



"I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."

John 11: 25 – 26

BEREAVEMENT: SUPPORTING SCHOOLS WHEN SOMEONE DIES

A Guidance Document for Schools in the Diocese of
Westminster

With thanks to Rainbows GB and Child Bereavement UK

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“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”
(John 3: 16)

Introduction

"I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."

John 11: 25 - 26

As members of a Catholic School community, we are called to witness our faith in times of joy and sorrow, and to support one another; especially in a time of crisis. When a member of the community dies, it is important that the community respond in an appropriate way. A different response may be necessary depending on whether it be a death of a pupil, a staff member or any other member of the school community.

The death of a loved one is a traumatic event for anyone to experience, especially for children. Although grieving is a natural process which can be helped by the sympathy and understanding of those who care for us, it is also important that the right support is given so that the person experiencing grief is able to work through it in a positive way.

School communities provide a safe space for children, but supporting a child who has experienced bereavement can be a daunting prospect, as it is not always easy to know how to help a child effectively as they navigate the grieving process. Many teachers receive no bereavement training and are unsure how to support grieving children and young people in their class.

In order to assist schools in their mission to care for and support their pupils in times of bereavement and loss, the Education Service has compiled a document on bereavement. Information within the document is provided by renowned bereavement charities including Rainbows GB and Child Bereavement UK.

The document aims to support schools by providing examples of good practice in dealing with the event of a death within the school community. It provides useful resources linked to procedures schools may wish to follow, including examples for creating a bereavement policy. It also contains useful information on bereavement and how to support children through the grieving process. The document also signposts schools to where they can access further support and training.

Section A – Information, Guidance and Support



Responding to a Death within the School Community

For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end. Psalm 48:14

This guidance is to support schools in their first response to the death of a staff member, student and parent. Although much of the advice is common sense, in the midst of a tragic event it can often help to have a checklist. Each case is different and may or may not require the same detail. Please use the “Sudden Bereavement Flow Chart” [here](#) to assist you.

Arrange a staff meeting as soon as practicable

Always try to communicate with staff first and then pupils

Consider whether some members of the school community should be told first.

Identify absent staff.

Include members of support staff, mid-day supervisors, premises staff. More than one meeting maybe required but ensure that everyone hears the same message.

Informing staff members

If a death has occurred in a holiday period, make sure that all staff are informed. Some schools have a ‘snow day’ or other urgent communication systems in place that could be used.

Be aware that news can spread rapidly and indiscriminately through social media, which may mean that some people hear the news before others.

Informing Parents and student

Ensure a letter or notification has been sent to parents clearly informing them of what has happened, the school’s procedure and how the pupils will be supported when they arrive at school. It is appropriate to consult with the bereaved family as to the content. It is sometimes difficult for parents to communicate upsetting news to the children, so repeating information in school ensures that everyone hears the same message. Include some guidance information for parents/carers to talk to young people about death, and to help when answering questions. This can also include information on Child Bereavement UK website www.childbereavementuk.org or Rainbows Bereavement Support <https://rainbowsgb.org/>

Give a factual and brief explanation of how the death occurred. Be prepared for obvious upset and feelings of anger/guilt. Staff and students may connect the incident to their own personal experience of bereavement, so feelings about past bereavements may need to be discussed. This is perfectly natural.

Staff Absence

To enable absent staff to feel part of a caring team, arrangements should be made to inform them over the telephone if a personal visit is impractical.

Media & Communications

For a death that may attract media coverage (e.g. if the member of staff was a well-known personality or died tragically), identify a nominated spokesperson (e.g. Head Teacher, Chair of Governors) to provide a timed 'news statement' with support of the Director of the Education Service for the Diocese, as a way of dealing with media intrusion. Liaison with the individual's family is essential, prior to reporting information to the media, in order to respect their privacy and wishes. Establish good lines of communication with all relevant parties, this will always include family and staff, in other cases it may involve communication with emergency services, health, the Educational Psychology service, Social Care, and other support services.

Prepare a short assembly

A whole school assembly may not be appropriate or wanted, especially if it is an individual pupil who has been bereaved. However, sometimes this is the best way to give the news, particularly when the death has affected the whole school. The decision will be influenced by the size of the school and if the person who died was well known to the school community or not. The benefit is that the entire school receives the same news, at the same time, keeping speculation and rumour at bay.

Ideally, this should be led by two members of staff to model support, giving a factual and brief explanation of what has happened. Include a time of prayer for the person who has died and the family who are experiencing loss. Encourage the community to pray as this can bring consolation and support. Please contact your Parish Priest, Chaplain or Diocesan Chaplaincy Adviser for further support. (*please see [Appendix 1](#)*)

Sign-posting

Issue a list of organisations to all staff members (please see '[Useful Contacts](#)') and allocate named members of staff who can provide support them (Headteacher, classroom teacher, Counsellor, Chaplain, named support staff).

Be inclusive

There can be times when members of our school community are not provided with the same information. This is often unintentional, and misunderstandings can be avoided by allocating a member of staff to inform and update support staff, Midday supervisors, Premises officers and Office administrators. These are often many of the front-line staff who come in to contact with parents, students and staff members.

Next Steps

Breathe and take a moment to reflect on your next steps:

Stability and Calm

Establishing stability and calm within the school after a bereavement takes time and must be handled sensitively. Therefore, it is vital to have allocated named staff in place to listen to the concerns of staff and students and guide them through the next steps of grief. Whilst acknowledging that some members of the community will want to “do something” or “be active” it is important to remain calm and consider ‘if and when’ this is appropriate.

The empty chair

The ‘empty chair’ could be a physical reminder of the person who has died, a cup in the staffroom, a nameplate on a tray. Staff and students often have a particular chair that they sit in or place that they stand. It may take a few weeks, but often there is a natural movement that requires the seat to be taken. Again, this can be acknowledged as part of the process, but not forgetting.

Beyond The Empty Chair

Look beyond the empty chair
To know a life well spent
Look beyond the solitude
To days of true content
Cherish in your broken heart
Each moment gladly shared
And feel the touch of memory
Beyond the empty chair

by Catherine Turner

Sudden Bereavement Flowchart



Dealing With Bereavement - The Role of the School

The death of a loved one is a traumatic part of life, especially when this occurs at a young age. Therefore when a child or young person experiences this, they require different levels of support to help them to adapt to living with their grief within the family home, and also to the challenges of a changed life in the outside world. School is therefore an important place for children and young people to receive support, as they spend a large proportion of their time at nursery, school or college, and their social life is often centred on friends made there.

In supporting pupils through their loss and grief, most children will not need a 'bereavement expert', instead they need people who care. Children and young people will seek familiarity and consistency in what has become an upturned world. Schools carrying on with their usual day-to-day activities, can provide that stability and provide a huge amount to support a grieving pupil. By gently introducing death and grief into the classroom the fear is removed, and young people will develop coping skills should someone they know die now or in the future.

Consulting grieving pupils is key to effective support ensuring that they are and involved in any decisions that may affect them.

General Guidance

Be honest

Death is not an easy subject for anyone. Model the fact that difficult feelings are ok, and totally normal. If you are upset, do not be afraid to be empathic but manage your emotions.

Use clear language

Trying to avoid the death by using phrases such as "your loss" and "gone to a better place" can be frustrating. Simply use language which is real and clear; "I was really sorry to hear that your Dad died last week, how are you feeling?" or "I'm sorry to hear about..."

Expect questions, but don't feel pressured to provide immediate answers

Recognise that every death and every reaction to it is unique.

Don't assume anything

Ask the pupils how they feel, rather than projecting feelings that you might expect them to have.

Allow time and space

Staff and students need time to work out how they feel and this is different for everyone; be prepared to questions and feelings over days and weeks as they move in and out of grief.

Act early to prevent rumours

In the case of an unexpected death, it is important to act early to prevent rumours and protect the family involved.

Please seek advice from the Local Authority and Diocesan Education Service

Guidance for staff

Supporting grieving pupils can be a daunting task for staff, for fear of getting it wrong or saying the wrong thing. Despite these fears most staff want to help but need guidance, when dealing with this emotive subject, so that they know how to respond and support the grieving pupil. The training of teachers and other school staff is therefore important so that the right support is given in a timely and effective manner. Training can be sort through various organisations such as The Catholic Children's Society via their Rainbows Bereavement Support Programme <https://www.cathchild.org.uk/rainbows-bereavement-support-programme/> or other bereavement charities dedicated to supporting children such as Child Bereavement UK or Winston's Wish (please see 'Useful Contacts')

Providing a sense of normality

As stated above, a child or young person whose life has been turned upside down by bereavement, needs to have a sense of normality within their life and the routines of school life can provide this. Everything else around them may feel in disarray but school and the people within it can offer a sense of continuity and security. School can provide children and young people with a sense of relief from an emotionally charged atmosphere at home. The processes involved when someone dies can be overwhelming, dealing with their own emotions and those of others within the grieving family. Other situation may be difficult to deal with such as be a constant stream of visitors expressing their own grief. It therefore it is not unusual for grieving children to return to school almost immediately after a death has occurred, whilst other may need to take a few days off. However, the longer they are away from school, the harder it can be for them to return. It is also important that pupils get the opportunity to be a child, even when very sad, children still need to be children. Loss and grief are very grown up experiences. School offers the chance to play, laugh, sing and generally just be a child without feeling guilty.

Providing a listening ear

A listening school is a supportive school. School staff can provide an opportunity to talk about what has happened with a familiar and trusted adult in relative peace and calm, if this is what the pupil wants. When a parent or sibling has died, children and young people can mask their own feeling in an attempt to spare their surviving parent feelings by hiding their own grief and appearing to be OK. A listening school is seen as somewhere safe for the pupil to express this grief. It is often easier for a child to talk to someone who is not directly involved, such as a trusted teacher or learning mentor.

Communication and general support

Communication with a bereaved pupil's parents/carers is important, in order to support the child and build a clearer picture of how the young person is managing their grief. Ensure regular contact with home is maintained, to discuss concerns, and provide ongoing support. However it is important to remember that positive news and successes are equally important as voicing any concerns about their wellbeing or changes in behaviour.

A bereavement-aware culture

Within the school provide resources subject (*Please see [books/resources](#)*) Stories are a wonderful way to gently introduce young children to the concept of death. Novels and poems offer young people a chance to learn through reading, listening and discussion.

When someone dies in your school community, whether the death is one that affects an individual pupil or of someone known to the whole school community, how you respond will be remembered by everyone affected, child or adult. The school's response will depend on individual circumstances and the needs of pupils, staff and the wider school community. Everyone, child or adult, will grieve in their own way. Try not to make assumptions about what they should be doing, how they should be feeling or what is going to help. When not sure, ask the pupil or their family what they would like to happen.

Someone from school should liaise with the family. Offer to visit if the family would find this helpful. A card or letter of condolence will reassure the family of your support. Avoiding the subject always makes matters worse. It is better to explain what has happened in a sensitive way to avoid rumours and whispers. Use the correct words 'death' and 'dead' rather than euphemisms such as 'lost', 'passed' or 'gone to sleep'.

When the death affects an individual pupil, discuss with them how they would like the news to be shared. Do they want everyone, no one or just their close friends to know? Make sure information about the bereavement is shared sensitively with other members of staff and that the pupil is aware of this. Some pupils may be reluctant for this information to be given out but reassure them that if everyone has the basic facts, and details of any procedures in place, it will ensure that they will feel supported in school at all times

Staff and pupils may wish to attend the funeral; this may depend on who has died and their relationship with the family. It is important to communicate with the family to find out whether they welcome members of the school community.

Transition Points

It can be very helpful when information about a pupils circumstances is passed on so that they do not need to repeat their story at each transition point. If possible, prepare the pupil for the changes ahead, encourage them to share any concerns they may have and let them know who has been told about their bereavement and what was said.

Transitions could include:

- Changing school
- Moving class/year group/tutor group
- Teacher changes

Supporting bereaved pupils

It can often be difficult to know what to say to or do with people experiencing death and grief, this is equally true when supporting bereaved children. Every situation is different, and children will be affected to a greater or lesser degree, dependent on the circumstances of the death and the nature of the relationship they had with the person who has died. The following are brief guidelines:

A listening ear

An offer to spend a bit of quiet time with a pupil who clearly wants to talk will be greatly appreciated. Some will welcome the opportunity to just sit with you and say nothing; for others it is enough to know that you are keeping a look out for them.

Empathy not judgement

Grief comes in many shapes and sizes and is a very personal experience, no two people experience the same things. Therefore, in school every child and young person will grieve differently, even those from the same family. School staff need to take care not to make assumptions as to how children and young people should or may be feeling and what they should be doing. They therefore need to approach each situation as a unique experience, seeking out what support needs to be offered for the individual concerned.

Don't be afraid to talk about death

If you are discussing something in class that will refer to the person who has died, don't be afraid to do so. Avoiding references to the person who died might be perceived as a denial they ever existed. If not sure, check with the bereaved pupil first, letting them know your intention.

Do not be afraid to use the word 'death', 'I was very sorry to hear of the death of your ...'. If you find words difficult you can discreetly give the pupil a card expressing your care and concern. A card to a bereaved pupil from his/her class is usually appreciated and helps to keep up contact with school if they are not attending.

Importance of fact checking

Ensure you are familiar with the circumstances surrounding the death. Communicate with the family and make sure that what you say will not conflict with the family's wishes. Different information from home and school will confuse a pupil and complicate their grief.

Individual responses to grief

As stated previously, we all react differently to grief, and an individual's response will vary, even within the same family. Don't assume that a lack of reaction means that they do not care, as children and young people will experience and cope with the of grief differently. Initially, the full reality may not have sunk in. Young people can feel that they have to be seen to be coping as a

sign of maturity, or providing support to other family members. Allow them to express emotion and feelings and do not be afraid to share your own feelings of sadness if you have any.

Honesty is the best policy

It is better to answer questions truthfully. If you are faced with a difficult question, rather than answering straight away, ask the child what they think.

Time to grieve

Grieving is a complex process and each situation is different. Schools staff need to be sensitive to the needs of the child and young person. It may be many months before they can fully cope with the pressures of school work again. Remember that they will be grieving for life and the loss will always be with them. Explain to other pupils how the bereaved child may be feeling and encourage them to be openly supportive.

What bereaved pupils find helpful in school

- The opportunity to meet and talk to the teacher/ pastoral support/head/tutor to plan how their return to school will be managed.
- Being asked how they would like to break the news to their friends and classmates, and support with this, if needed.
- For school to acknowledge what has happened without making a fuss.
- Having a dedicated adult in school to talk to, ideally the pupil's own choice.
- Provision of a safe space or a 'time out' system so that they can space away from the hustle and bustle if they feel overwhelmed by their emotions. It is important that this is shared with all staff to ensure support is consistent throughout the school.
- For children to be given simple choices, particularly with regard to managing their grief.
- Some flexibility around deadlines for handing in work.
- An understanding that grieving can be exhausting and it can impact of a child or young person's concentration within school and therefore on their work.
- A compassionate environment where adults who care and will listen to them
- Keeping a record of key dates, such as the anniversary of the death, which can often act as a trigger for pupils to revisit their grief.

The most important thing that the school community can provide is people who care and who have a bit of understanding. It doesn't matter that they are not trained bereavement counsellors. School staff know how to listen and being heard is what is important to young people.

School Assemblies - Breaking News of a Death to the School Community

Holding an assembly or act of remembrance after a death in the school community is a helpful thing to do. It can begin to bring about a sense of normality into what may have been a very unsettled time. Below are some ideas to help you organise something appropriate.

Reasons to hold an assembly:

- To enable the school community to come together to acknowledge what has happened;
- To remember and reflect on the life of the person who has died;
- To highlight the message that is OK to be sad whilst also acknowledging it's OK to not be affected;
- To share in and therefore normalise the grieving process;
- To signpost support that is available to pupils and staff.

School Procedures and Advice on Conducting a Bereavement Assembly:

(On receiving news of the death of a student or a member of staff please follow the agreed procedures which will include the following points)

- Consult with the bereaved family concerned to ascertain their wishes.
- Those to be informed of a death should be gathered together in an appropriate place. This is best done in familiar groupings by someone they know.
- Whoever is giving the news should prepare themselves with what to say.
- Try to be as composed as possible as this helps to reduce the possible over emotional reaction of some students. Remember, however, it is perfectly human and understandable if you are moved by the events.
- Start by acknowledging that you have some sad news to give them.
- Be honest; give the news stating simple facts which have been checked for accuracy.
- Talk briefly about the person who has died.
- Let the students know of any arrangements already in place or of any arrangements agreed by the family.

- Underline how important their support is at this most difficult time and that it may be appropriate to involve them in a school response e.g. letters, flowers, cards, funeral attendance, memorial etc.
- Keep a watching brief throughout the assembly/meeting and for a period of time afterwards to pick up and support students and staff showing signs of distress.
- Keep in contact with the family suffering the loss. Make a note to remember the anniversary.
- Confirm any agreed arrangements by email or letter to parents and ensure details are posted on the school's website but not before all members of the bereaved family have been informed.

Attendance at the assembly

The assembly should be open to anyone who wishes to be there (*subject to school safeguarding procedures*): school staff, pupils, any family members who feel able to attend. The logistics in a large school, may make it difficult to get everyone together, therefore year group assemblies might be more appropriate. Families may find comfort in other people organising something special and welcome being there, whereas other may not wish to participate but should be given the opportunity to do so.

Who should be involved?

It is a good idea to involve anyone who wants to be. Consideration needs to be given to the age of the children and what is appropriate for their age and understanding. Young children will need varying amounts of adult support but can still participate in a meaningful way, whilst older children with require less input. Organising and participation helps them feel involved and gives a sense of doing something positive.

The structure of an assembly

The structure of the assembly should model usual practice for assemblies including Gather, Word, Respond, and Going Forth but with notable differences that are specific to this type of assembly. It is a good idea to start the assembly by explaining the purpose and length of the assembly. This can then be followed with a brief reminder of the circumstances surrounding the death and when it happened. Explain that everyone is different, and some people will be more affected than others. Whether they feel deeply sad, just a bit thoughtful, or anything in between, that is fine.

Ideas to include in the assembly

Gathering:

- Favourite music / songs or poems of the person who has died
- Lighting a special candle of remembrance
- Photographs of *Name* to give a visual reminder.

- Placing objects associated with the person who has died into a special memory box.
- Prayers of thanksgiving for *N's* life and the impact they had on so many
- Prayers of comfort for those who loved and will miss *Name*

Word:

- Read a passage from scripture, short story, poem, or reflection.

Respond:

- Reflections on the scripture reading
- Short eulogy
- Pupils or staff taking it in turns to recount stories or memories.
- Pupils to talk about a memory tree or collage they have created.

Going Forth:

(Try to ensure that the end of the assembly can leave everyone with a sense of looking forward.)

- Blowing out the remembrance candle
- Create the right atmosphere through playing reflective but uplifting music
- Asking pupils to bring a farewell message into a special box as they leave.
- The school community could go on to place a bulb/tree within the school grounds
- Reminding pupils of what support is available to them.

For an example of an assembly structure see *Appendix 1 – Sample Assembly – Breaking sad news to the school community*.

Considerations for After the Assembly

The timing of the assembly is best suited before break as this affords both pupils and staff with the time and space to reflect before carrying on with the normal school timetable.

If arranged for the end of the school day, leave time for pupils to compose themselves before leaving for home. Be prepared for different responses; some pupils may be deeply affected, others not at all, or they may behave out of character. Ensure they all know where to go for support if required.

Memorial and Funeral Services

Funerals and memorial services are a way in which the family, friends and society can say goodbye to someone who has died.

The value of funerals and memorial services are:

- They acknowledge the deceased person and provide space for the person to be remembered,
- They give the opportunity for the death to be put in a religious context, if that is appropriate for the family and/or for the school community
- They give significance to what has happened,
- They provide a time when the bereaved try to come to terms with what has happened,
- They provide a time to express sorrow. Such an occasion helps in the grieving process and should be encouraged at every opportunity.

If the funeral is that of a parent, then the school may wish to send a representative or representatives in support of the pupil who has lost a parent. Should the school wish to send children then please check with the family of the bereaved and ensure permission has also been given from the parents of those attending.

If the funeral is that of a pupil or member of staff, then the numbers of pupils and teachers wishing to attend may be considerable. Again, please check with the family of the bereaved and with the parents of those attending.

The following should always be considered:

- An appropriate member of the school Bereavement Team should always contact the family of the deceased to discuss funeral arrangements and to ascertain the family's wishes regarding representation from the school. Such wishes are paramount and should always be respected.
- If the school is to be represented at the funeral by pupils, it would be good if the pupils received support from appropriate members of staff before and after the funeral service.
- Under certain circumstances a form/class close to the bereaved may wish to send messages of sympathy to the bereaved family. These messages may be in the form of poems, cards, flowers etc. The appropriate staff should ensure that all such presents are appropriate.

Often a memorial service may be held in school. This could be a whole school assembly or within a class situation. The planning of such an occasion, choosing readings, poems, music, hymns, pictures, tributes etc. all assist in the grieving process. It might be appropriate to invite members

of the bereaved family to share in such a service. Again, staff members should be on hand to lend support to the pupils who could be upset when sharing in this part of the grieving process.

For further guidance and for specific examples of memorial services please see '[Attitudes to Death](#)'; the case studies provided and the list of books and websites.

Support for families on organising funerals can be found in the following resources:

- Order of Christian Funerals (Liturgy Office) [Click here](#)
- Catholic Funeral Planning Checklist [Click here](#)
- A guide to Catholic Funerals [Click here](#)
- A Guide to Catholic funeral etiquette, rites and traditions [Click here](#)

Support for families in financial difficulty

CARITAS Westminster currently offer grants to help specifically with funeral costs in cases of hardship. Funeral grants are given through all Westminster parishes and a grant can contribute towards the funeral costs.

<https://www.caritaswestminster.org.uk/grants.php>

Communicating to the School Community - Letters, Memos and School Website Notices

Introduction

The death of a pupil, member of staff, governor or other close member of the school community can cause great shock and distress to all concerned.

Parents need to know how a school has responded to the death of a member of the community and what information has been given to their child. This will no doubt include:

- Factual information about the circumstances of the death
- Information about how their child may respond to the news
- Practical suggestions to help their child to understand the news

Mobile phones, social networking sites and email can all quickly be the means of effective and speedy communication but they can also be a cause of great speculation, often before the school has had chance to provide the information. It is important that any information shared with the school community is carried out centrally by a designated member of the school staff. Caution is needed if members of staff responsible for communicating to parents are in shock, then the situation is more difficult to manage.

The letters in [Appendix 2](#) are offered as samples, simply to support and guide colleagues if faced with communicating to governors, staff and parents, the death of a member of the school community.

ACTION: If faced with having to write such a letter, or post the information on the school website, please just take a moment to check the accuracy of the information before beginning and please ensure other colleagues proof read what you have prepared.

Our hope is that you may find these examples helpful if you find yourself in the position of having to inform parents and indeed others of a death within your school community.

Sample letters are offered on the following:

1. To offer condolences to family of pupil who has died
2. To inform parents of the death of a member of staff as a result of illness.
3. To inform parents of the death of a pupil.
4. To inform governors and staff of the death of a pupil.
5. To thank parents after a time of support following the death of a pupil.

School Bereavement Policies and Procedures

Having a bereavement policy enables the school to be prepared and have the necessary plans in place to deal quickly, effectively and compassionately with death, grief and bereavement for all members of the school community. Its ultimate aim will be to provide systems, procedures and information in supporting a bereaved pupil or member of staff, as well as responding to a critical incident or tragedy, such as a death of someone within the school community. The school's bereavement policy will enable a school to:

- Consider the impact of a death within the school
- Identify share responsibilities and use expertise;
- Plan appropriately, produce guidelines and draft letters;
- Provide resources/information to support the school community;
- Facilitate CPD for staff
- Create a bereavement-aware culture within the school community

The procedure following the death of a pupil or member of staff will be different to managing and supporting individual bereaved pupils and the policy should reflect this.

The following is a suggested framework for structuring a school bereavement policy:

A suggested framework for a bereavement policy	
1. Aims, ethos and mission statement	7. Support for pupils
2. Rationale	8. Support for staff
3. Objectives Section 1 – Death of a pupil or member of staff	9. Remembering Section 2 – Supporting a bereaved pupil
4. Roles and Responsibilities	10. Returning to school after a bereavement
5. Procedures	11. Longer term support
6. The first few days	12. Death, grief and bereavement in the curriculum
7. The funeral	13. Support for staff

See [Appendix 3](#) for policy advice and [Appendix 4](#) for sample policies

Attitudes to Death

Among the world's many different cultures, beliefs and religions there are significant differences in belief about death and differences in marking this event by mourning. There is, however, no difference in the experience of grief that accompanies the loss of a family member or friend through death.

Teachers and all others who work with children and young people are in an important position to be able to watch for the signs of grief. It would be of great value if they are also able to set this grief in its cultural or religious background. Many of the traditions and cultures of different religions, for example, may mean that bereaved children may be absent from school for longer periods than those who belong to the Christian tradition. Compassion, sensitivity and understanding need to be exercised by all staff at this difficult time.

Please note: While stating the obvious, we need to acknowledge that there is no definitive type of Christian, Sikh, Muslim, Jewish, Humanist, or Hindu family, just as with any other culture or religion. The wishes of the individual family must always be paramount and we need to be aware of the dangers of generalisation.

Christianity

The funeral of the deceased may take place in church and/or a cemetery/crematorium chapel. It will be led by a priest, deacon or lay-leader. The service includes prayers, readings and hymns. Some funerals are held within the context of the celebration of the Eucharist or Mass.

In both the Roman Catholic and Church of England traditions, the Anointing of the Sick is often given to the dying person. There is no set period of mourning. Prayers for the deceased and/or mourning family are said in Church during the weeks following the funeral.

As part of the Catholic community, the school can remember those who have died throughout the year, coming together in an annual service to remember the dead on All Soul's Day on the 2nd November and indeed during the whole month of November to remember those who have died. There is also the opportunity within the Catholic Tradition to have Mass said for the dead person at any time and especially at anniversary times.

Non-religious funerals

Many people are uncomfortable with religious funerals if religion has had no meaning for the dead person and when most of the dead person's closest relatives and friends are not religious. The British Humanist Association offers personal and dignified funerals and memorial ceremonies for those who have chosen to live without religion.

A humanist funeral remembers the life of the person who has died and reflects on their contribution to the world and to others. Although it does not include hymns or prayers, the ceremony can be entirely acceptable to religious people mourning an atheist friend or colleague. It is important to acknowledge that humanist ceremonies do not include anti-religious material whatsoever.

Buddhism

The funeral of a Buddhist is usually led by a monk. Prayers and readings are recited along with symbols such as water pouring into a bowl to signify that the dead person will receive all that is needed for the soul's journey. Prior to the funeral, the body of the deceased usually remains at home. No cooking is permitted in the house during this time. Pictures are often removed from the walls of the house and the wearing of jewellery is forbidden.

After the funeral a meal is usually held at the house for family and friends. On the third day after death, alms are given and on the seventh day the monk receives alms as a symbol of merit of the dead person. This is usually repeated after three months and every year on the anniversary of the death.

Hinduism

At a Hindu funeral, the body is usually taken into the crematorium on the shoulders of six mourners. The pandit (priest) or eldest member of the family leads the mourners in prayers and after the ceremony is completed, the youngest member of the family usually leads the way home.

The mourning period may be 10 – 16 days but 'unofficial' mourning may last up to 40 days. The mourners often have no contact with outsiders, adopt a strict diet and take no part in any public activities. On the fourth day after the funeral, the ashes of the deceased are thrown into a river. On the eleventh day, in a ceremony to help the deceased on the journey, water and rice balls are often offered as sustenance. After this is concluded, the mourners can return to their usual lifestyle. For anniversaries, it can be the custom for many families to visit the Mandir with an offering of food to remember the loved one.

Islam

The Islamic belief is that Allah gave life and he will take it away. This belief requires a natural dignity in expressing grief as the death is the will of Allah and not to be questioned. Usually, only men attend the Islamic funeral where the body is carried into the Mosque or burial ground on the shoulders. Prayers are said throughout. The body is buried in the ground facing Mecca.

Mourning normally lasts up to three days but the period of mourning may last for forty days, with special ceremonies held on the third, tenth, and fortieth days, all designed to mark the progress of the soul's return to Allah. During this time, no jewellery or make-up is worn and no joyful celebrations may be held. For anniversaries it may be the custom of the family to hold prayers and food served for family and friends to remember loved ones. Some families have prayer on Thursdays to remember the deceased.

Judaism

The Jewish funeral usually takes place within twenty-four hours of death. It is not common for women to attend the funeral. The coffin passes the home of the deceased during the funeral. Clothes are often torn at the funeral service to symbolise grief.

The mourning period begins after the body is buried. Cremation is not allowed. Seven days of intense mourning are followed by a further thirty days. During this time the family are supported by friends even to the extent of fulfilling domestic duties. Work may be resumed during this period but no celebration may be held. Mourning officially lasts until the first anniversary of the death when prayers are recited in the synagogue.

Sikhism

At a Sikh funeral, hymns are sung and prayers said. The body is cremated and the ashes are scattered in running water. After the cremation Sikh communities may finish prayers at home or at the gurdwara and then eat. In some families, children are not allowed to go to the crematorium but in others children have a choice.

A period of mourning, usually lasting from ten to thirteen days follows the initial period immediately after death when the continuous readings of the writings of Guru Granth Sahib are read. This lasts for about forty-eight hours, during which time, relatives and friends join in. During this complete time of grieving the family is cared for by relatives. For anniversaries it may be the custom to visit the temple with an offering of food to remember the loved one.

PLEASE NOTE: These notes are taken and slightly adapted from the work of Robin Cooper "Young People and Loss – a Handbook for Schools".

The Grieving Process

(This article is based upon the work of Robin Cooper, author of “Young People and Loss – A Handbook for Schools” and used with the kind permission of his widow, Lucy Cooper)

Grief is the intense response to loss. The compulsory work of grieving, according to Freud, is mourning. This is inescapable and painful but has to be endured if the necessary adjustment is to be made to living life once again.

There are discernible grief reactions displayed by those who grieve. Based on the findings of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, many professionals have named the fundamental reactions as:

- Denial the refusal to accept what has happened. “This cannot be happening!”
- Anger the random direction of highly charged emotion against others.
- Bargaining the making of agreements with self/others in order to reverse the situation.
- Depression the feeling of utter futility.
- Acceptance the feeling that one can live now, positively, with memories of the past.

These well-known and acknowledged ‘grief reactions’ are often named ‘the five stages of grief’. However, from our shared experiences, we believe that grief, which is unique to every individual, is not simply an experience of moving through these named ‘stages’ but of moving forward in and out of these ‘experiences’, until with time, ‘acceptance’ or ‘adjustment’ comes along with the ability to live with the memories of the past.

The reality is that life will never be the same again and ‘acceptance’ will only come with much adjustment.

Further to these five basic reactions, there are a number of common, accepted emotions which characterise grief:

- Shock the feeling that such a thing is unreal.
- Fear the feeling of apprehension about the present and the future.
- Guilt the irrational blaming of self.
- Helplessness the feeling that there is no hope at all.
- Despair the feeling that there is little point in trying to go on with life.
- Loneliness the feeling of being convinced nobody else feels the way you do.
- Loss the pain filled days of memory
- Hope the feeling, however fleeting, that the grief stage will pass.

The following offers an outline of the emotional turmoil often experienced.

Denial (Shock - Confusion – Disbelief - Guilt)

Denial is the immediate reaction to any sort of loss. It is an instinctive psychological defence the mind uses to drive away the pain or threat of loss. It produces numbness where everything seems unreal, which, in turn, leads to confusion. It is the inability to face the reality of the situation; a refusal to believe what has happened.

Coupled with denial is often a sense of confusion where the bereaved young person may act irrationally. They may, for example, expect the person who has died to suddenly arrive home. They may think they hear familiar sounds such as a key turning in the door.

In the short term this denial can be helpful in protecting the bereaved as they adapt to the confusion and immediacy of change. It can, however, be unhealthy if the response of denial continues indefinitely.

One of the most common reactions to grief is to blame oneself. Many young people blame themselves for not preventing the loss that causes them to grieve. They often also feel that they are blamed by others. The thought, "If only . . ." can be followed by an endless number of alternatives which were not at all plausible or possible. Guilt is a most distressing feeling that needs to be recognised and dealt with.

Anger (Fear and Anxiety)

This anger is a deep seated rage over what has happened. Often mixed with the anger is resentment and even envy at what has happened. There is also a frustration that there is nothing that could be done to prevent what has happened. Anger is a normal reaction. It is not wrong to express anger in appropriate ways. It can be expressed in different ways, projected at random against anybody who is in the way, family, friends, teachers, and self because of guilty thoughts and self-recriminations that often accompany a young person's anger. Even God suffers such anger from those with religious beliefs.

