



LOCATION : SCHOOL HANDBOOK, SECTION 2, DOCUMENT 15

BEREAVEMENT POLICY

Explanations of death are a part of the curriculum (Science, PSHCE, Religious Education and SMSC). However, these opportunities do not provide support or advice in 'bereavement care'. This policy offers an insight into this subject and will help staff to feel more confident in their knowledge of death in order to be able to appropriately support pupils. (Refer also to Leave of Absence Management Policy (No 8) in the Staff Handbook for staff entitlement). The school has also developed an insight into what it means to be a 'Bereavement prepared school' (See appendix 3), and the effects of repeated bereavements on school staff (See appendix 4).

The Understanding of Death

This developmental process will begin once a pupil has an awareness of 'others' (i.e. not just a concept of self) and usually progresses throughout childhood but also into adulthood for those who are developmentally delayed. However, the process is likely to accelerate where a pupils has immediate and personal experience of bereavement.

As pupils develop, their concept of death changes. Pupils who are developmentally young (e.g. PMLD) may not understand death but may well have the concept of absence or 'loss'. A familiar adult who suddenly disappears can cause great distress through 'separation anxiety'.



Pupils then begin to perceive death as something that happens to objects e.g. plants and pets. The concept is similar to sleep but is perceived as temporary. (At this stage pupils may only ask one question at a time and should be given simple answers to their questions).



Pupils then begin to develop the concept that death is permanent (the deceased can no longer eat, sleep, cry etc). At this stage pupils may show fear and will need reassurance. From now on, pupils are likely to raise numerous questions and can be significantly affected by death (changes in behaviour). Patience and understanding are essential.

Grief (deep or violent sorrow)

Emotional effects of bereavement are as profound for pupils as they are for adults. Pupils, however, do not have control of their circumstances, which can cause difficulty in coping with grief. Reactions to grief will vary from one pupil to the next but are likely to involve one or more of the following:

- Shock - withdrawal, distraught
- Denial
- Searching
- Despair
- Anger
- Anxiety - depression
- Guilt

These can be triggered by the death of a significant adult (the main carer), which can disturb the pattern of life, or by the death of a sibling that can have the added complexity of making the pupil aware of his or her own mortality. The loss of a schoolmate, similarly, may trigger these reactions or bring back previous painful events in a person's life.

Forms of Grief

The myth still exists that coping with grief means not crying and 'being brave'. This makes things easy for those around the bereaved individual but does not do anything positive for the grieving process. Those whose grief reactions persist into adulthood are likely to have had little support and no opportunity to mourn.

Supporting Bereavement

The following principles can help to prepare pupils for bereavement and to cope with it if it occurs: Bereavement education is as important as bereavement support.

- if a pupils wants to talk, find time to listen again and again (don't be afraid to use the word death)
- expect questions and reply honestly. If you don't know then say 'I don't know' Give pupils time
- look for changes in behaviour, treating incidents patiently
- it is permissible for pupils to cry and laugh ; allow them to express emotion
- don't argue with what a pupil says he / she feels and don't assume a lack of reaction means they don't care
- be aware of special occasions at home
- remember who you are (or are not) inviting to parents evening or to whom you address school correspondences
- other pupils can often be a source of support. Encourage peer support as and when appropriate.

The school has an important role to play

Pupils experiencing grief need to be given:

- Time
- Normality
- Relief from Grief
- An outlet for grief
- A listening ear
- Support
- The opportunity to be a child

Breaking the News

Breaking the news of the death of someone significant in a pupil's life is a stressful task for anyone to undertake. The person closest to the pupil will be the best option but it may be necessary for school staff to be involved as the situation demands. Locally, Demelza House Children's Hospice would be able to offer advice / support if deemed necessary.

Breaking the news of the death of a peer or colleague requires sensitivity and planning. At Abbey Court the following arrangements are in place to ensure that everyone can be sensitively informed of the death, supported and allowed the opportunity for talking or reflection where it is needed.

