THRIIVE
A LIFE-AFFIRMING LOOK AT FINDING HOPE IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY
EDUCATION PACK 2016/17
ABOUT ZEST

Zest is a national touring theatre company creating eye-opening new work for, by and with young people.

Zest Theatre was established in 2007. We tour to theatres, outdoor spaces and schools with a variety of interactive, immersive, site specific or promenade productions. Our work places the audience right at the centre of the action and creative process. Each year we engage around 17,000 people across the country as audience members or participants with productions that have been described as ‘inclusive’ (The Northern Echo) and ‘invigorating’ (The British Theatre Guide).

ABOUT THRIVE

Research suggests that roughly half of the British population will experience at least one traumatic event in their lifetime. How do you think you would you cope if it happened to you?

Thrive is about three young people that didn’t go looking for suffering, but suffering found them anyway. When Ollie, Ashleigh and Raph are thrown together by the sudden death of someone they knew, they find themselves wrestling with the turbulent emotions that painful events throw up. Join them on their journey and stand side by side with them as they recover, survive and maybe even Thrive.

This exciting production for young people is staged inside a visually stunning set that completely surrounds the audience. Using humour, movement and spoken word, Zest Theatre beautifully portrays the most challenging of emotions with courage and optimism. Thrive shows us what happens when three people, pushed to the edge of what they can bear, dig deep and learn to live on.

Developed in collaboration with Psychologists and inspired by true stories of young people, Thrive is a life-affirming look at finding hope in the face of adversity. The show explores the notion of Post-Traumatic Growth - the positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances.
HOW TO USE THIS PACK

This pack is primarily designed as a learning resource for groups who have recently watched a performance of Zest Theatres production, Thrive, however for some of the activities this is not essential. There are a variety of discussion points and exercises that can be explored in isolation or as part of a longer module. The exercises can be done in a mixture of groups, pairs, and individually. The pack covers the themes, content, and characters as well as practicalities of putting on a show like Thrive. This makes it suitable for PSHE, Drama and even Religious Education lessons.

Please be aware that Thrive deals with themes around loss and grief, which some students may find distressing or may trigger an emotional response. Teachers should approach the sessions with sensitivity to the young people and their past experiences. In cases where a student is in the early stages of grief or has suffered a recent loss, it might be appropriate to discuss the session with the young person and/or guardian beforehand and allow them to decide whether they would like to take part.

DISCLAIMER

Please note that, although Thrive and all it’s resources have been developed in collaboration with psychologists, the exercises in this pack should not be taken as medical advice or recommendations in any way. If you are concerned about the wellbeing of a young person in your care, please follow your schools policies and procedures.
ESTABLISHING GROUND RULES

Before starting, it is important to set some ground rules for the session. This will help students to feel safer and more comfortable airing their views. It might be useful for the students to come up with these themselves, but some that work well are:

- Only 1 person speaking at a time
- Listen to each others opinions, even if you don't agree
- Include everyone in the group
- Try your best

Bear in mind that the themes in Thrive may provoke some strong responses and differences of opinion. This is fine and can be really interesting, as long as everyone gets a chance to have a say and people's views and feelings are respected. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions; they are designed to get students thinking more about the shows content and the wider themes around it.

Also consider that not everyone will feel comfortable participating in group discussion. It doesn't mean they aren't engaging, they may just be processing the information in a different way. Our pack is designed with open ended questions that encourage everyone to share their thoughts, but you may need to prompt or give extra help to some.
EXPLORING THEMES OF THE PLAY

INTRODUCTION EXERCISES

These exercises are designed to get you chatting about Thrive. You may want to spend a couple of minutes sharing your initial thoughts on the show.

(1) (10 Minutes) Working in small groups, list all the themes/topics which are explored, however briefly, in the play. For each theme, refer to how is covered in Thrive and what it might tell us about the character(s) involved. Share and discuss your answers with other groups.

(2) (10 minutes) In one sentence, sum up your understanding of the word ‘trauma’. In particular, think about how it differs from a bad day or something that might annoy you and affect your mood for a short while i.e. Missing the bus or not being invited to a party. Give some examples of traumatic events/situations.

