

## Big Situations – Stories for Reflection

### Loss and Grief



This story includes mention of suicide and may raise big feelings. Before you read this, make sure this is the right time for you, and that you can access support for yourself if you need it. Should any of the information in this document cause distress for you, it may be helpful to contact Lifeline on 13 11 14, Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636 or the Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800.

*Read this story to help you be better prepared to respond to loss, or if you have already encountered a situation like this and you want to hear about other educators' experiences. This is a fictional story informed by real experiences. If you are facing a situation like this now, you can find [Tips for responding now](#) and resources to support children, parents and educators in the [Big Situations](#) section of the NSW/ACT Inclusion Agency website.*

### When a parent dies

We knew Matt's family were struggling, because his dad Sam had lost his job, but we were shocked when Sam took his life. He'd usually been upbeat, and he'd been the parent we saw at the service as his partner Kim was at work. Everyone who knew him was shocked.

We found out from some other families because the dads played football together. I wasn't sure what to do, but I phoned Kim, thinking I'd leave a message for her. She actually answered the phone, and I told her we'd heard about Sam, we were so sorry, and to let us know if we could help.

Kim's initial thought was to tell Matt that his dad had been in an accident. That was understandable, but it wasn't true. I was concerned that he might find out from overhearing other people, and that he might be angry with Kim when he did find out the truth. I found some helpful information from *Be You* I could share with her. We also talked about whether it might be best for someone else to tell Matt, so Kim could focus on supporting and comforting him. Kim thought her brother would be a good person. She told me later her brother started by asking Matt what he knew about what had happened. In fact, Matt had understood more than they realised, and Kim was glad they hadn't confused him more by telling him a fake story.

Kim wanted us to keep things as normal as possible for Matt, and he came back to the service the next day. He told some of the educators that his dad had died. They listened when he wanted to talk and sometimes asked him about his feelings. He said he was sad, and they agreed that it was sad his dad had died.

One of the staff had previously lost someone close to suicide, and this brought up a lot of strong feelings for her. We really tried to be there for her, and both she and some other team members found the Employee Assistance Program helpful. Seeing her distress was really hard.

We weren't sure what to do about going to the funeral. In the end, one of the staff went and the rest of us worked as usual, because several of the families were going, and we wanted them to be confident that the centre would be running well for their children. I think that was a good decision for this particular situation, but it might be different in different situations.

One of the unexpected things for us was when Father's Day was coming up, we asked Kim how she was approaching this with Matt. She was quite anxious about it, and we were able to talk through some ideas. It prompted us to think about all the different families we had at the centre and what different celebrations might mean to them. That prompted us to have more conversations with families about our plans for celebrations, and to get more ideas about what and how we celebrate at the service. It was a hard time for us as a team, but after supporting Matt and Kim we also felt less afraid about talking with families about hard things.

### Things to think about:

- ▶ Using your knowledge of child development and inclusion, think about some ways in which children's experiences of loss and grief may differ from those of adults.
- ▶ What strengths do you think you (and your team) would bring in an experience of loss and grief like the one in this story?
- ▶ Think about your work context and the needs of the children you are including. How might your experiences be similar or different to those in the story, if a parent died, or if there was a loss to suicide?
- ▶ Who could you call on if you needed information or someone to talk to if you experienced the death of a family member in your work role?

### The following resources can help you be better prepared for critical incidents:

- ▶ [National Mental Health Education Initiative](#) (Be You)

Access professional learning modules for educators or to get the most benefit from Be You, sign up your service to create a learning community and access a Be You consultant from Early Childhood Australia.

- ▶ [Community Trauma Toolkit for Educators](#) (Emerging Minds)

Access short courses and resources to help educators support children following a disaster or community trauma.

**Note:** See additional resources on the [Loss and Grief](#) page of the Big Situations online resource.

### Please remember:

An Inclusion Professional can support educators to proactively prepare to have the skills and confidence to respond to big situations that may occur. This preparation could include support to use the [Big Situations](#) resource and may involve strategic inclusion planning. It should be noted that big situations often require support from experts that sit outside the role and expertise of the Inclusion Professional. Inclusion Professionals can help you connect with external organisations and agencies as needed.

### Disclaimer:

This is a fictional story informed by real experiences to support you to reflect and plan for the future. If you would like support or have any feedback on this resource please [contact us](#).