Some children and young people fear for their own safety after the loss of a close friend or relative. There is also a great fear that the loss they have suffered will be repeated. Another friend or the other parent may die and the pain will start all over again.

Bargaining

This is a time when an attempt is made to exchange something willing to be given up for something wanted. An attempt is made to come to some agreement with anyone considered to be in charge of the situation. The child or young person tries to make agreements with self, others and for those with a religious faith, even God. "If I do well at school, then my Dad will come back" sums up this emotion. Such bargaining is doomed to fail.

Depression (Loneliness - Despair - Hopelessness – Helplessness)

There is a mistaken belief among many children and young people who are bereaved that they are the only ones who are experiencing such emotions. They are unaware that such emotions are common and are experienced by others. This leads to a loneliness and withdrawal from friends and family.

This is a feeling of utter powerlessness. The grief overwhelms the bereaved with waves of inadequacy, and despair. There is often a great struggle to come through this stage. “Nothing matters anymore” characterises this emotion.

Sometimes life for the grieving seems out of control and depression sets in. The bereaved person may become apathetic. They may take less interest in themselves or others around them. There is a lack of purpose. This can have a devastating effect on young people. There is a danger that escapism could be sought in alcohol, drugs or the internet as young people seek to obliterate the feelings of loneliness and helplessness in the face of what has happened. There is also the real possibility, in a minority of cases, of the bereaved seriously contemplating suicide as an answer to their pain.

Physical illness

It is not unusual for there to be a feeling of physical illness amongst those who grieve. Some young people go through a period of ill health after grief. The symptoms may be those of a cough or cold, choking sensations and breathlessness, head and stomach aches. There may be a loss of appetite as well as insomnia. Some young people may become very withdrawn.

Pain of Loss

When a young person has been bereaved through parental death or family relationship breakdown, there will be times when the pain of loss will be particularly sharp. These times of difficulty can be identified as:

- 1 The anniversary of a death
- 2 Birthdays
- 3 Christmas
- 4 Holidays
- 5 Other special festivals such as Mothers’ or Fathers’ Day.

Many children will still want to send or make a card for the parent who has died. They may wish to mark such days with some ritual such as a visit to the graveyard or looking at photographs.

Acceptance or Adjustment (Hope)

In the early days of the journey through grief it is hard to see a time in the future when the grief will not be there, preventing any chance of happiness.

Most young people who go through the stages or phases of grief reach a time when they learn how to live with the loss they have experienced. They come to believe that they will be able to cope. It is a time when the present is no longer governed by the past but where there is a looking forward to the future. It is a time when the event of loss can be accepted without negative influence; still with feelings of loss but feelings that are positive. Life can be faced with renewed hope and optimism.

W. Worden has described four specific tasks that must be completed before acceptance or adjustment may be reached:

1. The reality of the loss must be accepted.
2. The pain of loss must be experienced.
3. The adjustment to an environment in which the missing person is no longer present must be made.
4. Appropriate ways must be found to remember the person who is no longer present.

It must be remembered that grief does not follow a strict time frame and the journey is not a smooth transition through various stages, ending with a time of acceptance or adjustment of what has happened. These stages or tasks can be revisited and experienced time after time. Some young people may remain in one of the stages for a considerable time.

1. The reality of the loss must be accepted

When the death of a loved one occurs, it is a natural reaction for adults to express disbelief at the event. Such disbelief manifests itself in behaving at times as if the dead person is still present. Gradually the adult adjusts to the reality that the loved one has gone for ever.

Children, also, have to come to terms with this disbelief. They may spend a long time thinking the dead person will return. They have to be led to a realisation that death is final and irreversible. This is virtually impossible for children aged 0-5 (all ages indicated are for general guidance only) as they have little concept of the reality of death or that it is irreversible. The best way for children to be helped is to be told about the death and to talk about it using simple but appropriate language. Such conversations should be repeated often.

A child who does not receive this sort of help may well lapse into times of fantasy where their perceived understanding of what has happened is more frightening than the reality of the situation.

2. The pain of loss must be experienced

A whole range of emotions awaits the bereaved. These must be experienced as part of the grieving process. Children between 5-7 years old are a particularly vulnerable group. Their understanding of the permanency of death is not fully formed and they lack the necessary skills to deal with the full intensity of loss. Nevertheless, they may well experience sadness, anger, guilt, yearning, loneliness, anxiety and other feelings associated with loss.

3. The adjustment to an environment in which the missing person is no longer present must be made

It is inevitable that daily life and family routines will change following the death of a loved one. For a child, learning to live without a deceased parent may be extremely difficult. Adjustments have to be made to the loss of the role that the parent played. It is essential for the family to follow routines as much as possible so that a child may identify with daily life. Talking about the deceased may be of great value at this stage. Gradually the child will hopefully adjust to life without the loved one and learn new coping strategies.

4. Ways must be found to remember the person who is no longer present

It is not true that the bereaved child or young person needs to “let go” of the person who is no longer present. The task facing the bereaved is not to let go of the relationship they enjoyed but to find new and appropriate ways in which to remember.

An increasing number of schools find that the age related structured programmes available from Rainbows Bereavement Support GB offer an appropriate means of support.

Children and Young People's Understanding, Needs and Reactions to Death

(Adapted with permission from the work of Robin Cooper)

Coping with Loss

Each child or young person will react to the loss of a family member or other significant person in their lives in their own individual way. There are many factors that influence how this is accomplished.

It is possible however to suggest the following indicators as the main influences that affect the journey of grief following the death of a parent, a family member or another significant person in their lives:

1. The type of death and the rituals that accompany it.
2. The relationship the child experienced with the deceased.
3. The ability of the surviving parent to care for and nurture the child.
4. The ability of the family members to offer emotional support to the child and surviving parent.
5. Other family influences such as the size of the family, its financial security and stability, and its ability to cope with change and disruption.
6. The support the child may receive from peers and school.
7. The child's own stage in understanding the concept of death.

Understanding, needs, and reactions as a result of death - Birth - Age 4

(N.B: Ages are for general guidance only)

Young children may be beginning to understand the concept of death, but do not appreciate its finality. Some may not appreciate the permanence of death. For example, a child could say: 'Shall we dig granny up now?' They think in literal and concrete terms and so will be confused by euphemisms for death such as 'passed away', 'lost' or 'gone to sleep'. Children of this age may well require repeated explanations of what has happened. As their thinking is very much centred on themselves, they may consider that something they did or said caused the death. They are prone to fantasise at this age and, if not told what is happening, may dream up something scarier than reality *(Source Child Bereavement UK)*

Understanding

- There is little or no understanding of death.
- Infants may sense the absence of a parent.
- Infants may miss familiar sounds smells and touches.
- Children may sense feelings of sadness, and become aware of any anxiety or distress around them.
- In the second year onwards, the early understanding of grief is apparent. Children may search for the missing person.
- There may be an increase in anger
- There is a growing awareness of non-verbal expressions.
- Very young children understand death to be temporary and reversible. The deceased is expected to return.
- Some children are illogical in blaming self for what has happened. They believe their actions can control events and this leads to feelings of guilt.
- Some children think that death and sleeping are the same. This promotes fear.

Needs

- The child needs positive care and attention. It is imperative that s/he receives nurturing care. If nurturing attention is absent, this can lead to an inability to establish close emotional ties in adult life.
- The child needs to feel close to primary carers. The child may fear losing the primary carer's love. If possible, time spent away from the primary carer should be limited. There is a need for holding and hugging.
- It is difficult for children to cope with the many changes that can happen to the family. A consistency in environment and routines is helpful in these circumstances of change. Any changes in family circumstances affecting the child should, if at all possible, be gradual.
- Children of this age are unable to verbalise feelings even though they are keenly aware of non-verbal expressions, consequently they have a need to act out such feelings. This often results in misbehaviour or disobedience and such children need to learn appropriate ways to release hostility, frustration and aggression.
- There is the beginning of a realisation that they are missing someone that others have in their families.

Reactions

- In the first year, a change in mood or way of caring, or absence of carer may cause distress to the child.
- This can show itself in increased crying, irritability, disturbed sleep patterns, erratic feeding.
- The demonstration of denial in the form of shock is displayed along with despair at the prolonged absence of the person who is no longer present. Many children will consistently ask for the absent parent.
- Many children cling to the principal carer as a source of comfort. Further clinging and insatiable demands may be made for affection and approval.

- Some children become lethargic and pre-occupied.
- An infant may become withdrawn and unresponsive. This can show itself in a refusal to hold eye-contact, to smile or seek any form of physical comfort.
- Distress may be manifested in disturbed sleeping and eating patterns.
- Yearning for the deceased may promote a demonstration of anger.
- There may also be feelings of guilt because of the belief they are responsible for the death.
- This may promote demanding behaviour, regression to baby behaviour and language, tantrums and bed-wetting.
- Many children display physical aggression, hitting, biting, and bullying.
- Outward signs of grief are not always visible.
- Children can behave as if nothing has happened.

Understanding, needs and reactions as a result of loss - Age 5-10

(N.B: Ages are for general guidance only)

At about five years of age most children are beginning to realise that dead people are different from those who are alive, that they do not feel, they cannot hear, see, smell or speak, and they do not need to eat or drink. At around seven years of age the majority of children accept that death is permanent and that it can happen to anyone. This can result in separation anxiety. As they develop, they become more-able to express their thoughts and feelings but may conceal them and outwardly appear unaffected. They need to be given an opportunity to ask questions and to be given as much information as possible to allow them to adjust. They are likely to be very interested in the rituals surrounding death. *(Source Child Bereavement UK)*

Understanding

- There is a complete realisation that someone is missing from the family unit.
- Within this age range, children come to understand the permanence and irreversibility of death.
- They may understand death is the result of accident or illness.
- There is a tendency to fantasise. They believe they can talk to the dead person or that the bereaved is watching over them.
- Some think that what has happened to their family is a punishment. They blame themselves for what has happened.
- Some believe their actions control the behaviour and destiny of others.
- Children become a little less egocentric and begin to show empathy to others.
- Some still believe it is right to take on an adult role, which can prevent them coming to terms with loss.

Needs

- There is a need for the changes that are occurring in the family to be explained. Otherwise they will be misunderstood.

- There is a need to be reassured regarding their fear of being abandoned by the remaining parent.
- The child yearns for the absent parent.
- There is a need for reassurance, attention and love.
- There is a need for children to learn appropriate ways to release hostility, frustration and aggression.
- There is a fear of the future. This can show itself in exaggerated concerns about money, food, and the home.
- Some children become self-conscious about the family being different to others. Again there is a need for explanation and reassurance.

Reactions

- There can be regression to the reactions of younger children: - crying, bed-wetting, thumb-sucking, disturbed sleeping or eating patterns, aggression towards or withdrawal from others.
- Children may become irritable.
- Many children may fear for their own survival and a fear that the other parent may also die.
- Many children display psychosomatic complaints such as headaches, feelings of nausea and diarrhoea.
- There may also be disruption in school attendance.
- Many children show a fall in academic achievement.
- Many children display a lack of self-esteem and self-confidence.
- The outward signs of grief are not always visible. Peer pressure may make the child feel they are not able to express their feelings.
- The fear of ridicule by peers may be strong. This may give the impression that they do not need support. Some become the target of bullying by peers who do not understand the grief being experienced.
- Many children display physical aggression, hitting, kicking, biting, and bullying.
- Other common behaviour indicators are the refusal to speak or insatiable demands for affection and approval.
- Some bereaved children turn into bullies as a way of reasserting themselves in their own confused emotional setting.
- Some can become pre-occupied with death.
- Some children have a real fear of the future. The child may feel that there is nowhere for him/her to feel safe.
- Some children of this age have a problem with self-identity.
- Some children display an insatiable hunger for money and material things.

Understanding, needs and reactions as a result of loss - Age 11-18

(N.B: Ages are for general guidance only)

The struggle for independence at this age may cause bereaved teenagers to challenge the beliefs and expectations of others as to how they should be feeling or behaving. Death increases anxieties about the future, and they may question the meaning of life and experience depression. Teenagers may find it easier to discuss their feelings with a sympathetic friend or adult than with a close family member. They may have difficulty coming to terms with their own mortality and that of those close to them; they may cope with this by denying the possibility of death by taking part in risk-taking behaviour. Anger makes up a large part of their grief, often compounded by a sense of injustice. *(Source Child Bereavement UK)*

Understanding

- At this age, young people begin to think abstractly about death.
- The concept of death becomes accepted as something totally irreversible.
- Many tend to think about the justice and injustice of death.
- Many young people begin to contemplate their own mortality.
- Some begin to explore the different beliefs about an after-life.
- There is a consciousness, and sometimes, shame that the family is different.
- Changes in family situations can cause anger, fear, a loss of personal identity, and low self-esteem.

Needs

- There is a need to hide the intense emotional pain. This is often expressed in extreme anger.
- There is a need for security as there is often a feeling of vulnerability. All questions should be answered honestly.
- This can be a time of depression and loneliness.
- Many young people feel the need to busy themselves with activities and friends, seeking approval. There is a need for peer approval.
- There is often an acute sensitivity to family tensions.
- There may be a desire to compensate feelings of loss with more possessions.
- Parental illness is a great fear.
- Authority is often challenged.

Reactions

- These years are already a time of transition, from the security of childhood to the independence of self and personal identity. Loss adds pressure to this natural progression.
- Bereavement can add to the young person's unwillingness to communicate with adults.
- They may become over-sensitive amongst their peers.

- The predominant reaction at this age is one of anger, which may be a cover for the pain being experienced. With some, the anger they feel makes them aggressive and anti-social towards their families and within their different community groupings.
- Some young people have difficulty coping with the loneliness they may feel and their own inability to reach out for support.
- Some young people may withdraw from friends and activities.
- Some have continual experience of nightmares.
- School work may suffer as the young person tries to come to terms with his/her feelings. Some may begin cheating in an attempt to keep up with work. Absence and lateness may increase.
- Often the young person may resort to lying. Some may resort to stealing / shoplifting.
- Many young people suffer from psychosomatic illnesses such as headaches or stomach aches.
- There may be frequent mood swings in this adolescent period. There is a great sensitivity to emotional tension in the family which is often expressed negatively.
- Many young people are overwhelmed with additional responsibility of substituting for the missing parent in family matters.
- Many young people suffer from mood swings; from elation to severe depression, and withdrawal from family or friends.
- There may be an increased attitude of violence and aggression to self or others.
- Some display eating, obsessive and self-harming disorders.
- Some resort to alcohol, drugs and sexual promiscuity.
- In extreme cases, suicidal tendencies may be displayed.

Typical fears experienced by young people include:

- illness of parent,
- inadequate money,
- being different to others,
- being ridiculed,
- being lonely, and,
- being unpopular.

Dealing with Bereavement and Children with Special Educational Needs

Talking to any child or young person about death is often felt by adults to be a very difficult situation and even more so when the child or young person has special educational needs. However, grief is a universal emotion and applies to all human beings regardless of their abilities or disabilities. Each person's reaction will be unique to them. All children and young people, regardless of their circumstances, have a right to have their grief recognised, to hear the truth and to be given opportunities to express their feelings and emotions. Children with learning difficulties are no different, but they may need extra help with their understanding and ways to express feelings.

Children with special educational needs, like all other children, are individuals in their own right and will deal with death in many different ways. Some will bounce back as though nothing has happened and adjust to their new life circumstances well, while others will find it extremely difficult to cope.

Communicating the truth

When bereavement has occurred, all children need to have their questions answered; be listened to; be given appropriate information; helped to feel safe and have people they trust to support them. When a death occurs in a main-stream school setting, care must be taken to ensure that children with special educational needs are supported professionally and sensitively according to their developmental ability. Indeed, in all settings, when bereavement has occurred, although all staff need to be informed, those who know the individual child best will need to adopt and adapt the known specific strategies that aid understanding.

It is essential for adults, when supporting children with additional needs, to use clear language with unambiguous meaning. The language they use when talking about the end of life needs to be clear and consistent e.g. using the words 'death', 'dead' and 'dying' are more appropriate than 'asleep', 'gone away' and 'lost'. Equally, phrases such as 'sorry you've 'lost' your mother' or 'gone to sleep' or 'past away', while often intended to help the child, are more likely to further complicate understanding and ultimately adjustment. References to sleep often lead to difficulties with bed time routines and fears of going to sleep.

