



Managing Death and Bereavement Advice for Schools

December 2022

This advice is brought together for school leaders to refer to in the event of a bereavement in the school community.

Ideally, schools should have a plan in place before any need to refer to this document, so that everyone knows what to do in the event of a death of a pupil, member of staff/school community or a child's relative. This is particularly important in the event of a sudden death. Some schools have included such planning in their Critical Incident Plan and others have Bereavement policies in place which include contact information for The Local Authority Education Psychology Service and local clergy. This is very helpful information to have to hand because often a bereavement is a shock to everyone and having a policy or agreed procedure in place helps leaders to focus on offering practical support.

Training: Great emotional damage can be caused by people who are not aware of the pitfalls and sensitivities around bereavement. The need for training is therefore very important for all school staff, particularly if adults are to talk with recently bereaved children/students. A number of organisations, e.g. Cruse, Child Bereavement Charity and Brake, offer proven training programmes. Teachers are *not* social workers or counsellors unless professionally qualified and so need to be supported in how to respond to bereavement and to recognise the possible reactions of bereaved pupils.

Supporting pupils and families of other faiths and none: Schools should ensure that they have information and advice on the various death traditions and customs of faiths other than Christianity. Inadvertent insensitivity or ignorance can cause great offence and add to a family's grief (*Some SACREs have issued valuable advice*).

Resources for classes: In all classes there should always be age appropriate books about death, so that children begin to know and understand the vocabulary of death (Appendix 2 book lists.)

Having words to express what they see and hear around them, when and if the time comes, will help children to articulate their fears and distress.

The curriculum: School leaders should consider how learning about dying and death is included within the curriculum. For example, having plants in the classroom that live and die is a way of beginning to talk about the life cycle.



Things to do on hearing of a death of a child or close relative

1. The Headteacher briefs the class teacher. The teacher may also wish to talk to someone more experienced e.g. the educational psychology service, the parish priest, Winston's Wish (tel: 0845 2030 405) who specialise in giving advice (Appendix 1).
2. All school staff are briefed.
3. The class teacher is released from class so that she can meet with the child and talk privately. Ways to start might be:
'I am really sorry to hear what happened to your..... . Would you like to tell me about it?'
4. The class teacher should ask the child about how he/she would like the rest of the class to be told informed. The teacher will also talk to the child about telling them together.
5. Teacher and child tell the class (f the child wishes to be present.)
6. The Headteacher will visit each class individually and talk to them.
7. The Headteacher writes a letter to all parents of that class and offers support and advice.
8. Informative letter to all other parents at the school (Appendix 3).
9. Letter to the bereaved family (Appendix 4).

Follow up for the Headteacher

1. Find out what the arrangements are for the funeral. Do the family want the school involved in any way?
2. Organise cover for the teacher and TA if appropriate.
3. Would the family like other parents to be informed of the arrangements? Are children encouraged to be at the funeral?
4. Will the parish priest plan a service / assembly for the school community?
5. If it is one of your pupils who has died, suggest a memorial service to be held in a few weeks' time.
6. Talk to the children about a way to remember. Ideas like a bench, a tree, a water feature or similar can be a very powerful symbol.



What children may know and understand about death - Foundation Stage and KS1

1. Can remember the person that has died and hold their image inside their head.
2. The centre of their world is their family.
3. See everything in relation to themselves, trying to bargain to bring back to the person who has gone (e.g. *'If I do/don't do this - willcome back'*).
4. Wants facts – e.g. *'Where have they gone?'* The facts must be straightforward i.e. died – no euphemisms
5. Not really understanding what 'gone' means – e.g. *'Will they come back?'* Needs to be shown the difference between dead and alive – e.g. plants.
6. Confuses magic with reality – e.g. fly up to heaven and get someone back.
7. Expresses themselves through play – need to extend their vocabulary and create play opportunities.
8. Does not understand why other people are upset – e.g. adults crying.
9. Body-centred reactions – e.g. incontinence, tantrums. May also have nightmares.
10. Finds separation more difficult, may not want to go to school. Needs a very secure routine.

What children may know and understand about death - KS2

(Some of the issues for younger children may still apply).

