



# Bereavement and Loss

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**Review Date:**

May 2025

**Review Frequency:**

Every 5 Years

**Approved By:**

Headteacher

## **Introduction**

We understand that bereavement is faced by members of our school community at different times and that when the loss is of a member of our school community such as a child, family or staff member, it can be particularly difficult. Families and staff need to be supported when they experience family bereavements and other significant losses in the course of their lives whilst they are part of the Moss Lane school community.

This policy will provide guidelines to be followed after a bereavement. The aim is to be supportive to both pupils and adults, and for staff to have greater confidence and be better equipped to cope when bereavement happens.

Every death and the circumstances in which it occurs is different and this policy has been constructed to guide us on how to deal professionally, sensitively and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances. When home circumstances are changed because of a death in the family all around appears 'different'. At Moss Lane we aim to be a place that both children, staff and families can rely on, and gain some much needed support.

As a school we are committed to the emotional health and well-being of pupils, families and staff. We are dedicated to the continual development of a 'healthy school'. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that supports and prepare pupils and the school community for coping with separation or loss of a loved one.

The main aim of this policy is to provide a framework for all staff, both teaching and nonteaching, to give guidance on how to deal sensitively and compassionately in difficult and upsetting circumstances.

If the death is of a child, family or staff member the whole school community will work together to support with the help one another with the aid of outside agencies when and where appropriate.

## **Procedures**

At Moss Lane we work in partnership with families. When children join the school, we find out as much as possible about every child to tailor the academic, social and emotional teaching to their needs. Parents are encouraged to make teachers aware of any previous changes that might have profoundly affected their child (divorce, bereavement, moving, new babies etc). If there has been bereavement, information on what the child was told (in terms of religious beliefs etc.) should be sought, in order that the school does not say anything that could confuse or upset the child or family.

## **Following a Bereavement**

We believe that children and adults alike have the right to: -

- be given space and time to grieve
- be given support from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate – if possible, of their own choice.
- encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement.

## **We recognise that:**

- grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real.
- differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment.
- a death has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/care team of that child and every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far reaching contacts.

## **The Management of Bereavement in School**

A universally accepted procedure outline will, in itself, not enable everyone to feel comfortable in dealing with the practicalities of death and bereavement. Each bereavement is unique and comes with its own specific challenges; however, it is helpful to have a framework on which to build. One of our main concerns must be the immediate family of the deceased and as a school we state our commitment to any such family as may need practical, emotional and ongoing 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.

### **Family Bereavement**

When school is informed of bereavement or loss the following action should be considered:

- The family should be contacted for appropriate support. (See Appendix 1 for addresses and relevant telephone help lines)
- The family should be asked how much and what the child already knows and how they have been involved.
- It should be explained to the family how the school can be involved to support the child and family.
- The importance of working together and liaison will be explained – both parties assessing any changes in behaviour. (Eating and sleeping patterns may change or behaviour in school may deteriorate or the child becomes withdrawn.)
- Involve outside agencies as appropriate e.g. the school nurse, HSLW, Cruse, Psychological Service, Barnardos etc.
- For a member of staff experiencing close family bereavement, absence will be arranged for attendance at a funeral and appropriate time off in line with the Absence Management Policy. Additional time may be given through sick leave as appropriate.

### **Death of a child or member of staff**

The school may be notified in a number of ways. Upon notification of the death of a pupil/staff member.

- Past experience has shown that if death occurs families usually let the school know directly and the person answering the phone will put them through to the most senior member of staff.
- Where death occurs in the holidays or at weekends the family will contact whoever they can – they may have the phone number of a member of staff at home for example.
- If a member of staff takes the call they will immediately contact the most senior member of the school and that person will then assume responsibility for the dissemination of the information.

When the school is informed of the death of a child or member of staff; the following action should be considered:

- Discussion should take place with the family and their wishes taken into account before decisions are taken on how and what to tell the children/adults in school.
- Counselling should be available if necessary e.g. in cases of sudden or violent death (outside agencies should be involved with this e.g. Psychological Service, Areas schools Office).
- Staff and children should be supported throughout the grieving period; anyone displaying signs of stress should be offered appropriate support.

