Loss and bereavement
Key messages

For professionals supporting young people across the criminal justice system

"Staff now feel they can begin to have these conversations."

(Practitioner, 2017)

Introduction and Aims

Although the only real certainty in life, death is one of the hardest losses to accommodate. It's also one of the most difficult and significant events for the practitioner when supporting young people in the criminal justice system.

The criminal justice system incorporates environments involving enduring losses, where offenders confront death, bereavement and separation at a very high rate (Vaswani, 2014). Where appearing tough is an important survival skill, young offenders cannot always mourn openly (Hendry, 2009).

Young adults may have a history of bereavement, but there is a lack of support within the custodial context (Justice Committee, 2016). As a result, issues of loss and bereavement are likely to be overlooked.

Criminal justice professionals are not counsellors or therapists but are often well-placed to initiate sensitive conversations with young people around their experiences of loss and bereavement. Specialist support should always be sought by the professionals where deemed necessary.

Introduction and Aims

These key messages have been co-developed with professionals across the criminal justice system. This resource provides an overview of loss and bereavement and the varied impacts upon young people (aged 16-25) within the CJS.

This resource is designed to encourage professionals to engage, participate and reflect on the bereavement support needs of young people in the CJS.

The key messages will:

- remind professionals that loss can mean different things to different people
- promote professional understanding about the theoretical concepts of loss and grief
- encourage professionals to think about practical, creative approaches to supporting young people
- ensure that a consistency of loss and bereavement support is available to all young people in the criminal justice system.

> “...no soul remembered is ever really gone.”
>
> (Albom, 2013, p.308)

Understanding loss & bereavement

> "Life is characterised by movement and change and therefore by its very nature, transitions, losses and grief."
>
> (Thompson, 2002, p.1)

Death is usually perceived as the hardest, greatest loss to accommodate, perhaps because of its finality, permanence and irreversibility.

> "It sometimes seems as if all our lives we are trying to cope with loss – either the fear of it, or the memory of it or its raw immediate presence."
>
> (Oswin 1991, p.15)

Exploring Losses (Machin 2009, pp.13-31)	
Types of loss	Description of loss
Developmental loss and change	Loss occurring across the life course.
Circumstantial loss and change	Unpredictable loss e.g. changes in relationships; ill health; disability; death.
Invisible grief and undervalued people	Marginalised communities rarely receive the support they need following a loss.

Grief and mourning

> “No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing. At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me.”
>
> (Lewis, 1961, p.5)

Grief cannot be hurried and its impact should never be underestimated. There are no easy answers to supporting loss, everyone is unique and different; therefore, every loss is unique and different. **Be patient** and wait until the young person is ready to talk.

Grief can be **complex** because of circumstances such as the nature of the death, the relationship with the bereaved and the context in which the death occurred, as shown below.

Six young men in custody were all grieving when their close friend was murdered. They had no contact with each other in prison yet they all trashed their rooms and got involved in fights at the same time.

The men felt angry, they knew who had murdered their friend and they couldn’t deal with the perpetrator themselves. The six friends were not allowed to go to their friend’s funeral.

Grief and mourning

Mourning is the process of accommodating loss and bereavement (Worden, 2009). A current loss can easily trigger a previous loss, resulting in multiple losses - which may be difficult to disentangle. Multiple losses can be a contributing factor to young people becoming offenders. Bereavement can also be an indirect cause of criminal behaviour.

> "The pain of loss has been expressed in extreme anger and violence...alcohol and illegal drugs are an escape from painful feelings of loss and maintaining a drug habit leads to crime."
>
> (Rodger 2004, pp.27-28)

With sensitive support many people can be helped to do the things they really need to do following the death of a loved one. Sensitive support includes active listening, person centred approaches and working creatively, all involving skills that professionals use on a regular basis.

Prisons can be very tough environments where people 'don't want to be seen as weak and emotional'. It is often difficult to start sensitive conversations.

Equality, diversity and loss

Grief is experienced in similar ways across cultures. Yet race, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, gender reassignment (trans), marriage and civil partnerships, religion or belief will all bring diversity in loss and bereavement.

Living in single sex environments can profoundly affect the way people experience loss.