- Would you agree that the characters in the play suffered from a trauma?
- What are your reasons for this?
- What other events or situations do you think may be classed as trauma?

Share and discuss your answers with other groups.

TRAUMA

1. A deeply distressing or disturbing experience.
2. Emotional shock following a stressful event or a physical injury, which may lead to long-term neurosis.

Oxford English Dictionaries
One of the main themes in Thrive is grief. We witness our characters going through counselling during the play. What other things can people do to help them deal with grief? Discuss with other groups.

List as many alternative words or phrases for ‘Death’ or ‘Dead’ as you can. For example passed away, lost, no longer with us. Why do you think people use these slang names? How do you think it might affect the people who are grieving?

Think about someone you know who may have faced grief at some point in their lives or from what you have seen in media. How do you think the person might behave that shows family and friends they are grieving?

Using the fact sheet provided, decide which of the statements about grief you feel are true, and which you think are false.

According to studies, there are five stages of grief. Using the ‘Stages of Grief’ sheet attached, discuss the characters general behaviour and decide which stage each of our characters is at the beginning of the play, and how far they have come by the end. Talk about the different coping mechanisms used by each character, for example Raph's rubik cube or Ollie’s isolation, why you think they behave that way, and whether you think it helps or hinders their recovery.

It is important to understand that everybody grieves differently and will process things at different speeds and in different ways. The symptoms of grief can be both physical and psychological. Similarly, some people may appear to experience none of the typical symptoms of grief. It does not mean they are not grieving, and should still be offered support and services.
(6) (20 minutes) At the beginning of the play, Ashleigh and Ollie have an argument because Ollie disagrees with the idea of a party for James. He accuses her of being disrespectful – Do you agree? What else could Ashleigh have done to show that she was still thinking of James?

(7) (30 minutes) Write a letter or poem to James from one of the other characters. Describe how you might be feeling, things you miss about them, and good times you were grateful for. If you prefer, you could write this from a more personal perspective.

(8) (40 minutes) When writing his speech for James’ memorial service, Ollie seems to exaggerate James’ good qualities, and sweep over any negatives.

• Why do you think he does this?
• Is it OK to say negative things about dead people? If not, why not?
• Is it more important to protect friends and families feelings, or give an honest account of someone's life?
• How do you think someone who had been horribly bullied by James might have felt hearing Ollie’s first attempt at his speech?
• If you were James or someone close to him, would you prefer Ollie's first speech, or the one he gives at the end? Give reasons for your answers.

**HOMEWORK TASK**

Pick a culture or period of history different from your own and research their beliefs and rituals surrounding death. Look at how their traditions may differ from yours. Present your findings creatively: for example a poster, collage, leaflet or power point.
Post Traumatic Growth (PTG) refers to those times when the difficulties and challenges we face in life make us stronger rather than weaker. A traumatic event like a bereavement, abuse, an accident or an assault challenge us to the core and leave us having to put our lives back together afterwards. Everybody struggles, but some people find that once they’ve started to recover from the trauma, they also start to grow in all kinds of beneficial ways. They are wiser, more compassionate, more courageous, less naive, connected to others, spiritually aware and so on. This is post traumatic growth, when the things that we thought would break us, actually make us.

Roger Bretherton, Psychology Lecturer, Uni. Of Lincoln

(1) (15 minutes) Using the chart and interview attached, discuss your understanding of Post Traumatic Growth and make a list of examples such as the one above. How do you feel this relates to our three characters in Thrive? What positive changes or developments come out of their traumatic experience?

(2) (20 minutes) What images, objects or symbols are used in Thrive that you think represent this idea of growth? How do each of our characters react to those images/symbols and what does it tell us about where the character is at on their journey?

Take 10 minutes to walk around your school and try to capture a further 3 images on your phone that you feel show ‘growth’ in any way. Show and explain your choices to the rest of the group.

(3) (40 minutes) Discuss the significance of the ‘Before I Die I Want To’ tags in Thrive. Why do you think people make bucket lists? What effect does it have emotionally on the person that makes it and the people they share it with? How do you think someone would feel if they had not achieved all the things on their list?

Take some time to think about your goals and make your own bucket lists. The goals can be however big or small you may want. Make your bucket list into a poster that can be put up in the classroom. Discuss what small steps you can take to help you achieve one of the goals on your bucket list.
Some examples could include:

- Completing a marathon
- Living in a specific place
- Trying a new food/hobby
- Spending more time with family/friends

(4) (10 minutes) Using what you know of James’ character in Thrive, list 5 things you think would be on his bucket list. How could the other characters use James’ bucket list to help them grow?

(5) (40 minutes) Imagine Ashleigh, Ollie and Raph are meeting up 10 years from now to celebrate James’ birthday. Devise 2 scenes. In scene 1, the characters did not grow from the painful experience of losing a friend. In scene 2, they did. Show the scenes to the rest of the group. How are each of the characters and scenarios different? Share the scenes with the rest of the group.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Not everyone will experience growth in the aftermath of trauma. Everybody is different; it’s not that some people ‘chose’ to grow and others don’t; it’s down to each person’s individual circumstances and characteristics.
MAKING THE PLAY

(1) (15 minutes) In your groups, discuss the format and structure of the play (how the play has been put together rather than what the story is). Some things to think about could include:

- Did anything about the play surprise you?
- Does the way the space is used enhance the story? If so, why?
- How does your experience compare to previous theatre visits?
- Did you stand up or sit down during Thrive? Do you think this affected your experience?
- What do you think the advantages and disadvantages to staging a play this way are?

(2) (15 minutes) Imagine you are pitching (a bit like Dragons Den) Thrive to a group of teachers/parents etc. Is it an important piece of theatre for teenagers to see? If so, why? What can be learned from it? Present your pitch to the rest of the class.

(3) Although there are only three characters on stage during the play, it was important when rehearsing it that all the characters had a connection (however small, in Raph’s case) to James’ character and felt that he was a real person before the accident.

(15 minutes) Using what you know of James from other characters, fill in the Character Profile Sheet provided. Pick one person to be James and ‘hot seat’ the character.

(3) (20 minutes) Devise a scene with James and any combination of the characters that could have taken place before the accident. This may have even been their last interaction before he died. Some ideas could include:

- Ollie and James talking about what to do for James’ birthday.
- James and Raph at the bus stop before school – Do they even talk to each other?
- James and Ashleigh rowing about what film to see at the cinema

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Between now and the next session, write a review of Thrive. Things to comment on could include:

- The set
- What you thought of the topics and themes
- What you thought of the characters
- Any critique or improvements you think could be made
CHARITIES / HELPLINES

Mind
www.mind.org.uk
Helpline: 0300 123 3393
Text: 86463
info@mind.org.uk

Grief Encounter
www.griefencounter.org.uk
Helpline: 020 8371 8455
contact@griefencounter.org.uk

Winston’s Wish
www.winstonswish.org.uk
Helpline: 08452 03 04 05
info@winstonswish.org.uk

Bereavement UK
www.bereavement.co.uk
support@bereavement.co.uk

Samaritans
www.samaritans.org
Helpline: 116 123
jo@samaritans.org

Young Minds
www.youngminds.org.uk
Workbooks

WORKBOOKS

‘Grief Encounter Workbook and Forever Journal’
by Dr Shelley Gilbert MBE PGDPM, PGDC, Snr Accredited MBACP, UKRCP Reg

Filled with activities to promote constructive ways of dealing with grief.

Available from www.griefencounter.org.uk

BOOKS

‘What Doesn’t Kill Us: A guide to overcoming adversity and moving forward’
by Professor Stephen Joseph

‘A Monster Calls’
by Patrick Ness, based on a concept by Siobhan Dowd

‘Bad Time Rhymes’
Edited by Dr Shelley Gilbert MBE and Sue Goodwin.

