Bereavement and Loss Policy for Schools

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Introduction and Context

This policy has been developed by Powys Educational Psychology Service for schools to adapt to their individual needs and circumstances. Further information on creating a school bereavement policy is available at:

 Child Bereavement UK

All schools will have to deal with bereavement at some time. One in 29 school age pupils will have experienced the death of a parent or sibling, and many more will have experienced bereavement of wider family/friends. The death of a pupil, member of staff or someone from the school community can be extremely difficult to cope with. Every death and every person's reaction to it is unique to their situation. It will be affected by the relationship with the person, the circumstances of the death, their sources of resilience, the development of the child or young person, and many other factors. Most children and young people, with the support of a loving parent or carer and supportive adults in school will be able to manage the range of emotions that they experience. How we support bereavement can have a significant impact on how people are able to manage during this difficult time and in the future. Having a bereavement policy will help schools to be prepared for these times.

When to use this Bereavement and Loss Policy

This policy has been developed to support the school community when a pupil, staff member, governor or other prominent member of the local community has died, including family members of pupils. The impact of bereavements should not be underestimated but are usually considered to be within the realm of normal human experience. This policy will also help to support bereavement and loss over the longer term.

What is a Critical Incident?

The Local Authority has a separate approach to 'Sudden Bereavement as a Critical Incident'. A critical incident is a tragic and unexpected event affecting a number of people. They are outside the normal range of expected human experience. Critical incidents have the potential to overwhelm usual responses and are always unpredictable, for example:

- The death or serious injury of a child or staff member as a result of an accident or act of deliberate violence which occurs within the school context:
- This could occur on site or off site
- The unexplained death (suspected suicide) of a child or young person
- Damage to the school as a result of natural or man-made disasters
- An accident on a school excursion
- The effects of terrorism, war or natural disaster

In the event of a Critical Incident please immediately inform the Director of Education Lynette Lovell on 01686 614047, lynette.lovell@powys.gov.uk

The Chief Education Officer will inform the Principal of the Educational Psychology Service, Alun Flynn, on 01686 614044 who will be able to provide advice and support.

Purpose of School Bereavement Policy

A bereavement and loss policy should be a useful working document which will enable a school to:

- Understand what action to take immediately and in the longer term
- Provide a framework for all staff to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with the bereavement
- Support pupils and/or members of staff before (i.e. in instances of life-shortening illness), during and after bereavement, and in the longer term
- To identify key staff and their roles, within school and the governing body/Local Authority
- To have clear expectations about the way school will respond to a death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all
- Make appropriate plans, produce guidelines and draft letters
- Collect resources for support
- Know where to find relevant information that you will need to refer to
- Prepare staff and organise any training

Initial Actions Following News of a Bereavement

See Appendix 1 for Checklist

1. Most senior member of staff (head teacher if available) to speak to the family. Ask their permission to tell the school community (parents, pupils, staff and governors). Some families may want to share information with the school community while others may not. The school can help to prevent speculation and rumours, as well as be a source of support for the family and the school community. Ask the family if they wish school staff to share the news of the bereavement with other children and if there is any information that the family would especially like to be passed on (or possibly restricted). Express condolences and offer support. Check important details/facts if appropriate. Be available to the family; keep in touch. Ask the child or young person/family what help/support they would like.
2. If Police are involved school will need to follow their guidance on release of information.
3. In the case of an unexpected death, the police will initiate and co-ordinate the Procedural Response to Unexpected Deaths in Childhood (PRUDIC). This will involve police and safeguarding teams from both Children's Services and the local health board

4. Inform Local Authority. Telephone or email the Director of Education Lynette Lovell lynette.lovell@powys.gov.uk if it is the death of a child or a member of staff. Mark the email URGENT. Or contact the helpdesk on 01597 826422.
5. Contact local services for support and advice
    a. Alun Flynn, Principal Educational Psychologist 01686 614044 or email alun.flyn@powys.gov.uk who can give advice on how to support children and young people using psychological first aid
    b. Cruse are often able to provide support to schools, contact the Powys branch on 01686 610220
6. Identify high risk or vulnerable staff. This may include staff who were particularly close to the person who died, who have experienced other significant loss/bereavement, or who may not have adequate support structures.
7. Inform school staff and governors. If this occurs during school hours it may be necessary to arrange for pupils to be looked after by a senior member of staff who has been informed, so that the head can speak to the rest of the staff. If the news occurs outside of school hours you will need to consider how to ensure that all staff members are contacted and they have adequate support.

Guidelines for breaking news about a death to staff and governors:

- Arrange a staff meeting as soon as possible
- Do not be afraid or surprised to show emotion, this is a human reaction.
- Impart factual information, never make assumptions or repeat rumour
- Give news sensitively and empathetically, be aware that people react in different ways, be aware of staff relationships with the person
- Ensure that someone is responsible for telling people who are unable to attend the meeting i.e. part time, peripatetic, lunch time supervisors. What is the best way; home visit, telephone.
- Agree what information is to be given to all staff, parents/carers and pupils to ensure consistency

