

BENWICK PRIMARY SCHOOL



Bereavement Policy

School Name: Benwick Primary School

Date Agreed at FGB: 27.3.23

Next Review: March 2025

Signed: Role:

Rationale

Every 22 minutes in the UK a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 41,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, and, sadly, around 12,000 children die in the UK each year. Within our school community there will almost always be some recently bereaved children who are struggling with their own situation – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil. We would hope to not encounter such circumstances, but the statistical inevitability of such an occurrence implies the necessity of having a Bereavement Policy in place in order that we might be proactive, rather than reactive, when responding to these sensitive situations. Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children – or staff – require, though referral to more specialist support should be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex. Additional information and resources can be accessed at www.childbereavement.org.uk

Responding to a Bereaved Child

A bereaved child may display the following behaviour:

- Withdrawal
- Open distress – tears
- Panic
- Aggression
- Fear
- Nervous giggling
- Playing the class clown
- Exhaustion
- Denial
- Impulsive bravery

How Can the School Help?

Whole School Issues:

- The Headteacher to ensure that all staff know about the bereavement including lunchtime supervisors so that they can respond sensitively.
- Ensure that books, stories, music and art are available for use in circle times etc (see Appendix 1 - Resources and 1A - meeting the needs of Bereaved Children).
- Provide friendship / quiet garden for contemplation and thought.
- Use <http://childbereavementuk.org> or contact 0800 02 888 40 for organisations for support.

Class Issues:

- In the event of a child being bereaved within a class, the class teacher to talk to the children in circle time and give the class an opportunity to ask questions to discuss how they can support their bereaved classmate - one of the key hurts which bereaved children recall is the feeling that few people acknowledge the loss – Compassionate Friends.
- Recommended resources, including lesson plans and guidance can be located at: www.elephantsteaparty.co.uk. This can also be accessed through the childbereavement.org website.

Individual Issues:

- The school will identify an adult available for the child to talk privately to (Appendix 2 - Points to consider).
- The school will provide a safe place for pupils to go to when necessary. This may be John's Garden or a small room within the school.
- The school will acknowledge that grief caused by death is long lasting and will ensure that anniversaries etc. are remembered, this may be in terms of the class teacher asking the child quietly 'how are you?'. And the special days such as Fathers Day, Mothers Day and Christmas are handled sensitively.
- The school will inform parents / carers of organisations who are available to help individual children (Appendix 3 - Agencies who offer support and Appendix 3B - Supporting Staff).

Responding to the Death of a Pupil / Staff Member

Refer to Managing Bereavement in Cambridgeshire Schools and ELH Guidance – Responding to a Critical Incident

Supporting Staff

The Headteacher will ensure that all staff are informed, including those who are absent. The school recognises that staff, particularly senior members of staff will be expected to manage the event and may have to put personal feelings aside, however the Headteacher will endeavour to support staff and provide opportunities to grieve through discussion and reflection (see Appendix 3 - Agencies who may offer support).

Supporting Parents

In the event of a death of a pupil or member of staff the Headteacher will ensure that she, or a representative is available before and after school in the playground to offer support.

The Headteacher / Assistant Headteacher will:

- Ensure parents are aware of the intentions of the school and invite parents to attend any school response to death (sample letters to parents - Appendix 4).
- Offer guidance to parents on how they might act and information about other services (see Appendix 3 - Agencies who may offer support).

Supporting Children

- Children will be informed in groupings that are familiar to them, ideally in their own classroom, but their class teacher / teaching assistant will also be available to talk to pupils and to give individuals the support they need.
- Children will be told as soon as possible to avoid them hearing rumours.
- The age and understanding of the children will be taken into account when deciding on how and what information to provide (see Appendix 5 - Children's / Young Peoples Reaction to Death).
- Staff will ensure that they provide accurate and truthful information. Inaccurate information can lead to the child doubting the information they have been given and uncertain about who they can trust.
- Once the children have heard the news they will have opportunities for questions / answers and discussion.

Governors

The Headteacher will inform the Chair of Governors who will disseminate the information to all other governors.

Others

Other members of the community may be informed if appropriate to the individual e.g. Religious Leader.

Monitoring

This policy has been adopted as part of our response to loss and change through the Health Promoting Schools initiative and it's success will be monitored through the Health Promoting Schools Working Party, made up of parents, staff and governors.