A book of poems about grief written by children and young people.
### CHARACTER PROFILE WORKSHEET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
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**Characteristics (What are they like/how do people view them?)**

1) 
2) 
3) 

**Likes:**

1) 
2) 
3) 

**Dislikes:**

1) 
2) 
3) 

**Best Friend:**

**Worst Enemy:**

**Favourite Food:**

**Favourite Colour:**

**Best Present Ever Received:**

**Family:**

**Hobby:**

**Favourite TV Programme:**
• If somebody died over a year ago, the person grieving should have moved on by now.

• Some symptoms of grief include overeating, headaches and trouble breathing.

• Exercise can help improve the mood of someone who is grieving.

• If someone is grieving, it's better not to mention the death at all in case it upsets them.

• If a pet dies, the grief won't be as bad as when a person dies.

• There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

• When you are grieving, it can be common to experience levels of guilt about the person who has died.

• If someone is laughing and joking, they clearly aren't grieving.

• Death isn't the only cause of grief. Grieving can occur during the death of a relationship, i.e. divorce, or a life changing illness. Grieving is the mourning of an old way of life before embarking on an altered journey i.e. Without a person, without health, without a job etc.

• Grieving can sometimes begin before the changing event has occurred.

• Maintaining a daily routine can help you when grieving.

• Grieving is something that is better done alone.

• Sometimes people grieving will feel emotionally numb rather than sad.

• Spasms of grief can occur at any time, even years after the event, sparked off by people, places and things that bring back memories of the person who has gone.
The Stages of Grief

The Kübler-Ross model of grief (the five stages of grief) describes five primary responses to loss. These stages are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Someone who is grieving may go through these stages in any order, and they may return to previous stages.

**Denial:** “This can’t be happening.”

Individuals may refuse to accept the fact that a loss has occurred. They may minimize or outright deny the situation. It is suggested that loved ones and professionals be forward and honest about losses to not prolong the denial stage.

**Anger:** “Why is this happening to me?”

When an individual realizes that a loss has occurred, they may become angry at themselves or others. They may argue that the situation is unfair and try to place blame.

**Bargaining:** “I will do anything to change this.”

In bargaining, the individual may try to change or delay their loss. For example, they may try to convince a partner to return after a breakup, or search for unlikely cures in the case of a terminal illness.

**Depression:** “What’s the point of going on after this loss?”

At the stage of depression the individual has come to recognize that a loss has occurred or will occur. The individual may isolate themselves and spend time crying and grieving. Depression is a precursor to acceptance because the individual has come to recognize their loss.

**Acceptance:** “It’s going to be okay.”

Finally, the individual will come to accept their loss. They understand the situation logically, and they have come to terms emotionally with the situation.
TRAUMA RESILIENCE

THE 5 GIFTS OF CONQUERING ADVERSITY

NEW POSSIBILITIES
See things from another angle, knock down barriers that have held you back, tap into a new purpose for your life.

INCREASED STRENGTH
Build resilience in the face of challenge. Each problem you tackle, learn from and overcome, leaves you stronger and more confident.

MORE MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS
Dealing with a challenge can create more empathy in your heart and an overall desire to love and help others. You also recognize who your “real” friends are and have a desire to form appropriate boundaries to support your growth.

GREATER APPRECIATION
It’s easy to get wrapped up in life and forget about expressing gratitude. When a trial knocks you down, it has a way of making life that much more valuable.

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT
A deep faith in God or the divine has been shown to increase the probability of survival. When you experience something difficult, often all you are left with is faith.
How Children and Young People Grieve

As concerned adults, we would like to be reassured that children are too young to feel the deep sadness and despair that grief can bring. Sadly, this is not the case. Children and young people grieve just as deeply as adults but they show it in different ways. They learn how to grieve by mirroring the responses of the adults around them, and rely on adults to provide them with what they need to support them in their grief.

After the death of her sibling, Meg’s father kept himself very busy at work and when he came home started a frenzy of redecorating the house. Meg emulated her father’s response by going out a lot.

