revival was in 2013 when Lord Mayor Naoise Ó Muirí held the Ball in aid of three charities and the three Lord Mayor's since his term of office have held Balls to raise money for three charities each year.

As the Ball is kindly sponsored by Fire Restaurant and The Round Room, all ticket sale proceeds on the night will be divided amongst FirstLight, Aoibhneas, and Ruhama. In addition, all monies raised on the night from an auction and raffle prizes will be divided amongst the three charities.

Tickets are priced at €125 per person and a table of ten persons is €1,250, so if you are considering a Christmas or Valentine's Gift for 2022 you might think of two tickets to the Lord Mayor's Charity Ball. Alternatively, if your company or employer is requesting submissions for charities to support in 2022, you might think of suggesting sponsorship of a table of ten for the Ball; where 100% of the proceeds will go directly to FirstLight.

For additional information on the Lord Mayor's Charity Ball 2022 phone Andrew Mernagh at the head office on 01-8732711 or email Andrew directly at andrew@firstlight.ie

NEW NATIONAL 24-HOUR HELPLINE NUMBER

At the end of this year, the five NGN (Non-Geographic Number) ranges will be reduced to two. 1850, 1890 and 076 ranges will be withdrawn, and the 1800 (Freephone) and 0818 (Standard Rate) ranges will remain. The 1850, 1890, and 076 numbers are widely used in Ireland; FirstLight has, to date, used the 1850 range for its 24/7 Helpline. In light of this development FirstLight has now switched its National 24-Hour Helpline from 1850 391 391 to **1800 391 391**.

FirstLight Christmas Gift Shop Now Open

We are delighted to let you know that FirstLight's Christmas Gift Shop is now open. We have a number of gift ideas available. Not only will you find a nice Christmas gift, but you'll also be helping FirstLight support suddenly bereaved parents and families across Ireland. We have our Christmas cards, FirstLight Candle, and two beautiful books by two FirstLight moms.



CANDLE GIFT SET

€20 (Incl. P&P)



Irish Made Rathbornes

Pillar Candle

50+ hours of burning time,
and a FirstLight pin



FIRSTLIGHT CHRISTMAS CARDS



- 1 Pack of 12 Cards €11 (Incl p&p)
- 2 Packs of 12 Cards €16 (Incl p&p)
- 3 Packs of 12 Cards €25 (Incl p&p)
- 4 Packs of 12 Cards €55 (Incl p&p)
- 5 Packs of 12 Cards €70 (Incl. p&p)

The Beautiful Children's Book Tadhg to the Rescue By Kariann Uí Fhainín



Kariann & Eoin Ó Fainín's world fell apart the day Tadhg, their son, was taken away from them in a tragic accident. Speaking about Tadhg, Kariann and Eoin said, "Tadhg is an extraordinary 5-year-old boy who left a massive imprint on the people he met, even if he only met them once. We never think of Tadhg as part of our past as he will always be very much in our present and future.

The children's book Tadhg to the Rescue is written by Kariann Uí Fhainín with beautiful illustrations by Bronwyn Clohissy Boyd and is designed by Karen Nelson. Kariann has very kindly donated proceeds of all book sales to FirstLight.

Encourage Yourself, Encourage Others By Anne Devine

To honour Seán's 33rd anniversary, Anne Devine has donated 33 copies of her book to FirstLight. The book is like a wise companion on life's journey, gently exploring themes of friendship, resilience, solitude, perseverance, healing, and gratitude. It offers light, hope reassurance, and most importantly, encouragement to keep going forward, one step at a time.



HOW TO PLACE YOUR CHRISTMAS ORDERS

BY TELEPHONE
01-8732711

BY EMAIL
info@firstlight.ie

NEW National 24-Hour Helpline Number 1800 391 391

Carmichael Centre, 4 North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7
Phone: 01-8732711: Website: www.firstlight.ie: Charity No. CHY7716

If you have a newsletter query or a story for inclusion in the newsletter please email info@firstlight.ie