

Bereavement Policy

Rationale

No matter how prepared we think we are, death is often traumatic and unexpected. A considered, planned and organised response to an event is often more effective than acting on impulse.

Intervention Team

Mr
Mrs
Class Teacher

When news of a death reaches the school a member of the Team must be informed so that the Team can meet to make decisions on how to progress. A member of the Team will contact the next of kin of the child/member of staff to discuss how the school can best deal with the child's/member of staff's needs. One of this key member's primary roles should be to gather all the facts, particularly if the death has been traumatic, and disseminate this information to all staff, taking into consideration the wishes of the family.

Death of Child or a Member of Staff

The sudden death of a pupil or member of staff challenges the very heart of the school community, its identity and its coping mechanisms. The NEELB provide support for schools in such circumstances (see Appendix). After consultation with the deceased's family, the Team would inform close friends before holding a special assembly to announce the news to the rest of the school. It is important to be open and honest and to not make any assumptions about the cause of death. After children have been informed they should be given the opportunity, within their class, to express their emotions, feelings and thoughts. Not all staff will feel confident with this and, if required, a Team member will help support staff. Sharing grief in a supportive environment can facilitate the grieving process. Sensitivity should be shown respecting the pupil's choice as to when they are ready to explore their feelings. For pupils or staff particularly affected it may be necessary to contact appropriate outside agencies. (see Appendix)

Funerals, Memorial Services

Pupils and staff may express a wish to attend a service but they should only do so with the agreement of the deceased's family and, in the case of pupils, with the agreement of their own family.

Procedure to help a pupil deal with bereavement when a member of their family dies:

- Visit or telephone the family before the pupil returns to school.
- Ask if you should inform other pupils in the class.
- Watch out for the reaction of pupils who have previously suffered loss.
- Watch out for signs of recurring grief for some months and particularly on anniversaries.
- Be available to listen to and support the bereaved pupil.
- Arrange a one-to-one session if appropriate.
- Be calm. Show them you are listening/understanding by occasionally repeating what they have said and acknowledging their emotions.
- Beware of using platitudes e.g. "I know how you feel"
- Talk to children using words they understand
- Don't be afraid to show children how you are feeling
- Encourage children to ask questions and answer them honestly and simply

Return to School

In this phase of the process, the work of the team should be re-active, sympathetic and supportive to meet the needs, feelings and emotions of both staff and pupils. In most cases it is advisable, provided the bereaved or family of the bereaved agree, that everyone is aware of

the situation before the pupil returns. Teachers should endeavour to foster an environment that is compassionate, yet disciplined. School, with its routines and rituals, often provides a respite at this traumatic time. Anniversaries or birthdays often spark a revival of feelings of bereavement and it is important to be aware of such dates and to react with sensitivity and respect.

Terminally ill Pupils/Staff

The wishes of the person and their next of kin must always be respected. Honesty about death and dying is the best line of approach. Sometimes there is just no other way.

Changes in the Bereaved Child

Children in the Primary School age group have an understanding of the finality of death. After a death a child may display reactions such as:-

- Withdrawal
- Aggression
- Anger
- Nervousness
- Sullen moods
- lack of concentration
- Sleep problems
- Loss of self-esteem
- Headaches, stomach ache, sickness

These are all normal reactions for young children.

Self-care

"The loss of a loved person is one of the most intensely painful experiences a human being can suffer and not only is it painful to experience but also painful to witness, if only because we are so impotent to help." - Bowlby

Teachers also require support structures when dealing with grief. Never take on too much. If you are having difficulty dealing with your own or other's grief, talk to a partner, friend or colleague.

and finally...

Some advice

- Tell the people you love that you love them
- Leave no unfinished business
- Have fun – enjoy the child in you
- Each day maximise the pleasure of living
- Strive to be happy and loving
- Accept the fact that no one can live forever

Appendix

Useful Contacts

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• Helpline 0808 808 1677

Barnardo's · 028 9064 5899	Advice	Line
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