



Bereavement Care Policy

RATIONALE:

Many of the children in our care are likely to encounter the death of a pet, grandparent, other relative or family friend during their time at school. For a few the loss will be more immediate and traumatic, involving the loss of a parent, sibling or personal friend.

PURPOSES:

1. To foster a caring attitude to those suffering a bereavement
2. To encourage a consistent, yet flexible approach to the situation.
3. To inform all those involved in the school ***community in consultation with the child and family concerned***

GUIDELINES

These guidelines are particularly relevant and appropriate in cases where the loss concerned is of a close relative or friend but can, and should be adapted according to individual circumstances.

1. If child absent, then discussion can take place first between home and school as to how the family with the child affected would like the school community to be told (including the class involved) **ALWAYS AGREE WITH CHILD & FAMILY WHAT WILL / WILL NOT BE DONE**
2. Class teacher may ring home to say how sorry they are and how they will be working with the child to let other children and adults know about the death and how to react to them
3. On day of return / or next school day if child turns up class teacher given strategy to talk to bereaved pupil at start of school day in private. "I was really sad to hear about the death of your, Becky – it helps to talk."
[If you 'control' / agree date for return, consider:
 - Organising their first day back to be not quite normal
 - Get them to come in at break time, this way they can talk to who they want to rather than be subjected to all kinds of questioning before school
 - Maybe have some of their best friends meet them and chat together in the staff room for a bit – make them feel special.
4. Special friends may be told of death in separate group with class teacher / class teacher and child – **if child agrees**
5. **If child agrees**, class teacher and child talk with class together about what has been happening while away / to inform them of ... death. How to talk with child and allow them space as needed
6. If child involved not in school, you may like to ask them if it is ok if you tell the rest of the class what has happened. If so, get the class to write

letters or cards to them, assuring them of how sorry they are to hear the news, but also how much they are looking forward to them coming back and helping them with the school play, playing football, going to the shops together. This will be a great parcel for you to deliver to the family home, and will make the return to school much easier

7. If class discussion ensues, be honest about your feelings; use appropriate terminology (dead, died, death) not 'lost', passed away ... as these confuse; If you can't answer a question it is OK to say 'I don't know how to answer that, but perhaps we can find someone to help us.' Or 'That's a good question, people often believe lots of different things, what do you think?'; end any discussion on positive note – not all people who are ill, have accidents die & many get better. Prayer to remember name & family
8. Head Teacher visits other classes and informs them of situation. "I've got some really sad news to tell you today that might upset you. There is an illness called cancer. Sometimes people with cancer get better, but other times people die from it. You may know that Father / mother / sister etc. has been ill with cancer for a long time. I have to tell you that sadly Died yesterday."
Or "Sometimes people have accidents at work, at home at school or on the road. People may be hurt or injured in the accident and they may have to go to hospital for treatment. Sadly there are some accidents that cause people to die. I have some really sad news to tell you that might upset you. Yesterday Was in an accident in his car and he was so badly injured that he died."
9. Factual newsletter prepared for all pupils to take home
10. Information for parents on how to talk to their children about death prepared. [Winston's Wish sheet – Appendix A] All pupils in the child's class take this information home. Information for other parents available in school Office
11. Letter of condolence from Head Teacher sent to family
12. Children should be allowed time to grieve and know that tears are often an outward sign of that grief.
13. It should be made known that staff will find the time to listen and talk and will do their best to comfort when necessary. **Ask the child if they want a particular adult supporter** – and provide them with permission to seek them out when they want to
14. Children should be aware that staff will try to help them to come to terms with their feelings
15. A distressed child should be allowed time and access to materials in order that he/she may express their feelings in their own way
16. Within school a resource bank containing reference materials for staff, parents and pupils should be developed and maintained
17. A whole school assembly is probably not appropriate for death of a child's parent / sibling. (Though a prayer to think of the child and family once school community knows would be.)
18. All staff and assistants involved in the care of a bereaved child should be aware of the situation
19. The possible fears, insecurities and emotions of other children, which may arise from the situation, should be recognised and addressed sympathetically
20. Religious, cultural and social backgrounds, as well as parental wishes, should be taken into account when considering appropriate responses. It may well be appropriate to involve other faith communities /

representatives of, if these have a very close connection with the family and the family wishes their involvement.

CONCLUSION

A bereaved child, especially if the death concerned is that of a close relative, parent, sibling or friend, is likely to experience many different emotions. At school we should aim to provide a stable and supportive environment in which he/she is able to gradually come to terms with the loss. It is recognised that this process is lengthy and support is likely to be required long term, this may also require adaptation in the implementation of our Behaviour Policy to meet the needs of the child/children.

Headteacher & SENCO
Date
Reviewed 23/11/22

Ratified by Governors 28/11/22
Next Review 1/11/23

Appendix A

Helping Children Cope with Death

These guidelines are intended to give parents and carers some practical ways of helping their child(ren) cope with a death within the school community.

Talking

- As soon as possible after the death, set time aside to talk to the child and establish their feelings, worries or concerns.
- Use of the correct language - say the words “*dead*”, “*died*” etc. Avoid using phrases such as: “*He’s sleeping*”, or “*God took her away*”, or “*He went away*” etc. Accurate terminology helps the child to understand that the death is permanent.
- Use the given name of the deceased when speaking to your child.

Questions

- Ask questions. “*I wonder how you are feeling?*”, “*What have you heard from your friends?*”, “*What do you think happened?*” etc.
- Ask your child if they have any questions.
- If you cannot answer their questions it is OK to say, “*I don’t know how to answer that, but perhaps we can find someone to help us.*”

- If your child asks you a question, tell them that it is a good question and invite them to think of an answer themselves (e.g. Child: 'Is Mrs Smith in heaven now?' Adult: 'That's a very good question, what do you think?').

Feelings

- Talk about feelings, such as: sad, angry, feeling responsible, scary, tearful, mixed up, depressed, wishing to die too. It is normal for bereaved children and their families to experience a range of feelings.
- Explain your own feelings to the child, especially if you are crying - it may be that the person who died was well known to you or you may be reminded of your own bereavements. Give them permission to cry too. We are their role models and it is good for children to see our sadness and to share our feelings with them. Experiencing the death of a parent or brother or sister is a very sad event.

The funeral and saying goodbye.

- Talk about funerals. Explain what happens there and find out if your child wants to attend. Children regret not being given the opportunity to make their own informed decisions about attending the funeral. Staff at Winston's Wish would be happy to discuss this with you.
- Think about ways children can say "*goodbye*" to the person who has died. This may be an activity that is already going on in school but if your child had a special relationship with the teacher or other member of staff, they may want to say 'goodbye' in their own way.
- Talk to your child about their beliefs about what happens to people after they die. E.g. God, Heaven, Reincarnation, Memories etc.
- Talk about memories, good ones and ones that are not so good. It is important for children to have honest memories of the person that died. It may be that the child has mixed feelings (e.g. perhaps the deceased teacher 'told the child off' when they last met).

The future

- Read a book on death to your child if you can find one in the library. There is a wide selection of fiction and non-fiction that could prove helpful to your child.
- Invite your child to come back to you if he or she has more questions or has heard rumours and that you will help him or her get the correct information.

Things to look out for

- Watch out for 'bad dreams' - are they occurring often? Talk about dreams. They are our way of discharging stress and coming to terms with feelings.
- Sudden death, violent death, death of a young person, is especially hard to understand and disruption of sleep, appetite, daily activities is a normal response to an abnormal or unusual event.
- Watch for behavioural changes in your child. It is normal for a child to experience some changes after a death, but if changes continue or they concern you talk with the teacher.

Appendix B

Supporting Bereaved Children in School

A death within a school can have a significant effect on staff and pupils. The following are some of the Winston's Wish principles that teachers have found particularly useful in supporting bereaved children.

Talk

As soon as possible after the death find time to talk with the children. It may require some flexibility within school for each class to be informed about a death and given time to express their feelings. There should be an agreed 'end' to this session to allow the school to resume some sort of routine.

Terminology

Use the correct word e.g. 'death', 'dead' and avoid euphemisms and phrases such as 'lost', 'sleeping', 'gone away' etc. Many of these imply that the dead teacher chose to go somewhere without their friends and some children might think that it was their fault. The word 'lost' implies that the person might be found. Accurate terminology assists the understanding that death is permanent.

Acknowledge feelings

Explain your own feelings to the child. Death evokes difficult feelings so, avoid saying *"Everything will be all right"*. It doesn't feel 'all right' and the future will be different for the school and everyone involved. If you are moved to tears this will give the child permission to cry. This may be the most challenging but rewarding aspect of supporting a bereaved child.

Physical contact need only be holding a hand or an arm on the shoulder. Being with the child when they are crying, and offering a tissue is support enough.

Comprehension

Consider the age and the ability of the children, and match the appropriate intervention. Children of 10 years or more may be able to talk about the death. Younger children may prefer to draw, model or to have a story read to them. Experience gained from the Winston's Wish programme has found that sitting alongside a child engaged in a practical activity is the most comfortable situation.

Questions

Children may have questions when they learn of the death of a fellow pupil, a teacher or other adult they know. Answer these questions factually. Don't be afraid to say, *"I don't know the answer to your question, but perhaps we can find someone to help us."* Consider consulting professionals such as the school nurse, doctor or Priest/Minister/Vicar to assist with answers. Many children are comfortable with the concept of the dead person's spirit going to Heaven, and that funerals are a way of disposing of the body in addition to saying goodbye.

Memories

Talk about memories, good ones and those not so good, and encourage the children to create a memory display upon which photographs and other pictures or objects can be mounted. The children could make cards to send to the family or write letters and poems to contribute to the display.

Behaviour

Be aware of any change in behaviour. Aggression in the playground may indicate that a child is feeling angry. It is common for bereaved children to experience learning difficulties through lack of concentration or distraction. Tiredness may be the result of a genuine effect of grief. Anxiety or embarrassment may cause children to giggle or display 'silly behaviour'. This indicates that they have taken the death seriously but are unable to cope with their emotions. Such behaviour does not mean that they do not care.

Parents

If possible, consult the parent(s) of the children that are finding the bereavement particularly difficult and establish what they have told their child(ren) about the death. They will learn of your sensitivity and concern if you communicate with them. It could be that the family have had a recent bereavement and the death of the teacher or other staff member has brought back feelings of grief. Parents can also read a book to the child, and this may help the family initiate discussion about the dead person.