



Bereavement Policy

William Reynolds Primary School and
Nursery

February 2018
To be reviewed February 2020

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Introduction

Every death in the school community, expected or sudden, presents real challenges. This guidance is intended to help the school community to respond appropriately and sensitively at this challenging time.

When the whole school may be affected by the death of a pupil or member of staff

Immediate response following the death

- Gather the facts, not hearsay, in order to plan an appropriate response.
- The Head Teacher will contact the family of the person who has died and seek permission to inform pupils and parents.
- Inform the Local Authority and Governors.
- Inform all staff and agree how to inform pupils
- Inform pupils of the death as a class or with the younger children, in smaller groups. Some pupils may need to be informed on an individual basis.
- Prepare a brief personal tribute about the person who has died to pass to Corporate Communications (Public Relations) who can liaise with the Press on behalf of the school.
- Prepare a letter for parents informing them of the death. The letter should be sent on the day the pupils are informed so that parents can support their children.

Useful contacts:

- The Educational Psychology Service 01952 385216
- Corporate Communications (Public Relations Team) 01952 382402
- Local Clergy (Reverend Rosemary Freeman)
- Chair of Governors (Jane Tranter)
- Pat Bailey (Learning mentor within school) has received Bereavement training

It is important to be open and honest with all members of the community. Remember that grief is painful but normal and healthy. Children need to be allowed to grieve just as much as adults. **They are unlikely to need "experts" counselling them.** Rather they need **familiar and trusted adults** who can be sensitive to their feelings and offer a listening ear.

Next steps

- Head Teacher to visit the family
- Consider arranging a meeting for staff so that they can be advised on how best to support pupils and one another. The Educational Psychology Service can facilitate this.
- Ensure that pupils have the opportunity to talk about the death with familiar, trusted adults with whom they have daily contact. For younger children this may be done, e.g., in circle time. For older students, a room could be made available for those particularly affected perhaps supported by staff who know them.
- Consider whether further support may be required for pupils and/or staff who have directly witnessed an incident.
- Maintain contact with the family prior to the funeral and for some time afterwards, depending on individual needs.

Further steps

- Establish the family's wishes regarding funeral arrangements and find out if the family would like staff and individual pupils to attend.
- In consultation with the family, decide if the school should have a memorial service and/or a more lasting memorial such as a sensory garden, a cup or trophy, a tree or a painting.

When an individual pupil is affected by a bereavement, which may not impact on the whole school.

- Gather the facts and liaise with the family to find out what the pupil understands.
- Let the pupil know, in a sympathetic manner, that you are aware that someone close to them has died.
- Dedicate a member of staff to make daily contact with the pupil, whilst allowing the pupil to seek support elsewhere.
- Maintain routines but adjust expectations.

Everyone of us will, at some point in our lives, experience a significant loss and have to suffer the grief and bereavement that ensues. It is helpful to understand the process both in terms of how we cope and also how children manage this kind of loss.

Grief is a normal, essential response to the death of a loved one. It can be short lived or last a long time depending on the personality involved, the closeness of the relationship, the circumstances of the death and previous losses suffered. In many cases, this grief can take the form of several clearly

defined stages. This is not necessarily a linear process and difficulties may occur at any of the stages described.

1. Shock and disbelief
2. Denial
3. Growing awareness
4. Acceptance

1. Shock and disbelief

This is likely to happen whenever our model of the world is upset.

2. Denial

This generally occurs within the first 14 days and can last minutes, hours or weeks. In this stage the bereaved person behaves as if the dead person is still there, no loss acknowledged.

3. Growing awareness

Some or all of the following emotions may be experienced:

- **Yearning** - the urge to search; going over the circumstances of the death, trying to find a reason for the death or visiting where it happened
- **Anger** - this can be against any or all of the following: the medical services, the person who caused the death, the deceased for leaving.
- **Depression** - the bereaved person begins to feel the despair, the emptiness, the pain of the loss.
- **Guilt** - the emotion is felt for the real or imagined negligence or harm inflicted on the person who has just died. There is a tendency to idealise the person who has died.
- **Anxiety** - in extreme cases anxiety can even become panic - as the full realisation of the loss begins to come through.

4. Acceptance

This generally occurs in the second year after the death has been relived at the first anniversary. The bereaved person is able to adjust to life without the deceased and begins to invest energy elsewhere.

Reactions of children

In children, the stages of grief may manifest themselves in the following reactions:

- 1. Children, like adults, will enter a period of shock which will last for a few hours or up to a week.**
It can manifest itself by the child going through daily life mechanically, automatically smiling on cue or being apprehensive. They may have periods of panic. Alternatively, they may become withdrawn and gaze into space for long periods.
- 2. The death of a close relative heightens our sense of vulnerability and for children death and separation are synonymous.** They may:
 - Become very anxious about being separated from parents for any reason
 - Be reluctant to go to school
 - Be depressed
 - Be prone to infection i.e. colds, ear infections and tummy upsets
 - Bite nails or cuticles, pick themselves, twiddle with their hair
 - Develop a fear of the dark (which may last for years)
 - Have difficulty in going to sleep
 - Possibly have nightmares
 - Develop a phobia about hospitals, nurses and doctors
- 3. Regression to an earlier stage of development is common.**
- 4. Children may lose concentration at school.**
- 5. Food can become important.**
Some children will eat and eat to fill up the emptiness they feel inside. They may hoard food and hide it away. Others will lose interest in eating. The phase usually only lasts a comparatively short time.
- 6. Sadness and anger need to be expressed but children are often afraid and confused about venting their feelings as they do not know what is allowed.**
- 7. Some children may be frightened to ask questions and will only talk to 'outsiders'.**
- 8. The duration of the grief process for children is the same as adults - approximately two years.**

School code of practice for answering children's questions

Children often hear words and use them without necessarily having full understanding of them so it is essential to find out why the child is asking the question and what the child knows. What a child is not told with regards to loss they will make up and fill in the gaps for themselves.

- **Answer the question honestly, logically** and at age and culturally appropriate level.
- Use **proper biological terms**.
- **Accept what children say** - don't make judgements - it's alright to ask questions.
- **Avoid personal views**.
- **Grief and loss education** is planned in to the curriculum but if the child asks a question at other times, respond to the questioner only - individual response.
- **Talk to parents** about questions children have asked so that parents are well informed and able to support children's understanding.
- **Avoid** inappropriate level of detail. Answers should be age and culturally appropriate and should take account of the child's experience.

More specific support and advice is available from:

Winston's Wish www.winstonswish.org.uk 08088 020021

Hope House Children's Hospice tel. 01691 672618 e-mail

counselling@hopehouse.org.uk

CRUSE www.rd4u.org.uk CRUSE Youth Helpline 0808 808 1677 Mon-Fri
9.30 - 5pm

The Samaritans www.samaritans.org.uk tel 116123 e-mail

jo@samaritans.org

Death in the curriculum

Pupils are likely to cope better with bereavement if they have had natural opportunities to think about death within different areas of the curriculum such as in stories and role play, Drama, English, PSHE, RE and Assemblies. There are also specific resources which focus on bereavement, e.g., within PSHE.