Identify suitable individual members of staff who feel able to:

i. Support members of staff
ii. Support groups of children

- If you have an ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) in school, they will have received training in supporting children with bereavement
- Identify a member of staff to liaise with the individual's family, to deal with staff condolences and any funeral arrangements
- Identify a member of staff who will provide a letter for parents/carers which should be sent the same day (See Appendix 3 and 4)
- Arrange a staff meeting at the end of the day to catch-up with staff and have a chance to debrief on their day
- Identify sources of advice and support for staff, which includes Cruse 01686 610220/0808 808 1677, and further examples are given later in this document

8. Set up support structure for pupils i.e. quiet room, with tissues, pens, paper, water, teddies, blankets, cushions, bereavement stories (see list later), etc made

available. Provide paper and pens for them to write or draw their thoughts and memories, and provide some ideas (see point 12 below)

9. Identify high risk or vulnerable pupils. This may include children who were particularly close to the person, as well as those who may have had disruptions in their relationship with the person who has died. It may include pupils who have experienced bereavement and loss (this often includes children who are looked after or adopted). Some of these pupils may need to be informed separately from their class and provided with additional support.
10. Inform pupils during the school day
    a. Inform the children/young people as soon as possible about the death
    b. Where possible inform in small groups ie class or tutor groups

It helps to feel prepared when delivering sad news, so a script can be useful. Again, do not be afraid or surprised to show emotion, this is a human reaction, but be careful not to overwhelm children. Suggestions for writing a script (also see Appendix 1):

Prepare a script in advance:

- Start by acknowledging you have some sad news to give. Be honest. Give the news stating simple facts, use the words dead/died
- Avoid ambiguous language. Use language that is appropriate to their developmental level of understanding (see information later)
- If known, and with the family's permission, explain briefly where and when the death occurred. If not known, say so, and that you will endeavour to find out. If rumours are rife, say which of these are definitely not correct, if known
- Talk briefly and positively about the person who died without eulogising them
- Acknowledge that not everyone will be feeling sad and that is OK
- Acknowledge that people react differently to grief and that is ok too
- Where appropriate, remind pupils of their responsibilities and the impact when posting on social media
- Reassure that not all people who are ill or have accidents will die and that many people get better
- Put a time limit on discussion. It is preferable to resume normal activities soon to ensure minimal disruption. Provide activities that have reduced cognitive demand
- Possibly conclude the discussion with a prayer or special poem to remember the person who has died and their family
- Let pupils know who and where they can access additional support and help, both in school and out of school
- The Sue Ryder charity provide further advice about how to tell sad news to children

After breaking the news:

- Allow a short time for pupils to process the news and take a little time-out
- Allow children/young people to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms they will understand
- Allow feelings to be verbalised
- Allow the situation to be discussed and experiences of death to be shared
- Be honest about your own feelings, without overwhelming

- Ensure children/young people understand that the death is nothing to do with anything they have said or done. It is not their fault

11. Send letter out to parents/carers on the same day (see appendices for examples)
12. Initiate remembrance book or make art materials available for children to draw or write their memories and messages. It can be helpful to show children ideas of what they can do; poems, drawings, sentence starters such as 'If I had five more minutes with you I would tell you….'
13. Any requests for information from press should be directed to Powys Communications Department
14. In some circumstances it may be necessary to identify a member of staff to actively support the child in their return to school. This will include speaking with the child and family about support available and arranging time to meet individually with the child regularly
15. Do not rush into organising a memorial event. This needs time and discussion with the family once the news has had time to settle.

Supporting Staff with Loss and Bereavement

This can be a very difficult time for school staff and can be upsetting and emotionally draining for you. Some school staff will not feel able to provide support for pupils due to their own circumstances or grief, or their past experiences of bereavement and loss.

If you are going to be able to support your pupils, you also need to remember to look after your own wellbeing. It is important that you:

- Take time for yourself to grieve
- Talk to people about your feelings and memories and talk about the person who has died
- Look after your own physical well-being, making sure you are eating, drinking, and sleeping/resting
- Try to maintain normal routines – these provide an important sense of security for children and adults
- Tell yourself that although this is a difficult time it WILL get easier
- Allow pupils to see your grief and be open about your feelings, whilst being careful not to overwhelm them. Children learn how to deal with grief from those around them, and they need to know that it is good to express emotions

There is a self-help guide for bereaved adults at
Get help with grief after bereavement or loss - NHS (www.nhs.uk)

See Appendix 6 for strategies that help us to cope during times of stress

Supporting Children with Loss and Bereavement

Talking to children about loss and bereavement

Members of staff may be unsure about how or if to approach the subject with the pupil. It is better to say something than nothing at all. It is ok to say 'I heard about your grandfather, I'm sorry he died'. There is leaflet on how to talk to children about death at Information_to_help_you_help_children_understand_death.pdf (goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk)

Children have a different understanding of death at different developmental stages, and information should be given to them at the level that they will understand. It is important to use concrete words like 'death' and avoid using terms like 'losing' someone, or that the person has 'passed away', as this can be confusing for children.

Below are some guidelines about the developmental levels for understanding death, that may help you to talk to children and young people at their level of understanding, although this will depend on the individual pupil.

Children under the age of two

Very young children do not understand the concept of death; however, they may experience death as a loss or separation from an attachment figure. They may search for the person, cry, or become withdrawn. It is important to provide continued routines and to receive the emotional attention of their main caregivers. As they grow up, they should be kept aware of the person who died and their history as part of the family.