Assumptions are sometimes made that young people with learning difficulties need more protection from death and dying than others, or not to have the capacity to understand. Whilst to a certain extent this is true, we often underestimate their abilities to cope with tough things in life. What is needed are creative ways to communicate when words are sometimes not appropriate.

Useful considerations when talking about death and dying:

- If using words, use the real ones e.g. 'dead' and 'dying', not euphemisms.
- Use as many real life examples if you can, e.g. pictures of funerals and coffins to aid understanding.
- Acknowledge any death. To ignore what has happened implies that this is an unimportant event and denies the existence of the person who has died.
- Pre-grief work is especially important to help prepare for an expected death.

Understanding the concept of death

A full understanding of death and its implications depends on recognising that: death is universal and that everyone dies eventually; that death is an inevitable part of life; that death is permanent and that death is irreversible. Many children and young people may never reach this level of understanding but will still experience the full emotions of grief while having great difficulty in expressing or communicating their feelings.

Children and young people with special educational needs who have experienced a significant loss in their lives need to be:

- Given information appropriate to their understanding
- Listened to with sensitivity and empathy
- Helped to feel safe (*often school feels a safe and secure place*)
- Able to speak with people they trust
- Supported by the use of clear, unambiguous language
- Given appropriate explanations of 'death' words e.g. funeral; dead; coffin; grave
- Enabled to develop their own understanding through the use of known specific teaching strategies
- Offered time to have questions repeatedly answered and explanations given until they can be processed and understood
- Secure in the knowledge of clear boundaries, rules and routines
- Supported over an extended period of time and at significant times e.g. anniversaries, Christmas, Fathers' Day / Mothers' Day
- Helped to understand and cope with their 'new' emotions and the 'new' emotions of others
- Reassured of any changes in practical arrangements e.g. home to school transport, new family routines
- Encouraged to know that it is okay to be happy and have fun
- Helped to understand that death is a natural part of life and often not as seen on TV or computer games

Expressing their grief

As stated earlier - children do not need protection from the feelings and emotions associated with grief. What is important is that they do need support to express these feelings and reassurance

that these sometimes powerful and overwhelming emotions are a normal and necessary part of the grieving process.

Useful tips to children with additional needs to express their grief:

- Use a simple workbook such as *When Someone Very Special Dies* by Marge Heegard. This can easily be adapted for various ability levels.
- Looking at photographs or watching videos of the person who has died can facilitate expressions of sadness or anger.
- Act as a role model, shed tears if genuinely felt, use symbols to communicate how you are feeling but also reassure that you are OK, and your response is natural.
- Carrying a comfort object such as a small piece of warm furry blanket can be an aid for getting through difficult moments.
- Reassure that being angry is OK. Offer opportunities for safe ways to express frustration and anger, feelings which are common in grief for many bereaved young people. For example, they can punch a pillow as a focus for their anger.

Remembering the person who has died

- Creating a memory box/book of tangible reminders chosen by the child. This can help give some insight into factors and events that are key to the relationship with the person who has died.
- Use a timeline to spark off memories of significant events and pictures to build the life story of the person who has died.
- Have a piece of fabric from clothing carried in a pocket or made into a cushion can be comforting.
- Placing their favourite perfume or after shave on a hanky.
- Listening to audio recordings of the voice or favourite music of the person who has died may help the visually impaired.

(Please see [resources for children and young people with SEND](#))

Dealing with Suicide Within the School Community

Suicide is a difficult topic and one that hopefully never impacts your school community. The reality, however, is that it does cross the minds of many young people, including schoolchildren.

Hearing the tragic news that someone in your school community has taken their own life will bring up many different emotions for you, and this will likely be a difficult time for the entire school or college community and beyond.

It is important that children and young adults who have been bereaved by suicide receive support and care as they understand what has happened and grieve for their loss. It can feel difficult to know what to do for the best – our protective instincts mean that we want to avoid causing them further pain. The task may be made harder by your own grief and the fear that you will not be able to say the right things or be able to understand and meet your child's needs.

Suicide is a traumatic, sometimes violent, event and in our society and still has the stigma of being a taboo subject. Suicide rates for teenagers are on the increase. In the secondary sector, it is one of the most common types of violent death in teenage boys and 75% of suicides are carried out by males. For a young person experiencing rapid change and lack of security in their life, suicide can sometimes seem the only way to take control. People who die by suicide do not necessarily want to die, it is more that they cannot find a reason to live, or that they want to stop feeling the way they do.

Suicide is a very public event and school communities tend to have active grapevines. The circumstances surrounding the death may well be common knowledge but added to with rumour and confusion over details. The children directly affected, if not told the truth, will eventually find out what really happened and consequently lose trust in the adults around them. In consultation with the family, it is important that a school communicates to staff and pupils the simple facts of the events, as quickly as possible. It may help the family to sensitively explain the benefits for them of the school being able to share the very basic facts of what has happened, to avoid painful gossip or half-truths. However, whatever approach is decided upon, school should follow the family's wishes.

Talking with Children

When children learn that someone decided to die, similar problems of comprehension arise as they do for adults; questions that are difficult when a death is "natural" or even caused by another become even more difficult and painful to answer when the death is by suicide – "how did it happen?" or "why?". You may also fear that by talking about the suicide that you are putting frightening ideas into their heads.

Honesty is widely recognised to be the best approach. This does not mean giving every detail but gently providing enough information, in a language that they understand to enable them to understand what has happened and to ask the questions that they need to. Children need to know that they can trust us.

Children are likely to experience new worries after a suicide – fear that others will leave them, fear that suicide runs in the family, fear that it was their fault. They need to be supported and reassured by people they trust – and a lack of honesty, however well intended, could damage their confidence in you.

One of the most important things to help your child understand is that it was not their fault and that they are in no way to blame for what happened.

The young persons' bereavement charity [Winston's Wish](#) offers guidance about talking with children and young people about suicide including how to break the conversation into stages and ways you might respond in specific circumstances.

How much will they understand?

Children as young as two often have some understanding of death but don't necessarily understand that they are "gone forever" until around the age of five. They may expect the person who died to come back sometime – and as the period of absence increases, so does the child's feeling of insecurity.

From the ages of five to nine, children may have a clearer understanding that death is forever but may struggle to understand that this can happen to them and their family. Older children and young adults will understand that death is irreversible and may have a greater awareness of the circumstances surrounding the death. They will try to cope with events and face some of the similar challenges to adults.

Changes in behaviour

Children will react and cope differently but be prepared for some changes in their behaviour as they try to adapt to what has happened. They may feel many of the same emotions and reactions as adults do – grief, anger, anxiety, guilt – and may try different ways to find security or seek attention. For example, they may become clingy, revert to baby speak, hide or run away, withdraw into themselves, behave aggressively or copy behaviours of the dead person. Be patient and do what you can to make them feel safe.

Returning to School

Children may face a number of challenges when they return to school. They may struggle to concentrate in class, homework may be difficult and some topics may be challenging for them. Worst of all they may need to cope with thoughtless or malicious comments

from other children. This will be made even worse if you have not been truthful about what happened.

It helps if you can talk with the school staff about what has happened and share with your child what you have told them so that they know. Some schools may have a specific teacher who provides bereavement support. Agree with your child what they should do if they have any concerns whilst they are at school to give them reassurance that they will be safe.

Some important points:

- Children and young people bereaved through suicide are more likely to need skilled help, but the informal support of familiar and trusted adults such as teachers is still vital.
- Children and young people who witnessed any part of the suicide, or found the body, may experience recurrent and intrusive recollections of the event. This will have a major impact on their ability to concentrate and school work is likely to suffer.
- The overwhelming feelings of anger and guilt associated with suicide may cause challenging
- behaviour at school. Reassure that nothing the child did or said was the cause of the death.
- Suicide is the ultimate form of rejection for a young person or child and can result in very low self-esteem. School can help a child to feel better about themselves by emphasising the positive and recognising the pupil's achievements, however small.
- It is difficult to find words to use around any bereavement, let alone one through suicide. It is important to offer the same comments that might be said to any pupil experiencing the death of someone close to them. Silence will reinforce feelings of isolation and possible shame.
- Where a pupil dies by suicide, Samaritans provide a Step-by-Step programme to support schools and can be contacted on 0808 168 2528

Support Groups

SOBS (Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide) - <https://www.uksobs.org>

SOBS is a bereavement support charity which exists to meet the needs and overcome the isolation experienced by people who have been bereaved by suicide. It provides support and advice for those bereaved by suicide and resources and training for those who aim to support the bereaved.

Papyrus – Prevention of Young Suicide - www.papyrus-uk.org

PAPYRUS is the national charity dedicated to the prevention of young suicide. Its comprehensive website information for both young people and parents with guidance for those worried about a suicidal friend and support for those contemplating suicide. It also has resources to support school staff.

Children Bereavement UK – <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

Child Bereavement UK is a charity that supports children and young people up to the age of 25 and their families who are facing bereavement, and anyone affected by the death of a child of any age. The charity also provides training to professionals in health and social care, education, and the voluntary and corporate sectors, equipping them to provide the best possible care to bereaved families.

Winston's Wish - <https://www.winstonswish.org/>

Winston's Wish is a bereavement charity dedicated to providing emotional and practical bereavement support to children, young people and those who care for them. They offer one off and ongoing bereavement support and we also provide online resources, specialist publications and training for professionals including schools.

Samaritans - <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/step-step/>

The Samaritans provide a Step-by-Step programme to support schools and can be contacted on 0808 168 2528

(Please see [resources supporting schools in dealing with suicide](#))

Looking After the Wellbeing of Staff

Dealing with bereavement personally or working alongside anyone experiencing a loss can be emotionally draining. Supporting a bereaved pupil can also take its toll, and emotionally challenging. It is therefore important to take care of your own mental well-being.

Look after yourself

It is important to make time to do something just for you or give yourself, and switch off from your busy work schedule. Physical exercise is proven to be beneficial to good mental well-being, and can be a great stress buster. There may be times when, due to your own personal circumstances, you feel less able to support a bereaved pupil. There are many reasons for an increased vulnerability such as:

- Your own bereavement experiences;
- Caring for elderly relatives;
- Carrying a particularly heavy workload;
- A recent experience of separation or loss such as a divorce; or
- Having a child that is the same age as the bereaved pupil.

It is important to let someone know if you are finding it too demanding to support a bereaved pupil.

Self-awareness of your own mental well-being (Are you running in empty?)

Working in schools is very much about giving in terms of time and energy. Therefore, supporting a bereaved pupil may compound this, resulting in depleted energy levels. It can be difficult to ask for help when we most need it as to do so requires energy and strength. Some of the signs to look out for include feeling physically exhausted and overworked, an inability to delegate and generally not feeling on top of things.

Talking to someone

Talk to your friends and colleagues about how you are feeling and to share experiences. Your school may have a dedicated mental health first aid person who you could talk to. Having other people that you can talk to and knowing that others are affected can help you to feel less alone and better able to cope. Informal peer support in the staffroom can be a welcome opportunity to talk through issues and concerns and reduce feelings of inadequacy by jointly talking through strategies to help.

Your own emotional reactions to grief and bereavement

Your own emotional response to situation of grief and bereavement are perfectly normal. In order to support others in their grief, it is important that you feel emotionally resilient yourself. Your own experiences of grief may have resurfaced and in these situations, do not be afraid to say so and potentially stepping back. This is not a sign of weakness but merely a recognition that we all have our limits.

Realising professional boundaries

As education professionals it can be easy to let the carer in us take over and professional boundaries become a little blurred. Getting over-involved is not helpful to either yourself or to the bereaved pupil or adult despite how well meaning. It is important to recognise that you cannot carry their grief for them, but you can accompany them on their journey by supporting them and being there for them when they need it.

Support information, resources and organisations that can help

This guidance document aims to provide helpful information, signposts resources and highlights useful contacts details of bereavement organisations. These can be useful to share with those in need of professional help.

Supporting colleagues

If a colleague is experiencing the effects of a death in your school community, or personal bereavement themselves, find the time to offer support. Training is available to be a Mental Health First Aider, which can help you assist colleagues going through emotional turmoil. (<https://mhfaengland.org/>) . However, it's important to be realise your limitations and the amount of support you can give. It is much better to offer something small but consistent, rather than unrealistic gesture that you are unable to deliver. Always signpost them to professional organisations that can support them

Providing effective help

It can be a daunting prospect supporting either children or adults who are experiencing grief or trauma. You may feel inadequate and out of their depth, but you do not need to be an expert to provide valuable support. Walking alongside those affected by grief and being there for them whilst in school is more important than being a bereavement professional. You can always guide them to seek professional help.

Getting Help Through Bereavement Support Groups

Advice from various bereavement charities state that children who experience grief, need easily accessible, informal support, and that they often feel more comfortable receiving this from their peers or from trusted adults rather than parents and carers. Schools can be ideally placed to offer support.

The benefits of Support Groups

Adults within the family may often struggle with their own grief and they may have neither the physical nor emotional capacity to support their bereaved children, even if they would like to. Therefore, support through bereavement groups may be able to bridge the gap. Schools also can be a source of help in these challenging times.

Schools that have set up bereavement groups, such as the Rainbows programme provide support for pupils who attend:

- They build a child's own coping strategies and provide support for one another;
- The children feel less isolated through meeting others in similar circumstances, normalising their experience;
- The groups provide an opportunity for children to express their emotions in a safe place and in a safe way;
- The groups setting can make it easier for children to talk to an adult who is not emotionally involved;

Choosing which model to use

There are no right or wrong models, it is very much about what fits with your school. Options that you may wish to consider include:

- Open groups, which provide the flexibility that some pupils require, enabling them to attend sessions intermittently and for as long as they feel the need. However, dependency can build up and endings can be difficult to achieve.
- Closed groups can run for a fixed length of time with a set group of pupils. The group dynamics are not disturbed by new members joining half-way through
- A group for a fixed length of time with a set group of pupils but with the option of attending the next one for pupils who feel they need more support.

Important things to consider:

- Choosing the right support – There are a variety of charities such as Rainbows, Child Bereavement UK and Winston's Wish that provide school training in running a support group.
- Who should run the support group?
- The referral process – who should attend?
- Confidentiality needs careful thought, especially for adolescents and teens. Primary schools normally let parents/ carers know that their child is attending a group.

- Timing - Lunchtime works for many schools, with pupils either attending after eating lunch or bringing lunch with them.
- Think through how to respond and who to go to when pupils reveal 'tough stuff' or if child protection issues arise
- Identify where to go for help when you feel out of your depth or when a child might need more support.
- Be wary of overstepping your professional boundaries by getting too involved
- Be aware of the impact on yourself and the possibility of your own losses being brought to the surface. It is essential to look after yourself. Make sure all staff involved have some sort of regular and compulsory support or supervision.

The Rainbows Bereavement Support Programme

The Catholic Children's Society provide training for school staff so they can deliver support groups for children who have experienced a significant loss in their lives. This may be due to the death of a loved one, or family breakdown/separation.

<https://www.cathchild.org.uk/rainbows-bereavment-support-programme/>

Guidance for Parents and Carers

In communicating with the school community about a bereavement and when supporting a family through their bereavement parents and carers may appreciate guidance to help them better understand reactions from their children and respond to their questions.

In the majority of cases, children and young people affected by a death just need the care and love from the family around them. You cannot take away their sadness, but you can acknowledge it and support them through the experience. Grief is a very individual experience and reactions will differ from child to child, even within the same family. If they were not close to the person who died, they may be unaffected.

It is best to avoid making assumptions. Any death may make children and young people anxious, as they become more aware of their own mortality and that of those around them.

Questions are healthy, as is curiosity. Honesty is a good approach with any age and to acknowledge what has happened and then answer questions as they arise, using age-appropriate language. It is better to use the words 'dead' or 'died' rather than euphemisms which can be confusing. A simple biological explanation of death can be very helpful.

Don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer to their questions. Children often have a surprising capacity to deal with the truth, if given information in simple, straightforward language, appropriate for their age and understanding. Young children tend to make up what they do not know, and their imaginings are often worse than the reality. Adolescents and teenagers could resent a lack of honesty from the adults around them. Do not think that you have to hide your own sadness. Seeing adults expressing emotion can give a child of any age 'permission' to do the same, if they feel they want to. Hearing how you are feeling may help them to consider their own feelings.

Young children are often less inhibited on the issue of death so try not to be taken aback by some of their comments and reactions. It is not unusual for them to act out funerals or play at being dead. It is their way of trying to make sense of what has happened. Teenagers may become withdrawn and difficult to engage with. Respect their need for personal space whilst gently reminding them that you are there if they need you.