APPENDIX 1

Resources

The Personal Social and Health Education base at Brampton Infants School, has a database of resources on all aspects of PSHCE including Bereavement for children and young people from

4 - 18. Further information about this database can be accessed by phoning the base on 01489 375171

The Schools Library Service supports the PSHCE Advisory Service in providing resources to schools, which experience bereavement. The intention is to produce a Core Support Box, containing the following resources. Schools Library Service can be contacted at Whittlesey on 01733 758014. Further bereavement books may also be available from The Schools Library Service. Where appropriate schools will be charged in the usual way:

Giving Sorrow Words - Managing Bereavement in Schools

Video and Book - This is a training resource for adults working in schools concerned about the impact of death on children and young people of all ages. It can be used as part of a structured In-Service Training Programme or by a teacher who needs immediate ideas. It gives practical advice from professionals and also uses drama to illustrate ways schools can make a difference. The main areas covered are:

Introduction - how bereavement may effect children / young people and the consequences for school. ~The major challenges of the grieving process are explored.

Breaking the news of a death of a member of the school.

A child returning to school following a family bereavement.

Exploring the long-term effects of loss.

When specialise help is needed

By Steven Killick and Stuart Lindeman - ISBN 1 873942 72 9 - Lucky Duck Publishing -
Tele: 01179 732 881 - email: publishing@luckyduck.co.uk

Forgotten Mourners

This book gives clear, concise guidance on how children / young people grieve. The simple, clear language and key points at the end of each chapter make this book easy to read and understand. It offers practical suggestions for working with children / young people in a supportive context that will facilitate their mourning. It is a useful guide for all who work with grieving children / young people.

By M Pennells and Smith - ISBN 1 85302 264 0 - Kingsley Publishing

Badgers Parting Gifts

This fictional book can be used by older children / young people to explore the issues around death or can be read to younger children as a focus for discussion.

Badger dies at the start of the book and the gifts he leaves are the memories which each of his friends holds on to after his death. The book makes the point that using these gifts or memories they will be able to help each other to cope with their loss.

By Susan Varley - ISBN 1 85681 164 6 - Random Century Publishing

What do We Think About Death?

This is a factual book for children in Key Stages 1 & 2 although some children in Key Stage 2 might find it a bit basic. It is illustrated with up to date photographs, explaining the biological process of life and death, responses to death and can be used to either introduce the subject of death or to help and support children who have been bereaved. The approach is secular allowing parents or teachers to introduce spiritual aspects according to the child's religious belief.

By L. Bryant-Mole - ISBN 0 750 2220 85

Beginnings and Endings with Lifetimes In-Between

This beautifully illustrated book takes the simple theme of 'a lifetime' and using the example of plants, animals and people, explores it in very straight forward ways, each time concluding that as life begins at a point in time, so it ends at a point in time. This book could be used at any

age but particularly younger children to (as the title suggests) talk about the beginning of life, the end of life but also the lifetime in between.

By Bryan Mellonie and Robert Inkpen - ISBN 1 85561 760 9

Winston's Wish - Supporting a child when someone in their family is seriously ill.

This resource aims to help parents / carers and their children cope with a serious illness in the family. It provides practical advice and suggested responses to questions from very young children and young people, drawing on the experience of those who have experienced a family bereavement as parents, siblings or children.

ISBN 0 9539112 2 9 www.winstnswish.org.uk email: infor@winstonswish.org.uk

Appendix 1A

Meeting the needs of Bereaved Children / Young People

Worden (1996) conducted a two year study of bereaved children / young people which has detailed some of the needs of bereaved children / young people.

- *Accurate information* - children / young people need to have an age appropriate understanding about the causes of death. In the absence of this information they are likely to make things up to fill in the gaps in their knowledge or even to believe that they were in some way responsible. Make sure the child does not have any misconceptions.
- *Continued involvement and Inclusion in daily activities* - however deep the despair or tragic the loss, life still needs to continue and the child's involvement in a school that carries on in a familiar way is of great help. Getting a child back to school reasonably soon after the loss and getting their full involvement in the academic and social life of the school can be important. How long this takes will depend on the child.
- *Have fears and anxieties addressed* - sometimes children / young people will have fears about what will happen to them or surviving members of the family. These may be realistic or reflect imagined worries. However the child needs to have these fears listened to and addressed. By giving accurate and age appropriate information, however difficult, the child becomes more able to cope. Children / young people are often able to deal with very difficult situations if they are trusted with the truth and are given support to deal with it. Children / young people are often able to deal with very difficult situations if they are trusted with the truth and are given support to deal with it. Children / young people may have awkward questions that adults struggle to find the answers for. These questions should be answered as fully as possible and with respect for the child's curiosity. If you do not know the answer then do not be afraid to say so. You can then endeavour to help the child find out how they may get an answer.
- *Do not presume you know what the child is feeling* - take time to inquire and listen to their answers. We may think we know what the child is feeling but this may be based on our own experience or assumptions. It can be useful to ask; I don't know what it is like for you; can you tell me how you are feeling?
- *Reassurance that they are not to blame* - younger children especially may feel that they are in some way responsible for the death. Whether this fear is openly expressed or not it can be useful to reassure the child that there was nothing that they did that could have caused the death. Giving the opportunity to talk also offers the child the opportunity to test out their ideas.
- *Modelling appropriate grief behaviours* - children / young people can learn about how to make sense of their feelings by watching how others react. Teachers are extremely important in showing how to adapt. They can also do this by sharing their own experiences of loss and talking about their feelings of both happy and sad memories. Raising the subject shows that it is appropriate to remember the dead. These simple techniques can make a tremendous difference.
- *Offering opportunities to remember* - however long after the loss, it is still helpful to give opportunities for the child to reminisce. As the child grows older, and can think about a lost parent in more sophisticated ways, remembering gives the opportunity to stay connected with that parent and to answer new questions as they arise. To have the chance to do this outside the family is useful. Inquiring about mementoes, how the person is remembered, especially around anniversaries and other special days, gives the chance for the child to think about the importance of remembering.
- *Validation of feelings* - grief brings up complex and conflicting feelings. Again, careful talking and listening gives the child a way to work through this process. It is very easy to not accept the feelings of sadness in a child. For instance, by offering reassurance that things will get better. However too much reassurance may not allow a child to express their feelings. It is however, by such expression of feelings, which may be done through talking, crying, drawing or playing that allows a child to move on.