- The class/staff most affected might like to write down their thoughts and feelings; these could then be given to the bereaved family to assist in the planning of the service.
- Have a book of condolence set up by the office.

### **Terminally Ill Pupils/Staff**

- In the event of a child or member of staff becoming terminally ill, their wishes and those of their parents/guardians/next-of-kin should always be respected.
- Should the child/staff member wish to attend school, the head teacher/class teacher may need to inform the class/staff of the people's condition.
- Occasionally, the child/adult may wish to talk to their fellow classmates'/work colleagues about their predicament themselves. Honesty about death and dying may be the best line of approach. Sometimes there is just no other way.

### **Sharing information**

It is important to agree, with the parent, before the school can take on the role of informing concerned parties within, or outside, the school community. There can be no definitive list of people to contact and, therefore, it will be different for each individual. The school should ensure that all people who are close to the individual are told in a sensitive and supportive manner rather than risk them hearing it 'on the grapevine'. The school needs to ensure it does not add to the sorrow by leaving people feeling marginalised. The following people should be considered:

- Current school staff not in school that day
- Previous school staff who worked closely with the child/adult
- Social Work team if applicable
- SEND team
- Medical team – the school nurse for example
- Chair of Governors
- Respite centres if applicable
- Other professionals who work with the child/adult Ed Psych
- Other parents – if children have been informed, the school needs to send a note to parents informing them of the loss, and they may need to support or comfort their children. See Appendix 5.
- Some parents may need to be telephoned if their relationship is closer but who may not have been informed by the family. The process for telling the other pupils will be decided by the Headteacher following consultation with the teaching staff. For example, with different aged pupils there will be different decisions made and the class teacher of the class with the loss will usually be the best person to tell the rest of the children in that class. It is important that staff avoid adding worry – for example, if the child died in hospital we do not want to give children a fear of hospitals. Although the finality of death cannot be diminished, if there are mitigating circumstances that may help - such as that the child was in pain and now is free of pain - this can be used to help alleviate sorrow. Children must be told that, while they may feel sad, they do not have to feel guilty if they go on to have fun and pleasure in their day ahead. They must not feel obliged to assume a burden of grief. Children must be allowed to ask questions at this time or at any point in the following days or weeks. Staff must answer honestly and to the best of their knowledge.

### **The funeral**

- It is essential to sound out the family's wishes. The family may well welcome involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to keep things private.
- The Headteacher and/or the Deputy Headteacher will make arrangements for the school to be represented at the funeral, and identify which staff and pupils may want to attend, together with the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport.
- For some schools it is appropriate to close, for others it is not, consequently difficult decisions will sometimes have to be made concerning attendance.
- Will flowers be sent and/or a collection made? Involve staff and pupils in the decision.
- Cultural and religious implications need consideration.
- If the family wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed. Past experience has shown that this can be helpful in their grieving.
- After the service, staff and pupils should be encouraged to meet and express their thoughts and feelings as such services are important in the grieving process.

### **Return to School (see Appendix 3)**

- For the bereaved child or member of staff, returning to school may be traumatic.
- Where there has been a close family bereavement, in most cases everyone (teaching, support staff, volunteers if appropriate and pupils) should be made aware of the situation before the pupil returns (providing the parents/guardians of the bereaved pupil agree).
- Staff should show appropriate compassion and allow expression to those suffering grief.
- Teachers should try to foster an environment that is compassionate, yet disciplined
- Family life at this traumatic time, can be particularly distressing, routines upset, relationships strained, the future uncertain. For this reason, school routines should be kept as normal as possible in order to provide a respite.
- Staff should be aware of anniversaries as this can spark a revival of feelings of bereavement.
- Staff might keep an eye on those particularly affected by the death of someone close to the.