When the school is advised that a child / member of staff has died

- A member of the SMT will assemble staff at the next appropriate opportunity e.g. at briefing/ break / lunchtime/ after school and advise them of information available to date
- Teaching staff will discuss with a member of the SMT the most appropriate way (and where) to advise pupils e.g. during assembly / collective worship / class groups or as individuals (and the most appropriate time for doing this).
- All staff and pupils will be given time and opportunities to discuss their feelings as needed. Pupils will be invited to make contributions.
- Further information will be given to staff as it is forthcoming (e.g. funeral details etc).
- The Headteacher (or their representative) will attend the funeral. (If possible classroom staff will be invited to attend.) Attendance will be in accordance with the families wishes
- A letter of sympathy will be written to the family.
- The Director of Children's Services, Governors and parents of all pupils at Abbey Court will be advised by letter.
- The school will advise all visiting schools personnel / agencies as appropriate.
- Flowers will be sent to the funeral or a remembrance donation will be made (in accordance with the family's wishes).
- Families are always invited to remain in touch with the school and the school seeks to continue to support families.
- Pupils work and record of achievements will be offered to the family.
- Opportunities in school will be given to enable pupils to "ritualise" and remember pupils death (eg. by marking important memory days and/or anniversaries).

Support

Staff

At Abbey Court we work within a supportive staff team. However, additional support may be required by individual staff members from time to time. (Also see staff wellbeing policy)
The following contacts are available to staff.

- Support Line: 01622 605539 This is a free counselling service available to all Medway employees
- The Child Bereavement UK 0800 0288840. This is a professional support line available to education staff. (support@childbereavement.org)

(Child Bereavement UK supports families and educates professionals when a baby or child of any age dies or is dying, or when a child is facing bereavement).

It is important to advise a colleague or senior staff member if you are particularly affected by a death in order that appropriate support can be accessed.

Pupils

Any member of staff who becomes particularly worried or concerned about the behaviour or reactions of any individual pupil should report this to a Senior member of staff as soon as possible so that additional support from, for example the psychology service can be accessed.

**March 2001, 2005, Autumn 2009, 2011, Spring 2014, December 2015; Sept 2017;
Dec 2019 John Bosley**

Appendices

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| Appendix 1 | Guidance for Parents and Carers |
| Appendix 2 | Bereavement Resources (available on both sites) and contacts |
| Appendix 3 | The Bereavement Prepared School |

Supporting your child through Bereavement and Loss

Guidance for Parents and Carers

Introduction

It is a sad fact that many young people will experience the death of a member of the family, a friend or someone close to them.

As parents and carers you may find it particularly difficult to help your child, especially if the death is of someone close to you as well.

We hope to be able to provide a few suggestions to help you understand your child's responses and find ways of helping him or her through the normal stages of grief.

Reactions to Bereavement and Loss

Children of all ages will experience feelings of grief and may be said to mourn, just as adults do. However, your child's understanding of and response to death may vary depending on their age and special needs.

How do Children Grieve?

Grief is a normal response to the death of a loved one. It can last for a short while or continue over a period of months or years. Whereas adult grief tends to be ongoing, a child's grief may appear to come and go. For adults and children grief has several stages. These are:-

- **Shock and belief -** a feeling of numbness, apathy, possibly withdrawal
- **Denial -** refusal to accept a person is dead
- **Growing awareness -** may be accompanied by surges of Intense feeling eg, guilt, anger, depression, sadness, fear, and anxiety
- **Acceptance -** this may not occur until the second year or later following the death

How feelings Affect Behaviour

You may notice some of the following responses. These are not cause for concern, providing they do not go on for too long, or cause extremes of distress:-