It is important to maintain routines, such as going to school. Familiar situations and contact with friends brings security and a sense of normality. Continue to expect the usual rules of behaviour. Normality with love and compassion is what to aim for.

Things to look out for in your children – these are all normal as long as they do not continue for too long:

- A change in behaviour, perhaps becoming unnaturally quiet and withdrawn or unusually aggressive.
- Anger is a common response at all ages and may be directed at people or events which have no connection to the death.
- A disruption to their sleep and or experiencing bad dreams.
- Displays of anxiety which are demonstrated by clingy behaviour or a reluctance to be separated from parents or carers. Older children may express this in more practical ways, for example by expressing concerns over issues that adults may perceive as insensitive or unimportant.
- Being easily upset by events that would normally be trivial to them.
- A difficulty concentrating, being forgetful and generally 'not with it.' This makes school work
- particularly difficult and academic performance may suffer. Older children may feel that there is
- no point in working hard at school and they might lose a general sense of purpose in their lives.
- Complaints of physical ailments, such as headaches, stomach aches and a general tendency to be run down and prone to minor illness.

Grief is a natural and necessary response to a death. However, if concerned about a child, do not hesitate to seek advice from your GP or organisations dedicated to supporting children, young people and families affected by bereavement. (Please see [resources for parents](#))

Section B – Resources



Scripture and Prayers

A celebration of the life of the deceased is important and there are many possible ways that a school community can gather together to do this. It is important to have some key scripture passages and appropriate hymns to be used in any prayer or liturgical celebration. As already mentioned, much depends on who the person is that has died; a pupil, a staff member, a parent etc. as does the nature of the death; sudden or prolonged. Prayers are offered not only for the deceased individual but for the members of their family and friends who are suffering from the loss.

Scripture Readings: Old Testament

Psalm 9:9

Holy God, Your word says that You are a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Lord, I call upon You to be my stronghold in my time of grief! I feel oppressed by the pain and the sorrow that I feel, but in You, I know that I can find peace for Your word tells me so. Awesome Father, please have Your divine way within my mind so that I can find comfort in this difficult time, Amen.

Psalm 18:2

Blessed God, You are my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer; my Lord You are my rock, in whom I take refuge. You are my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold! Father, I pray that I put my trust in You, even in my mourning, even after experiencing such a great loss, I pray that I lean on You because I know that I cannot get through this alone. I know that in my own strength I am weak, Amen.

Psalm 22:24

Wonderful Counsellor, You have not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one. You have not hidden Your face from me, but You have shown me that You are right here beside me in my anguish. Thank You for hearing me, for hearing my pain even when I could not form the words to say. I know that You understand every tear, every cry, every whisper, and every sigh. God of Wisdom and Understanding, I praise You, Amen.

Psalm 23:1

Good Shepherd, I know that with You I lack nothing because Your word says so. I have suffered immense loss recently, but even so, your word declares that with You I lack nothing. I am currently living in the harsh reality of grief right now, but I pray that I get to the place where I feel like I again lack nothing. I pray that I get to a place where I am healed from the pain and the grief and instead, I am filled with peace, Amen.

Psalm 23

Awesome Shepherd, I know that with You, I shall not be in want because just like You lead the sheep to the green pastures and still waters, with me You will also lead me to a place of peace. Grief is a horrible thing to deal with, but I know that You will restore my soul, I know that I do not need to fear because Your rod and staff comfort me. I know that my cup overflows, surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in Your house forever, Amen.

Psalm 27:4-5

Heavenly Father, I look to You! One thing I ask of You is that I will dwell in Your house all the days of my life so that I may gaze upon Your beauty and seek You in Your temple. Lord, in the day of trouble You will keep me safe in Your dwelling; You will hide me in the shelter of Your tabernacle. Oh Lord, help me find my way to Your dwelling because the grief is overwhelming, Amen.

Psalm 30:5

God of Truth, honestly, I cry through the night and embrace mourning in the day. But Your word declares that weeping may remain for a night but rejoicing comes in the morning! I pray for this shift in my life, I pray for divine peace within my heart so that I can rejoice in the morning, even though I have lost, and I have grieved. I believe in Your word, and I know that even though it doesn't feel like it, I can achieve healing from this pain, Amen.

Psalm 34:18

Draw me closer to You Lord and never let me go! I know that You are close to the broken-hearted and You save those who are crushed in spirit. With the loss that I have endured and the grief that I am in, I know that I am both broken-hearted and crushed. I pray that I feel Your presence even more in this season so that I know that I am not alone and that I do not need to remain in this state of sorrow, Amen.

Psalm 103

The Lord is compassion and love, slow to anger and rich in mercy. He does not treat us according to our sins nor repay us according to our faults. As parents have compassion on their children, the Lord has pity on those who fear him; for he knows of what we are made, he remembers that we are dust. As for us, our days are like grass; we flower like the flower of the field; the wind blows and we are gone and our place never sees us again. But the love of the Lord is everlasting upon those who hold him in fear; his justice reaches out to children's children when they keep his covenant in truth.

Proverbs 14:32

Awesome God, even when calamity comes, the wicked are brought down, but even in death, the righteous have a refuge! I thank You for this word that gives me comfort in knowing that although I have lost one that I love, they have gained by entering Your heavenly kingdom. They have found a better place and are resting eternally in You, so I thank You. I pray that this word resonates within me so that I can move on from my grief, Amen.

Job 5:11

The lowly he sets on high, and those who mourn are lifted to safety.

Isaiah 41:10

Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.

Scripture Readings: New Testament

A Reading from the Holy Gospel According to John

There are many rooms in my Father's house.

Jesus said to his disciples:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still, and trust in me.

There are many rooms in my Father's house; if there were not, I should have told you. I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return to take you with me; so that where I am you may be too. You know the way to the place where I am going.

Thomas said, "Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus said: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me."

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

A Reading from the First Letter of John

Think of the love that the Father has lavished on us, by letting us be called God's children; and that is what we are. Because the world refused to acknowledge him, therefore it does not acknowledge us. My dear people, we are already the children of God but what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed; all we know is, that when it is revealed we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is.

A Reading from John 16:33

I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

A Reading from Romans 8:28

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose.

A Reading from Romans 8:37-38

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A Reading from Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

A Reading from 2 Corinthians 1:3

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

A Reading from Philippians 4:6

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done.

A Reading from Hebrews 13:5

I will never leave you or forsake you.

Prayers

Eternal rest grant unto *(Name)* O Lord and let perpetual light shine upon them. May s/he rest in peace. Amen

God, we come for comfort in our grief. The absence of *[Name]* creates within our lives an emptiness that hurts. The darkness of grief clouds our vision and hides your light. Come to us. Hold us, heal us and strengthen our weak spirits with sure faith in the Resurrection. Amen

Most merciful God,

whose wisdom is beyond our understanding, surround the family of *(Name)* with your love, that they may not be overwhelmed by their loss, but have confidence in your goodness, and strength to meet the days to come. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lord of all gentleness, surround us with your care and comfort us in our sorrow, for we grieve at the loss of *(Name)*

As you washed N. in the waters of baptism and welcomed him/her into the life of heaven, so call us one day to be united with him/her and share forever the joy of your kingdom.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession (1)

Response: Lord, hear our prayer

In his great love, the God of all consolation gave us the gift of life.

May God bless us with faith in the resurrection of his Son, and with the hope of rising to new life.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

To us who are alive may God grant forgiveness, and to all who have died a place of light and peace.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

May almighty God bless us, In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen

Prayers of Intercession (2)

Leader: Lord we have loved (*Name*) in this life and will sorely miss him/her. Out of that love we pray that you take him/her to yourself, forgive his/her sins and give him/her eternal joy with you
Lord hear us

All: Lord, graciously hear us.

Leader: As we grieve we know that at this very time others are grieving great losses too. Teach us to be sensitive to the sufferings and pains of others. Help us to take strength from the community of our sisters and brothers in the faith. *Lord hear us*

All: Lord, graciously hear us.

Leader: We pray for those others, whom we may not know, whom (*Name*) touched during his/her life. May we all be united one day in the joy of Heaven. *Lord hear us*

All: Lord, graciously hear us.

Leader: We pray for the whole people of God. Give us all the grace, in our own community and throughout the world to be a light of truth, justice and love. *Lord hear us*

All: Lord, graciously hear us.

Leader: Let us pray together in the words that Jesus taught us.

All: Our Father...

All: Glory be to the Father... **Leader:** Let us pray:

Lord God, you are compassion and love; Our loved one, (*Name*), has been called home to you.

Welcome him/her into the love of heaven; console us in our loss and make us truly grateful for all he/she was to us in life. Fill our home now empty with his/her loss with your love and care.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen

Heavenly Father we are stunned and shocked at the death of (Name) and as a community we have gathered together to share our sorrow, our bewilderment and our pain. We are all asking the question 'Why?' but there seems to be no easy answer. We pray especially today for her/his friends, her/his classmates, her/his teachers and all who knew her/him.

We remember (Name) for *(List some characteristics or traits of the deceased)*

We just don't understand this Lord, but help us to let go of any anger or any desire for revenge. May our tears be replaced by smiles when we think of (Name), giving thanks for her/his life and all that she/he was to us and our school. Help us now pick up the pieces once again and to carry on in life as we believe (Name) would wish us to. Amen

Almighty God, you know that it will be very difficult for us at our school without (Name). Bring us the strength and the hope we need to carry on as (Name) would have wished us to do. We thank you Lord for the special gifts (Name) brought to the school and shared with us. May the Church and the wider community give thanks for the contribution (Name) made to the life of (village/town name) and may we redouble our efforts to serve each other, in honour of her/his memory. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

We hold before God all those who are sad because someone they loved has died
We hold before God all those who are sad because someone they knew has died
We hold before God each one of us that we may support each other in the days to come. We hold before God (Name) who has died. May s/he rest in peace. Amen.

Lord God, help us find comfort in our sadness,
Certainty in our doubt
And the courage to live.
Make our faith strong
Through Christ our Lord, Amen

Lord, we look up to you and receive from you
Your blessing
Your strength
Your most holy love.
In the darkest moments of our lives,
Let us remember that you are the light
You are the hope
You are the courage we need. Amen

Circle us Lord
Keep hope within;
Keep fear without.

Circle us Lord,
Keep peace within,
Keep darkness out.

Circle us Lord,
Keep calm within
Keep turmoil out.

Circle us Lord,
Keep love within
Keep anger away.

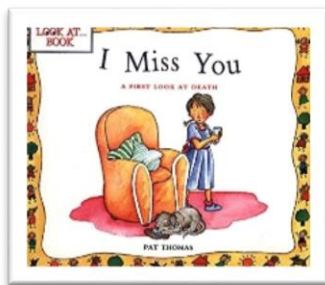
Books and Resources for Children and Young People

Sharing books with children and young people is a very helpful way to explain about, and develop an understanding of death, loss and grieving. Below are some suggestions of age appropriate books

Books and Resources – Early Years

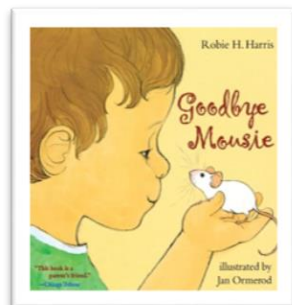
For children, under the age of five, the concept of death may be difficult to understand but they will be very aware that something important has happened. Books are a helpful way to develop a bereaved child's understanding of death. They need simple and honest explanations, possibly repeated many times.

The books below are more suited for general use within the EYFS setting. These books can help to introduce topics such as death, grief and the life cycle to young children.



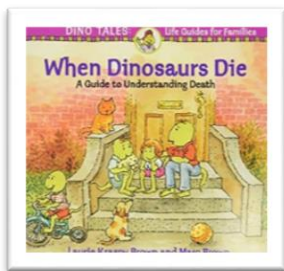
I Miss You: A First Look at Death - Pat Thomas

This picture book explores the difficult issue of death for young children. Children's feelings and questions about this sensitive subject are looked at in a simple but realistic way. This book helps them to understand their loss and come to terms with it. A good book for introducing the subject of death.



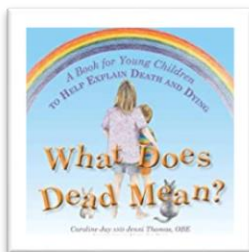
Goodbye Mousie - Robie H Harris

This is a story of a young boy who, one morning, finds that his pet, Mousie, won't wake up. The truth is Mousie has died. At first the boy doesn't believe it. He gets very mad at Mousie for dying, and then he feels very sad. But talking about Mousie, burying Mousie in a special box, and saying good-bye helps this boy begin to feel better about the loss of his beloved pet.



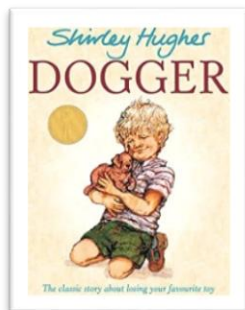
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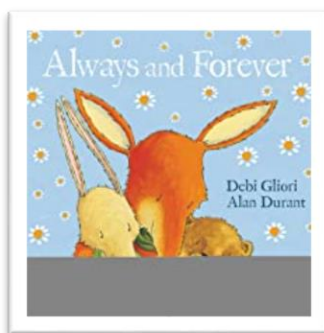
What does dead mean? - Caroline Jay and Jenni Thomas

A beautifully illustrated book that guides children gently through 17 of the 'big' questions they often ask about death and dying. Suitable for children aged 4+, this is an ideal book for parents and carers to read with their children, as well as teachers, therapists and counsellors working with young children.



Dogger - Shirley Hughes

Dogger is about a little boy called Dave who loses his favourite toy 'Dogger' and describes his feelings and responses as a result. Useful as a gentle introduction to the subject of loss.



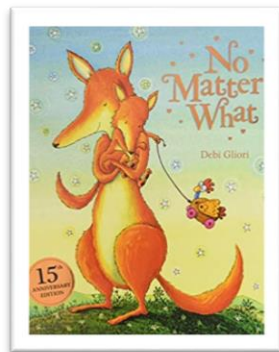
Always and Forever - Alan Durant

When Fox dies the rest of his family are absolutely distraught. How will Mole, Otter and Hare go on without their beloved friend? But, months later, Squirrel reminds them all of how funny Fox used to be, and they realise that Fox is still there in their hearts and memories.



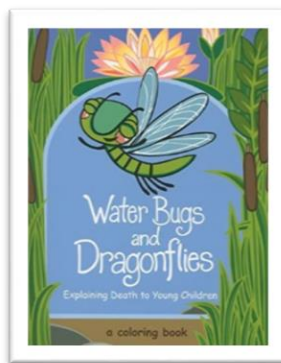
Rabbityness - Jo Empson

This is the story of a very special rabbit. Rabbit enjoys doing rabbit things, but he also loves un-rabbit things! When Rabbit suddenly disappears, no one knows where he has gone. His friends are desolate. But, as it turns out, Rabbit has left behind some very special gifts for them, to help them discover their own unrabbit talents!



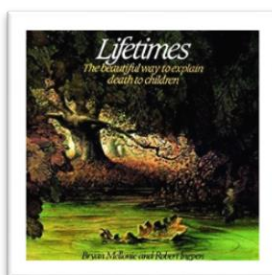
No Matter What - Debi Gliori

'I'll always love you no matter what...' 'No matter what?' Small asks. But what if he turns into a bug, or a crocodile, or even a grizzly bear? Small has all sorts of questions about love, and his mummy must reassure him that her love will never, ever run out - no matter what.



Waterbugs and Dragonflies - D Stickney

Written from a Christian perspective, this book can be used to help explain the concept of death to young children. The story illustrates that death is inevitable, irreversible but natural. It is presented as something sometimes difficult to understand but a happy experience for the person who has died.



Lifetimes - Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen

A pet . . . a friend . . . or a relative dies, and it must be explained to a child. This sensitive book is a useful tool in explaining to children that death is a part of life and that, eventually, all living things reach the end of their own special lifetimes

Books and resources – Primary (KS1& KS2)

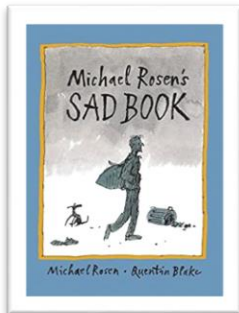
Books can be a useful tool in helping pupils who are experiencing loss, make some sense of their confusing and sad emotions. Young people need simple and honest explanations of death, possibly repeated many times. They can also provide children with a sense that they are less alone.