### **Memory Assemblies**

It may be appropriate to hold a memory assembly for the individual. Staff need to be able to show pupils that it is perfectly normal to feel upset at the loss of a friend and that helpful rituals, prayers, and remembering can be shared in a manageable way together.

### **Talking to the Bereaved**

- Try to be available to listen and support if possible, arrange a one-to-one session with the HSLW/HT as soon as possible after the individual returns to school.
- Be calm and show them that you are listening and understanding by occasionally repeating what they have said and by acknowledging their emotions.
- If people feel like crying they should cry – crying is not a sign of weakness, but often a sign of deep feeling.
- Beware of using platitudes e.g. "I know how you feel", (people may feel offended that you presume how they feel).

### **Do**

- Let them know that you genuinely care
- Make time to be available and listen
- Accept all that they are saying
- Allow them to express their feelings their way
- Let them know their feelings are normal
- Talk honestly and share your feelings

- Be honest
- Have eye contact
- Have appropriate physical contact
- Let them know that it is not their fault
- Be aware of the home situation

### **Don't**

- Stop the adult/child talking
- Tell them how they should or should not feel
- Avoid contact
- Change the subject
- Deny your pain and feelings
- Point out things for which they should be grateful
- Be frightened of sharing your own feelings

### **On-Going Support for staff:**

Following bereavement, it is only to be expected that some members of staff will be emotionally affected and would benefit from the provision of some time for reflection.

The following support may be helpful:

- A specific room could be allocated- e.g. the staff room - for the duration of a lunchtime to enable staff to meet and share their thoughts over a coffee or tea. It should be emphasised that anything shared on such occasions should be held as confidential and not for public airing.
- Access to one to one time with a member of staff who is trained in bereavement support.
- The Educational Psychology team offer counselling support and staff will be reminded about this service.
- Availability of information about accessing bereavement support outside of school, e.g. CRUSE

### **For Pupils:**

Experience in many special schools has shown that most pupils can be supported by the school staff.

- In most cases, each child will have a favoured member of staff to approach.
- The PSHE leader will ensure that we have suitable books and other materials to help children discuss death and come to terms with loss.
- Social Stories may be one way to help pupils to understand loss.
- The Educational Psychology team can offer support to pupils who may need more help.

### **For The Family:**

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support. Send a letter of condolence from the school.
- Give parents and families the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died.
- Send a representative to the funeral.
- Hold a collection /flowers to be sent as appropriate.
- Invite parents/family to any commemorative events held by the school, both at the time and in subsequent years.
- If memorial work has been completed, for example a remembrance wall or book, then this should be returned to the parents at an appropriate time, and pupils informed where it has gone.
- If the families wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed.

Families will be told that they are welcome in the school and will be encouraged to come and visit. Past experience has shown that this can be helpful in their grieving. The first visit to the school is often difficult and will be arranged sensitively in accordance with their wishes. It will then be for the family to decide if they wish to maintain on going links. Each family will be different, with differing needs. Therefore, the school will always be there to act as a source of support and information.

### **Responsibilities**

The designated person within the school who has overall responsibility for support and liaison in event of a death or traumatic loss is the Headteacher. In the event that this person is absent then another Senior Leader will take responsibility.

His/Her responsibilities are:

- Policy development and review, involving pupils, staff, governors, parents/carers and relevant local agencies.
- Implementing the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities.
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies. Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary school.
- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff.

## **Appendix 1**

Useful Websites for dealing with loss and bereavement in the school community:

www.winstonswish.org.uk  
www.childbereavement.org.uk  
www.mind.org.uk  
www.cruse.org.uk  
www.chums.info  
www.childbereavement.org.uk  
www.juliesplace.com  
www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/index.htm  
www.bbc.co.uk/.../bereavement/bereavement\_helpchildren.shtml  
[www.jigsawsoutheast.org.uk/](http://www.jigsawsoutheast.org.uk/)

South West Surrey Cruse If you live in Guildford, Surrey Heath or Waverley and need our help, please call our helpline on: **01483 565660. Our line is open on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday mornings between 9.30am and 12.30pm (Excluding Bank Holidays).**

