



Bereavement and Loss Policy

Adopted by Curriculum, Standards and Wellbeing Committee 14th March 2018.
Reviewed: Spring Term 2024 Curriculum and Standards Committee

Introduction and Philosophy

Death is difficult to come to terms with for any community or family, we have a responsibility to support each other and our pupils when faced with this inevitable situation.

In order to ensure sensitive handling of a death in a school community it is important that the staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities for which areas.

A death in a school usually affects all staff. By keeping yourself strong and fit you are better fit to support others. However, it is important that someone can support you. Use a partner, friend or colleague to talk about your feelings and reactions. Don't take on too much; you can't carry a child's grief for them but you can support the child to express their grief. Contact other professionals if necessary.

Good Practice

We can make a significant contribution by:

- If a pupil, member of staff or a family member has died it needs to be **acknowledged** in an appropriate manner. Such as a special assembly or send flowers depending upon the circumstances. All of these arrangements should be made taking into consideration the religious and cultural beliefs of the family.
- **Monitoring** pupils who have experienced a major loss throughout their school life.
- Feeling **confident** in your ability to understand and take appropriate actions.
- Providing **reassurance** eg young person is not to blame.
- Acting as a **role model**. Adolescents need to know from adults that their feelings are normal and appropriate, that sadness and tears are **ok**, but so is laughter and enjoyment.
- Creating **opportunities to remember**, share happy and sad memories.
- Recognising that **anniversaries** are often difficult times and will continue to be so, e.g. birthdays (their own as well), Christmas, holidays, anniversary of death.
- Understanding **re-emergence** of grief.
- Acknowledging the need to keep home and school **separate in some circumstances**
- Remembering that children and young people **unable** to grieve at the time of death, need to do so later.
- Using the **curriculum and PSHE** to explore issues of loss and death in a carefully planned and supportive way. Talking is not the only means children use to express their feelings: drama, art, music, writing poetry and letters are other ways that feelings can be expressed privately or shared.
- Ensuring **School Records** contain information about important life events; ensuring that this information is known to all staff including supply, temporary and new teachers, as well as being passed to new schools.
- Maintaining **consistency**. The school provides **stability and security** at the time of major change. Life needs to go on. There is a need for ongoing involvement and inclusion in daily activities.
- Creating appropriate **opportunities to talk** about experiences and feelings, if they wish- young people can hold their grief silently within themselves because there is a wall of silence.
- **Listening** – Fears and anxieties need to be addressed.



- **Respecting** the wish to talk or need for **privacy**. It may be easier to talk to a member of staff who is not responsible for them and who does not represent an authority figure.
- A child should not be singled out for special privileges but it is important to offer the pupil the opportunity of a quiet corner where they can have **privacy** should they feel overwhelmed.
- **Accepting** whatever feelings is being expressed. Don't be put off by apparent **indifference**. Reassuring them that what they are feeling is **normal**.
- Providing **information**. This enables the adolescent to understand and normalise their feelings as well as gain some control in their lives.
- **Anticipating** behaviour problems. Acknowledge and discuss the feelings, enforce normal boundaries and suggest alternate coping strategies and safe ways of expressing strong feelings.
- **Providing activities such as the following** - Emojis can be used to express feelings. Look inside binoculars (create using toilet rolls with child). Look inside yourself and discuss what feelings you have. Guided journaling – Provide children with the following I am ... I feel ... I wish ... Journal does not have to be shared.
- **Pick me up prompts** – Plan ahead. During a period of calm talking about what helps - breathing exercises, talking to a specific adult. Make visual card prompts and use when the period of calm is over. Pick me up prompts to be shared with adults. Revisit and check it is still appropriate.
- **Generate joy** – escape from painful feelings. It's ok to be happy.
- **Cathartic crying** – feelings need to be heard. Permission to cry must be given. Create an emotional and physical safe space at school. Music, art, film and drama may help for child to let go of big feelings.
- **Capture worries** – Naming and Taming worries helps children to make their feelings more concrete. Child to write or draw their worries, give them to an adult or talk about them together. Butterfly worries – write worries on butterflies and let them fly away. Older children to write lists and then rank them.
- **What was left unsaid** – letter, picture or video. The child may know how the person who died may have responded to the letter, picture or video.
- **Keep and make memories** – make a memory jar or box – include pictures and belongings. Memory box is a living thing – memories of when the person was alive and then add to it – new memories.

Roles and Responsibilities

No one should ever feel that they have sole responsibility. There is always someone who can listen to worries and help.

Liaison with family	Head Teacher, Deputy Head Teacher or Class Teacher depending on who is most appropriate
Bereavement Training for staff	Head Teacher
Information for staff	Head Teacher
Main contact for media/ police	Head Teacher
Decision making on attendance at funeral	Head Teacher
Identification of pupils affected	All staff
Provision of support for the pupil/ pupils concerned, short term and long term	Head Teacher, Deputy Head, class teachers
Long term support – moving to Secondary School	Head Teacher
Briefing of a bereaved pupil on return to school	Deputy Head, Head Teacher



Monitoring the pupils well being	All staff
School Records	Office staff
Informing Temporary/ Supply Staff	Office staff
In the case of the death of a pupil, responsibility for the removal of exercise books, practical work etc., perhaps passing on to family.	Head Teacher
Dealing with the 'empty chair'	Head Teacher/ Class Teacher

Name to Tame those emotions. -

- Grief is a **normal** emotional response to loss
- Each loss is **unique**
- There is **no right or wrong** way to grieve
- Grief is **ongoing**
- **Fear** accompanies grief
- Grief comes in **waves**
- It is very **hard work**, physically and emotionally
- There can be many **different** reactions to death
- Children and young people are as **deeply** affected by bereavement and loss as adults
- We cannot know what the child or young person is feeling unless we ask them
- Small losses can **trigger** memories of bigger losses from the past, evoking a corresponding **intensity** of emotion.

Tasks of Grief

To **accept** the reality- children and young people need the facts to accomplish this.

To **experience** the pain- the adult's natural response is to try and protect

To **adapt** to the loss- further change and loss can impede the progress to **integrate** the loss into the present

Common responses and feelings to loss and ways children and young people might express them

SHOCK

Shock may be accomplished by disbelief, dismay and protest, by withdrawal, numbness, or carrying on as if nothing had happened. For a **young person**, the numbness and inability to feel which often comes from shock can be very scary and confusing. The difficulty of not being able to take in what has happened, and the apparent failure to function rationally is similarly upsetting. It engenders feelings of helplessness associated with being a child, rather than of coping, which the teenager expects in the adult role they are preparing to take on. The feeling of noting tends to be followed by very strong feelings.

DENIAL

A **child** may continue to expect/ask when dead persons will return, not show signs of grief. A **child or a young person** may become hyperactive- a coping mechanism to avoid thinking about what has happened and defence against becoming overwhelmed. A **young**



	person may become switched off, unable to discuss what has happened.
SEARCHING	A preoccupation with thoughts of a dead person, vivid memories and wanting to be in places associated with them are common to all ages. Restlessness and aimlessness. Young people may wish to be on their own.
DISPEAR	Intense sadness, rejection of others, pessimism about the future, maybe accompanied by school refusal. Young people may feel that nothing is worth doing because life is too precarious.
ANGER	Common response for all age groups: angry outbursts, hitting out, getting into fights, aggressive behaviour, acting out, difficult at home with one parent/ surviving parent.
ANXIETY	Anxieties about self and other, fears and frightening thoughts, feelings of guilt and blame, and in younger children separation anxiety. Young people have the intellectual capacity to understand the consequences of events, and their anxiety may focus on practical and financial worries.

Children's understanding of loss and concept of death

Children and young people's understanding of death, and their response to it will reflect their age, their development level and previous experience of loss.

0-2 year olds

Primary concern is separation. No concept of death. Aware of feelings, such as sadness in others. Responses- unsettled, seeking behaviour, continued crying, eating and sleeping problems.

2-5 year olds

Hazy notion of death but some capacity to think. Many will not have grasped the concept that death is permanent and irreversible. Feelings are expressed physically in behaviour and play. Easily confused and need repeated explanations. Responses- crying, insecure, bedwetting.

5-9 year olds

Generally able to understand the concept of permanency of death, loss of function. Magical thinking, feelings of guilt and blame. Take cues from adults around them. Curious about death and likely to wish to be involved in mourning rituals. Behaviour responses, fears, fantasy, nightmares, sleeping difficulties, regression, bedwetting, loss of appetite (and opposite). Headaches and stomach aches.

9-12 year olds

Death absorbed as a part of life, often taken in a casual way. Increasing cognitive ability gives recognition of finality, universality and inevitability of death. Awareness of own mortality. Fears. Tendency to carry on as normal and put grieving on hold. Responses- may need to act out or withdraw. Psychosomatic symptoms such as stomach pains, headaches, limp pain etc.

12 years to adolescence

Greater capacity for abstract thinking prompts a revision of previous concepts and experiences in the light of their increased understanding. Able to grieve more as an adult but also struggling with rapid physical and emotional development task of becoming independent. Increased need for dependency is in conflict with development task of becoming independent. Pressures to take on adult roles prematurely. Intense emotions, mood swings and depression. Fears about loss of control of emotions. May have suicidal thoughts. Question meaning of life. Can lead to exploration of issues of life after death, spiritualism and the occult. Magical thinking easily reactivated. Difference can lead to isolation from peers. Affected by financial changes. Responses: behaviour problems, school problems, feeling of shame, loss of self-esteem and confidence, becoming more sexually active.

New levels of understanding trigger a revisiting and reassessment of previous losses. Grief is an ongoing process.



Some factors affecting grief

Nature of relationship	Closer the relationship, greater the loss
Quality of relationship	A difficult relationship is likely to be more difficult to deal with
Developmental and chronological age	
History and experience of previous losses	
Whether the death was anticipated, sudden or even violent and whether it was witnessed	
Knowledge/ understanding of what happened	Misinformation/ lack of truth
Family Support	

Characteristics of grief in young children

Young children can only grieve for **short periods** at a time. They are able to go off and play, laugh and/or forget for periods of time. The periods of intense grief are therefore shorter but grieving period may last **longer**. They may therefore appear not to be grieving because, for some, or much of the time, they carry on as before.

Adults have greater experience, power and control and are more **autonomous**. Conversely children lack experience and are dependent on the adults around them.

The process of grieving is **similar** to adults but their distress is expressed in their **behaviour**. Behaviour can **mask** how children and young people are feeling.

Children **protect** adults by not showing their feelings. They are able to put their grieving on hold.

Children aged 3 to 5, and adolescents are **vulnerable age groups** for managing bereavement and loss.

Problems can come **months or years** after the death of a loved one.

Secondary loss and new roles

Changes in family roles

Change in position in family e.g. death of sibling

Changes in parent- emotional state and behaviour

Loss of family income, status

House moves, loss of friends, neighbourhood, school, teacher, shared personal history, people who knew deceased person

Family breakdown. New partner. Step families

Loss of future

Ongoing losses

Loss of friendships

Loss of community

Loss of social experiences

Learning disability and special needs

Factors to take into account:

People can grieve even if they cannot communicate.

Needs are the same: information, inclusion, involvement, expressing feelings etc.

It may take longer for someone with learning disabilities to understand death and adapt to loss because their disability may have limited their life experiences.

Developmental age is significant. However, increasing age may develop maturity through experience, so that the gap between cognitive development and chronological age may lessen as they grow up.



May understand some aspects/ concepts of death but not others.

Establish a level of understanding, and then explore those areas where there is confusion, one issue at a time with simple explanations.

Move at the pace of the child.

Families of children with learning disability can marry losses, every day of their life, and may already have difficulty in adapting to, and accepting these pre-existing losses.

Remember staff have needs too. Working with families who face multiple losses by virtue of having a child with a learning disability is emotionally demanding and stressful.

Common problems in school

Poor concentration

Difficulties in memorising information

A slower learning pace

Loss of initiative

Decline in academic performance, also over achievement

Changes in energy levels- lethargic, overactive

Peer problems

Social isolation

School refusal

Vulnerability to unkindness and bully peers

Indicators of difficulty

In general, it is the **severity, persistence,** and **duration** of the system, and the **degree** of **impairments** to normal functioning which needs to be considered, since many of the difficulties indicated below are common to adolescence:

Symptoms which **persist** are **delayed,** usually **intense** or **disturbed.** The **absence** of response to a death.

Marked and prolonged **changes** in behaviour

Prolonged **disturbance** in sleep/ eating patterns

Problems with **peer** relationships- failing to re-establish previous friendships, difficulty in making new relationships, or withdrawing from them

Suicidal thoughts

Risk taking and self-harm

School refusal

Major **depression**

Prolonged inability to access **learning** and move on

All these issues will apply as much to family breakdown and separation, as loss through bereavement, and may be even more complicated to cope with.



Do's and Don'ts

Do

- Do** take your lead from the bereaved young person
- Do** consult them about their wishes even if not in school
- Do** maintain class contact with the absent/ sick/ bereaved student
- Do** be honest, even if it is only to say that you do not know
- Do** be patient with the inevitable difficulties
- Do** be on the lookout for teasing or bullying
- Do** be sensitive to the beliefs and customs of the bereaved
- Do** use words like 'death' and 'died'
- Do** say it simply – that the person is dead.

Don't

- Don't** use euphemisms like 'passed away', 'gone to sleep'.
- Don't** use phrases like 'Kicked the bucket'
- Don't** say things like 'you should be over it now', 'you've got to be the adult' etc.
- Don't** be afraid to show your own feelings