The books below are suited for general use within the classroom. These books can help to introduce topics such as death, grief and the life cycle to pupils in KS1 and KS2.



Badger's Parting Gifts - Susan Varley

Badger is so old that he knows he must soon die, so he does his best to prepare his friends. When he finally passes away, they are grief-stricken, but one by one they remember the special things he taught them during his life. By sharing their memories, they realise that although Badger is no longer with them physically, he lives on through his friends.



Sad Book - Michael Rosen

Michael Rosen's *Sad Book* chronicles his grief at the death of his son Eddie from meningitis at the age of 19. A moving combination of sincerity and simplicity, it acknowledges that sadness is not always avoidable or reasonable and perfects the art of making complicated feelings plain.



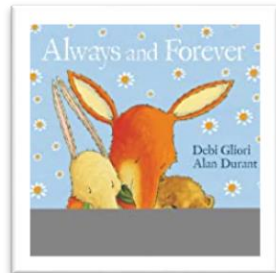
The Lonely Tree - Nicholas Halliday

A story based on the life cycle in the natural world. The young tree is sad when his old friend the Oak dies but Spring brings joy to the little tree.



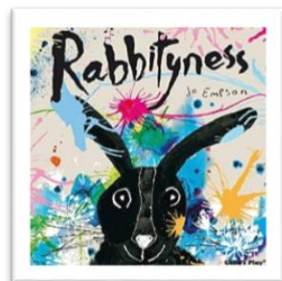
The Memory Tree - Britta Teckentrup

Fox has lived a long and happy life in the forest. One day, he lies down in his favourite clearing, takes a deep breath, and falls asleep for ever. Before long, Fox's friends begin to gather in the clearing. One by one, they tell stories of the special moments that they shared with Fox. And, as they share their memories, a tree begins to grow, becoming bigger and stronger, sheltering and protecting all the animals in the forest, just as Fox did when he was alive.



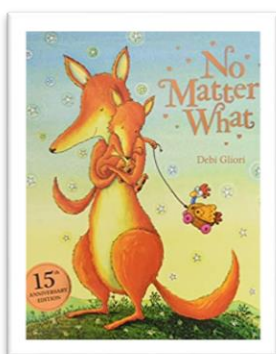
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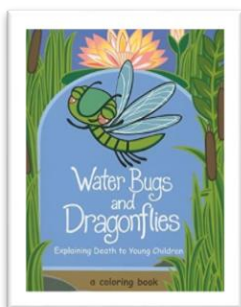
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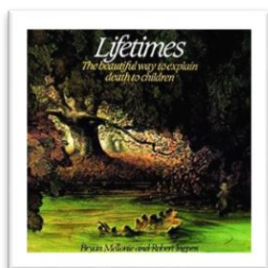
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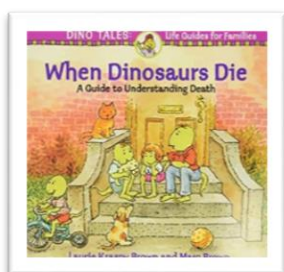
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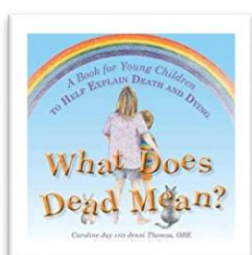
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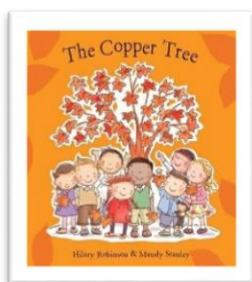
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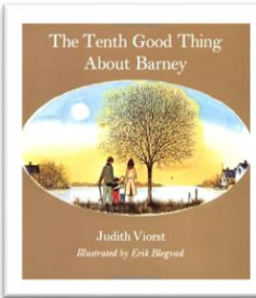
The Copper Tree - Hilary Robinson and Mandy Stanley

'When Olivia's teacher dies, the children at her school are encouraged to think of everything that reminds them of her. Sprinkled with light-hearted moments, The Copper Tree approaches grief with sensitivity and sound judgement. A delightful and touching short story.



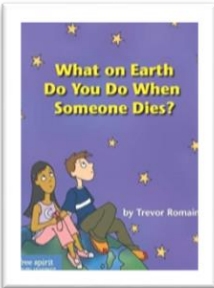
The Invisible String - Patrice Karst

Specifically written to address children's fear of being apart from the ones they love, The Invisible String delivers a particularly compelling message in today's uncertain times, that although we may be separated from the ones we care for, whether through anger, or distance or even death, love is the unending connection that binds us all, and by extension, ultimately binds every person on the planet to everyone else.



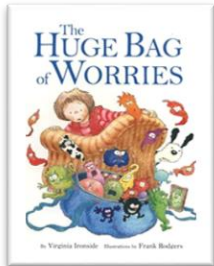
The Tenth Good Thing About Barney - Judith Viorst

A short story that by dealing with the death of a pet, takes a child through the rituals associated with any death, addressing the feelings children have when faced with loss. This book does not have religious overtones, so it can be used by pupils with different sets of beliefs.



What on Earth do You do When Someone Dies? - Trevor Romain

Written by Trevor Romain after his father died, this book suggests ways of coping with grief and offers answers to questions such as 'Why do people have to die?' and 'How can I say goodbye?' Friendly, accessible text and illustrations aimed at ages 8-14.

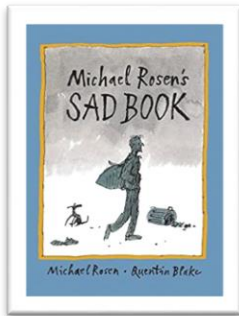


The Huge Bag of Worries - Virginia Ironside

Bereaved children and those in families where someone is expected to die often have worries that they feel unable to share. This reassuring story will encourage them to voice their fears and concerns.

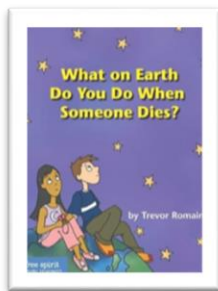
Books and resources – Secondary

Reading about others in similar situations can be reassuring for young people and sometimes easier to do than talking about their loss. The books, films and resources below will help them deal with the subjects of death and grief.



Sad Book - Michael Rosen

Michael Rosen's *Sad Book* chronicles his grief at the death of his son Eddie from meningitis at the age of 19. A moving combination of sincerity and simplicity, it acknowledges that sadness is not always avoidable or reasonable and perfects the art of making complicated feelings plain.



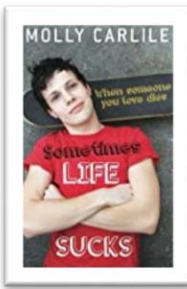
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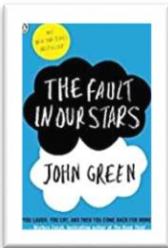
The Grieving Teen - Helen Fitzgerald

Written about, but also for teenagers, this book covers the entire range of situations in which grieving teens and their friends may find themselves. It offers explanations and guidance in a very accessible format.



Sometimes Life Sucks: When someone you love dies - Molly Carlile

Teenagers can experience death in all kinds of ways. Full of tips and stories, this will help them to make some sense of their shock and grief.



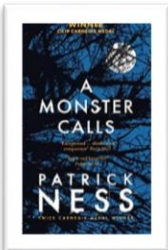
The Fault in Our Stars (Book and film) - John Green

The story follows the main character, Hazel, as she battles cancer. Not only is she trying to live the normal life of a 16-year-old girl, but struggling with how it will be for her parents after she dies.



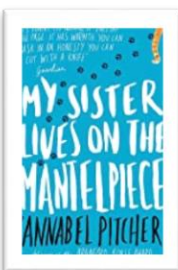
The Thing About Jellyfish (Book and film) - Ali Benjamin

After her best friend dies in a drowning accident, Suzy is convinced that the true cause of the tragedy was a rare jellyfish sting.



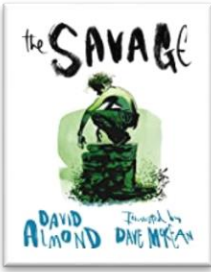
A Monster Calls (Book and film) - Patrick Ness and Siobhan Dowd

Connor's mum has cancer and life is irrevocably, disturbingly changing. First there is the nightmare, filled with screaming and falling; then there is school, where people avoid him (not knowing what to say), or persecute him.



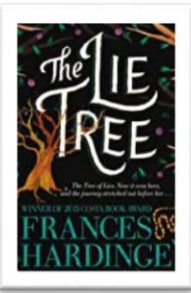
My Sister Lives On the Mantelpiece - Annabel Pitcher

To ten-year-old Jamie, his family has fallen apart because of the loss of someone he barely remembers: his sister Rose, who died five years ago in a terrorist bombing.



The Savage - David Almond

Blue's father has died suddenly, and finding that the school's counselling increases his anguish, he turns to writing a story instead.



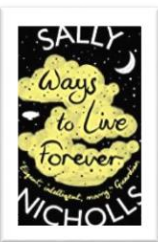
The Lie Tree - Frances Hardinge

Faith's father has been found dead under mysterious circumstances and, as she is searching through his belongings for clues, she discovers a strange tree. The tree only grows healthily and bears fruit if you whisper a lie to it. The fruit of the tree, when eaten, will deliver a hidden truth to the person who consumes it.



Us Minus Mum - Heather Butler

The boys think Mum is invincible. But they're wrong. Because Mum is ill. Really ill. It's up to George and Theo to keep Mum (and everyone else) smiling – which will almost probably definitely involve willies, shepherd's pie and Goffo's victory at the pet talent show. This book is both funny and sad.



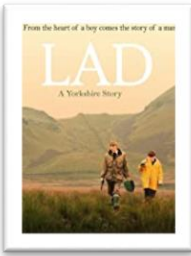
Ways to Live Forever - Sally Nicholls

1. My name is Sam. 2. I am eleven years old. 3. I collect stories and fantastic facts. 4. I have leukaemia.



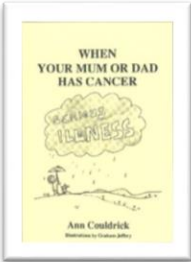
If Only - Carole Geithner

Corinna's world is crushed after her mother dies of cancer. How does she get through the funeral, trays of ziti, a father who can't communicate, the first day of school, Mother's Day, people who don't know what to say, and the entire eighth-grade year?



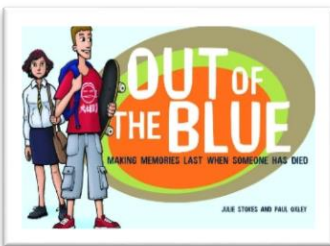
LAD – A Yorkshire Story - A film by Dan Hartley

When 13-year-old Tom Proctor’s dad dies his world falls apart; his brother joins the army, his mum is threatened with eviction and Tom gets into trouble with the police. Tom comes to terms with the loss of his dad through the friendship he forms with national park warden, Al Thorpe. This enchanting coming-of-age story is set in the stunning Yorkshire Dales.



When Your Mum or Dad has Cancer - Ann Couldrick

Available from Child Bereavement UK’s online shop This is a useful booklet for younger children (7+) to teenage children. It has an introduction for parents but then explains cancer in a simple way children can relate to. It also covers many questions children ask, such as whether the person will die and what exactly happens, and tackles the answers with insight and honesty.



Out of the Blue - Winston’s Wish

Written and designed specifically for teenagers with aim of supporting them through their bereavement using a range of activities. Narrated throughout by teenager’s words and stories, the book talks openly about the real feelings they may struggle with when someone important in their life dies. The activities in the book allow feelings to be worked through and safely explored.

For a wider range of books which may be useful to share with a bereaved child and young people see:

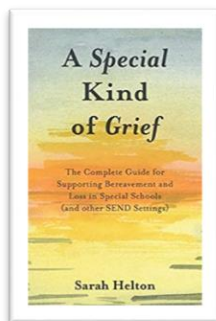
- www.childbereavementuk.org/resources-for-children-and-young-people
- <https://www.cruse.org.uk/about-cruse/publications/recommended-books/books-for-children>
- <https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/bereaved-family-friends/supporting-grieving-child/books-about-death>

Resources for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs

Talking to any child or young person about death is often felt by adults to be a very difficult situation and even more so when the child or young person has special educational needs. When bereavement has occurred, all children need to have their questions answered; be listened to; be given appropriate information; helped to feel safe and have people they trust to support them. Sharing books with children and young people is a very helpful way to explain about, and develop an understanding of death, loss and grieving. Below are some suggestions of age appropriate books.

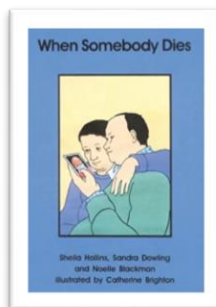
Bereavement affects everyone and children and young people with special educational needs and disability are no different. Books can be a useful tool to aid communication but helping these children may present issues that mainstream literature does not address. The following are suggestions that may assist children and young people with learning difficulties to understand difficult concepts such as the permanence of death, to have some knowledge of bereavement rituals, and to help them to make sense of confusing feelings.

Books and Resources



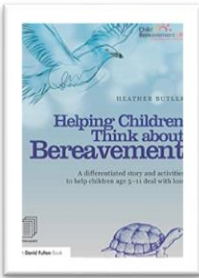
A Special Kind of Grief – Sarah Helton

Set in a special school, this book has been written to help children with additional needs cope with the death of a friend.



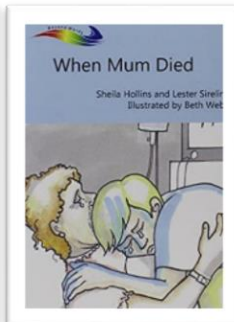
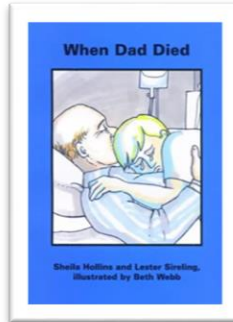
When Somebody Dies - Hollins, Dowling and Blackman

Using pictures, the book tells the story of Mary who is very upset when someone she loves dies. She is encouraged by a friend to go to regular bereavement counselling sessions, which help her to feel less sad. John also loses someone he is close to. He is given comfort and companionship by friends and is shown learning to cope better with life.



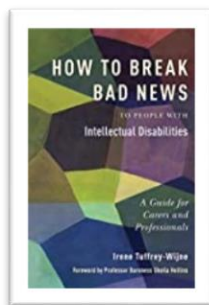
Helping Children Think About Bereavement - Heather Butler

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop This fun story and related short activities are presented as four lesson plans including one for pupils with learning difficulties. It helps pupils develop resilience and coping skills should someone they know die.



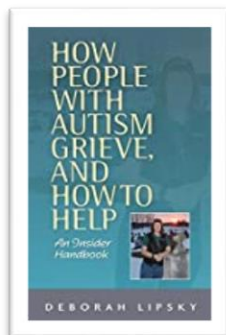
When Dad Died *and* When Mum Died - Hollins and Sireling

Both books take an honest and straightforward approach to death and grief in the family. The pictures tell of the death of a parent in a simple but moving way. When Dad Died illustrates a cremation, When Mum Died shows a burial. The approach is non-denominational.



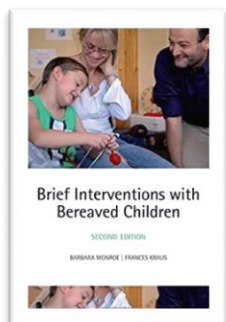
How to break bad news to people with intellectual disabilities - Irene Tuffrey Wijne

A guide for professionals and carers.



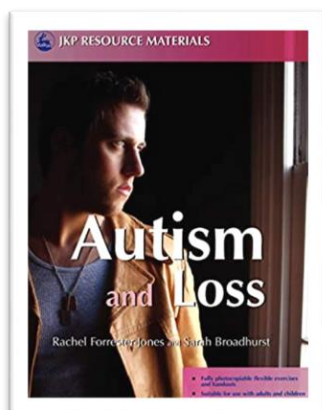
How People with Autism Grieve, and How to Help: An Insider Handbook - Deborah Lipsky

Explores how people with autism feel and express the loss of a loved one and how they process and come to terms with their feelings of grief. Includes clear instructions on how best to support someone with autism through the grieving process, how to prepare them for bad news and how to involve them in the funeral or wake.



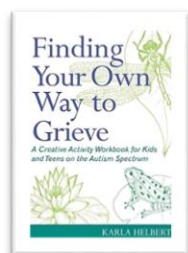
Brief Interventions with Bereaved Children - Barbara Monroe and Frances Kraus

A useful resource with lots of practical ideas. Chapter 9 is titled Loss for Children with Learning Disability. This explains how children with learning disabilities understand death and how they are likely to communicate feelings with behaviour rather than words.



Autism and Loss - Rachel Forrester-Jones & Sarah Broadhurst

People with autism often experience difficulty in understanding and expressing their emotions and react to losses in different ways or in ways that carers do not understand. In order to provide effective support, carers need to have the understanding, the skills and appropriate resources to work through these emotional reactions with them. Autism and Loss is a complete resource that covers a variety of kinds of loss, including bereavement, loss of friends or staff, loss of home or possessions and loss of health. It includes a wealth of fact sheets and practical tools that provide formal and informal carers with authoritative, tried and tested guidance.



Finding your own way to grieve - Karle Helbert

Creative workbook for kids and teens on the autistic spectrum.



Bereavement and Loss: Supporting bereaved people with PMLD* and their parents - Pamis - promoting a more inclusive society

A learning resource pack with helpful guidance and practical ideas. Includes a DVD with real life stories. <http://pamis.org.uk/resources/bereavement-and-loss/>

Resources for Parents and Carers

In communicating with the school community about a bereavement and when supporting a family through their bereavement parents and carers may appreciate guidance to help them better understand reactions from their children and respond to their questions.

Grief is a natural and necessary response to a death. However, if concerned about a child, do not hesitate to seek advice from your GP or organisations dedicated to supporting children, young people and families affected by bereavement.

Resources to support parents



A Child's Grief Winston's Wish

Useful and informative short book for any adult who is supporting a bereaved child. It covers a variety of issues and offers practical suggestions and activities.



When Your Partner Dies: supporting your children Child Bereavement UK

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop A booklet of information and guidance for surviving parents and carers who are trying to manage their own grief and that of their children.



Death and Bereavement Across Cultures - Murray, Laungani, Pittu and Young

Covers rites, rituals and mourning traditions for adults and children from the major religious and secular belief systems, their own grief and that of their children.

Useful Websites to support parents/carers:

Child Bereavement UK - <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

Winston's Wish - <https://www.winstonswish.org/>

Rainbows - <https://rainbowsgb.org/>

Catholic Children's Society - <https://www.cathchild.org.uk/rainbows-bereavment-support-programme/>

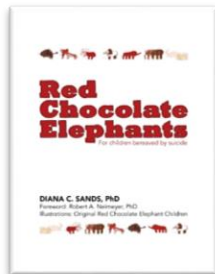
Resources to Support Schools in Dealing with Suicide

Suicide is a difficult topic and one that hopefully never impacts your school community. The reality, however, is that it does cross the minds of many young people, including schoolchildren.



Building Suicide-Safer Schools and Colleges: A guide for teachers and staff. – Papyrus

An informative document to promote suicide awareness/prevention and support for school staff. [Click here](#)



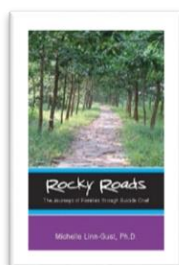
Red Chocolate Elephants Book with DVD

The pages include drawings, memories and words of children bereaved by suicide. A valuable tool for supporting children in schools and other settings.

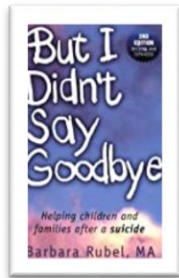


Beyond the Rough Rock - Winston's Wish

A sensitively written booklet which offers practical information and advice, and looks at ways in which death through suicide can be explained to children and young people. [Click here](#)



Rocky Roads – The Journeys of Families through Suicide Grief by Michelle Linn Gust



But I Didn't Say Goodbye: Helping Children and Families After a Suicide

by Barbara Rubel

Support Groups

SOBS (Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide) - <https://www.uksobs.org>

SOBS is a bereavement support charity which exists to meet the needs and overcome the isolation experienced by people who have been bereaved by suicide. It provides support and advice for those bereaved by suicide and resources and training for those who aim to support the bereaved.

Papyrus – Prevention of Young Suicide - www.papyrus-uk.org

PAPYRUS is the national charity dedicated to the prevention of young suicide. Its comprehensive website information for both young people and parents with guidance for those worried about a suicidal friend and support for those contemplating suicide. It also has resources to support school staff.

Children Bereavement UK – <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

Child Bereavement UK is a charity that supports children and young people up to the age of 25 and their families who are facing bereavement, and anyone affected by the death of a child of any age. The charity also provides training to professionals in health and social care, education, and the voluntary and corporate sectors, equipping them to provide the best possible care to bereaved families.

Winston's Wish - <https://www.winstonswish.org/>

Winston's Wish is a bereavement charity dedicated to providing emotional and practical bereavement support to children, young people and those who care for them. They offer one off and ongoing bereavement support and we also provide online resources, specialist publications and training for professionals including schools.

Samaritans - <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/step-step/>

The Samaritans provide a Step-by-Step programme to support schools and can be contacted on 0808 168 2528

Useful Contacts

Your local Parish Priest		www.rcdow.org.uk/directory/
Peter Sweeney	<i>Interim Director of Education</i>	petersweeney@rcdow.org.uk
Amanda Crowley	<i>Deputy Director of Educations</i>	amandacrowley@rcdow.org.uk
Elaine Arundell Diana Roberts Tony Gorton Patrick Murphy	<i>Primary RE Advisers</i>	elainearundell@rcdow.org.uk dianaroberts@rcdow.org.uk tonygorton@rcdow.org.uk patrickmurphy@rcdow.org.uk
Trisha Hedley Claire O'Neill	<i>Secondary RE Advisers</i>	trishahedley@rcdow.org.uk claireoneill@rcdow.org.uk
Marie Saba	<i>Communications Officer for Diocese of Westminster</i>	mariesaba@rcdow.org.uk
Rainbows Bereavement Support	<i>Provide in-service training, counselling and support and resources</i>	Click Here
Child Bereavement UK	<i>Support and information for supporting a bereaved student</i>	Click Here (Primary) Click Here (Secondary)
Catholic Children's Society	<i>Provide family counselling and first response counselling in schools and resources</i>	Click Here
Winston's Wish	<i>Excellent support, resources and training for schools</i>	Click Here
Cruse Bereavement Care	<i>Excellent resources and bespoke training for schools</i>	Click Here
Hope again	<i>A site for young people living with loss</i>	Click Here
Papyrus UK	<i>Provide advice for those with thoughts of suicide linked to bereavement</i>	Click Here

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)	<i>Useful resources and support</i>	Click Here
CARITAS	<i>Grants (Crisis and funeral grants)</i>	Click Here
Young Minds	<i>Information and advice for young people and parents dealing with grief and loss</i>	Click Here
Childhood Bereavement Network	<i>Information for school staff in supporting children and young people through bereavement.</i>	Click Here
Mentally Healthy Schools	<i>Information for school staff in supporting children and young people through bereavement.</i>	Click Here
Grief Encounter	<i>Has a dedicated section for young people with videos</i>	Click Here
Glasgow City Council/NHS	<i>A Whole School Approach to Supporting Loss and Bereavement</i>	Click Here
SecEd	<i>Article on bereavement in schools entitled When death happens: Bereavement in schools</i>	Click Here
Sue Ryder	<i>Information for parents on helping their child through grief and loss.</i>	Click Here
Together for short lives	<i>Information and support for families dealing with the death of a child.</i>	Click Here
The Compassionate Friends	<i>A charitable organisation of bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents dedicated to the support and care of other bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents when a child dies.</i>	Click Here
The Art of Dying Well	<i>Provides information and practical and spiritual support to those faced with the prospect of death and dying. It is a site for everyone.</i>	Click here
The Liturgy Office	<i>Provides resources and information on funerals</i>	Click here

References

The information contained in this booklet has been compiled from the resources of a number of organisations with two main sources in particular:

- Rainbows Bereavement Support Great Britain <https://rainbowsgb.org/>
- Child Bereavement UK www.childbereavementuk.org

We are incredibly grateful for their work and wish to credit the use and inclusion of their support materials throughout this document.

Images on pages 2, 4 and 48 – are copyright free images taken from Pixabay.com

Appendix 1 – Sample Assembly – Breaking Sad News to the School Community

(We offer these words below purely as an example. You may like to cut and paste phrases that you find helpful. We recommend that in the event of having to break the news of a death within the community that you take a little while to consider what you will say; how you will say it and how you and colleagues will manage the situation)

Start

There is no easy way to say this to you and the event that has happened will affect us all in one way or another but I have to tell you (.....) or *(You may have heard already that (Name) has died.)* The information that we have and therefore can tell you about is that....

While we are all deeply shocked at this awful, sad news, before we do anything else and while we are all together to support and help each other, may I suggest that we be still now for one or two minutes to honour and remember *(Name)*

Thank you. *(Name)* was a gift to our community here and we are so deeply grateful for the privilege of knowing *him/her*. In some way we are all better people because of *(Name)*.

I ask you to close your eyes for a moment and to remember the unique part that *(Name)* played in our lives. We think of good times together, training, travelling on school trips, etc. We reflect on *her/his* many talents and blessings. *(Examples: think of her/his delight on the occasion that she sang, that he scored that goal..., that he/she represented the school at...)*

We all feel the loss of *(Name)*. Place a circle of light around *(Name's)* face now and think lots of love and thanks and hope for *(Name)*.

We do not know much about what happens after death but at this time we may find comfort in our faith and it is possible that our loving thoughts and wishes and prayers this morning may help *(Name)* to a place of great happiness and peace.

There will be many opportunities for us to show our feelings during the next few days. As more details come to us, we will let you know what is happening and how the family would like us to be involved. There will be a variety of ways of honouring *(Name's)* life and their life amongst us. Your ideas will be most welcome. Talk to *(name of dedicated member of staff)* but talk to any of the staff with your thoughts and feelings. We are all here to help each other; that is what our community is about.

A poet has written these lines to help us at a time like this; you may like it:

Name, may you continue to inspire us:
to enter each day with a generous heart;
to serve the call of courage and love,
until we see your face again
in that land where there is no more separation,
where all tears will be wiped from our mind,
and where we will never lose you again.

Appropriate Ending

Perhaps the poem itself; music; a prayer; a moment of silence.....

Appendix 2 – Sample Letters

1. Letter to bereaved parents
2. Letter to inform parents/carers of the death of a member of staff as a result of illness
3. Letter to inform parents/carers of the death of a pupil
4. To inform all governors and staff of the death of a pupil (*Via email, memo or secure area of school website*)
5. Letter to thank parents after a time of support following the death of a pupil

1. Letter to bereaved parents

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear the sad news of *(Name's)* death. There are no words to express our sadness and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through at this incredibly sad time.

As a school community, we will miss *(Name)* very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to his/her friends, classmates and teachers. *(Name)* was a (*valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly*) member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help as you plan *(Name's)* funeral, please let us know.

We will hold you in our thoughts and prayers and continue to keep in touch and will support you in any way we can.

With deepest sympathy

2. To inform parents/carers of the death of a member of staff as a result of illness

Dear Parents/Carers,

It is with great sadness that I write to inform you that over the weekend, *(Name)*, a highly respected and much loved member of our teaching staff, has died. *S/he* had become increasingly poorly over the last few days and in the end died peacefully, with *his/her* family at *his/her* side

The *children/young people* have been told of *her/his* death today in their own classrooms and as anticipated, a number of them are experiencing some significant distress. They were told the name of the illness was *(cancer)* and it was also explained to them that many times people with *(cancer)* do get better, but other times people die from it.

On behalf of the school community I have expressed our sympathy to *her/his* family.

I hope in the weeks to come we will find an appropriate way to celebrate the life that *s/he* had with us here at our school, together with the significant contribution *s/he* has made.

Personal end...

Alternatively

Dear Parents/Carers

I am sorry to inform you that a *(well-respected/long-standing/well-loved/popular/ well-known)* member of our staff, *(Name)* died *(suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness)*.

The pupils were told today by their *(class teacher/tutor/head of year/in assembly)* and many will be reacting to this news. When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some pupils may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

We have tried to answer their questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Rainbows Bereavement Support <https://rainbowsgb.org/> or Child Bereavement UK website www.childbereavementuk.org

Our thoughts are with *(Name's)* family at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember *(Name's)* life.

Personal end...

3. To inform parents/carers of the death of a pupil

Dear Parents/Carers,

It is with great sadness that I write to inform you of the tragic death of one of our pupils, *(Name)*, from *(Year/class)*. We learned this morning that *(Name)* had died after *(a short illness/tragic accident or other appropriate phrase)*. Mr and Mrs *(.....)* have told me that *(Name)* died *(peacefully in hospital/hospice last night.)*

Members of staff have informed the pupils in school this morning and lessons were suspended for a short time to allow us to gather to express our individual and shared sorrow.

It is our intention, with Mr & Mrs *(.....'s)* permission, to hold a 'Celebration of *(Name's)* Life' on the same day as the funeral will be taking place in order for the whole school community to be part of this time. You are more than welcome to join us at this service and we will post details on our school website as soon as times have been confirmed.

We continue to hold *(Name's)* family in our thoughts and prayers.

I enclose a leaflet which you may find useful with one or two suggestions that might help you to help your child with their grief.

Personal end...

Alternatively

Dear Parents and Carers

Your child's *(class teacher/form tutor/head teacher/head of year)* had the sad task of informing the pupils of the death of *(Name)*, a pupil in *(Year....)* *(Name)* died *(suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness yesterday/last week/over the weekend/during half term)*.

He/she was a *(valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly)* member of the school community and will be missed by everyone who knew *him/her*.

When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some pupils may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

We have tried to answer their questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Rainbows Bereavement Support <https://rainbowsgb.org/> or Child Bereavement UK website www.childbereavementuk.org

Our thoughts and prayers are with *(Name's)* family and friends at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember *(Name's)* life.

Personal end...

4. To inform all governors and staff of the death of a pupil *(Via email, memo or secure area of school website)*

NB Remember to inform ALL staff including absent colleagues and peripatetic staff:

Urgent Information for All Staff and Governors:

Further to staff briefing and phone calls made to governors may I confirm the sad news of *(Name's)* death. As colleagues were informed at the briefing at *(time)*, *(Name)* died *(provide factual information.....)*.

I have spoken to *(the deceased next of kin)* and expressed our deepest sorrow and sympathy.

All pupils in school have been informed during the day (state how pupils have been informed). Parents and Carers will be informed by letter this evening and a notice will be placed on the school website. (Copy below) *Mr/s N (.....)* will respond to any requests from the media for information. Please provide her details to anyone requesting information and do not offer any comment yourself to external requests.

Needless to say we are all deeply shocked to receive this news. Arrangements have yet to be made for the funeral and for a school memorial service but we will of course inform all staff and governors once these are known. In the meantime, the *(school chapel / prayer room/quiet area)* is available for quiet reflection. Our School Bereavement Team will ensure that this area is always staffed.

May I remind staff and governors that you will find the **'bereavement guidance'** that we approved for such times as this, on the school network headed *(.....)*

Further information will be made available through our daily staff briefings and via the secure *(.....)*

Please take care

Personal end

5. To thank parents after a time of support following the death of a pupil

Dear Parents/Carers,

On behalf of all the staff I would like to express our sincere thanks to everyone for the support, sympathy and concern we received throughout last week.

The emails, texts, letters and flowers have helped ease our sadness here in school and for that we are all most grateful. Our hearts go out to *Mr & Mrs (.....)* and their family. They will need our support for many months to come.

I know that despite their pain and sorrow they were greatly comforted by the love and genuine compassion shown by the whole school and the local community. The special assembly and funeral service gave tangible evidence of this compassion. The remembrance book will remain in the hall for the remainder of this half-term. Please do continue to add to it or visit the garden/chapel at any time. Its presence has been a tremendous release and comfort for many of us.

As at other times of the school year, please do not hesitate to talk to me or any member of staff if you are concerned about your child's reaction to *(Name's)* tragic death. However, we also enclose some practical guidance for parents which you may find helpful and our school website lists a number of books and links to other websites which may be useful

Thankfully, what we have experienced as a school is extremely rare. I have no doubt that the experience has drawn us closer and has created new bonds but it will also leave a lasting heartache. Together I know we will ensure that it is also a positive experience, which will enable us all, children and adults to be more sensitive and compassionate human beings.

Above all else, perhaps this tragedy has helped us all put things into perspective and to unite together as a community of faith.

With our sincere thanks for your on-going support and understanding

Yours sincerely

Appendix 3 - Policy Advice From Child Bereavement UK

Section 1 - The death of a pupil or member of staff

Section of policy	Questions/Points to address	Points to consider/useful information
Roles and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who will take overall charge? Who will be responsible for communicating with the family or families? How will the news be shared with the school community? How will the news be shared with the pupils? Classes, tutor groups, year groups, whole school assembly If the press is involved, who will liaise with journalists? What support is available for staff/pupils? 	<p>Consider the size, structure and organisation of your school. If the head will take charge, how might this impact the day to day running of the school? Who will deputise if the head is not available?</p> <p>In the case of sudden or traumatic death of a pupil, the school may be called upon to be a part of a multi-agency review. If this were to be the case, who would you appoint as representative?</p> <p>The best person to liaise with the family may depend on the specific situation, relationship with the pupil/family and experience of the member of staff. The policy can reflect this and cite Headteacher/Deputy/Class Teacher/SENCO/Head of Year/Pastoral Support depending on circumstances.</p> <p>The indiscriminate spread of news via social media may mean that some members of the school community hear the news before others. How will your school let members of staff know about the death? What method of communication would be most appropriate for staff in your school? Telephone 'pyramid' (out of hours), staff meeting, text, email, school social media. Consider the impact of hearing the news via text message/social media/email.</p> <p>When delivering news to pupils, some schools prefer to do this in smaller groups with a familiar adult, while others choose a whole school assembly. If a pupil has died, it may be more appropriate to share the news with their class/year group first.</p> <p>Can school provide a safe place and time to grieve? What pastoral support is available? Can you include details of external bereavement support organisations? Support and information can be found on the Child Bereavement UK website childbereavementuk.org</p> <p>If a pupil dies by suicide, Samaritans provide a Step-by-Step programme to support schools. They can be contacted on: 0808 168 2528</p>
Procedures	<p>procedure which will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarify information and the wishes of family/families. Share the news with staff and pupils. Prepare a script. Inform parents/carers. 	<p>A simple confirmation of the death may be required until more details are available, and/or the family consulted. The school can help to prevent speculation and rumours, as well as be a source of support for the family and the school community.</p> <p>It helps to feel prepared when delivering sad news, so a script will be particularly useful. Do not be afraid or surprised to show emotion, this is a human reaction. Suggestions for writing a script:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start by acknowledging you have some sad news to give. Be honest. Give the news stating simple facts, use the words dead/died. If known, and with the family's permission, explain briefly where and when the death occurred. If not known, say so, and that you will endeavour to find out. If rumours are rife, say which of these are definitely not correct, if known. Where appropriate, remind pupils of their responsibilities and the impact when posting on social media. Talk briefly and positively about the person who died without eulogising them. Mention any arrangements already in place, including for those needing support. Acknowledge that not everyone will be feeling sad and that is OK. Allow a break in the timetable for pupils to process the news and take a little time-out. A template letter to parents/carers is provided (in the appendices). Our website provides information for parents to help them discuss a death with their children. They may also be directed to guided support from Child Bereavement UK's Helpline on 0800 02 888 40 or Live Chat on the website, available 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

Section of policy	Questions/Points to address	Points to consider/useful information
The first few days	<p>Is it appropriate for the timetable to remain the same or will some adjustments be needed for all, or some, pupils?</p> <p>Will school provide a space for grieving pupils? Will support be available for them?</p> <p>What support will be available to staff?</p> <p>Will there be somewhere within the school grounds for pupils and staff to pay their respects/contribute to a book of condolence?</p>	<p>Although school can provide stability and normality for staff and pupils, some flexibility may be necessary.</p> <p>Bereaved young people may need time to grieve and manage overwhelming feelings, being able to leave a classroom and take time out in a safe space can be very welcome.</p> <p>The location for a temporary tribute/book of condolence needs to be safe, accessible and ideally where pupils can be supervised. Offer the family the opportunity to visit, if they wish to, or take photographs to share with them later.</p> <p>Consult with staff and pupils before removing any temporary tribute, giving notice to prepare them beforehand.</p>
The funeral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will the arrangements be for the funeral? • Will school send flowers or make a collection? • How will pupils be supported? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rather than making assumptions, consult the family to find out whether members of staff and/or pupils are welcome to attend. • Can/will pupils be involved in choosing flowers or organising a collection? • Identify the practicalities of issues such as staff cover to allow all those wishing to attend the funeral to do so. (For some circumstances, it may be appropriate to close the school, for others, it may not). • Consider any arrangements for pupils attending the funeral, and how they will be supported/supervised.
Support for pupils	<p>What support will be provided for pupils?</p>	<p>Consider whether this can be provided by school staff, external agencies or local services? Compile a list of outside agencies and people who may be able to provide support.</p>
Support for staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the wellbeing of staff be monitored when managing this stressful situation? • Consider training requirements for all staff. • How will staff welfare be reviewed? 	<p>Supporting bereaved pupils can be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions. At certain points in time, some members of staff may be more vulnerable due to circumstances in their own lives.</p> <p>Further information about training can be found at childbereavementuk.org or contact Child Bereavement UK's Helpline on 0800 02 888 40 or Live Chat on the website, available 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.</p>
Remembering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the pupil/member of staff be remembered by the school? • Will there be a permanent memorial, assembly, event? • How will pupils be involved in the plans? 	<p>Consult the family of the person who died about any plans for a memorial, assembly or other tribute.</p> <p>A more permanent memorial (a tree, a special garden, a piece of artwork, a bench) may be appropriate, but in future the removal, relocation or replacement will need to be managed sensitively.</p>

Section 2 - Supporting a bereaved pupil

Section of policy	Questions/Points to address	Points to consider/useful information
Returning to school after a bereavement	Who will meet with the pupil and their family/carers to discuss their return to school or upon their return to school following a bereavement?	<p>Most grieving pupils do not need a 'bereavement expert', they need the support of familiar and trusted adults. School, with its familiar environment and routines, can be a place of comfort for a bereaved young person.</p> <p>It can be helpful to meet with the pupil and their family/carers to establish what has happened and to discuss their return to school. This could be a familiar adult, such as the class teacher, form tutor, SENCO, a member of the pastoral support team or it could be the head of year, Deputy or Headteacher.</p> <p>The purpose of this meeting should be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge the death. • Find out how the pupil would like to share their news. • Organise a safe space for the bereaved pupil to go if they feel overwhelmed by their grief and need a 'time-out'. How will they inform staff of this? For example, a 'time-out' card, a non-verbal signal or message. How will this be communicated to all staff? • Consider whether to provide 'time-out' activities – journals, art and craft, books, screen time, memory boxes etc. • Set guidelines for communication – with the pupil, between members of staff and between home and school. • Consider providing support for peers when they have a bereaved friend. <p>A short film is available on the Child Bereavement UK website: childbereavementuk.org/for-teachers-when-a-pupil-returns-to-school-after-being-bereaved</p>
Longer term support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a method within school to record significant dates for the bereaved young person? • Who will communicate with the family/carers and pupil? • How will communication with pupils, members of staff, the family/carers and the wider community be managed and reviewed? • How will the progress (both in learning and emotional wellbeing) of the pupil be monitored? • Who will be responsible for passing on details of the bereavement at transition points? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The pupil will continue to grieve for the rest of their life and may require ongoing support. Significant dates or anniversaries, Mother's/Father's Day, etc. may be particularly difficult. Regular contact with the family/carers and reviews with the pupil will help to build up an overall picture of how the pupil is coping. • The grief may impact the pupil's progress. Some pupils work really hard and may put themselves under extra pressure to succeed, while others may find it difficult to focus in class and on their work. There may be changes in their behaviour, how will these be managed? • Bereaved young people can find change difficult, so preparing them in advance (where possible) may help them to voice their worries and ease the process. • Consider vulnerable pupils as they may need additional support, particularly on transition.

Section of policy	Questions/Points to address	Points to consider/useful information
Death, grief and bereavement in the curriculum	How could death, grief and bereavement be included in the curriculum?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching the topic of death, grief and bereavement will help pupils to understand feelings of grief and prepare them for the future. Informing parents and carers in advance will help to gather information about previous bereavements so that vulnerable pupils can be prepared for the lesson. Recently bereaved pupils may find it helpful if they are given the option to work elsewhere or step outside, if they think it would be too painful to attend. See Elephant's Tea Party resource on Child Bereavement UK's website
Support for staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will staff be trained and supported? What process is in place to identify vulnerable members of staff? How will staff welfare be reviewed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being alongside anyone experiencing a loss can be emotionally draining, and supporting a bereaved pupil particularly so. At certain points in time, some members of staff may be more vulnerable due to circumstances in their own lives. Consider how school can support these members of staff and whether there is capacity to utilise other staff members to help share the load. Provide details of support agencies for staff. Further information about training can be found at childbereavementuk.org Or contact Child Bereavement UK's Helpline on 0800 02 888 40 or Live Chat on the website, available 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

Appendix 4 – Sample Bereavement Policy and Procedures

Sample School Policy - Responding to a death within the school community

(This sample policy and procedures are offered as Word documents to enable you to make any adaptations as appropriate.)

NAME OF SCHOOL.....

MISSION STATEMENT.....

SAMPLE POLICY STATEMENT: *(Insert)*

We acknowledge that death, while being the inevitable end of life, is often unexpected and traumatic. Its unpredictability can cause severe distress and can shock and disturb the whole school community.

We acknowledge that should our school community be informed of a death, our response should be a planned, tested and considered one. An unplanned response could make the situation worse for all concerned; we need to ensure we are able to react sensitively and professionally.

We acknowledge that the communication of any death within our community must be planned and handled with great sensitivity. While recognising the need to act speedily, we will ensure that the immediate family of the deceased have been consulted prior to any wider communication through the school website, text, telephone, email, or social media sites.

We will establish a “*School Bereavement Team*” to be chaired if and when necessary by a ‘*Bereavement Team Leader*’ who will be the most senior appropriate member of staff in school. Members of the Team will be ... *(list as appropriate for your school e.g. Chairman of Governors; Rainbows Co-ordinator; School secretary/initial parent contact; Year Group Tutor or class teacher; local minister or faith representative as appropriate. Please ensure that a member of the school office staff is included)*

We acknowledge our responsibility to all those who grieve as a result of a life changing significant loss in their lives. We will provide opportunities for pupils to share their feelings in the school environment supported by trained staff and when appropriate, through the use of age related structured programmes provided by Rainbows Bereavement Support GB. Appropriate support will also be offered to staff.

The Bereavement Team will ensure all staff and governors are aware of our policy and procedures. This policy and the accompanying procedures will be reviewed annually or in the event of a death within the school community.

Date Policy Approved:

Date for Review:

Sample procedures to be followed in the event of a death within the school community:

We will ensure that school office staff are prepared to receive the news of a death within the community and respond in an appropriate manner.

Should we receive the news of a death, in **ALL** cases the person receiving the news will:

- Confirm the information, check it, record it and check it again. (*It is essential to have the facts confirmed*)
- Share the news as soon as possible with an appropriate senior member of staff and a member of the Bereavement Team.

The senior member of staff and the members of the Bereavement Team will:

- Consider the action required, follow the agreed procedures, take notice of the guidance and examples and be aware of the impact of shock on each other and on the wider community.

The sudden death of a parent or close relative

We acknowledge that in the case of the death of a pupil's parent or close relative, it is best that a family member breaks the news with the support of an appropriate member of staff. If this is not possible the Bereavement Team Leader will ensure someone suitable to break the news to the pupil or member of staff concerned. The news of the death will be given to all relevant staff as soon as possible.

The death of a pupil

Should we receive the news of a pupil's death, we will call appropriate colleagues together having consulted with the family of the pupil to ascertain their wishes.

We will:

- Encourage staff to voice concerns they have about telling the rest of the pupils/students.
- Consider the most appropriate way of communicating the news within school; be that a full school assembly, year groups, or a class/form group?
- Give pupils opportunities to express their feelings at the time they are informed and over the following days and weeks.
- Avoid rumours, exaggerations and embellishment of the event, by agreeing the facts which will be stated openly and honestly without assumptions or judgements.
- Remember that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotions and feelings. Some may deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some may show feelings of anger. There may well be tears and distress. Planned support will be available.
- Inform parents the same day in the most appropriate way via text, website, email, phone or newsletter depending on the circumstances

Ensure time for corporate grieving amongst the staff and enable them to share how they feel about what has happened.

The death of more than one pupil

Should we receive such news, members of the *Bereavement Team* will be called together to be briefed with the salient facts and to decide what steps are to be taken. Information may already have been 'sent' from the incident.

We will consider:

- Who will contact parents, if necessary?
- Who will meet with parents who arrive at school? Where?
- Who will inform the staff? When? Where?
- Who will inform the pupils/students? When? Where?

It is imperative that rumours and interpretations of the truth be avoided. In a case of multiple deaths there is bound to be some media interest. Members of the Bereavement Team responsible for dealing with the media will prepare all necessary statements. Such statements should deal only with facts in as sympathetic a way as possible. We will agree a format of response to telephone inquiries, including approaches from the media

The death of a member of staff

We acknowledge that if such a death occurs it is doubly traumatic for the staff; supporting the pupils but also grieving on a personal level for a colleague. Should we receive the news of the death of a member of staff; the appropriate senior member of staff will call together colleagues from the Bereavement Team.

We will use the guidance notes below:

- Gather together the staff and inform them of the news.
- Allow time for corporate grieving amongst the staff.
- Allow the staff to share how they feel about what has happened.
- Inform the teachers that they may need to address what has happened in their classes.
- Impress on staff what facts are to be announced to the pupils/students. To avoid rumours, exaggerations and development of the event, the agreed facts should be stated simply.
- Communicate to the staff how the announcement will be made. Should it be a full school assembly, year groups, or a class/form group?
- It must be remembered that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotional feelings. Some will deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some may show feelings of anger. There may be tears and distress; everyone will react in their own way.
- Under such circumstances some staff may have difficulty coping with the loss themselves. Colleagues will need to be aware of those staff who seem particularly affected by the death.

Breaking Sad News

Should we need to break sad news to children or young people we will first refer to the *“Guidelines for Breaking Sad News of a Death to a class or assembly”* found in Child Bereavement UK [here](#)

Memorials and Funeral Services

Should we need to consider our involvement with any funeral services or memorial services or memorials, we will first refer to the *“Guidelines for Memorials and Funeral Services”*

Return to School

We acknowledge our responsibility to ‘keep a special watch’ on pupils who have been bereaved, especially on their return to school and for at least a two-year period and at times of transition. We further acknowledge our responsibility to prepare staff and pupils appropriately before a bereaved member of our community returns. Members of our Bereavement Team will advise an appropriate response, depending on the individual’s circumstances.

Managing anticipated death and the terminally ill

We acknowledge that the anticipated death of a member of our community, whilst very difficult to manage, enables us to establish appropriate communication with the family to support those likely to be most affected before and after the death.

We acknowledge our responsibility to support adults, children and young people within our community who have to face the painful reality that a parent or someone close to them is terminally ill.

When supporting children and young people who are experiencing anticipatory grief, we will:

- Confirm the facts concerning the pupil’s sick relative or friend
- Communicate the information as appropriate (in line with school procedures and the family’s wishes)
- Never give false hope to the child or young person
- Discover what the pupil has been told of the illness
- Allow the pupil to talk freely about the sick person in an appropriate setting
- Enable the pupil to talk freely about how he/she is feeling
- Be honest! If we do not know the answer to a question we will say so
- Not inform the pupil about any progression concerning the illness unless the family have given permission and requested us to do so

The place of death and bereavement within the curriculum

We acknowledge the importance of remembering anniversaries of death. During November or December each year we will hold a special assembly/liturgy/act of remembrance as appropriate, to celebrate the life of those members of our community who have died.

We will ensure we have approval from the family of the deceased to record the deceased name in our school memorial book / memorial garden / memory tree. We also acknowledge our

responsibility to explore issues surrounding death and bereavement within the curriculum. This will take place within area of the curriculum in Years

Long term support for those who grieve

We will offer pupils access to a range of age related peer support programmes available through our trained staff provided by Rainbows Bereavement Support GB.

Support for staff who support bereaved pupils and colleagues

We will ensure that all staff are familiar with this policy and these procedures for responding to bereavement and will offer training as part of our staff induction programme. Whenever necessary we will request additional support from colleagues or from external support agencies.

This sample policy and procedures is taken from “When Somebody Dies” Rainbows Bereavement Support GB www.rainbowsgb.org