It is essential to explore loss and bereavement within each particular context by remembering that:

- micro-cultures exist within cultures, with individual differences and preferences
- many people have multiple identities i.e. mixed heritage, with parents, grandparents and great grandparents from different groups or communities
- cultures are not fixed and static.

Most major faiths teach that death is not the end but the form that such continued existence takes varies within different religions and even within different denominations.

Sometimes, people turn to religion for an explanation of personal tragedy, but sometimes people turn away from it if they feel religion has let them down.

Some people may have a secular lifestyle which does not accept the existence of god(s) or an afterlife.

Equality, diversity and loss

Sometimes, spirituality is expressed through religion, but this is not always the case:

- some people may describe themselves as both spiritual and religious
- other people may consider themselves spiritual but not religious
- other people may consider themselves religious but not spiritual.

> End-of-life experiences, loss, and grief raise the core questions of life and what it means to be human… those questions are asked in many ways: What does it mean to be human, to live? To die? Who am I? Who have I been? Who will I be? What's the purpose of this? Why the suffering? Who will be with me? Where is God in the midst of this?
>
> Those are questions of identity, purpose, and community. Adding to those the questions of what gives or maintains hope in the face of loss…and what we hold on to, in other words what faith, gives us the framework and context for understanding our own experiences.

(Gaventa, 2014, p.71)

Remember:

Loss has many forms and can include multiple losses.

Losses are not always obvious or recognised.

Grief work can take time and cannot be hurried.

The impact of loss can affect people in many different ways.

As there are visible aspects of culture (e.g. dress) try not to make assumptions about what you see.

Explore the less obvious aspects of culture: shared norms and values of a group, community or society.

People may turn to or away from religion at different times in their lives.

Some people choose a secular lifestyle that does not include 'god'.

Sensitive support can help young people to open up about loss, thereby aiding the grieving process.

- Consider what might help you to see and appreciate the young person's losses.
- Think of ways to identify what losses are important to the young person.
- Think about how you can support the young person to talk about loss.
- Consider who needs to be involved in the support process.
- Check what support the young person may need.
- Find out what resources are available to help you to support young people.
- Explore with the young person their background and social circumstances to help with the support process.
- Identify local agencies who can offer additional specialist support.

Understanding grief

A model of grief offers a framework for practitioners to help them facilitate or enable grief work. The models and approaches identified below are used to offer a flavour of how such understanding can facilitate the healthy support of bereaved young people.

Models of loss and bereavement	
Four Task Model (Worden, 2009)	1. Accept the reality of the loss 2. Work through the pain of grief 3. Adjust to living without the person 4. Keep connections to the person
Continuing Bonds (Klass et al, 1996)	This model promotes the importance of observing and maintaining connections or continuing bonds to the deceased over time.
Dual Process Model (Stroebe & Schut, 1999)	This model illustrates how bereaved people oscillate (move) between feeling overwhelmed with grief and getting on with their life.
Disenfranchised Grief (Doka, 1989; 2002)	This model recognises the importance of the social context of grief and how marginalised groups can be excluded from the grief process.

Common responses to grief

Common responses to grief include feelings or emotions, physical sensations, cognitions and behaviours (Worden, 2009, pp.18-31) which may lead to criminal behaviours (Rodger, 2004).

Responses to loss (Worden, 2009, pp. 18-31)	
Feelings	Sadness, anger, guilt, loneliness, fatigue, anxiety, shock, yearning, helplessness, relief, numbness, emancipation.
Physical sensations	Hollowness in the stomach, tightness in the chest, oversensitivity to noise, breathlessness, muscle weakness, lack of energy, dry throat and mouth.
Cognitions	Disbelief, confusion, preoccupation, sense of presence, hallucinations.
Behaviours	Sleep and appetite disturbances, absent-mindedness, social withdrawal, dreams of the deceased, avoidance behaviours, searching and calling out, sighing and restless hyperactivity, crying, visiting old haunts, treasuring objects that belonged to the deceased.

> "Alcohol and illegal drugs are an escape from painful feelings of loss and maintaining a drug habit leads to crime…the pain of loss has been expressed in extreme anger and violence."
>
> (Rodger, 2004, pp.27-28)

Continuing bonds in grief

Continuing bonds is an approach where the survivors maintain a relationship with the deceased. These continuing bonds can be a healthy part of the survivor's ongoing life. Talking about the deceased, capturing and maintaining memories, visiting familiar places and keeping mementoes all help to preserve these bonds.

