



Tredington Primary School

LOSS & BEREAVEMENT POLICY (& Procedures)

May 2020

To be reviewed September 2020

"Death neither obeys the school timetable nor appears on it...it enters the classroom without knocking."

Winston's Wish

Approximately 1 in 25 children and young people has experienced bereavement of a parent or sibling - that is about the same as one child in every school classroom in the country.

Many children and young people will experience bereavement, through the loss of a parent, sibling, grandparent or friend. Children can also face the loss of a loved animal or pet which can be as significant for them as losing a relative or friend. The term 'bereavement' refers to the process of grieving and mourning and is associated with a deep sense of loss and sadness. It is a natural process; however effects of bereavement can be overwhelming. At any one time, 70% of primary schools have a recently bereaved child on their roll.

One of the country's leading childhood bereavement charities, Winston's Wish, reports that children often feel isolated during their grief experience and may feel that nobody understands their feelings. However, experience of bereavement is unique to the individual and it is very difficult to predict how someone will respond. Certain reactions are common to children as well as adults. What can we do?

Normality

For the majority of children or young people whose life has been turned upside down, the routines of school life can give a sense of normality. Everything else may have fallen apart but school and the people within it are still there, offering a sense of security and continuity.

Relief from Grief

For children and young people, school can give relief from an emotionally charged atmosphere at home. They may feel overwhelmed by a grieving family. There may be a constant stream of visitors expressing their own grief. Children and young people can find this difficult to deal with.

An Outlet for Grief

When a parent or sibling has died, children and young people can try to spare their surviving parent by hiding their own grief and appearing to be OK. School is often seen as somewhere safe to express this grief.

A Listening Ear

Family members struggling to deal with their own grief can overlook children. For a child who wishes to talk, school staff can provide an opportunity for the child to

communicate their thoughts and feelings about what has happened to them, to a familiar and trusted adult in relative peace and calm.

The Opportunity to be a Child

Even when deeply sad, children still need to be children. School offers the chance to play, laugh, sing and generally just be a child without feeling guilty.

General Support

Systems should be in place to keep in contact with home; discuss concerns but also successes. Grieving children and young people can display altered behaviours in different situations. Good communication with home will help school to be aware of this and provide a more realistic picture of how the child is coping.

How children understand death at different ages

Preschool-age children (2-5 years old)

At this stage of development, children believe that death is reversible. They may also be convinced that it was something that they said or did which caused the person to die. Abstract concepts are not easily grasped, therefore it is important that the child is spoken to in very concrete terms. In order to make sense of what has happened children at this age may often ask the same questions over and over again.

Key points at 2-5 years of age. Children...

...are curious about death and believe death is temporary or reversible.

...may see death as something like sleeping—the person is dead but only in a limited way and may continue to breathe or eat after death.

...are characterised by 'magical thinking' and understand the world as a mix of reality and fantasy.

...are naturally egocentric and see themselves as the cause of events around them.

...often feel guilty and believe that they are responsible for the death of a loved one, perhaps because they were 'bad' or wished the person would 'go away'.

...may think that they can make the deceased come back if they are good enough.

...will worry about who will take care of them and about being abandoned.
...are still greatly affected by the sadness of surviving family members.
...cannot put their feelings into words and instead react to loss through behaviours such as irritability, aggression, physical symptoms, difficulty sleeping, or regression (such as bed-wetting & thumb sucking)

Primary school-age children (6 to 11 years old)

Children begin to develop the understanding that death is irreversible and something that eventually happens to all living things. Death may be regarded as something that is a bit 'spooky', and they may display what seems to be an unhealthy curiosity in the more morbid aspects of the death. Children at this age may complain of headaches, a sore tummy or other ailments in response to bereavement. These are referred to as 'somatic' complaints and are generally physical manifestations of grief and emotional pain. Behaviour may change, but it is important to encourage children at this age to express their feelings and to understand that what they are feeling is perfectly natural.

Key points at 6-11 years of age. Children...

...understand that death is final, but see it as something that happens only to other people.
...may think of death as a person or a spirit, like a ghost, angel, or a skeleton.
...understand (by the age of 10) that death is universal, unavoidable, and will happen to them
...are often interested in the specific details of death and what happens to the body after death.
...may worry about their own death as well as experience a range of emotions including guilt, anger, shame, anxiety and sadness.
...continue to have difficulty expressing their feelings and may react through behaviours such as school phobia, poor performance in school, aggression, physical symptoms, withdrawal from friends, and regression.
...may worry about who will take care of them and may experience insecurity, clinginess, and fear of abandonment.
...may still worry that they are to blame for the death.