Children aged between two and five

Younger children do not understand the finality of death. They may repeatedly ask about the person as if they are coming back and may need to have it explained to them a number of times. Children's understanding of language at this age is very literal. You may need to tell them that the dead person has stopped breathing, and that the person will not be coming back. You can also talk about remembering the person in our minds, thinking about them, and the many things that we can do to help us to remember the person. They are likely to be particularly affected by the emotions of family members around them.

Children aged between six and eleven

Children around this age gradually begin to realise that death is final and that the person will not be coming back. They may be fearful about death and associate it with stories and films including 'ghosts' or 'zombies'. They are unlikely to understand the emotional, behavioural and physical responses that they are experiencing, and will need support to understand the connection between their feelings and these responses. They may be concerned about losing others close to them and will benefit from reassurance.

Children aged between twelve and eighteen

Children of this age are more aware of the finality of death, which can be intimidating and sad for them. They may think about the loss in terms of how it will impact their future. The death of a parent may involve the teenager in having extra responsibilities. They may feel that they need to be strong for the rest of the family and may be unable to grieve until they feel others are stronger. Social contact is particularly important at

this stage, and they should be encouraged to use their normal methods of communication to talk with their friends.

Understanding the process of grief

Every child will respond differently to loss and bereavement. A child will have had their own individual view of what has happened and a unique relationship with the person that has died. Loss and bereavement will bring with it a range of emotions which may include shock and disbelief, anger, sadness, guilt, fear, confusion amongst many other emotions, and these may change on a daily basis. They may be expressed through physical elements, such as appetite, sleep disruption, headache/stomachache, restlessness and ability to concentrate. Children may express their grief through behaviour such as avoiding the subject, distracting themselves, withdrawal, acting out, loss of interest in hobbies, tearfulness, mood swings and also no obvious reactions. There is no right or wrong way to grieve but there are healthy ways to manage grieving.

Supporting children with loss and bereavement

- Normalise emotions/reactions to the event. When we experience a trauma such as losing someone suddenly and unexpectedly, the way our body and minds react can feel quite out of our control and, this in itself can be frightening. Reassure them that their feelings are normal. People grieve in different ways. Tell them that it's ok to feel different to how they feel usually. Reassure them that they will feel better with time
- Children will learn from the adults around them how to manage grief. How you respond will teach them how to respond. It is important that you do not hide your own feelings, whilst being aware of not overwhelming children
- Create an atmosphere where pupils feel comfortable to talk about their feelings. Talking things through with a trusted adult will help them to understand their feelings
- Reassure pupils that it is ok to have fun still, and to be happy. Emphasise that the person who died would want them to be happy still. It is important to do things that make us smile when we are sad, this is how we look after ourselves and we should not feel guilty or bad for doing this
- If they want to talk, give them some time and space to do so, when they can have your full attention, without distractions
- Children may feel that life as they knew it has changed completely and feel a loss of control. This uncertainty, referred to as 'loss of continuity' can be extremely anxiety provoking. It is consequently very important to restore some 'normality' and continuity back into their lives. School is an important aspect of continuity and it is important for children to return to school as soon as they are able
- Children may be experiencing separation anxiety and may worry when they are away from loved ones, therefore may need additional reassurance.

Activities to do with pupils

Children and young people may need help to hold on to memories and to express their feelings. Below are some activities that you can do with them to help them to do this. It is important to be led by the child in these, as depending on the circumstances and

the relationship children who are not affected by the bereavement should not be asked to do prolonged activities about death.

Talk about the person who has died, and your special memories of them.	Walk to a special place that the person had, or set up a special place at school, perhaps with a photo or something special belonging to them, where you can go to think about the person.	Write a song or poem for them or about them. Make a playlist of their favourite songs, or songs that remind you of them.	Draw or write memories of times spent with the person who has died. Make a scrapbook of photos and other keepsakes.
Write a letter to the person you have lost telling them all the things you want to say to them. You could start with "If I had five more minutes with you I would tell you...."	Light a candle or blow some bubbles into the air and imagine that they are carrying messages to the person. 	Create a memory box containing items that remind them of the person who has died – photos, drawings, objects.	Do something that commemorates them, such as planting a tree, or flowers in their favourite colour or the colours of their sports team or raising money for a donation to a charity.

In time, school may wish to plan your own memorial event at school, which could include a short time for sharing memories, poems, readings or prayers, or doing something that has meaning for the pupils and staff. It is important that permission is sought from the family to organise a memorial event, and they may wish to attend.

Therapeutic stories

Sharing stories about loss and bereavement can help adults to open conversations with children of all ages, and to help them to understand their loss and to accept that their feelings are normal.

You can watch together an example of a therapeutic story about loss called The Small Creature by the British Heart Foundation. British Heart Foundation - The Small Creature, an animated story to help bereaved children - YouTube

Books for Children and Adults to Read Together

- The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back by Margot Sunderland and Nicky Armstrong (Therapeutic story)
- Someone Has Died Suddenly by Mary Williams. (www.suddendeath.org)
- Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine (Activity book) by Diana Crossley

Welsh language books

- Taid by John Burningham
- Hyd ac Ym Byth by Debi Gliori

Books for Younger Children (Nursery and Foundation Phase)

- Goodbye Mousie by Robie H Harris
- Dear Grandma Bunny (A Miffy Book) by Dick Bruna
- Badgers Parting Gifts by Susan Varley
- Always and Forever by Debi Gliori and Alan Durant
- Are You Sad, Little Bear? A Book About Learning to Say Goodbye by Rachel Rivett
- When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death by Laurie Krasny Brown

Books for KS2 children

- Milly's Bug Nut by Jill Janney
- Why Mum? By Catherine Thornton (book about serious illness)
- Saying Goodbye to Daddy by Judith Vigna

Books for KS2 and KS3

- The Cat Mummy by Jacqueline Wilson
- Sad Book by Michael Rosen
- What on Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies? Trevor Romain

Books for KS3 and KS4

- Double Act by Jacqueline Wilson
- Ways to Live Forever by Sally Nicholls
- The Charlie Barber Treatment by Carole Lloyd
- The Lost Boys' Appreciation Society by Alan Gibbons
- Straight Talk About Death for Teenagers: How to Cope with Losing Someone you Love by Earl Grollman

What can Schools do if they are Aware that a Death is Expected?

Coping with the expected death of a child

You may know in advance that a child is terminally ill. In this situation, the wishes of the parent(s) will dictate the degree to which you can prepare for their child's death. Some parents find the school a very helpful, supportive place to be, and want as much contact as possible for themselves and their child. Some wish to take an active part in any preparations that may be appropriate. Some do not directly acknowledge the seriousness of their child's illness or wish such knowledge to be limited to very few people. It is very important that the parents' wishes are sought and respected. There may also be a need to obtain permission from other parents if the preparations go beyond general curriculum- based activities.

Seriously ill and dying children often cope best with their condition by living as fully as they can. The school may represent one of the few areas where the child feels a sense of control and accomplishment. The sick child is often an expert on his or her condition and can help other children to understand in ways not open to adults.

Sometimes, older children do not want anyone outside of the family to know what is going on, perhaps because they worry about what their peers will think. In general, children do not like being different from their friends, and their wishes need to be respected. In the case of younger children, the wishes of the family should be sought.

Children and young people may find it hard to talk to their friends about the illness. School staff may be able to help the child or young person to talk to their friends and provide help to answer the other children's questions.

Coping with the expected death of a member of staff

Much of the above information may also be appropriate if it is known that a member of staff is terminally ill. Clearly, the wishes of the individual and his or her family will be paramount in planning how the children and young people will be prepared for the event.

Coping with the expected death of a child's parent or someone close to the child

Preparing children for such an event should be the responsibility of all those who have an influential role in the child's life, including teachers and support staff at school. Providing the child with a sense of security at home and at school is imperative. Children and young people who have consistent loving care, support and opportunities for success, are better able to remain happy, secure and optimistic about the future, even after the death of a loved one.
A family may contact school to share information where it is known that a close family member of a child has a terminal illness. In such circumstances, relevant information should be circulated amongst school staff so that there is a shared understanding of why the child may be experiencing difficulties that have not previously been an issue. For example, if the child starts having trouble with concentration, remaining on task in class or with behaviour more generally, teachers and support staff need to know the reason so that their problems are understood and addressed in context. It may be helpful for one teacher or trusted adult within the school to spend some extra time with the child, especially since life at home may be chaotic.

Other Considerations

Cultural issues

When working with children and young people from different ethnic backgrounds, it is important to be aware of the cultural context and beliefs. Cultural traditions, beliefs, and values do make a difference in how people outwardly express their grief and how they try to cope with it. There is a helpful leaflet by the NHS for line managers supporting colleagues, which contains information to help understand different bereavement practices Bereavement-Practices-Jan-2021.pdf (england.nhs.uk). Families who cannot communicate well in English may need an interpreter. It is not appropriate to use children or young people as interpreters in this situation.

Children with special educational needs

Children with special educational needs may have little sense of the permanence of death; in some cases, they may never come to a full understanding as we would see it. However, it is important to support them to learn about death so that are prepared, are not excluded, and their feelings taken into consideration. Talking about death and loss is important to the grieving and learning process and will lead to increased understanding and acceptance. It will also be important for adults to be more sensitive to changes in behaviour that may indicate changes in emotional well-being where children are unable to communicate this themselves. Special schools who may be more likely to experience the death of a pupil may wish to consider how they talk about death proactively with pupils, and could find out more about this at www.dyingmatters.org

The following advice for people with learning difficulties is from the Mental Health Foundation:

- Explain simply what has occurred, listening and responding with sympathy to the person's distress

- Explain that when someone dies the body stops working and doctors cannot fix it, and that the person who has died is not in any pain
- Should the person wish to view the body, this may be helpful as part of the grieving process. However, not everyone will want to do so. Some people with learning disabilities find it helps them to understand; others may find the prospect frightening. It is important to be sensitive to this
- Allow the person a chance to take part in arrangements for the funeral if they wish, e.g. choosing flowers, so that they do not feel marginalised
- Remember that explanations can be taken literally. Being told, for example, that a deceased loved one is both buried in the cemetery and in heaven can be a confusing concept
- Some people like to make a 'memories album' or a 'memories box' using pictures and newspaper or magazine cuttings and objects which remind them of the person who has died
- Visits to the grave or crematorium can help with moving on and coming to terms with the loss

There are a number of books and guides that can be used to assist understanding of death for children with learning difficulties.
Northern Health and Social Care Trust have developed a workbook for use with children and adults with learning disabilities, incorporating symbols, to help understand death: 96885-NHSCT-Client-Booklet-2016.pdf (hscni.net)
Wordless books on bereavement designed for people with learning difficulties are available at: www.booksbeyondwords.co.uk However these can be helpful for many children as the lack of words encourages people to use their own words.
Easy read guide:

- http://www.hscbereavementnetwork.hscni.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/96885NHSCT-Client-Booklet-2016.pdf

Picture guide:

- https://be.macmillan.org.uk/Downloads/CancerInformation/Easyread/MAC16345Whatcan-help-you-feel-better-when-someone-dies.pdf

There is further advice on supporting people with learning difficulties through bereavement at https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/dealing-bereavement including guides for carers.

Vulnerable families

Most children and their families will be able to cope with the death of a close family member, especially if families can talk about what is happening, about their thoughts and feelings, and about the person who has died. For different reasons not all children will have this experience within their family. For example:

- Children Looked After
- Children from families with a limited support network
- Children whose parent/s experience mental health difficulties

In such circumstances school may be a particularly valuable source of support to the bereaved child

Ongoing Support for Pupils and Staff

- Identify a quiet/time out place where people can go if necessary
- Timetables may require a little flexibility
- Try to engender awareness of when people need help and support
- Ascertain, through nominated staff, any family wishes about the school's involvement in the funeral, if any
- If the child or young person wants the other children to know, consideration could be given to sending the child a class card, or personal messages
- Allocate a staff member to actively support the child's return to school. Find out what support the pupil needs i.e. time out/ quiet room/ access to telephone to phone home, put this in place before they return to school
- Continue to access support agencies if required (for staff and/ or pupil).
- Allocate a staff member to monitor bereaved child throughout school life. Note anniversaries, Mother's Day, Father's Day etc. Pass this information onto any new school on transition.
- Continue to liaise with family/support agencies as required (this could be for several months/ years following death)

Should Schools Refer the Child/Young Person for Counselling?

Generally, counselling is not usually appropriate straight after bereavement, although a short session with the school counsellor may help to normalise grief and empower them to access the service in the future if needed. Children and young people need to be able to work through their feelings on their own, with the help of family, friends and school staff.

If you feel that a young person is finding it hard to come to terms with the bereavement, then specialist help may be useful. It is worth remembering that this may be months or even years after the bereavement.

Some indicators that specialist help (not necessarily counselling) may be required are:

- overly aggressive behaviour
- sudden drop in attendance/erratic attendance
- extremely withdrawn behaviour
- talk of hurting self or others

- an extreme change in personality or academic behaviour

If you think that counselling may be of use then ask the pupil if they would like to talk to someone. Counselling support could come from a number of agencies:

- School counselling service
- Community Counselling Service
- CRUSE bereavement counselling service

Conclusion

It is important for you to remember that you are doing your best to allow your pupils to have a safe space to grieve. There will be ups and downs in the coming weeks but over time, children will recover from this experience and, with your help, will be more resilient.

If you continue to have concerns about a pupil, then please contact Powys Educational Psychology Service (details of which, along with other useful links are below).

Powys Educational Psychology Service staff:

- South Powys - Alun.flynn@powys.gov.uk
- North Powys - Lynda.joyce@powys.gov.uk
- North Powys - Clare.jones1@powys.gov.uk
- Mid and North Powys - Becky.morgan1@powys.gov.uk (Trainee)

Ceredigion Educational Psychology Service have created a video on supporting children with bereavement and loss, that may be helpful for school staff and parents/carers to watch, please see:

- Welsh - https://youtu.be/sxivxOPziFk
- English – https://youtu.be/op50Fe1qKmQ

- Winston's Wish is a website with resources to support teachers, parents and children and young people when faced with the death of a child, sibling or parent. You can use their website or contact their helpline on: 08088 020021
- Cruse offer local support and advice for families following bereavement. They have a dedicated website for young people called Hopeagain
- Ataloss provides information about support available
- Young Minds have information and advice available on how to support children with bereavement
- Child Bereavement UK provide support via a helpline and online information for adults who are supporting a bereaved child or when a child has died.
- 2Wish.org.uk provides support for anyone effected by the sudden and unexpected death of a child or young person aged 0-25.
- Child bereavement network has online resources.

There is also online and phone support for mental health for young people in Powys (aged 10-19 years), at kooth or you can contact Louise Greenwood via email at louise.greenwood@xenzone.com).

Acknowledgements and thanks to Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynnon Taf Educational Psychology Service for kindly sharing their work, some of which has been used here.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Checklist of tasks to complete (see policy above for more details)

- ☐ Most senior member of staff (head teacher if available) to speak to the family.
- ☐ Ask their permission to tell the school community.
- ☐ Inform Local Authority.
- ☐ Contact local services for support and advice.
- ☐ Identify high risk or vulnerable staff.
- ☐ Inform school staff and governors.
- ☐ Set up support structure for pupils
- ☐ Identify high risk or vulnerable pupils.
- ☐ Inform pupils during the school day.
- ☐ Send letter out to parents/carers.
- ☐ Initiate remembrance book or make art materials available for children to draw or write their memories and messages.

Appendix 2 - Breaking sad news

Suggested words for an assembly following the death of a child

I have some very sad news to tell you. <Name> in <class> died on Saturday morning. He was crossing the road with his mum on the way to the local shop when he was knocked down by a car. An ambulance was called and <Name> was taken to hospital. The doctors and nurses did all they could to try and save his life but his injuries were too severe and he died. His mum is not injured.

<Name> was well known throughout the school for being a Manchester United fan and a very keen member of the football team.

This is really sad news, and some of you may be feeling upset. But we all feel things differently, and not everyone will feel the same way. When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of conflicting emotions - sadness, anger, and confusion - which are all normal. It is really important that we remember to be especially kind and supportive to each other in the days, weeks and months to come.

Please be mindful of what you write on social media sites

When you go back to class, you can spend some time thinking about what I have just told you. Your teachers will try to answer any questions you may have.

(Explain where and how to access support systems available in school and the plan and location for a book of condolence)

Appendix 3 - Sample letter: Informing parents/carers of the death of a teacher

<Date>

Dear Parent

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

Our thoughts are with <Name>'s family at this time and in an effort to try and respond to his/her death in a positive way, all children have been informed. The children were told that <Name> died from an <asthma attack> on <Date>. A number of pupils have been identified as being <asthmatic> and <Name>, the School Nurse has today reassured them that it is unusual for a person to die from <asthma>.

When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of feelings - sadness, anger, and confusion - which are all normal. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school. Children are likely to ask questions about death that need to be answered honestly and factually in terms they will understand. If you would like some information on how to best to support your child at home this is available from the school office. (*Or put links to Winston's Wish, Child Bereavement UK or Cruse).*

(Explain where and how to access support services available in school and the plan and location for a book of condolence)

Our thoughts are with the family at this sad time.

Yours sincerely
Headteacher

Appendix 4 - Sample letter: Informing other parents/carers of the death of a pupil

Note: before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the parents of the child who has died.

The contents and distribution list should be agreed by the parents and school

<Date>

Dear Parents

Your child's tutor had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>. They were told that <name> died from an illness called <cancer>. <Name> had been ill with <cancer> for a long time and died at home yesterday.

When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of conflicting emotions - sadness, anger, and confusion - which are all normal. But we all feel things differently, and not everyone will feel the same way. It is really important that we remember to be especially kind and supportive to each other in the days, weeks and months to come. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school, but I have made available some information which may help you to support your child at home. You can obtain this from the school office.

(Explain where and how to access support services available in school and the plan and location for a book of condolence).

When we are informed of the details of the funeral we will let you know, if the family ask us to do so. Our thoughts are with the family at this sad time.

Yours sincerely
Headteacher

Appendix 5 – Postvention protocol

Crisis Response following a suspected suicide in Powys Schools

A postvention protocol is an agreed approach to responding to a suspected suicide. In a school setting, this protocol should ideally: be a written protocol, developed in advance of a suspected suicide; include working with the local community; involve the formation and training of a postvention team – be clear about who will do what; include procedures for notifying staff, parents and young people about a suspected suicide; include guidelines on how to inform the school community and handle the media; identify appropriate postvention services and facilities; include procedures for recognising 'at risk' individuals (including staff) and identifying where people would be referred; include an evaluation of the effectiveness of the postvention and any follow-up protocol.

Steps that should be taken immediately after the school learns a pupil has died by suicide.

Step 1: Mobilisation and Co-ordination

When a school receives the news one of its pupils has died by suicide, the first step is to make sure this news is true.

Upon confirmation, the school should immediately implement a coordinated crisis response to achieve the following:

• Convene *a postvention team*: decide what is to be done and by whom

• Effectively manage the situation

• Provide opportunities for grief support

• Maintain an environment focused on normal educational activities

• Help pupils cope with their feelings

• Minimise the risk of suicide contagion

The Samaritans has Postvention Advisors available to guide and support you through the process - contact: 0808 168 2528; or email stepbystep@samaritans.org.

Powys Educational Psychology Service, Kooth, Youth Service, School Nurses and the CAMHs In-reach Mental Health Team are also available to provide support to your response team.

Step 2: Establish the facts and contact the family (immediate/within 24 hours)

A member of the Postvention team should check to be sure of the facts surrounding the death.

The nominated lead should contact the family as soon as possible. This will help support the family and manage communications.

It is useful if the key link to the family remains the same for the duration of the postvention period.

Information about the death should not be disclosed to pupils until the family has been consulted. Although the fact that a pupil has died may be disclosed immediately, official information about the cause of death should not be disclosed to pupils until the family has been consulted. The need to share information should be carefully balanced with honouring the family's request. Therefore, the school may choose to initially release a more general, factual statement without using the pupil's name if the family does not give permission (e.g., "We have learned that one of our pupils died over the weekend.").

There may be cases where the death has been declared a suicide, but the family does not want this communicated. Schools can state: "The family has requested information about the cause of death not be shared at this time."

Ensure that the family does not receive any general administrative letters/texts (e.g., school trip information, parent consultation events).

Ensure any schools or colleges where siblings attend are contacted.

Step 3: Media interest

A suicide of someone connected to a school can attract much media and social media attention. It is therefore important to contact PCC so that their Communications spokesperson can prepare a media statement. Ensure all staff are made aware that only the PCC media spokesperson is authorised to speak to the media.

Following a suicide death, pupils may immediately turn to social media for a variety of reasons, including:

• Getting and sharing news about the death (both accurate and rumoured)

• Expressing their feelings about what has happened

• Giving and receiving emotional support

• Calling for impromptu gatherings (both safe and unsafe)

• Creating online memorials.

Social media provides schools with a powerful set of tools to do the following:

• Disseminate important and accurate information to the school community

• Identify pupils who may need additional support or further intervention

• Share resources for grief support and mental health care

• Promote safe messages which emphasize suicide prevention

• Minimise the risk of suicide contagion that could occur through glorifying suicide or describing details of the means used.

N.B. R;pple Suicide Prevention (ripplesuicideprevention.com)

Step 4: Contact other agencies who may have been in contact with the individual

Step 5: Communicate with staff (within one day)

As soon as possible, organise a meeting for all staff to ensure the facts about the death and next steps are clearly communicated. In any communication about suicide, it is important to follow the guidelines on safe messaging about suicide. It is particularly important to avoid idealising the person and glorifying suicide. Talk about the person in a balanced manner. Do not be afraid to include the struggles that were known, especially in individual conversations about the death. If the pupil's struggles are not mentioned, it may cause confusion as well as give the impression that suicide is an effective way of addressing one's distress, especially among the other pupils.

After a death by suspected suicide, it is important to help pupils understand the mental health problems, suicidal actions, and the importance of seeking help when in distress or crisis. This is particularly true for young pupils who may not fully understand the cause of death. In a suicidal state people falsely believe the only way they can feel better is by ending their life. Highlight the fact that when depressed or emotionally distressed, people are not thinking clearly and often (perhaps impulsively) do not make good decisions; suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. Suicide is hard for friends and relatives to understand as it's not logical, and a false belief that an unbearable mental state will never change. It's critical to stress the importance of always sharing suicidal thoughts or concerns, whether your own or those shared by others, with a trusted adult. Suicidal thoughts or concerns should never be kept secret and by talking openly about suicide, teachers and support staff can model this important principle to children and young people.

Any discussion of suicide with a child or young person should include the advice to talk to a trusted adult if they experience any suicidal thoughts or have concern for someone else, and provision of details for age-appropriate suicide prevention resources such as websites and helplines.

Remember that staff may have experienced losses due to suicide of family members or friends. Given the high incidence of suicidal attempts and suicidal ideation and depression, some staff may have struggled themselves with suicidal ideation or depression. Signpost them to support available to them.

Ensure members of staff are made aware of how to identify and support both pupils and staff experiencing mental or emotional distress.

Ensure all staff are informed about where to find information and schools resources on mental health support available to them.

Step 6: Communicate with pupils (within one day)

As soon as possible after the staff communication event, break the news to the pupils. Samaritans' advice is that this is best done in small groups, or classes.

It is better to be factual but to avoid detail about the act itself. Do not disclose details about the method used, whether there was a suicide note, or its contents, for example. A briefing note for staff to use with the small groups/class can be useful to ensure consistency of message.

Consider providing immediate counselling or emotional support to pupils (and staff) in a separate room. Samaritans' postvention team may be able to assist with this support. You can contact the Educational Psychology Service who will be able to coordinate the provision and provide an opportunity to listen and support those who may be struggling.

It may be appropriate to send out a letter to parents/carers of all pupils/pupils, to inform them of the incident and to make them aware of possible risks, together with information about support available.

Step 7: Funeral

Depending on the wishes of the family, the school may wish to send representative/s to attend the funeral service. Samaritans' recommendation is that parents or guardians accompany pupils who wish to attend and that those who don't attend have normal classes to go to. There should be no reason why there would be a greater attendance at a funeral service under these circumstances than for any other tragic death at the school.

Step 8: Memorials

The school will want to think carefully about memorials for the individual who has died; to strike an appropriate balance between supporting distressed individuals and fulfilling the central purpose of providing education and learning. Some establishments have used a miniature artificial tree (and labels with string) to be left in a suitable place, offering a chance for individuals to leave a thought/memory/prayer for the individual on the branches of the tree. These messages can be passed to the bereaved family in a memory box when it is dismantled. It is important to set an appropriate time limit to the memorial and to strive to treat all deaths in the same way.

You may also suggest specific types of safe creative memorialisation for pupils, such as:

• Put together a team to participate in an awareness or fundraising event sponsored by one of the national mental health or suicide prevention organisations or hold a fundraising event to support a local mental health and wellbeing group/organisation

• Sponsor a mental health awareness day.

• Purchase books on mental health for the school or local library.

• Work to develop the curriculum focused on emotional development and help-seeking behaviours.

• Raise funds to help the family defray their funeral expenses.

• Make a book or notecards available in the school office for several weeks, in which pupils can write messages to the family, share memories of the deceased, or offer condolences. The book or notecards can then be presented to the family on behalf of the school community.

Sending a card to the parents/family one year after the incident can also be a supportive gesture and one that may be well appreciated.

Step 9: Evaluation and follow-up

Consider gathering the thoughts of the postvention team, to evaluate the response, record key learning and adapt procedures accordingly.

Resources

Guidelines Helping pupils cope

In the aftermath of a suicide, pupils and others in the school community may feel emotionally overwhelmed. This can make it difficult for the school to return to its primary function of educating pupils and can also increase the risk of prolonged stress responses and even suicide contagion.