1. Will understand about bodies, death, funerals, coffins etc.
2. Will be able to discuss how they feel, but may also be better at hiding their feelings.
3. Will know that death is not reversible.
4. May ask difficult questions – e.g. *'Why did this happen?'*
5. May suddenly be trying to act like a grown up.
6. Less likely to use play to work things through.
7. More aware of other people's feelings and yet may find it difficult to express their own.
8. Lots of things become worrying (e.g. dark, monsters) and they may have tantrums or wet the bed.
9. May start to draw comparisons between 'before' and 'after' especially if they have become 'carers'.
10. Can use metaphor to explain how they feel.
11. Friends, school and teachers become increasingly important.
12. May try to escape the pain, and have strong reactions – e.g. illness, bullying, school refusal
13. May feel vulnerable and anxious, need routines and a sense of normality.
14. Needs time to discuss how they feel and not be laughed at or dismissed.

What children may know and understand about death – KS3

(Some of the issues for younger children may still apply).

1. Teenagers coping with physical changes as well, boys and girls may react very differently.
2. Greater sense of finality and of being alone.
3. Friends and school may be more important than family.
4. Finding time and space to grieve may be very difficult – e.g. friends may not want to talk about it.
5. Their reactions may range and change quickly from not wanting to talk about it to being over protective and fussy.
6. Need privacy and encouragement to share their thoughts.
7. Need creative outlets to express feelings.



8. Need security but may start testing boundaries.

What children may know and understand about death – KS4+

(Many issues carried over from previous descriptions).

1. May be confused – on an emotional rollercoaster.
2. Not sure whether to react as a child or an adult.
3. More egocentric again.
4. On the surface may seem to be 'getting on' with things but could be hiding a lot that they didn't want to face up to.
5. Not yet got the emotional intelligence of maturity so may react in unusual ways.
6. May not be able to find time or place to grieve.
7. Friends and school very important, could reject their family because it is too painful, or reject the outside world because it is too risky.
8. Looking for meaning – e.g. *Why are we here? What's the point?*
9. Could find talking and trusting adults even more difficult.
10. Need to begin to develop resilience in order to face the future.

Appendix 1 – Organisations and Websites dealing with Bereavements

- Winston's Wish – www.winstonswish.org.uk - Freephone helpline: 08088 020 021 for guidance and information for families of bereaved children and professionals supporting bereaved children.
- Brake www.brake.org.uk/support and the Sudden Initiative <http://www.suddendeath.org/> - Brake is a road safety charity which also runs the sudden initiative, offering support following a sudden death. It offers helpline support (0808 8000 401) to people bereaved and seriously injured in road crashes, and professionals working with them. It also includes really helpful advice on supporting suddenly bereaved children and young people. Brake also produces support literature, including books for children bereaved by road crashes and books for children bereaved by any sudden cause.
- The Child Bereavement Charity - www.childbereavement.org.uk – National UK charity providing specialised training, information, support and guidance for professionals to help them respond to the needs of bereaved families. Support and Information line: 0800 02 888 40 excellent website.
- Church Army - [Death, Grief, Hope](#) resource.
- Cruse Bereavement Care – <https://www.cruse.org.uk/> – Cruse provides counselling and support and offers information, advice, education and training services. It aims to promote the well-being of bereaved people and to enable them to understand their grief and cope with their loss. Freephone helpline 0808 808 1677; [CruseChat](#).
- Grief Encounter www.griefencounter.org.uk helps bereaved children get help, recognition and understanding following their loss.



- Rainbows www.rainbowsgb.org , www.rainbows.org helps children and young people grieve and grow after a loss.
- The National Alliance for Grieving Children <https://childrengrieve.org> promotes awareness of the needs of grieving children and teens and provides education and resources for anyone supporting them.
- Support after Murder and Manslaughter (SAMM) <https://samm.org.uk/> supports families bereaved by murder and manslaughter.
- Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide <https://uksobs.org/> is an organisation offering emotional and practical support for people bereaved through suicide.
- Victim Support's Homicide Service <https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/> offers one-to-one care and support to victims and their families.
- The Compassionate Friends (UK) - www.tcf.org.uk – A charity offering advice and support for families who have lost a child. Helpline number 0345 123 23 04 (open 10am to 4pm & 7.00pm to 10.00pm); email helpline@tcf.org.uk.
- St Christopher's Hospice – www.stchristophers.org.uk – A charity providing professional care and supporting the emotional, spiritual and social needs of their patients, their families, children, friends and carers. Telephone: 020 8768 4500.
- Helen & Douglas House: Hospice Care for Children and Young Adults – www.helenanddouglas.org.uk – A registered charity providing professional care, practical support and friendship for children and young people with life-shortening conditions, as well as support for their families. Telephone: 01865 794749 (office hours only, 9am-5pm Monday to Friday).
- National Children's Bureau – www.ncb.org.uk – not specifically related to death and bereavement but offers information, resources and links about children and young people and their growth and development.



