



**Northern
Ireland
Children's
Hospice**

Horizon's Bereavement Support Service

Bridging the gap of inequity in bereavement care: a bereavement support model for sudden child loss



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Why this model matters?



Child death in context

- Sudden child loss is considered the most traumatic and painful loss for any family.
- Research suggests that bereavement due to the loss of a child is likely to cause problematic symptoms for individuals and the family system that is likely to warrant professional assessment and intervention.



Families are at high risk of

- Complicated grief
- PTSD
- Depression, anxiety
- Relationship breakdown
- Social isolation

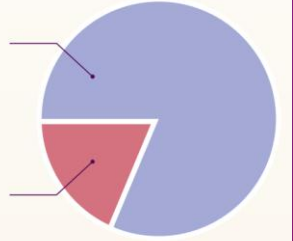


Parents describe

- Loss of identity
- Guilt and self-blame
- Feeling misunderstood by others

150 children die each year in Northern Ireland

Approximately **25** of these child deaths are sudden and/or unexpected.



Core Principles of the model

Trauma-Informed Care

Attachment -Focused

Family-System Approach

Culturally Sensitive Practice

Long –Term Perspective



Structure of Model

PHASE 1

Immediate/acute

Psychological first aid

Practical support co-ordination

Sleep, eating, basic functioning

Information about trauma responses

PHASE 2

Early Grief Integration

1-1 Counselling and/or therapeutic sessions

Couple sessions

Sibling support

Peer support groups

PHASE 3

Long-term adaptation

Meaning making work

Identity reconstruction

Commemorative rituals

Ongoing therapeutic interventions



What makes the model different?

Integrates Trauma
+ Grief (not treated
separately)

Includes entire
Family System

Offers proactive
follow-up

Flexible and
responsive support

Community
partnership and co-
production

Support to staff
involved in child
deaths



Impact of the model

- Trauma stabilisation – Just Breathe Café's Initiative
- Lower risk of long-term mental health issues
- Improved parental coping
- Stronger family resilience
- Honours the child's continuing place in the family

Evaluation Results (as of May 2025)

115 family members have received support, 37 have responded to formal feedback surveys over the course of the service representing a 32% response rate.

100%
of respondents rated
**Horizon's Bereavement
Service as extremely
helpful or very helpful.**

"The support has helped as I feel more able to express my feelings and I can talk to my family more now."

Sibling feedback

"The service helped us manage through the most difficult times. After every session, it gives us courage and strength to move on with life."

Parent feedback

100%
felt the service
should continue.

"I would love to see this service for every family as we did not know where to turn and when your child dies, you just can't think straight."

Parent feedback

64%
would **not have
accessed support** if it
hadn't been offered.

This is a concern as research suggests that bereavement due to the loss of a child is likely to increase isolation and cause problematic symptoms for individuals and the family system that may warrant professional assessment and interventions.

Just Breathe Café's Initiative (as of Jan 2026)



Our Just Breathe Café's Initiative is an example of co-production with bereaved families engaged with the service. Families suggested the benefit of other therapies for trauma recovery alongside the need for community connection. Hence our Just Breathe Café's Initiative emerged and launched in June 2025.

Research shows that breathwork techniques can be a valuable tool in trauma recovery, helping to process and release trauma-related energy, emotions, and memories.



100% of bereaved parents found the breathwork sessions very helpful or helpful.

"Really calming and helpful with breathing techniques I've never heard of that I can use at home. Girls were brilliant!"

Patient feedback