- **Increased misbehaviour, aggression and more immature behaviour**
- **Silence and withdrawn behaviour – reluctance to talk**
- **Sleep disturbance including bad dreams, fear of being alone or in the dark**
- **Excessive “clinging” – wanting to sleep with parents or carers**
- **Changes in appetite**
- **Fears for their own safety or that of family and friends**
- **Being easily upset by everyday events**
- **Difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, toileting accidents**
- **Unwillingness to go to school or to go out**



sad



love



goodbye



bury



cremate



dead



death



crying



friend



feelings



ill



photograph



funeral



remember



church



angry



quiet

How to help

You may be grieving for that person too, but the following should help:-

- **Try not to hide your own feelings from your child. It can even be helpful for your child to see you upset, rather than pretending everything is normal. Explain in simple terms that everyone gets upset by death.**
- **Try to allow your child opportunities to talk about feelings and about the person who died. Let them know its OK for them to cry, however old they are.**
- **Be ready to listen – but don't expect your child to be ready to talk. Hugs, sharing activities and giving your child time will provide reassurance.**
- **Acknowledge feelings which may include anger and guilt as well as sorrow. If your child says it's his/her fault that someone died, be prepared to discuss this and resist phrases such as "you'll soon feel better"**
- **Try to answer questions as honestly and accurately as you can in words that your child will understand. If possible, use the words "death" and "died". Phrases such as "passed away" or "gone away" can be confusing.**
- **Maintain routines such as bedtimes, meals or going to normal activities such as Cubs. These all help provide a sense of security.**
- **Expect your child to go to school. Familiar situations and maintaining friendships are important**

Useful Contacts

Child Bereavement UK – 0800 0288840

British Association for counselling – 0870 443 5252

Cruse – Bereavement Care – 0208 940 4818

Macmillan Cancer relief – 0808 808 2020

MIND info line – 0845 766 0163

Childhood Bereavement Network – 0208 843 9309

Resources for Parents and carers

Grief and Behaviour : Understanding children by Ann Couldrick ISBN 007023639

Talking about death by Earl Grollman ISBN 007023639

Questions children may want to ask when someone has died - Marie Curie Cancer care – 01793 582500

Looking after yourself

There are no easy answers – talking about and coping with death are some of the most difficult things we ever have to do. Caring for a bereaved child can be especially distressing – so do remember to take time to talk to your family and friends about your own feelings.

- **Ask that a few friends are told and are guided about how to help**
- **People young and old, often find it difficult to respond to bereaved friends**
- **Attending the funeral or cremation may be important part of the grieving process, especially if the rest of the family are going. You know your child best so do consider whether he or she would be helped by being there. Ask your child about this.**
- **If your child's responses are intense, persist over a long period of time, or prevent your child returning to a normal way of life, then you may need to seek extra help. Your GP will be a source of support.**
- **Be sure to advise the school if you have any worries or concerns.**

Appendix 2

Bereavement Resources (available on the Rede Court Road site located within the PSHCE Resources, and at the Cliffe Road site in the staff library)

Bereavement Books Available at Primary Site

When Something Terrible Happens – Children Can Learn To Cope With Grief – Marge Heegard

When Mum Died – Sheila Hollins & Leister Sireling

Good Grief 2nd edition Book 1 & 2 Exploring Feelings, Loss and Death with Over 11's and Adults -Barbara Ward & associates

The Fall of Freddie the Leaf – A Story of Life for all Ages - Leo Buscaglia Phd

The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back – Margot Sunderland

Positive Behaviour Management – Responding to Pupil Bereavement – Lesley Ratcliffe

Waterbugs and Dragonflies – Explaining Death to Children – Doris Stickney

Grief in Young Children – Atle Dyregrov

Attending to the Fact – Staying with Dying – Hilary Elfick & David Head

Someone Very Important has just Died – Mary Turner

Grief in Children A Handbook for Adults – Atle Dyregrov

John's Book – Jill Fuller

Caring for Bereaved Children – Cruse bereavement care

The Spirit of the Child – Revised ed – David Hay with Rebecca Nye

Childhood Bereavement – Developing the Curr and Pastoral Support – Nina Job & Jill Frances

Grief Bereavement & Change – Penny Casdagli & Francis Gobey

Grief & Bereavement – Understanding Children – Ann Couldrick

X2 Supporting Children with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder – David Kinchin & Erica Brown

