



West Byfleet Junior School

Bereavement Policy

INTRODUCTION

It is almost inevitable that a school will, at some point, have to deal with a death that affects its community. Most commonly, this will mean an individual pupil experiencing the death of a close family member, but it may also be a death of a child at school or of a staff member. This policy provides a framework within which all staff, can give guidance on how to deal sensitively with bereavement and other significant losses in the course of their time at our school.

AIMS

West Byfleet Junior School aims to meet the needs of all its children, staff and parents. Every death and the circumstances in which it occurs is different and this policy has been constructed to guide us on how to deal professionally, sensitively and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances.

PROCEDURES

When the school is notified of a death, the person answering the phone will put them through to the Head Teacher or if they are absent, then the most senior member of staff on site.

Sharing information

It is important to agree, with the family member what information to share, before the school can take on the role of informing concerned parties within, or outside, the school community.

Informing staff of a death within the school community

- Arrange a staff meeting as soon as practicable.
- Give a factual explanation of how the death occurred and share the

family's wishes.

- Be prepared that some members of staff will be emotionally affected and would benefit from the provision of some time for reflection. Information about accessing information about bereavement support outside of school, should be made available.
- Arrangements should be made to inform absent staff, in a sensitive and supportive manner, with consideration being given to their relationship with the deceased.
- Arrange staff condolences with collaborative agreement, if felt appropriate.
- For a death that may attract media coverage (eg if the deceased was a well-known personality or died tragically), identify a nominated spokesperson (e.g. Chair of Governors, LEA etc) to provide a 'news statement' at an agreed time, as a way of dealing with media intrusion. Liaison with the individual's family is essential.
- With death in traumatic circumstances, such as suicide or murder, consider requesting bereavement support services (Winston's Wish, Cruse, Compassionate Friends and the Education Psychology Service (if psychological de-briefing is thought necessary).
- Arrange a staff meeting for the end of the working day and invite each person to recount their feelings. Consider staff who will be alone that night and arrange for a colleague to contact them by phone.
- Differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment.

Informing children

The following guidelines will help you to inform children of the death of a member of staff or a close member of our community.

Children should be told in the smallest groups practicable, ideally in Class by their Class Teacher or by the Head Teacher visiting each class. Those children who had a close relationship with the deceased to be told, if possible, individually or in a small group. Who is told, should be determined by who knows the deceased, as it may not be appropriate for

the whole school to know the situation. Consideration should be made of other children, who may have been previously bereaved and whether they too will need support.

Guidelines on how to inform children

I've got some really sad news to tell you today. I know most of you will have heard of cancer and know that people with cancer usually get better but sometimes people die from it. Mrs Smith, has been ill with cancer for a long time and sadly died in hospital yesterday'. 'Sometimes people have accidents at work, home, school or on the road. People may be hurt or injured in the accident and they may have to go to hospital for treatment. Sadly, there are some accidents that cause people to die. I have some really sad news to tell you. Yesterday, Stephen, who is in Year 4, was in an accident and he was so badly injured that he died.'".

- Children will appreciate time to verbalise their feelings and fears. Allow time for 'If only's ...' to be acknowledged.
- Allow children to share their own experiences of death e.g. 'When my pet/Gran died', etc.
- Be honest about your own feelings and experiences, and talk honestly about the relationship you had with the person.
- Answer children's questions factually. Avoid using euphemisms like 'passed away', or 'lost' etc. Use the words dead, died and death to avoid confusion.
- Be prepared for children to say or do the unexpected, experience has shown some responses or apparent lack of response may be upsetting for adults. No apparent response does not mean that a child does not care.
- End the discussion on a positive note – 'Not all people who are ill or have accidents die, many get better'. Consider a prayer or ask for happy memories of the deceased. Perhaps co-ordinate an assembly to end the discussion.
- Try to identify any key answers that you may need to prepare, e.g. the facts about an illness.

Transition

In the event of a bereavement within the family, it is vitally important to ensure that this information is passed on to the relevant members of staff, so that provisions can be made. Time to be allocated with the Pastoral Support Manager, if required.

The funeral

It is essential to sound out the family's wishes. The family may well welcome involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to keep things private.

The Headteacher and/or the Deputy Headteacher will make arrangements for the school to be represented at the funeral, if appropriate, and identify which staff and pupils may want to attend, together with the practicalities of issues such as staff cover.

Cultural and religious implications need consideration.

Experience in many schools has shown that most pupils can be supported by school staff. In most cases, each child will have a favoured member of staff to approach. The PSHE co-ordinator will ensure that there are suitable books and other materials to help children discuss death and come to terms with loss. Social Stories may be a way to help SEN pupils to understand loss. The Educational Psychology team can offer support to pupils who may need more help.

The Death of a Member of Staff

The school will notify the LA as employer. Where appropriate to the wishes of the staff member's family, the Headteacher will seek permission from the Chair of Governors to close the school so that all members of staff are able to attend the funeral.

Responsibilities

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

The nominated Governor with responsibility for bereavement is: Lucy Murphy.

Follow Up

Family members struggling to deal with their own grief can overlook their children. For a child who wishes, school can provide an opportunity to talk about what has happened with a familiar and trusted adult. Grieving children can display altered behaviours in different situations. Good communication with home will help school be aware of this and provide a more realistic picture of how the child is coping.

Time out cards to allow the child to leave the class when they are feeling overwhelmed and emotional, should be offered. Children often feel embarrassed about showing their emotions and do not want to cry in front of their peers.

Consideration should be made of important dates, such as the anniversary of the death, Mother's Day, Father's Day, birthdays etc. A 'calendar of memories' – noting any dates that will be especially sensitive for the child could be created and passed on in transition, as the child moves up the school and onto Secondary.

Appendix A - List of Online Resources and Information

www.winstonswish.org.uk

A useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community.

www.childbereavement.org.uk

A bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

www.juliesplace.com

A support resource for bereaved siblings

www.bhf.org.uk/smallcreature

British Heart Foundation site to help children come to terms with loss using cartoon creatures. An animated film and we have a printed pack to go with it.

www.bbc.co.uk/.../bereavement/bereavement_helpchildren.shtml Information on the way bereavement affects children

<http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk>

An organisation offering local bereavement support to both adults and children

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/index.htm>

Federation of organisations

Appendix B - Books on Bereavement

GRANPA John Burningham

Designed to stimulate discussion rather than to tell a story, the book has a series of scenes of a little girl and her grandad, with comments from each or both of them. At the end, she is shown staring at his empty chair, without comments. The book allows the adult to direct discussion about not only the good things that the child remembers, but also the not so happy memories.

WHEN DINOSAURS DIE L & M Brown

Charming busy anthropomorphic pictures of dinosaurs illustrate topics and questions and a range of answers about death: Saying Goodbye; Customs and beliefs about death; Why do people die? What does "dead" mean? It is also quite acute psychologically, acknowledging that disbelief, anger, fear, and sadness are common feelings when someone dies.

REMEMBERING GRANDAD Sheila and Kate Isherwood

A girl's grandfather has died and looking back over the happy times they enjoyed together helps her to cope with the loss. Very specific episodes and illustrations give it a life-like feel. Sensible and sound if a little stereotyped in its pictures of family life, it could help children to think about how to remember someone.

FRED Posy Simmons

When Fred the cat dies, his owners Nick and Sophie attend his funeral and learn about his secret life as a famous singer. The story raises the idea of celebrating a life in a good-humoured and touching way, with entertaining pictures and not much text.

GRANDAD, I'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER YOU De Bode and Broere

A picture book about loss and memories, and potentially a good stimulus to talk about a bereavement.

LIFETIMES Bryan Mellonie and Robert

Beginnings and endings with lifetimes in between – a beautiful way to explain life and death to children places human life and death firmly in the natural world, and the tone is quietly reflective: "All around us everywhere, beginnings and endings are going on all the time. It may be sad, but it is the way of all things. For plants; for people; and for birds".

BADGER'S PARTING GIFTS Susan Varley

An old favourite, a charming illustrated book in which a very old and much-loved badger dies. The forest animals gather and reminisce about the important part Badger played in their lives, and as time passes memories of Badger make them smile. These memories were different for each of them, including very recognisable things like a favourite recipe or showing someone how to knot a tie - Badger's "parting gifts"

WE LOVE THEM Martin Waddell

Death is seen very much as part of life in this nicely illustrated story of life in the country, which conveys the idea that life goes on and that old creatures give way to young ones. But it is a bit too matter of fact about loss - barely is the old dog dead than the children have found a new one, is there an implicit message that dead pets (and people?) are easily replaced.

GRANDMA'S BILL Martin Waddell

Bill's grandma is a widow, and he learns about her "other Bill" by looking through her photo album with her. A bit too stereotypically suburban and middle class for general appeal perhaps. Some like its ordinariness, gentleness and factual accuracy, and couldn't fault what it had to say about death and living on in memories and in the family.

A BIRTHDAY PRESENT FOR DANIEL Juliet Rothman

This story of a little girl whose brother has died is intended for children aged 8-12. "A difficult subject handled very well and movingly".

Appendix C

Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a pupil

Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the child's parents.

The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the parents and school.

<Address> <Date>

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>.

(<Name> died from an illness called cancer. As you may be aware, many children who have cancer get better but sadly <Name> had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday.)

He/She was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try to answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we would be more than happy to help you.

(We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating <Name..>'s life.)

Yours sincerely

<Name> Head Teacher

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

<Address> <Date>

Dear Parents

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

Our thoughts are with <Name>'s family at this time and in an effort to try to respond to his/her death in a positive way, all the children have been informed.

When someone dies it is normal for family and friends to experience many different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion, and children are likely to ask questions about the death that need to be answered honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.

The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school but if there is anything else you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we will be more than happy to help you.

Yours sincerely

<Name> Head Teacher