A school's approach to supporting pupils after a suicide loss is most effective when it provides different levels of support depending on the pupils' needs. It is critical that an opportunity to meet in smaller groups be given to pupils in need of more in-depth support, augmenting the support given to all pupils.

Children or young people may not yet have learned how to recognise complex feelings or physical indicators of distress, such as stomach upset, restlessness, or insomnia. It is therefore important for schools to provide pupils with appropriate opportunities to express their emotions and identify strategies for managing them, such as in group and individual sessions.

Help is at hand – Support After Suicide

Papyrus UK Suicide Prevention | Prevention of Young Suicide (papyrus-uk.org)

Resources (annafreud.org)

R;pple Suicide Prevention (ripplesuicideprevention.com)

Step by Step | Samaritans

Step by Step is a Samaritans service that provides practical support to help schools prepare for and recover from a suspected or attempted suicide.

Suicide and self-harm guidance launched to support schools | GOV.WALES

Appendix 6 - Information sheet for families affected by bereavement

Supporting the death of someone you love is like being parachuted into a strange land where you have no map and don't know the language. Navigating your own way, let alone helping a child find a way through this land of pain and loss is very hard work.

Surviving this experience is something you and the children you care for will carry with you into the rest of your lives. Even if you are feeling crushed by your own grief, you are one of the best people to help your child.

Bereaved children need to be acknowledged, listened to and supported. Here are some ideas to help you at this difficult time:

- Answer your child's questions simply and factually
- Use language such as "death" and "dead" not "gone to a better place" or "gone to sleep"
- Help your child to understand that the person is not going to come back. Explain the cause of death in a simple way and make sure the child knows it was not his/her fault. Sometimes you may be asked the same questions over and over; be patient with this,

it is the child's way of making sure that the facts have not changed

- Give the child the opportunity to take part in the mourning process. Explain what will happen at the funeral and help them to decide whether or not they want to attend. If they don't, they may like to put flowers or write a note to the person.
- Give your child plenty of love, affection and reassurance, so s/he knows that they are still loved in the middle of the sadness and grief.
- Keep to school routine and let the child continue to see friends, go to clubs etc. Keeping routine and consistency helps a child feel more secure
- Give the child a chance to be quiet and alone from time to time
- Let them talk at their own pace, in their own time. Allow them the chance to express their feelings openly and give reassurance that many different feelings are common to people who have been bereaved, including sadness and anger
- Help the child to remember the person who has died. Creating a memory box with photos and special mementoes can be helpful
- Let them know that there are adults around who can listen and help
- Children jump from sadness to joy quickly – if they are happy, let them be happy! This does not mean they do not care
- Be honest and show your own grief; it's ok to cry! But try not to overwhelm the child.
- Look after yourself – grief is tiring
- Be aware of changes such as clingy, aggressive or moody behaviour; these are all expressions of grief
- Don't feel like you have to have all the answers or get it right all the time – doing your best is good enough
- Keep in contact with school and let them know how you can be helped
- Take one day at a time

Charities who can offer support, advice and guidance:

- Winston's Wish (www.winstonswish.org.uk) Tel: 08088 020021
- Cruse Bereavement Care (www.cruse.org.uk) Tel: 0808 808 1677/ 01686 610220

Appendix 7 - How do we cope with stress and difficult emotions?

We all rely on a range of different coping mechanisms each day, in order to manage the general stress of life and to lift our mood if we are feeling low or anxious. We may need to use these strategies more during difficult times, and we can use them to teach children to find the ones that work best for them.

These strategies have been put in six different groups. Using the term BASIC Ph can help us to remember the groups, with each letter representing a different group of strategies. Think about which strategies you usually use, can you do more or vary these, share ideas with friends and colleagues about what strategies they use.

- Belief – This can be religious, political, ideological beliefs that help us to understand the world, provide strength and comfort in difficult times and meaning to our lives. This may involve attending religious worship, being part of an organisation whose ideals you value or practicing techniques such as mediation and mindfulness.
- Affect - Our emotions can help us manage situations that are difficult. Crying, for example, can be cathartic (provide an emotional release). Laughter equally can help to temporarily alleviate difficult emotions, stress and anxiety.
- Social – This can be talking to friends and family that we are close to or other people who have had similar experiences. It can also just involve being around others so as not to feel alone and does not have to involve talking about the loss or talking at all.
- Imagination – Engaging our imagination to allow us a break from a difficult experience. Creative activities can be helpful in allowing this (e.g. drawing, painting, and cooking). Watching TV or listening to music can also allow us to have a mental break from our current concerns.
- Cognitive – Some people will have a strong need to understand what has happened. Coping in this way might involve looking for the reality, and logic, needing to plan and learn, wanting to gather information, set priorities and consider alternatives. Young people using this strategy may have lots of questions, some of which are difficult to answer. The fact that they are asking is an indication that they are trying to better understand and make sense of what has happened in order to cope.
- Physical – Activity and movement supports the body to respond to any chemical imbalance and react and cope by using physical expressions. The methods for coping with stress include relaxation (breathing and yoga type exercises), physical exercise and activity. Expending energy is an important component in many modes of coping. However, physical coping can also involve eating and drinking foods associated with pleasure and comfort and relaxation, which should not be over-indulged.