Bereaved Children and Teens – Earl. L. Grollman

Charlotte's Web – E.B. White

X3 Bild Understanding Death & Dying – A Guide for Families and Friends – Fiona Cathcart

X3 Bild Understanding Death & Dying – A Guide for Carers and Professionals – Fiona Cathcart

X2 Bild Understanding Death & Dying – feelings – Fiona Cathcart only 1

Someone Very Important Has Just Died by - Mary Turner

Great Answers to Difficult Questions about Death- Linda Goldman

x2 Children Also Grieve - Linda Goldman

Grandad's Ashes - Walter Smith x2

Talking Together About Death – Picture Cards – Joan Cooley and Frankie McGauran

I Miss You – Pat Thomas

Dogger- Sherley Hughes

Let's Talk About Death and Dying- Elizabeth Weintzman

When Mum Died
When Dad Died- Sheila Hollins and Leister Sireling
When Uncle Bob Dies - Sarah whimpers
Seeds of Hope Bereavement and Loss - Caroline joy
Let's Talk About When Your Pet Dies – Marianne Johnston
The Saddest Time – Norma Simon
Fred –Posy Simmons
Death – Janine Amos
Drop Dead – Babette Cole
Badgers Parting Gift – Susan Varley

Contacts

support@childbereavementuk.org

The Association of Children's Hospices
Kings House, 14 Orchard street, Bristol, BSI 5EH Tele : 0117 905 5082

The Acorn Children's Hospice www.acorns.org.uk

<http://gpn.unl.edu/guides/rr/141.pdf>

www.ngs-school.com/bookshop/index.php?action:detail&ASIN=0744598982

<http://www.booktrusted.co.uk/articles/documents.php4?articleid=8>

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/faculty/child/youngchild.htm#Death&Dying>

<http://www.jewish-funerals.org>

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/publications/bbw

Appendix3:

Bereavement Prepared School

The Bereavement – Prepared School

Flexible Routines

By necessity, staff are very proficient at becoming adaptable in order to meet the everyday demands of a school with vulnerable children. The specific needs of individuals mean that there may need to be a diversion from lessons at a moments notice and staff are able to ensure that this doesn't detract from the learning of other pupils.

The "skill" of adaptability is certainly called into being in the event of a bereavement alongside an awareness that there has to be a "air of normality" in order for other pupils to continue to feel safe and secure within their all important day-to-day routines.

Comfortable Caring

All staff at AC recognise and value their roles in carrying out caring functions as part of their support of the children/students, without losing sight of the primacy of the educational function. This enables them to respond comfortably and confidently in the event of bereavement so that the role shift from "caring for" pupil's personal needs to "caring about" their emotional needs is easy to do.

Building Effective Relationships

On a daily basis staff focus their energies on building *effective* 1:1 relationships and trust with pupils who often face very difficult challenges in order to get through the day. This helps them cope with the dramatic changes that take place when there is a bereavement. The shock and distress felt at this time and in the days following the loss of a fellow pupil/friend mean that the attachment to a trusted adult enables pupils to be supported through their grief.

The Management of Pupils' States

Working with those who present very complex needs, including those who do not have conventional communication, means that staff are aware of pupils susceptibility to ever changing emotional states i.e. heightened excitement, frustration, anger, anxiousness etc. Staff are well practiced at managing and responding effectively to pupils in order to bring some equilibrium to emotion and are aware of the need to manage their own emotional states, so that at any given time they can be what students need them to be. This brings about an air of constancy in a very confusing time.

Whilst not losing sight of their own need to grieve, staff allow pupils to show emotions following a bereavement and are able to offer support knowing that they have the skills needed to effectively manage a potentially very difficult situation.

Mutual Support

It is recognised throughout the school that both pupils and staff will share a need to express their grief in their own way and it is acknowledged that this will not be a linear process. However, because of the high levels of effective day-to-day teamwork, this is managed in a very positive way.