Appendix 2 – Children’s Books and Teacher Resource Lists

Bereavement Books for Children and Books that Help with Explaining Death to a Child.
(updated March 2020)

| Title | Author | Age range |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| Badger's Parting Gifts | by Susan Varley | 3+ |
| Always and Forever | Alan Durant | 3+ |
| Frog and the Birdsong | Max Velthuijs | 3-5 |
| Dogger | Shirley Hughes | 3-5 |
| Love you forever | Robert Munsch | 3-6 |
| No Matter What | Debi Gliori | 3-7 |
| Water Bugs and Dragonflies | Doris Stickney | 4-8 |
| The Invisible String | Joanne Lew-Vriethoff | 4-7 |
| I'll always love you | Hans Wilhem | 4-7 |
| The Lonely Tree | Nicholas Halliday | 5-7 |
| Michael Rosen's Sad Book | Michael Rosen | 5+ |
| Scrumpy | Elizabeth Dale | 5-6 (used only) |
| I Miss You: A First Look at Death | Pat Thomas | 5+ |
| Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine | Winston's Wish | 5+ |
| Fred | Posy Simmonds | 5+ |
| Grandad's Bench | Addy Farmer | 5-8 (only used) |
| Granpa | John Burningham | 5-7 |
| The Scar | Charlotte Moundlic | 5-7yrs |
| The Heart and the Bottle | Oliver Jeffers | 5-8yrs |
| I feel sad | Brian Moses | 6-11 |
| Life's End | Denise Chaplin & Lynne Broadbent | 6-11 (non fiction) |
| Vicky Angel | Jacqueline Wilson | 9yrs+ |
| Bridge to Terabithia | Katherine Paterson | 9+ |
| I remember Miss Perry | Pat Brisson | KS2 |
| Goodnight Mister Tom | Michelle Magorian | upper KS2+ |
| A Taste of Blackberries | Doris Buchanan Smith | 9-12 |
| Mama's going to buy you a Mockingbird | Jean Little | 11-14 |
| My Sister Lives on the Mantelpiece | Annabel Pitcher | Teens |
| A Monster Calls | Patrick Ness | Teens |
| Butterfly Summer | Christine Wood | Teens |



Teacher's Resources:

| Title | Author/link |
|--|---|
| Someone has died suddenly  | www.suddendeadth.org |
| How Grief may affect children | https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/bereaved-family-friends/supporting-grieving-child/grief-affect-child |
| Grief encounter: a workbook to encourage conversations about death between children and adults | Shelley Gilbert 2019 edition |
| Living with Grief in School: Guidance for Primary School teachers and Staff- very helpful for all age groups and includes policy example | https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=a35f83e5-e4ad-49e1-8b01-7e7d55ffa528 |
| When Children Grieve | Alfred Torrie |
| When Parents Die | Rebecca Abrams |
| Healing Grief | https://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm |
| Saying Goodbye to Greg – Understanding Bereavement- EYFS and primary | Christine Chapman |
| Then, Now and Always: Supporting children as they journey through Grief: A Guide for Practitioners | Julie A Stokes |
| Good Grief 1: Talking about and Learning about Loss and Death-ideas for the school curriculum | Barbara Ward and Jamie Houghton |
| Good Grief 2: Exploring Feelings, Loss and Death with Under 11's | Barbara Ward and Associates |
| Children at Funerals (download) | https://www.ionabooks.com/children-at-funerals-pdf-download.html |
| Resources for when children have died (download) | as above |



Appendix 3: Letter to all parents at the school

Dear Parents

You will be sorry to hear that this morning we heard that.....has died yesterday / over the weekend.

We felt that it was right to tell the children rather than they hear through rumours. The teachers have tried, and will continue, to be available to answer the children's questions. We know this can be a difficult subject to discuss with children and if we can be of any help do please contact us.

I have written on behalf of the school to..... expressing the sadness of the whole school community over their loss.

Appendix 4: Letter to the bereaved family

Dear.....

Thank you for letting us know your sad news this morning.

.....has had time to talk with her teacher today and was with her teacher when the class was informed of the death of your.....

I have written to all parents so that they know what has happened and why their children may be upset.

I will ring you in the next few days to see if we can help in any way as you begin to make arrangements for the funeral. If you have any concerns about..... please let us know so that we can try and help.

Yours sincerely



Appendix 5: Prayers and readings

Death of a Child

O God, he is your servant and the son of your servant. You did create him and sustain him and bring him to death and You will give him life. O God, make him for his parents an anticipation, riches sent on before, a reward which precedes... Let neither us nor them be seduced by temptation after his departure and give him in exchange for his earthly home a better dwelling place.

Muslim Devotions

Death of a Child

O merciful God, Your Son Jesus Christ took children in his arms and blessed them, we commit this child (*name*) to your care. We ask you to surround his/her parents with your love so that they are not overwhelmed by grief, but, supported by their family and friends, they may in due course rediscover meaning and hope. Amen.

Marcus Braybrooke

A Time to be Born and a Time to Die

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

- a time to be born, and a time to die;
- a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
- a time to kill, and a time to heal;
- a time to break down, and a time to build up;
- a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
- a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
- a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
- a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
- a time to seek, a time to lose;
- a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
- a time to tear, and a time to sew;
- a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
- a time to love, and a time to hate;
- a time for war, and a time for peace.

Bible: The Book of Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8

Nothing Can Separate Us From the Love of God

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword...?

Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus Our Lord.

Bible: St Paul, Romans 8: 35-39

Tell it Again and Again

This has happened to us, we tell it again and again.

We pour out our hearts, full of grief.

You are in heaven hear our prayer.

You, O Eternal, are a God of mercy and compassion.

Forms of Prayer for Jewish Worship



God Be In My Head
God be in my head,
And in my understanding:

God be in my eyes,
And in my looking:

God be in my mouth,
And in my speaking:

God be in my heart,
And in my thinking:

God be at mine end,
And at my departing.
Pynson's Hoare (1514)

Safe in God's Hands
All our laughter, all our sadness,
Safe now in God's hands.

All our anger, all our gladness,
Safe now in God's hands.

All our stories, all our memories,
Safe now in God's hands.

Those we remember, those we love,
Safe now in God's hands.
Ruth Burgess

What is Dying?

What is dying? I am standing on the sea-shore. A ship sails to the morning breeze and starts for the ocean. She is an object of beauty and I stand watching her till at last she fades on the horizon, and someone at my side says, 'She is gone'. Gone where? Gone from my sight, that is all; she is just as large in the masts, hull and spars as she was when I saw her, and just as able to bear her load of living freight to its destination.

The diminished size and total loss of sight is in me, not in her; and just at the moments when someone at my side says, 'She is gone', there are others who are watching her coming, and other voices take up a glad shout, 'There she comes' – and that is dying.
Bishop Brent

We Can Never be Separated From God
God is sitting inside you,
Nearer than your hands and feet.
The distance between you and God
Is as thin as an insect's wing.
We can never be separated from God,
Neither at birth nor at death.
A Sikh Prayer

God Gives Life and Death
Say, 'It is God who
Gives you life, then
Gives you death; then
He will gather you together
For the Day of Judgement'.
Qur'an 45: 26

Tears

Almighty God, Father of all mankind,
in your Son you took upon yourself the world's sorrow.
We offer you our own sorrow and sadness
knowing that you can help us to bear our grief
through the infinite understanding and love
of Jesus Christ our Lord.



Be Comforted, Be at Peace

Be comforted. Be comforted, dear ones;

There is eternal life for all souls who love God, Who is love; and where there is love there can be no separation. Your loved one is by your side. Death cannot separate you. Be comforted and at peace.

A Saying of White Eagle

Bereavement

Lord God, Father and creator of us all, thank you for...

We feel very sad.

Through our own sadness, help us to understand the sadness of others and try to make the world a kinder place.

The Death of a Grandparent

Lord in heaven, you have promised us new life through your Son, Jesus Christ; help us to live with that promise in our hearts and in our lives, so that our sadness can be turned by you into blessing and strength in the days ahead.

On the Death of a Grandparent

Dear Lord, thank you for grandparents.

My gran was fun.

She used to laugh a lot and read me stories.

She was warm and friendly.

I'll miss her now she's dead.

But I know I'm lucky –

Some children never even meet their grandparents.

It's funny to think

that one day I'll be old like my gran.

I hope I'll be as smiley and kind as her.

Thank you, Lord, for grandparents.

References:

Braybrooke, Marcus (2003) *World Prayers 1000*. John Hunt Publishing.

Herbert, Christopher (ed) (1993) *Prayers for Children*. National Society/Church House Publishing.

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