

January 2013

**CASE STUDY**  
**Samuel's story**

*Please note names and some of the details about this family have been changed to protect the identity of the family involved.*

Samuel was referred to our service through his primary school following the sudden and very tragic death of his dad.

Samuel was 6 years old when his dad died unexpectedly in the family home. Samuel is an only child who lived with both his mum and dad. Since his dad's death the family, who are based in South Devon, have had to move house and their life has changed dramatically.

Samuel's mum had been struggling to cope with her own grief and she felt that she needed to put her own grief to one side in order to support Samuel. This had caused mum's physical health to deteriorate. Samuel was displaying some very angry behaviour at home and at school the teachers reported that he was very withdrawn and was pretending his dad was still alive.

In November 2012 two of our therapists visited the family for the first time in their home. Samuel was very shy and hid under the table when the therapists first arrived. The first session was spent gently trying to get to know Samuel and mum started to tell a little of their story. Samuel said that he didn't want to speak about his dad as it made him feel too sad.

The therapists returned to visit the family for a second home visit and took a therapeutic game. Playing this game helped the family talk about their life, along with starting to address some of the thoughts and feelings they have about the death of their dad/husband. Samuel seemed different on the second visit and was happy to talk about himself, although he was still finding it hard to find the words to talk about his grief. Mum felt she needed to stay "strong" for Samuel and didn't want to address her own feelings.

On the third home visit, which took place just before the therapeutic weekend, the therapists played another therapeutic game with Samuel and mum, this time the game used focused on the facts, feelings, memories and dreams/wishes of each player surrounding the death of their dad/husband. Communication was starting to open up between Samuel and his mum and this enabled them to talk about some of their thoughts and feelings about the death of dad.

The family was sent an invitation to join our therapeutic weekend in January 2013, they were keen to attend but were unable to get to the weekend as they didn't have a car and mum couldn't walk far because of her deteriorating health. We arranged transport for them so that they could attend the weekend. Samuel was excited about coming to the weekend and especially about meeting other children who had experienced a death in their family, although still a little

hesitant about wanting to talk about his dad. Mum said that Samuel had felt very isolated from his peers, as he didn't know anyone else who had had the death of a parent in his school.

At the weekend we had 7 families attend including Samuel and his mum. Samuel brought a photo of his dad to the weekend to show the other families. Over the weekend Samuel made connections with a couple of the other boys at the weekend and they spent time talking and playing together.

The weekend gave Samuel a chance to explore some of his feelings about his dad's death through play, craft, story telling and he especially engaged with the work we did around anger. The anger work is done using clay and after expressing his anger on the anger wall Samuel went on to use the clay to create a model that reminded him of his relationship with his dad.

All the children were given a puppet on the Saturday, this is their puppet to keep and they are asked to bring it back on the Sunday and given an opportunity to talk about how the puppet is feeling. This gives the children a chance to talk about how they are feeling and because they do this via the puppet, it helps them to access and express feelings that might otherwise feel unacceptable to share normally.

Samuel found it easier to talk about his feelings on the Sunday using his puppet and this seemed to really help him to address some of those difficult feelings that he had been avoiding and especially having been able to allow his anger to be expressed through the clay the previous day, it felt that there had been a very definite shift in his feelings over the 2 days.

After the weekend the therapists visited Samuel and his mum for a closing visit at their home. Mum said that Samuel seemed in a much better place emotionally since the weekend and she and Samuel had been able to talk about dad following the weekend much more easily. Mum had realised that she needed to access some support for herself and so was going to look into getting some one to one counselling.

The family has asked to stay in touch with our charity and we will be inviting them back for social events. This gives them a chance to not only keep in touch with the therapists and families they met at the January weekend but also to give them an opportunity to meet other families associated with our charity, thus ensuring an on-going support network for them.

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