Supporting a bereaved child with Special Educational Needs

Children and young people with Special Educational Needs are sometimes assumed to need protection from death and dying more than most or not have the capacity to understand. It can be easy to underestimate their ability to cope with difficult situations. The challenge is finding creative ways to communicate when words are sometimes not appropriate. If using words, use the real ones, for example dead and dying, not euphemisms.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Head Teacher has overall responsibility for the policy and its implementation; for liaison with the *Governing Body*, parents/carers, and appropriate outside agencies.

There needs to be a **designated person** within the school who has overall responsibility for support and liaison in the event of a death or traumatic loss. In the event that this person is absent then another named person will take responsibility.

The designated person within school is Mrs Liz Sim.

Her responsibilities are:-

- Policy development and review.
- Implementing the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities.
- Co-ordinating the planned action to manage school-related incidents in and beyond the school; decide who will be responsible for communicating with the family directly involved, decide who gives news to the school community and if necessary who will communicate with the press.
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies.
- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff.

The **Chair of Governors** is responsible for bereavement issues.

Her responsibilities are:-

- To contribute to generating and updating the policy and review practice.
- To support the Head Teacher in overseeing the management of bereavement.
- To support the Head Teacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is tackled in the curriculum.

Related Policies

Other policies which relate to the implementation of this policy are:

- SEN Policy
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Offer of Early Help

These policies are on the school website.

Curriculum

Children and young people explore the concept of loss, bereavement and grief as part of the PSHE curriculum. In our school this is taught as part of the 'Relationships' theme. It is also addressed through cross curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles, as well as through art, literacy, topic and Religious Education. Assemblies may also be used to address aspects of death e.g. Remembrance Day or commemorative occasions.

Any questions relating to loss or death will be answered in a sensitive and age-appropriate yet honest and factual way.

Children are given the opportunities to learn about and discuss cultural and religious issues around death as well as being encouraged to express their own responses and feelings.

Teaching and Learning

Our teaching will be based on an understanding of the principles stated above and that a variety of approaches should be used to meet the needs of our pupils and show sensitivity to their age and experience.

Teaching methods adopted in the classroom include:

- Giving clear, truthful and accurate information, not trying to soften the blow with ambiguous language which does not tell the truth.

- Practising the collaborative social skills necessary to help cope with the feelings of loss.
- Giving relevant and appropriate advice and support.

Transition

It is vitally important to ensure that if a child has experienced bereavement that this information is passed on to the relevant persons when they move on to a new class or school.

Support for Staff

Supporting bereaved pupils will be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions. See list of outside agencies below that can offer help, both short and long term.

Confidentiality

Although it is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure, pupils will be made aware that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. This will help in retaining the trust of pupils and parents/carers and will ensure that the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. Sensitive information is only disclosed internally or externally with careful attention to the rights and needs of individuals.

Communication

Communication between school staff and parents is vital to ensure that appropriate support is given as necessary.

Breaking news to staff, pupils and families

Gloucestershire County Council protocol will be followed if a pupil or staff member of the school community dies. The Head Teacher will follow their guidance in this situation. Obtaining factual information should always be made a priority and the local authority will ensure this is done. It is vitally important not to make assumptions or repeat what has been heard through rumour. This will only add to distress. It is essential that all staff are informed straight away, ideally before pupils.

Inclusion and Equality

School recognises that there is a range of cultural and religious customs and procedures concerning death and that there may be differing expectations of the bereaved child and family. These differences may affect matters of school organisation. More details about this are to be found in 'Death and Dying in the World's Major Religions' by Steven J. Rosen.

School tries to present a balanced view of different approaches to death and loss. Children will be made aware that there are a range of different responses to bereavement and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

Reference documents used in the drafting of this policy

Winston's Wish Schools Information Pack.

Winston's Wish online support materials.

Useful Websites

There are many websites and resources on line to support bereaved children or families, however one local charity and one national charity are mentioned below.

www.winstonswish.org

www.childbereavementuk.org

NB Different circumstances may require different support so further specific signposting can be offered as appropriate for individual children and/or families.

Created May 2020

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