Staff work together daily in offering support of pupils throughout their time at school, so that when a bereavement occurs, those who are “good” at expressing and managing grief are able and ready to help staff members and pupils who may need more support. It is also recognised that the roles of “supporter” and “supported” may be different according to circumstance and individual need and that this will not be a linear process. Grief cannot be “done” in a once and for all way and as with the way pupils at AC learn, pupils are given the time they need to move forward in this process.

Coping with Change & Loss

Clearly, following a bereavement there will be a significant sense of change and loss and the nature of ACS means that this theme is an important part of its educational function. Pupils and staff are frequently faced with the potential for there to be many changes within themselves or others. These may include children with life-limiting conditions, degenerative illness, behavioural issues etc. Therefore it is a pragmatic basis upon which staff habitually operate and is included in its core curriculum

From Reception to F.E., pupils are taught that change happens and they are given the strategies to deal with those that occur on a day-to-day basis. This undoubtedly helps lessen the impact that the loss of a classmate has on some pupils as they can bring into play their own strategies for coping with change.

Staff Perception of Pupils

Perceptions that staff have of pupils reveal a consistently positive view at AC and are resolutely not morbid or fatalistic about children’s futures. Staff do not view or treat pupils as “broken” or “easily broken” and do not overprotect them. There is a clear sense of a “can do” culture within the whole school community including those pupils with life – limiting conditions. Staff are able to focus on the realistic potential of each child and purposefully challenge everyone to achieve.

This strong culture of celebration within AC enables staff to find countless opportunities to be celebratory about individual successes.

Following a bereavement the school are therefore able to emphasise the character and accomplishments of a “life –lived” rather than a “life – limited” and there is a special assembly that focuses on the individuals achievements. This enables everyone to remember the positive aspects of a child’s time at AC and gives a sense of well - being that they had the best of experiences that was possible.

High Levels of Vigilance

One of the skills that AC staff need to have to an unusually high level is that of observation or vigilance. An important benefit of this ability of awareness is that in times of bereavement staff are especially sensitive to shifts in pupils behaviours which may indicate internal turmoil, especially for those who are unable to communicate their feelings in conventional ways

Teachers and TAs in other schools especially mainstream settings which have greater numbers of pupils and less staff, may well have “blunter” perceptions and less developed levels of awareness so that they may not pick up minor but significant changes in their pupils at emotionally troubled times.

This does not of course mean that staff in primary and secondary schools cannot be sensitive to pupils’ emotional needs in times of crisis, but it may be a skill that needs developing and considering when thinking about being bereavement prepared.

Returning to “normal”

It is felt that, led by the headteacher and other senior managers; there is an unwritten policy of not making a drama out of a crisis. Things “out of the ordinary” that occur throughout the day are quickly and systematically dealt with and there is then an expectation that there will be a return to normality - staff are able to handle “dramas” in a professional way.

When a child dies, it is expected that staff members will have some kind of emotional response and that there will be a collective recognition and display of grief. However, in the best interests of the rest of the children, it is crucial to accept the need for a return to “normal business” and AC is able to balance the “tensions of opposites”. The school is able to consider and manage, the necessary expressing of grief and keeping emotion contained in order for pupils to continue to feel safe and secure in the knowledge that there is some normality in a very “un-normal” situation

The Management of Bereavement

- Whenever possible, all staff are informed at the same time.
- Staff are informed by the head teacher or one of the 2 deputies and the format is the same whoever makes the announcement.
- In the case of the death of a staff member, those staff members especially close to that person are told on a one to one basis before the general staff body are informed. Staff appreciate this practice and respect the rationale for it.
- Staff are always told: “You can take time out of you need to”.
- Once staff have been told of a pupil bereavement, an assembly is arranged with the emphasis on the celebration of their life and this is when pupils are told.
- Staff know that pupils may sense some ‘sadness’ from staff or the absence of the pupil and this is ok
- Staff are aware of the need for continued support for pupils and each other.
- Staff know that post-bereavement support is always available.