



LOSS & BEREAVEMENT POLICY

"Tears shed for another person are not a sign of weakness. They are the sign of a pure heart."

Jose N. Harris

*“Grief is the price we pay for love.”
Queen Elizabeth II*

Many children and young people will experience bereavement, through the loss of a parent, sibling, grandparent or friend. Children can also face the loss of a loved animal or pet which can be as significant for them as losing a relative or friend.

The term ‘bereavement’ refers to the process of grieving and mourning and is associated with a deep sense of loss and sadness. It is a natural process; however, its effects can be overwhelming. At any one time, 70% of primary schools have a recently bereaved child on their roll.

For the majority of children or young people whose life has been turned upside down the routines of school life can give a sense of normality. Everything else may have fallen apart but school and the people within it are still there, offering a sense of security and continuity.

Relief from Grief

For children and young people, school can give relief from an emotionally charged atmosphere at home. They may feel overwhelmed by a grieving family. There may be a constant stream of visitors expressing their own grief. Children and young people can find this difficult to deal with.

An Outlet for Grief

When a parent or sibling has died, children and young people can try to spare their surviving parent by hiding their own grief and appearing to be OK. School is often seen as somewhere safe to express this grief.

A Listening Ear

Family members struggling to deal with their own grief can overlook children. For a child who wishes to, school staff can provide an opportunity to talk about what has happened with a familiar and trusted adult in relative peace and calm.

The Opportunity to be a Child

Even when deeply sad, children still need to be children. School offers the chance to play, laugh, sing and generally just be a child without feeling guilty.

General Support

Systems should be in place to keep in contact with home. Discuss concerns but also successes. Grieving children and young people can display altered behaviours in different situations. Good communication with home will help school be aware of this and provide a more realistic picture of how the child is coping.

How children understand death at different ages

Preschool-age children (2-5 years old)

At this stage of development children believe that death is reversible. They may also be convinced that it was something that they said or did which caused the person to die. Abstract concepts are not easily grasped, so it is important that the child is spoken to in very concrete terms.

Key points at this age:

- Are curious about death and believe death is temporary or reversible.
- May see death as something like sleeping—the person is dead but only in a limited way and may continue to breathe or eat after death.
- Are characterized by ‘magical thinking’ and understand the world as a mix of reality and fantasy.
- Are naturally egocentric and see themselves as the cause of events around them.
- Often feel guilty and believe that they are responsible for the death of a loved one, perhaps because they were ‘bad’ or wished the person would ‘go away’.
- May think that they can make the deceased come back if they are good enough.
- Will worry about who will take care of them and about being abandoned.
- Are still greatly affected by the sadness of surviving family members.
- Cannot put their feelings into words and instead react to loss through behaviours such as irritability, aggression, physical symptoms, difficulty sleeping, or regression (such as bed-wetting & thumb sucking).

Primary school-age children (6 to 11 years)

Children begin to develop the understanding that death is irreversible and something that happens eventually to all living things. Death may be regarded as something that is a bit ‘spooky’, and they may display what seems to be an unhealthy curiosity in the more morbid aspects of the death. Children at this age may complain of headaches, a sore tummy or other ailments. These are referred to as ‘somatic’ complaints and are generally physical manifestations of emotional pain. Behaviour may change, but it is important to encourage children at this age to express their feelings and understand that what they are feeling is perfectly natural.

Key points at this age:

- Understand that death is final, but see it as something that happens only to other people.
- May think of death as a person or a spirit, like a ghost, angel, or a skeleton.
- Understand that death is universal, unavoidable, and will happen to them (by age 10).
- Are often interested in the specific details of death and what happens to the body after death.

- May experience a range of emotions including guilt, anger, shame, anxiety, sadness, and worry about their own death.
- Continue to have difficulty expressing their feelings and may react through behaviours such as school phobia, poor performance in school, aggression, physical symptoms, withdrawal from friends, and regression.
- Still worry about who will take care of them and will likely experience insecurity, clinginess, and fear of abandonment.
- May still worry that they are to blame for the death. Supporting a bereaved child with Additional Support Needs

Children and young people with Additional Support Needs are sometimes assumed to need protection from death and dying more than most or not have the capacity to understand. It can be easy to underestimate their ability to cope with difficult situations. The challenge is finding creative ways to communicate when words are sometimes not appropriate. If using words, use the real ones, for example dead and dying, not euphemisms.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Head Teacher has overall responsibility for the policy and its implementation; for liaison with the Governing Body, parents/carers, and appropriate outside agencies. In the event that this person is absent then another named person will take responsibility.

The designated person within school is Mrs Jane Frankish.

Responsibilities are:

- Policy development and review.
- Implementing the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities.
- Co-ordinating the planned action to manage school-related incidents in and beyond the school; decide who will be responsible for communicating with the family directly involved, decide who gives news to the school community and if necessary who will communicate with the press.
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies.
- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff.

Related Policies:

Other policies which relate to the implementation of this policy are:

- SEN Policy
- Confidentiality Policy
- Safeguarding Policy

These policies are kept in the School Office and are on the School Website.

Curriculum

Children and young people explore the concept of loss, bereavement and grief as part of the PSHE curriculum. In our school this is taught as part of the 'Relationships' theme using the SEAL materials. It is also addressed through cross curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles, as well as through art, literacy and SMSC.

Assemblies also be used to address aspects of death e.g. Remembrance Day or commemorative occasions.

Any questions relating to loss or death will be answered in a sensitive and age-appropriate yet honest and factual way. Children are given the opportunities to learn about and discuss cultural and religious issues around death as well as being encouraged to express their own responses and feelings.

Teaching methods adopted in the classroom include:

- Giving clear, truthful and accurate information, not trying to soften the blow with ambiguous language which does not tell the truth.
- Practising the collaborative social skills necessary to help cope with the feelings of loss.
- Giving relevant and appropriate advice and support.

Transition

- It is vitally important to ensure that if a child has experienced bereavement that this information is passed on to the relevant persons when they move on to a new class or school.

Support for Staff

Supporting bereaved pupils will be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions. See list of outside agencies, including professionals from Children and Young People's Services that may offer help, both short and long term.

Confidentiality

Although it is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure, pupils will be made aware that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. This will help in retaining the trust of pupils and parents/carers and will ensure that the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. Sensitive information is only disclosed internally or externally with careful attention to the rights and needs of individuals.

Referral Process

CHILDREN SHOULD BE REFERRED FOR SUPPORT USING THE SCHOOLS INCLUSION REFERRAL FORM.

Breaking news to staff, pupils and families

This is usually done when a pupil or staff member has died. Obtaining factual information should be made a priority. Think through how this might be done, remembering that contact with those directly involved may be difficult. It is vitally important not to make assumptions or repeat what has been heard through rumour. This will only add to distress. It is essential that all staff are informed straight away, ideally before pupils.

- Identify ways of doing this sensitively. Don't forget part-time staff. See suggested list of people/agencies to contact.
- Decisions need to be made about where pupils will be told if this is necessary. Identify the most vulnerable pupils and what support they might need.
- Pupils should be told as soon as possible. This is best done in familiar groups by someone they know. A large school assembly is usually not ideal. Staff may well need guidance on words to use and the approach to take. Have something pre-prepared.

Inclusion and Equality

We recognise that there is a range of cultural and religious customs and procedures concerning death and that there may be different expectations of the bereaved child and family. Some of these may affect matters of school organisation.

We try to present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. Children will be made aware that there are a range of different responses to bereavement and that we need to value and respect each one of these. Reference documents used in the drafting of this policy.

Useful Websites:

http://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/160/deaths/254/support_available_from_bereavement_services

http://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/160/deaths/283/registering_a_death/9

http://www.coventry.gov.uk/directory/65/community_activities_directory/category/368

<http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk/>

<http://www.achildofmine.org.uk/>

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/>

<http://www.winstonswish.org.uk>

<http://www.childbereavement.org.uk>

Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a pupil. **Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the child's parents. The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the parents and school.**



Dear Parents/Carers

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the death of _____, a pupil in _____. As you may be aware, many children who have _____ can get better but sadly _____ had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday.) He/She was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try to answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we would be more than happy to help you.

We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating life.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher

Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a member of staff.



Dear Parents/Carers

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the tragic death of _____ who has been a teacher at this school for a number of years.

Our thoughts are with family at this time and in an effort to try to respond to his/her death in a positive way, all the children have been informed.

When someone dies it is normal for family and friends to experience many different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion, and children are likely to ask questions about the death that need to be answered honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.

The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school but if there is anything else you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we will be more than happy to help you.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher