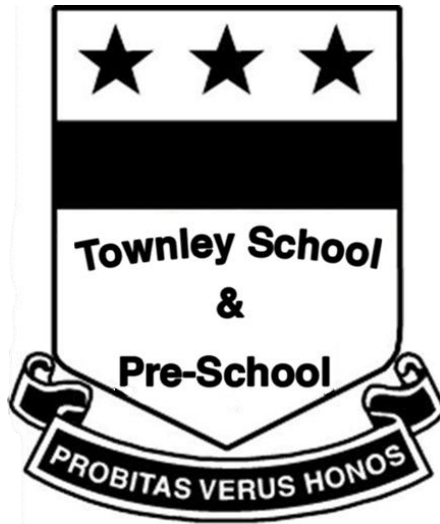


Townley School Bereavement Charter



In March, 2020, Townley Primary School became affected by the Covid-19 pandemic that required all schools to close indefinitely to protect the community and reduce the transmission of the disease. This is the context in which we decided to think ahead, planning for the return to school and how we help our children and families make sense of the events, especially if they have been personally affected by the death of a loved one. We acknowledge that the pandemic is a wholly unprecedented event, we recognise that we can learn a great deal from it in terms of how to plan for and address the impact of unforeseen change and loss.

At Townley Primary School we recognise the need to offer extensive and bespoke support to children and staff, who have experienced bereavement, particularly in respect of the loss of a parent, carer or sibling or close member of the school community.

Our Charter sets out how we will support children, families and staff in our school community who have lost a close family member individually and we also recognise that the entire school community will feel the impact of the death of a child or member of staff. Whilst we would hope to not encounter such circumstances, the statistical inevitability of such an occurrence means that we need to be proactive in responding sensitively and compassionately to such events.

In order to support our work in supporting children, families and staff who have experienced bereavement, we have adopted the Bereavement Charter for children from Winston's Wishes (See Appendix I)

We outline below how this will be put into practice at Townley Primary School.

We, at Townley Primary School, will provide:

- An empathetic understanding and care in the familiar and secure surroundings of our school. Where needed, and in consultation with the child's parents and/or carers, we will refer to a specialist service.
- Tailored and highly personalised support for the child/children and/or staff during and after bereavement
- Enhanced and sensitive communication that will explain how the school will work with the family and community to offer support in the short, medium and long term
- A nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all where the effects of bereavement are recognised, addressed and mitigated
- Staff training that will equip adults to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed in each individual circumstance.

Immediate Procedures for the Headteacher (or Chair of Governors if the deceased is the Headteacher)

1. The Headteacher will contact the family and establish factual information, with the aim of avoiding speculation, rumour or confusion. Their wishes as to how the information is more widely disseminated will be respected in all communications.

Sensitivity will be shown to cultural and religious beliefs of the family. The headteacher/chair of governors, in consultation with the school leadership team, will decide who is the best person to liaise immediately with the family. This will depend on the relationship with the child/family and the experience of the member of staff and will be decided by the Headteacher. (See Appendix II for a sample letter)

2. If the death occurs outside normal school hours or in the holidays, the telephone pyramid list will be used to contact staff. Staff should respect confidentiality at all times. Key school staff, who may not be directly employed by the school, also need to be informed (for example kitchen staff and sports coaches), as per the pyramid of contacts (contained in confidential part of critical incidents policy and provided to the teaching staff at the start of the new school year). The widespread use of social media makes it even more imperative that the information shared by the school is timely, consistent and respectful of the confidentiality of the family.
3. The children most directly affected will be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone well-known to them. The Headteacher will discuss each situation with the class teacher to agree on who speaks to the children. In order to feel better prepared, it may help to devise a script. (See Appendix III). Staff are encouraged to relate their own emotions to the children, albeit in a way that will not cause further distress, to validate the feelings the children are likely to express.
4. The Headteacher/Chair of Governors will gain permission from the child's parents before any wider communication takes place, which must be checked and agreed by them before dissemination and must take place at the earliest opportunity. A decision will be made in conjunction with the family about how the information will be distributed. (See Appendix IV and V)
5. The school timetable should be varied to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of children affected by the situation. However, any variation also needs to be balanced with the need for continuity; minimal disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security and familiarity.
6. Staff affected by the death will be offered support for as long as required. Staff supporting bereaved children may experience stress and find their own reactions and emotions overwhelming. Some members of staff may be more vulnerable due to circumstances in their own lives.
7. In consultation with the bereaved family, funeral arrangements will be ascertained, especially whether members of the school community should attend and whether there should be a full or partial school closure.
8. The Headteacher and/or Chair of Governors will liaise with the Local Authority. Where appropriate, a press statement should be prepared by the Headteacher in consultation with LA Media Team.
9. The Headteacher will ensure that the impact of bereavement is closely monitored, especially if any other significant unplanned events occur and also during planned events that herald significant change, such as transition to new schools and induction to new classes.

10. We recognise that some children may be particularly vulnerable due to their individual circumstances and we will be proactive in ensuring they receive tailored support.

Returning to school after a bereavement

On returning to school, we will guide our practice to ensure that children are supported. We will take the lead from listening to the child/children and liaising closely with their parents. Research shows that bereaved children can find comfort in a familiar environment with routines and familiar and trusted adults.

An initial meeting with the family should be arranged before the child returns so that specific concerns can be addressed. This should be a familiar adult, such as the class teacher, SENCO, teaching assistant or the Headteacher, depending on the child's individual circumstances.

The purpose of this meeting is to:

- Acknowledge the death.
- Find out how the child would prefer to let others know about it
- Establish how the child can indicate the need for 'time out' if they feel overwhelmed and explain how and where a safe space will be arranged
- Consider whether to provide 'time-out' activities – journals, art and craft, books, screen time, memory boxes etc.
- Agree preferences for communication – with the child, between members of staff, home and school.
- Consider how to provide support for peers when they have a bereaved friend.

Remembering

Marking the death of a child or close family member, or member of staff is very important. We will always consult the family of the person who died about their wishes for how we can do this. We may consider a memorial assembly or other tribute. A more permanent remembrance (a tree, a special garden, a piece of artwork, a bench) may be appropriate. We shall also consider the long term upkeep and maintenance of such a site.

Providing ongoing support

- Is there a method within school to record significant dates for the bereaved?
- Who will communicate with the family/carers and child?
- How will communication with child/ren, members of staff, the family/carers and the wider community be managed and reviewed?
- How will the progress (both in learning and emotional wellbeing) of the child be monitored?
- Who will be responsible for passing on details of the bereavement at transition points?
- The child will continue to grieve for the rest of their life and may require ongoing support. Significant dates or anniversaries, Mother's/Father's Day, etc. may be particularly difficult. Regular contact with the family/carers and reviews with the child will help to build up an overall picture of how the child is coping.
- The grief may impact the child's progress. Some children work really hard and may put themselves under extra pressure to succeed, while others may find it difficult to focus in

class and on their work. There may be changes in their behaviour, how will these be managed?

- Bereaved young people can find change difficult, so preparing them in advance (where possible) may help them to voice their worries and ease the process.
- Consider vulnerable children as they may need additional support, particularly on transition.

Death, grief and bereavement in the curriculum

Teaching the topic of death, grief and bereavement will help children to understand feelings of grief and prepare them for the future.

Informing parents and carers in advance of the intention to cover these topics in the school curriculum will help with this; they may wish to discuss bereavement with their child/children at home in advance. This is especially important where children have experienced bereavement. Staff should be aware of the need to reassure pupils and offer alternative provision if required.

The school has a wide range of books that can be borrowed to address bereavement; they can support children and the adults working with them to understand and manage grief. Some suggested book list can be found here <https://www.winstonswish.org/suggested-reading-list/>

Staff can find a list of resources they are able to use both for themselves and with children in the shared Microsoft Teams folder.