### **Useful telephone numbers and addresses:**

- Winston's Wish Family Line - 0845 2030405 – national helpline offering guidance, information and support to anyone caring for a bereaved child, including professionals and family members
- Childhood Bereavement Network - 020 7843 6309 – a network of child bereavement services
- Jigsaw South East- 01342 313895

## **Appendix 2**

### **Books dealing with death and loss**

- Supporting a Child who has been Bereaved through Suicide– Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley As Big As It Get
- As Big As It Gets - Supporting a Child when Someone in their Family is Seriously Ill - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley
- The Secret C - Straight Talking about Cancer - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley
- I Miss You - First Look at Death - Pat Thomson
- Lifetimes- Beginnings and endings with lifetimes in between – a beautiful way to explain life and death to children Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen

### **Storybooks**

- Grandpa- John Burningham
- Always and Forever – Alan Durant
- The Huge Bag of Worries – Virginia Ironside
- What on Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies? – Trevor Romain
- Badger’s Parting Gifts- Susan Varley
- Saying Goodbye to Daddy – Judith Vigna
- Waterbugs and Dragonflies – Explaining Death to Young Children
- When Dinosaurs Die – Diel and M Brown
- Fred - Posy Simmons
- Grandad, I’ll always Remember you – De Bode and Broere

### **Appendix 3**

#### **Support and Further Suggestions for Teachers**

Parents and carers often feel that teachers are experts on their children. They may turn to the school for advice and information, especially on matters of bereavement. It is important to remember that the family, friends and the immediate community often best support those suffering from bereavement, as is the case with other stressful life events. Teachers need not be experts on the subject but they do need to use sensitivity and their skills in understanding children's development and emotional needs.

The following are some points that may be helpful to bear in mind when talking to parents and carers:

- A death will disrupt the family for many months; in fact the family will never be the same again. Family members are grieving, relationships alter, and members may take on new roles. Sometimes there is a change of carer, house or school, all of which add to the disruption and distress experienced by the child. To support the child it is helpful to minimise, if possible, changes and disruptions in their normal daily routine and life in school.
- Bereaved family members may emotionally and physically withdraw from the child, to protect themselves from more distress. Some adults will deny the bereaved child is grieving, as it will be too distressing for them to acknowledge the child's pain. This may cause distress and confusion, causing grief reactions of anger, withdrawal or psychosomatic behaviours such as headaches, stomach-ache or sickness.
- The bereaved child may regress in behaviour, becoming clingy, difficult or withdrawn. His/her schoolwork may suffer. These changes will be partly due to grief but also to the disruption and changes within the family, causing the child to feel confused and unsafe.
- The child may feel resentment, jealousy or guilt towards the dead person or child. The expression of this verbally can cause the remaining family members distress and shock. Parents and carers need to know this is normal and will decrease as the child and the family become more stable and settled.
- Parents and carers need to be informed of the benefits that a child gains in being involved in the ceremonies and rituals that follow death. An explanation as to how mourning practices help children to express their feelings and come to terms with and accept the reality of their loss can be very beneficial.
- Teachers should remember that parents and carers will often use them as role models, counsellors or extended family; looking to them for support for themselves as well as finding appropriate ways of supporting and talking with their children.
- Teachers may require their own support structures. Supporting bereaved families, whilst rewarding, can also be emotionally draining

**Appendix 4****Developmental Stages relating to an understanding of death**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Understanding of Death</b>	<b>Child's Needs</b>	<b>Phrases/Techniques</b>
<b>Infancy Birth – two years</b>	Death as separation and /or abandonment. Careful listening and watching Death is when the body stops working.	Brief simple, honest explanations with familiar examples. Reassurance of safety, parental support and attention.	"We'll be here to take care of you.
<b>Pre- school 2 – 6 Years Uses magical and intuitive thinking</b>	Death as sleep, temporary, reversible, impersonal. Or as a person who comes to get you, can be catching. Egocentric thinking causes feelings of responsibility or guilt.	Clarification and expanded answers. Permission to attend funeral with assistance Acceptance of feelings without qualification, corrections or judgement.	Avoid euphemisms such as sleep, lost. Check and see if explanations are understood. Expect repeat questions. Acknowledge everyone's feelings of sadness and loss. Anticipate and counteract guilt. Look out for unusual or subtle expressions of grief.
<b>School Years 6- 11 years Uses concrete thinking, begins rational thinking</b>	Death is final, perhaps not inevitable. Occurs to others. Perhaps retaliatory.	Reassurance that grief is OK, to feel bad is normal. Open communication and opportunity to express feelings when ready. Encouragement to attend the funeral.	Acknowledge adult feeling, including anger and guilt. It's OK to cry Accept fluctuating grief.

## **Appendix 5**

### **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

Address

Date

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the death of, a pupil in. (died from an illness called cancer. As you may be aware, many children who have cancer 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

## **Appendix 6**

### **Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a member of staff**

Address

Date

Dear Parents

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

## **Appendix 7**

### **Supporting pupils**

The following guidelines are taken from CRUSE bereavement care website. They are general principles, and need to be thought about whatever the needs of the child are. Adapt and aid communication as appropriate.

#### **Loss from a child's perspective**

For many children and young people the death of a parent, caregiver, sibling or grandparent is an experience they are faced with early in life. It is sometimes incorrectly assumed that a child or young person who is bereaved by the death of someone close at a young age will not be greatly affected as they are too young to understand the full implications of death. This is untrue and unhelpful. Even babies are able to experience loss. A baby cannot cognitively process the implications of the bereavement but that does not mean that they do not feel the loss.

#### **Accepting the child's experience**

Children and young people need to be given the opportunity to grieve as any adult would. Trying to ignore or avert the child's grief is not protective, in fact it can prove to be extremely damaging as the child enters adulthood. Children and young people regardless of their age need to be encouraged to talk about how they are feeling and supported to understand their emotions.

It is also important to remember that children and young people grieve in different ways. Grief is unique and therefore it is not wise to assume that all children and young people will experience the same emotions, enact the same behaviour or respond similarly to other grieving children and young people. A child or young person's grief differs from that of an adult's grief because it alters as they develop.

#### **Time to grieve**

Children and young people often revisit the death and review their emotions and feelings about their bereavement as they move through their stages of development. Children and young people do not have the emotional capacity to focus on their grief for long periods of time and therefore it is not uncommon for grieving children and young people to become distracted by play. This is a protective mechanism which allows the child or young person to be temporarily diverted from the bereavement.

Bereaved children and young people need time to grieve and in order for them to address the bereavement they need to be given the facts regarding the death in language appropriate to their age or level of comprehension. Avoid using metaphors for death such as, "Daddy has gone to sleep", this will make the child or young person believe that Daddy will come back to them and may constantly ask when he is going to wake up. Similarly, the child or young person might encounter problems with bedtime and not wanting to sleep for fear of not waking up.

#### **Talking to children**

It is understandable that many caregivers are reluctant to talk to the child or young person about the death as they do not want to cause distress or fear. Children and young people who are bereaved need to know that their loved one has died, how they died and where they are now. Failure to be honest with the grieving child or young person means that their grief is not being acknowledged and this can cause problems later on.

If the bereaved child or young person wants to ask questions about death and what dying means, answer them truthfully and if you do not know the answer to a specific question don't be tempted to make the answer up. Assure the child or young person that although you do not know the answer to their question you will find out for them

Key points to remember

- Babies can experience feelings of loss
- Be honest with the bereaved child or young person

- Avoid using metaphors for death
- Every child and young person's grief is unique
- Encourage the child or young person to talk about the death and how they feel
- Children and young people may 'revisit' the death and review their feelings about the bereavement as they develop
- Use language that is appropriate to the child or young person's age and level of comprehension.

<http://www.cruse.org.uk/Children/loss-from-childs-perspective>