- *Help with overwhelming feelings* - sometimes a child may not want to express strong feelings of sadness, anger or guilt. Often writing, play or arts activities may present opportunities for these feelings to come out. If they can do so in an environment that is safe for them and others this can help make these feelings more manageable.
- *Continued monitoring* - often a child will appear to be coping well. They may wish to keep their grief hidden from their friends, family and even themselves. Problems may appear several years later. Do not presume that if everything looks to be fine then attention can be relaxed. Constant monitoring is needed.
- *Allow expression of feeling through play, drawing music or written forms* - All of the arts allowing for emotional expression can provide opportunities for the child to express and work through the complex emotions they feel and gain new understandings. At the basis of many art forms, especially drama is play. This can be a very powerful way of enabling a child to gain insight into what has happened and what feelings they and other have.

Worden J.W. (1996) - Children and Grief: When a Parent Dies - Guildford Press

Appendix 2

The following points should be considered when talking to any person or group of people who have been affected by the death of a person close to them.

Do

Let your genuine concern and caring show

Say you are sorry about what has happened and about their pain.

Allow them to express as much grief as they are feeling at the moment and are willing to share.

Encourage them to be patient with themselves, not to expect too much of themselves and not to impose any 'shoulds' on themselves.

Talk about the special and endearing qualities of the person who has died.

Reassure them that the care given to the person who has died was the best

Don't

Let your own sense of helplessness keep you from reaching out to a bereaved person.

Avoid them because you are uncomfortable (being avoided adds to an already painful experience).

Change the subject when they mention the person who has died.

Avoid mentioning the dead person's name for fear of reminding them of their pain.

Point out that they have others who they can love or love them (people cannot replace each other)

Appendix 3

Supporting Staff

Dealing with grief in children is emotionally demanding for anybody. Helping children work through the emotions of grief and so adapt to the loss will place stress on the staff in the following ways:

- They may well be grieving themselves, especially if they knew the deceased.
- The loss may re awaken previous losses or bereavement.
- They may not feel comfortable with talking about emotions.
- The emotional demands are stressful and in themselves, may be sufficient for staff to need support. However, if they have additional pressures this may exacerbate the stress.
- If staff are managing a situation they may not give full attention to their own needs and feelings.
- There may be a strong identification with the child or family.

Staff often find it difficult to ask for extra support for themselves, Some fear it may be perceived as a sign of weakness or not coping. Support should be offered as a matter of course to all of those dealing with bereavement.

On going monitoring for signs of continued anxiety, guilt, feelings of helplessness or any changes, can show if staff need more support. It is useful to recognise and acknowledge the difficulties of working with bereavement, to ensure staff look after their own needs and do not feel guilty about finding activities which, they enjoy and are relaxing.

One of the most effective ways of helping is taking time to talk things through as much as possible with individuals and in staff groups. Other strategies may include a staff session on stress management techniques or bringing people in who are experienced in working in this area and are able to talk about coping strategies.

Appendix 4

Sample Letter to Parents

These letters have been used by different schools at different stages. They are intended as a guide for schools who may be sitting down to write a letter at a very difficult time. Phrases or complete letters may be helpful or you may find different words to suit your school's needs.

Dear Parents,

It is with great sadness that I have to tell you that during the night *our teacher* died. She had become increasingly poorly over the last few days and in the end died peacefully, with her family at her side. We have told the children / young people during the day, some of whom are experiencing some distress. On behalf of the school community I have expressed our sympathy to her family. I am sure that in the weeks to come we will be finding our own way to celebrate the life that she had with us here at *Our School*

Dear Parents,

It is with much sadness that I am writing to inform you of the death of *our pupil*. *Our pupil* died unexpectedly during the early hours of the morning. I am sure you will wish to join us in expressing condolences to his / her family at this time.

Dear Parents,

It is with sadness that I am writing to inform you of the death of a pupil from our school. We learned this morning that *our pupil* has died after (a short illness / tragic accident or other appropriate phrase). Mr. & Mrs.....'s permission, to hold a Celebration of Life service on the same day as the funeral will be taking place, in order for the whole school to be part of this time. You are more than welcome to join us at this service. I enclose a book list with one or two suggestions that might help you to help your child with their grief..

Dear Parents,

On behalf of all the staff I would like to express our sincere thanks to everyone for the support, sympathy and concern we received throughout last week. The letters, words and flowers helped ease our sadness. Our hearts go out to Mr and Mrs.....and their family. They will need our support for many months to come. I know that despite their pain and sorrow they were greatly comforted by the love and genuine compassion shown by the whole school and the local community. The special assembly and funeral service gave tangible evidence of this compassion. The remembrance table will remain in the hall for at least another week. Please do continue to add to it, or visit at any time. Its presence has been a tremendous release and comfort for many of us. I am concerned that the impact this tragedy has had on all of us will still result in many different reactions for some considerable time. You and your children may need some extra counselling in the future and so I thought it would be beneficial to list some addresses and telephone numbers of professional organisations, which may be able to help. (See appendix 7.)

Please do not hesitate to talk to me, or any member of staff, if you are concerned about your child. Thankfully what have experienced as a school is extremely rare. I have no doubt that the experience has drawn us closer and has created new bonds but it will also leave a lasting heartache. Together I know we will ensure that it is also a positive experience, which will enable us, the children and adult to be more sensitive and compassionate human beings.

Appendix 5

Children's / Young Peoples' Reaction to Death

It must be stressed that these stages are only intended as guidelines and children and young people may not fit neatly into these categories. Bereavement in childhood may advance the child's understanding of death and its consequences. It may therefore happen that a child will exhibit features described as occurring at another stage in development regardless of his or her age.

Age of Child	Concept of Death	Common Reactions	Guidelines for Helping the Child
0 – 2 yrs	No concept of death Awareness of separation by absence.	Lengthy separation may lead to despair and detachment. Stranger anxiety. Regression to an earlier stage of development. Feeding / sleeping / toileting difficulties.	Keep parents involved. Help the parents deal with the crisis so they can comfort the child. Meet the child's physical needs – food, rest, warmth and comforting. Follow normal routines. Meet stimulation as appropriate.
2 – 5 yrs	Death seen as non-permanent, reversible. May feel responsible for the death by thoughts or behaviour.	Fears of abandonment and separation, intrusive procedures and mutilation. Crying, kicking, biting, holding on when separated from familiar people. Dislike of change in routine. Sleep problems, nightmares, and bedwetting. Regression in behaviour.	Keep parents involved. Help the parents deal with the crisis so they can comfort the child. Have favourite toy / blanket available for child. Lots of positive reinforcement.
5 – 8 yrs	Beginning to understand permanence. Knows that death is not caused by thoughts or actions. Interested in death rituals	Withdrawal, sadness, loneliness, depression. May act out behavioural difficulties at home / school. May become a 'perfect' child Regression may accompany stress. Range of mood swings and emotions. Play, stories, drawings may reveal feelings and fears.	Play, stories and drawing will often reveal a child's inner feelings and fear. The child wants to understand what is happening - give honest, concrete explanations. Continue contact with as many activities and friends as possible. Allow short-term regression and dependence on parents. Continue contact with as many activities and friends as possible. Allow short-term regression and dependence on parents.
9-12 yrs	Death seen as final, inevitable and universal. Awareness of own death. Death often associated with violence. Role-play connected with death and funeral scenes.	May exhibit some psychosomatic symptoms and or depression. Able to rationalise death and loss and accept it in a positive way. Able to work out possible implications for the future. Normal behaviour with occasional changes.	
13-17 yrs	Understands the permanence of death, often denies own death, sense of being immortal. May engage in risk taking activities. Interest in the occult, afterlife and rites of different cultures.	May exhibit some psychosomatic stress or depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts. Increased concern over own body image and changes. Regression and dependence. Shows fear through inappropriate behaviour, joking or sarcasm.	Try to give as much comfort as possible - involve the young person in the planning of their care and rule setting. Take feelings seriously, allow quiet times to talk. Keep active with peers if possible. Set limits on acting out behaviour