In his room, in his cell, he has a shrine. The friend who died in a crash had brought him and his fiancée together. His fiancée now looks after the shrine in his house. There's another shrine in his cell.

He doesn't feel able to take the shrines down. He feels guilty even thinking about this. The shrines have almost become too important to him.

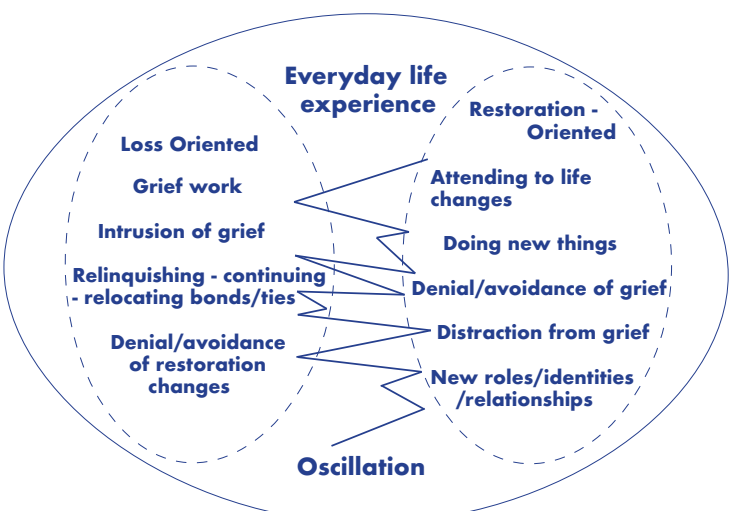
In restricted environments continuing bonds may be hard to establish but also can be hard to break, so prisoners can become stuck in their grief. Unable to do all the things that other friends and family members do (like taking flowers to the cemetery) prisoners may adapt and create attachment, as illustrated above.

It can be difficult to maintain a balance between establishing continuing bonds and finding healthy ways of moving on.

The dual process in grief

The Dual Process model of grief (Stroebe & Schut, 1999) is a contemporary approach that illustrates how bereaved people move (oscillate) between feeling overwhelmed with grief and getting on with their life:

- there are no fixed time limits associated with this movement process
- movement always occurs within a social context e.g. in the community or in the criminal justice system
- movement is not always a linear process, people will move back and forth during their grief work.



Disenfranchised grief

The term disenfranchised grief describes a grief that is not socially accepted, and so may be more difficult to deal with because of a lack of social support or participating in funeral rituals (Doka, 1989; 2002).

Certain groups are more likely to experience disenfranchised grief, e.g. people with mental health issues; children and young people; older people; prisoners; and people with a learning disability (Doka, 2002). This approach is helpful because it recognises the importance of the social context in which death occurs.

Key elements of disenfranchised grief

The griever can be disenfranchised because of mis-guided assumptions that other people make about the impact of grief.
The relationship may be disenfranchised if the relationship is not recognised or valued.
The loss can be disenfranchised (i.e. loss of home, loss of friendships, transitional losses) because of the tendency to associate loss mainly with death.

> "Prison inmates and their relationships are not well regarded by others…When grief is not recognised as valid, feelings of anger, guilt, and powerlessness can result in a complicated grief response."
>
> (Olson & McEwen, 2004, p.230)

Adolescence and grief

Adolescence is a special phase in life where family and social systems can influence adaptation and vulnerability (Hogan & DeSantis, 1994). Research shows that young offenders have higher rates of certain types of bereavements than the general adolescent population (Vaswani, 2014).

Traumatic bereavement can have a significant and enduring impact on the young person:

- adolescents grieve differently from children and adults
- the impact of grief can often be traced back to childhood and adolescence
- research shows that there are strong links between young people, suicide and bereavement
- traumatic bereavement in childhood or adolescence is linked to offending and unsociable behaviours.

> “...the younger they are, the more helpless they feel...”

(Prison Bereavement Counsellor, 2017)

Remember:

It is never too late to grieve or for you to support people.

Young people are often excluded from grieving.

Grief that is not socially acceptable may be more difficult to deal with.

Young people may experience a range of emotions and physical feelings during grief work.

Young people may hide or struggle to express their thoughts and feelings.

Some research suggests links between adolescence, loss, bereavement, and offending behaviour.

Substance misuse can be an escape from loss and can lead to criminal activity to support illegal drug use.

Grief work should be person centred and focused on the needs of each young person.

- Consider what model or framework can help you to work with the young person to explore their loss.
- Think about how the models of grief can help you to support people.
- Think of ways to identify where the young person is in their grief work.
- Consider how the young person's childhood, their family and social circumstances may influence their grief work.
- Check what support the young person may need and what resources are available to help you to support them.
- Explore how you can support the young person to talk about their feelings and emotions alongside the support processes in place.
- Identify local agencies which can offer additional specialist support.

Challenges to bereavement support

Young offenders experience bereavement at a much higher rate than the general population and are more likely to have suffered multiple/traumatic losses; leading to disenfranchised grief. They are more reliant on others to help facilitate their grief work.

Exploring support from a task perspective may be helpful in identifying the challenges for young people in this context.

Worden's Task model of grief (2009) adapted for criminal justice users.

1.	Viewing the body or attending the funeral provides an opportunity to accept the reality of the death; this is sometimes impossible for prisoners.
2.	Prisoners are cut off from support networks, in a macho culture where there is no privacy to grieve, and where emotional expression attracts negative attention (invisible loss).
3.	Incarceration suspends the prisoner's opportunity to adapt to new roles and adjust to life without the deceased.
4.	Being unable to visit the grave or mark anniversaries makes it difficult to stay connected to the deceased, and there is little prospect of forming new relationships in prison.

Challenges for professionals

Professionals may find it difficult to facilitate sensitive conversations because death and bereavement are taboo subjects. Professionals may:

- have limited knowledge of the subjects
- not have received adequate training
- not have access to appropriate resources
- feel unable to handle the responses
- not feel adequately supervised and supported
- worry about making people feel worse by talking
- may have unresolved or recent losses to cope with.

"So, we're both kind of knowing that we're talking about the death, but it's never a direct conversation. It's more about his attitude towards suicide and him trying to commit suicide, which in turn probably helps him process where his friend was at that point. So he could understand his thought process behind that.

But yes, what I think I'm trying to say is it's hard to talk directly about it and it's hard to know like what you were saying earlier, 'am I helping'?" (Practitioner, 2017)

These challenges may be compounded by constraints within the CJS.

> "...a professional culture that did not really focus on self care, reflective practice, and supervision."
>
> (Research Fellow, 2017)

Remember:

Young offenders are more likely to have multiple and traumatic losses than other young people.

Young people may have limited support systems and rely on others to help them with their grief.

Visiting the grave may help young people to accept the reality of death.

The macho culture of prisons stifles emotional expression.

Private spaces to grieve are important for everyone.

Professionals need knowledge, support and understanding to deal with grief.

Consistency of support may be hindered by inter-professional barriers.

- Consider how you assess the losses experienced by young people.
- Think about what support systems you already have in place.
- Consider how might Worden's task approach help you to support young people.
- Think practically and creatively about facilitating support for young people.
- Think about your supervision needs and how they can be best met.
- Consider how inter-professional working could be improved.

Communicating well

> Communication is vital to us all as human beings. It enables us to socialise with others and make sense of what is going on around us. If we cannot speak, understand words, or read and write very well, we are often excluded unless others around us are prepared to change. If we are unable to communicate for any reason we can feel misunderstood, frustrated, isolated and anxious.
>
> (Thurman, 2011, p.3)

As young people in custody may have poor literacy or hidden disabilities, professionals need to be aware of the importance of using effective, clear communication; allowing time for the person to digest the information and repeating information often.

Communication is 55% body language (including facial expressions) 38% vocal (sounds, volume, pitch, rhythm) 7% verbal (words) (Barbour, 1976).

Communication is a two way activity and is:

- a shared activity
- expressing and listening
- easily misunderstood. (Thurman, 2011)

Barriers to communication

Silence is a powerful medium of communication. When a young person is silent this may indicate they are distracted, thinking, listening or daydreaming. We need silence, we all use it, sometimes too little, seldom too much (Misteil, 2010).

Silence can be a sign that communication has stalled, or it can be an essential element of the communication which allows each person time to communicate.

Not being able to communicate our needs and wants can be frustrating. At sensitive times such as loss and bereavement, a young person may be desperate to tell someone just how sad they really feel.

"It's like sticking a plaster over the problem. We're lengthening someone's life by keeping them away from the objects that could potentially kill them, but then they're released again with nothing done that allows them to cope with what's going on. There's no coping strategy. And when they come out, they refuse to engage with services. They'll say prior to the release they'll engage with them, but the reality is when they come out they fail to engage with, for whatever reason." (Practitioner, 2017)

There can be many personal, social and physical barriers to communication, including:

- hearing loss, concentration and memory difficulties
- low expectations, poor focus and making assumptions
- discomfort, lack of privacy, stress and tiredness.

Person-centred communication

> "Communication is the essence of human life..."

(Light,1989, p.61)

Adapted from Allow Me (Ruiter, 2000)	
Share activities	Spending time with the young person helps you to get to know their preferred communication style.
Listen to the person	Listening involves more than hearing what the young person is saying, it involves total communication (body language, behaviour and words).
Observe behaviour	Observing how the young person reacts to different situations and people can help to demonstrate their communication style.
Wait for the person to communicate	Stepping back rather than stepping in will give the young person time to think about what they want to communicate.

Creative communication

> There were no magic solutions. It is not about finding a load of tools to make people magic relationships, it is about using simple basic things which we are doing anyway. It was important for project workers to realise their own abilities and recognise the value of daily interactions.

(Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, 2014)

Conversations can help us to understand when young people are in distress. Creative approaches can complement the spoken word; helping professionals to learn more about the young person and helping to develop a two-way, therapeutic relationship by:

- helping to make the person feel more comfortable
- developing concrete, visual aids that provide identity, heritage and history
- promoting clarity and understanding of how the young person is feeling
- promoting relaxation and shared conversations
- enhancing holistic support.

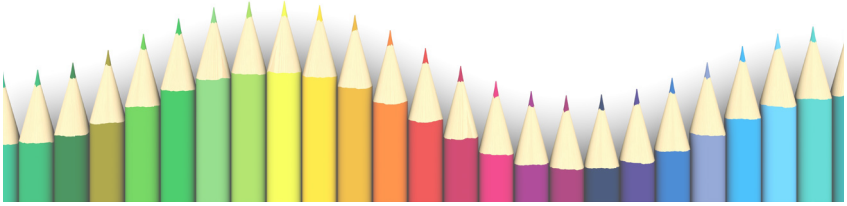
Creative approaches

Creative approaches can include:

- gardening
- working on an allotment

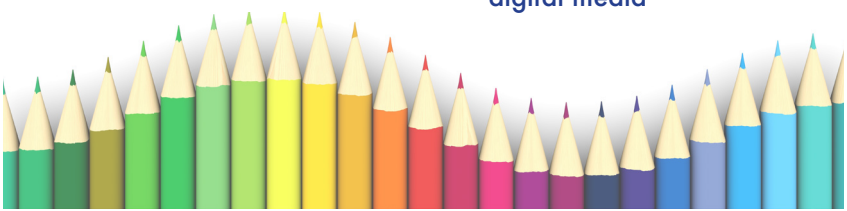
- art work
- family trees
- life story work

- story telling
- picture books
- keeping a diary
- scrap books



Creative approaches

- games
- television
- music
- activities
- photographs
- reminiscence work
- communication cards
- place maps
- digital media



Remember:

Sensitive conversations can be demanding and difficult as well as rewarding.

Communication is more than just words.

Silence can be healthy as well as uncomfortable.

When a young person is silent they may be thinking, listening, distracted or sad.

Communication is a two-way shared activity that can easily be misunderstood.

Not being able to communicate your needs and wants can lead to frustration.

Literacy levels vary, which may affect a young person's confidence to express their thoughts and feelings and to communicate with you.

Young people need time to think and to reflect.

- Think about how you communicate about loss and bereavement where you work.
- Consider the clarity of your information for the people you support.
- Think about how you use silence as part of communication.
- Assess the barriers to communication where you work (i.e. noise, privacy, feeling uncomfortable).
- Think what you can do to make communication more effective (i.e. listening, observing and reflecting).
- Consult with young people on how communication can be improved.
- You can learn how to improve communication from spending time with young people.

Supporting sensitive conversations

Support may come from many directions and from many people. Professionals across the CJS may be involved in offering and facilitating support to the bereaved young person.

Finding out what the person knows, and needs, and identifying how their needs can be met are the first steps in the healing and helping process. Professionals should actively listen to the young person (using body language, eye contact, facial expressions, etc.) to look for common responses to loss and difficulties in grieving.

Sometimes, starting a conversation around a difficult topic area is the hardest part. Some bereaved people tell us that saying nothing at all, and ignoring the loss, is worse than any clumsy language used.

Don't feel that you need to have all the answers to complex questions; just be there, available, and eager to listen. You are offering that most precious commodity: time to talk.

Providing an invitation to talk may prove difficult, since in restrictive environments, finding appropriate, personal space may be limited. Being approachable, even offering just 10 minutes in a busy calendar can make a difference to the person. Never feel that you have nothing to offer - you have yourself.

Breaking bad news

Breaking bad or difficult news can be challenging. Buckman describes bad news as any news that drastically and negatively alters someone's perceptions of their future (Buckman, 1992). He offers a useful six-step protocol or framework that professionals have found useful:

1.	Getting started, finding an appropriate, private and comfortable place, ensuring time is available
2.	Finding out how much the young person knows and understands about the situation
3.	Finding out how much the young person wants to know, although some people may not want to know the details surrounding the event, they do have a right to be told when someone has died
4.	Sharing the information, at the young person's own pace and communicate it in a way that they are likely to understand
5.	Responding to the young person's feelings, by recognising and measuring responses, offering constructive and reflective feedback
6.	Planning and following through, which involves informing appropriate others (after Buckman, 1992).

Working together

Support may come in many different guises across the CJS and beyond (e.g. advocacy services, religious faith groups, counselling organisations). Collaborative working is often key to effective support.

When supporting a bereaved young person, you need to consider who else needs to know about how you have helped them; where you need to record it; does the young person agree to you telling others about the help you are offering them.

This continuity of support across the CJS is valuable in the short, medium and longer term; but the young person does need to know that you are doing this.

Always consider differing cultural and faith needs, and where you can access help and support if required. It may be useful to develop a central resource contact list of local faith leaders.

There are a range of professionals to work with from:

- local specialist organisations
- liaison and diversion services
- local charities and support agencies
- organisations which support young adults.

Practical support

Practical support may involve offering people the choice to participate in the rituals surrounding death. Thus enabling them to say goodbye to their loved ones in a way in which they feel comfortable. This may involve contacting other relatives, finding out about funeral arrangements and explaining these in a way that the young person understands, and also contacting appropriate people who need to know about the death.

Such approaches would help to minimise the disenfranchising effects described by Doka (1989; 2002). Professionals may need to make contact with faith leaders, advocates, bereavement counsellors, and social workers.

Professionals could help the bereaved young person to establish and maintain tangible, meaningful memories of the deceased using photographs, life books and memory books.

"He as well had really-really significant attachment issues, so he had been in so many houses he couldn't even count, like we tried to do a lifeline to try and track sort of where he'd spent his childhood, and he actually couldn't remember areas or houses that he'd lived in."

(Practitioner, 2017)

Remember:

Support can come from many places and many people.

Additional bereavement support might be needed from faith leaders, advocates or bereavement counsellors.

Professionals across the CJS can help the bereaved young person to explore their grief.

You can offer the most precious commodity: time to talk, a listening ear.

The six-step framework of Buckman will help to prepare you for breaking difficult news.

Death rituals may be an important part of the grieving process.

Bereavement support may involve finding out information, such as contacting relatives and finding out details about the funeral.

- Finding out what the person knows are the first steps to helping and healing.
- Establishing and maintaining a dialogue makes for healthy relationships.
- Never feel you have nothing to offer, you have yourself.
- Think of the recording processes, where you record sensitive information, when you record it and who else needs to know about the death.
- Consider whether you have a centralised contact list of people or organisations (e.g. charities) who may be helpful.
- Don't feel you need to have all the answers, just being there and listening is what matters most.

" If this is the beginning then I'm excited because just from this, staff now feel competent just to have conversations. I'm not saying they've got all the answers but at least they can begin to have those conversations."

(Practitioner 2017)

February 2019

Barrow Cadbury Trust

T2A Transition to Adulthood

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