Children have a limited ability to put feelings, thoughts and memories into words and tend to “act out” with behaviours rather than express themselves verbally. They will gradually acquire the language of feelings by listening to words that you use. Showing your grief will encourage them to express theirs. Their behaviour is your guide as to how they are and this is as true for a very young child as it is for a teenager.

Children are naturally good at dipping in and out of their grief. They can be intensely sad one minute, then suddenly switch to playing happily the next. This apparent lack of sadness may lead adults to believe children are unaffected, but this “puddle jumping” is a type of in-built safety mechanism that prevents them being overwhelmed by powerful feelings.

As children get older, this instinctive “puddle jumping” becomes harder and teenagers may spend long periods of time in one behaviour or another.

One mother said
“My ten year old doesn’t seem to care, she cried on the day because we were crying but she hasn’t cried since.”

For a young person, getting on with life might mean a hectic social schedule as their way of shutting out the pain. Or they may withdraw into themselves, rejecting offers of help and being generally very hard to communicate with. If this is the case, try to stick with it and continue to let a teenager know that you are still there for them, but without putting them under pressure to talk.

The difference between adult and child grief is sometimes illustrated by the following: a child jumps in and out of puddles of grief, but an adult is deep in a river, being swept along with the current, finding it very difficult to get out.

Common responses, feelings and behaviours
It is normal for children and young people to react strongly to the death of someone close even if the resulting feelings and behaviours look and feel far from normal. Adolescents and teenagers find it hard to reveal intense and difficult feelings with family members when life for them is already full of challenge and uncertainty. Remember that a child’s attention span corresponds to the amount of information they can handle at any one time. When they reach their limit, they may substitute feelings that they can handle for those they cannot. For example, a child may laugh inappropriately to avoid talking about fear or sadness.

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This may appear uncaring but is actually a safety mechanism to prevent emotional overload. How a child or young person responds to someone dying will be influenced by their age and understanding, the relationship they had with the person who died, and how that person died.

**Age and Understanding**
All children are different and a mature 4 year old may have a better grasp of the situation, and of the full meaning of what being dead means, than a child who is older.

An older child generally understands more. The increasing realisation of the full implications of someone dying can be too much to bear, resulting in self-protecting denial and appearing OK. See our information sheet *Children’s Understanding of Death at Different Ages* for more information.

**Babies and Toddlers**
At this age there will be little understanding of what death and dying means but there will be a sense of someone important missing. The resultant feeling of abandonment may create more than usual clingy behavior. With no language to express themselves, their anxiety and insecurity may show itself with inconsolable crying. Feeding and sleeping routines may be disrupted and their distress expressed by being generally miserable.

**Toddler to 5 years of age**
Understanding will be increasing but so will the need for information to try to make some sense of what has happened, resulting in lots of questions. Anxieties about everyday practicalities are common as is increased separation anxiety even when left for short periods. There may be a regression in behavior, for example with bed wetting, and generally behaving like a younger child. Some children become anxious about the dark when going to sleep. Children of this age find it hard to grasp the permanence of death and can have an expectation of the person returning, with consequent disappointment and sadness. They may struggle with the concept of “no life” and therefore need reassurance that dead people feel nothing and are not in pain.

**Primary School Age**
Children of this age are beginning to grasp the concept that dead people do not return to life and that death happens to everyone, including themselves. They can start to fear the death of others important to them. Some children react by being especially good to compensate for a sense of badness that somehow what has happened was their fault. Others behave badly to attract the punishment that they feel they deserve. Even when there is no expectation, they sometimes take on the role of carer for a surviving adult or siblings, in an attempt to appear grown up they might take on inappropriate adult responsibilities.

**Secondary School Age**
Puberty is a time of great change and for a young person, grief just adds to this. Teenagers are striving to be independent and grown-up but the death of someone close creates vulnerability. Their feelings of grief may be similar to those of adults but they have strong inhibitions about expressing them, partly to be grown up, and partly to avoid being different from friends. Some young people become apathetic, depressed and withdrawn and develop a “what’s the point” attitude to school or even life. A hectic social life prevents time to think and risk taking behavior or anti-social behavior is not unusual.

None of the above are causes for concern unless they last a long time or affect a child or young person’s ability to engage with normal life. If you are unsure or concerned, you can call the *Child Bereavement UK Support and Information line* on 01494 568900 for guidance. It is important to remember that grief is normal and with the right help and support, most children and young people will be changed, but not damaged, by what has happened.

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The relationship they had with the person who has died
The loss of a parent or prime carer can have a devastating effect on a child. Feelings of insecurity are common and children will be concerned as to ‘who will look after me now?’ This may appear unfeeling but children live in a very concrete world and need to know that they will continue to be cared for. They can also fear that their other parent is going to die and will need lots of reassurance around this.

Following such a loss, children may feel it is their duty to take on the responsibilities of the parent who has died, even when no such expectation is in place. It is just something that some children feel they have to do. This is a heavy burden for them to bear and they will need lots of reassurance that this is neither an expected nor appropriate role for them to take on. In time, everyone will adjust to living life as it has become with new routines.

When a child dies within a family, the remaining brothers and sisters may feel left out as so many emotions are understandably centered on the dead child. Surviving siblings can experience conflicting emotions of deep sadness mixed in with relief that adults might now have some time and energy for them. They subsequently can feel bad for having these thoughts and guilt is common. When a sibling dies, surviving children may wonder why they are alive and their brother or sister is dead. They may fear it is their turn to die next.

A grandparent who was very involved with a child’s care will be probably be missed more than one who was rarely seen, but try not to make assumptions. A death that appears to be not that significant can trigger feelings around other losses.

How the person died
How someone died will affect a child’s response. A sudden death allows no time to prepare for what happens, no opportunity to say goodbye. There is also a feeling of being left suspended, or with unfinished business. When a parent or sibling dies unexpectedly in a road accident, or even more traumatically through murder or suicide, the immediate reaction is shock and total numbness. Young people may feel immense pain at their loss, and anger with the person who has died and left them. Frustration at missing out on planned activities together, which can now never happen, is another response. They may have bitter regrets about something they said, or wish they had said, but never got the chance.

“I didn’t really like Rowan very much and I wish I could tell him now how much I miss him.”
Ruby was age 6 when her older brother died.

Taking into account all of the above, we might assume that an expected death is easier to bear than a sudden one. This is not always the case, they are just different. For children and young people, the death of someone who has been ill for some time can still be a huge shock, especially if they have not been kept aware of the seriousness of the situation.

“We heard a man talking next to us about a young woman who had just died. From that I knew it was my Mum.”
Geoff was age 13 when his Mum died.

Remember we communicate with children all the time, even when we do not intend to. They will already know that something is wrong by the changed behaviour of the adults around them. With an anticipated death, try to take every opportunity to prepare children. Our information sheets When a Parent is Terminally Ill: supporting children and A Guide for the Parents of Terminally Ill Children may be of help.

Provided with the right support, most grieving children and young people will not need professional help. What they do need is the love and care of adults they trust. It can be helpful to get support from other family members or from concerned adults familiar to the child such as a teacher.

For ideas on how to support a grieving child see our information sheet What Helps Grieving Children and Young People.

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Suggestions of resources that offer further information

**Child Bereavement UK**
The Child Bereavement UK website [www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org) has a database that you can search for bereavement support organisations in your area, or telephone the Support and Information Line 01494 568900 for ideas on what might help.

**When your partner dies: supporting your children** Written with help from bereaved families, this simple booklet offers information and guidance for surviving parents and carers. Only available from Child Bereavement UK. It can be purchased online or ordered by phone.
Cost £2.50

**Talking About Death: a dialogue between parent and child** by Earl Grollman
A guide for adults and children to read together which helps with words and explanations for some of the questions that children might ask. Available from Amazon.

**A Child’s Grief** - Supporting a child when someone in their family has died.
A useful and easy to read introduction for any adult who is supporting a child through bereavement. Available from Winston’s Wish [www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk) Cost £6.95

**A teenage guide to coping with bereavement:** a guide for teens and their friends. Only available from Child Bereavement UK.
Cost 50p