Appendix 1: Winston's Wishes Charter for Bereaved Children

THE CHARTER FOR BEREAVED CHILDREN

Winston's Wish supports children, young people and their families after the death of a parent or sibling. This charter is based on our conversations with thousands of children and their families, who have told us what gave them hope after bereavement.

B

Bereavement support

Bereaved children need to receive support from their family, from their school and from important people around them.

E

Express feelings and thoughts

Bereaved children should be helped to find appropriate ways to express all their feelings and thoughts associated with grief - such as sadness, anxiety, confusion, anger and guilt.

R

Remember the person who has died

Bereaved children have the right to remember the person who has died for the rest of their lives; sharing special as well as difficult memories.

E

Education and information

Bereaved children need and are entitled to receive answers to their questions and information that clearly explains what has happened, why it has happened and what will be happening.

A

Appropriate response from schools and colleges

Bereaved children need understanding and support from their teachers and fellow students without having to ask for it.

V

Voice in important decisions

Bereaved children should be given the choice about their involvement in important decisions that have an impact on their lives, such as planning the funeral and remembering anniversaries.

E

Everyone involved

Bereaved children should receive support which includes their parents or carers, and wider family.

M

Meet others

Bereaved children benefit from the opportunity to meet other children who have had similar experiences.

E

Established routines

Bereaved children should, whenever possible, be able to continue activities and interests so that parts of their lives can still feel 'normal'.

N

Not to blame

Bereaved children should be helped to understand that they are not responsible, and not to blame, for the death.

T

Tell the story

Bereaved children are helped by being encouraged to tell the story of what has happened in a variety of ways. These stories need to be heard by those important people in their lives.

Helpline: 08088 020 021
winstonswish.org

Winston's Wish is a Registered Charity (England and Wales) 1060259, (Scotland) SC041960 | 0107511117

**WINSTON'S
WISH WW**

Giving hope to grieving children

Appendix II

Template letter to parents and carers (from Child Bereavement UK)

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear the sad news of <Name's> death.

There are no words to express our sadness and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through.

As a school community, we will miss <Name> very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to <his/her> friends, classmates and teachers.

<Name> was a <valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly> member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help as you plan <Name's> funeral, please let us know.

We will continue to keep in touch and will support you in any way we can.

With deepest sympathy,

Headteacher

Appendix III

Suggestions for information to be included when imparting the news of a death

- Acknowledge that you have some sad news
- Be honest. State clear facts, using the words death/died.
- If known, and with the family's permission, explain briefly where and when the death occurred.
- If not known, say you will endeavour to find out. If you are aware of rumours, say which of these are definitely not correct. Where appropriate, remind children of their responsibilities in respect of the use of social media.
- Speak briefly and positively about the person who died without eulogising them.
- Mention any arrangements already in place, including for those needing support.
- Acknowledge that not everyone will be feeling sad and that is OK.
- Allow a break in the timetable for children to process the news and take a little time out.

Appendix IV

Template letter to parents and carers: death of a child (from Child Bereavement UK)

Dear parents and carers,

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

<Name> died suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness yesterday/last week/over the weekend/during half term.

He/She was a <valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly> member of the class/school community and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies, children may experience many different feelings, including sadness or anger. Some children may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

We have tried to answer questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Child Bereavement UK website childbereavementuk.org.

Our thoughts are with <Name's> family and friends at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember <Name's> life.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

Appendix V

Sample letter on death of a staff member (from Child Bereavement UK)

Dear parents/carers,

I am sorry to inform you that a <well-respected/long-standing/well-loved/popular/well-known> member of our staff, <Name>, died <suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness>.

The children were told today by their <class teacher/headteacher/in assembly> and many will be reacting to this news. When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some children may feel shocked and upset by the news, others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

We have tried to answer questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Child Bereavement UK website: childbereavementuk.org

Our thoughts are with <Name's> family at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember <Name's> life.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher