



Newtown C of E Primary School

Bereavement Policy

Ratification Date:	July 2018	Signed: (HEADTEACHER) Mrs Janet Cane (CHAIR OF GOVERNORS)
Reviewed:	November 2025	Signed: Mrs Emma Howlett (Headteacher) Mrs Glyn Wright(Chair of Governors)
Review due to updates:	July 2026	Signed: Mrs Emma Howlett (Headteacher) Mrs Glyn Wright(Chair of Governors)
Next Review	November 2027	

School Vision

At Newtown C of E Primary School, our motto is enriched and sustained by our Christian values of **Love, Courage and Friendship**, rooted in the teachings of the Bible. We are guided by the call to *“love one another as I have loved you”* (John 13:34), *“be strong and courageous... for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go”* (Joshua 1:9), and *“a friend loves at all times”* (Proverbs 17:17).

As a school at the heart of an evolving community, we warmly welcome children and families from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. We are enriched by the unique qualities each child brings and value the talents and perspectives that help us grow together.

We are an aspirational school serving our community. We seek to know, understand and celebrate every child, nurturing their individual strengths and talents. We prepare our children to become confident, responsible global citizens in an ever-changing world, guided by our core values of love, courage and friendship.

Through **Love**, we show kindness, compassion and generosity, building a community where everyone feels safe, welcomed and valued. Through **Courage**, we persevere, meet challenge with confidence, and stand up for what is right with honesty and grace. Through **Friendship**, we grow together — encouraging one another, celebrating each other’s gifts, and looking to the future with hope and aspiration.

We live out these values by:

- Being a caring, welcoming and inclusive Christian community where staff, pupils, parents and governors work together in a safe and supportive environment, inspired by *“Above all, love each other deeply”* (1 Peter 4:8)
- Promoting the welfare and dignity of every child, safeguarding them from harm — including physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect and bullying — in accordance with statutory guidance in *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (Department for Education)
- Providing a rich, engaging curriculum that equips children with the knowledge, skills and character to become lifelong learners and responsible citizens, reflecting Christian teachings and British Values
- Building strong, positive partnerships with parents, the church and the wider community, and encouraging participation in local, national and global initiatives

- Fostering our Learning Behaviours of Resilience, Focus, Independence, Self-Regulation, Respect and Boundaries, encouraging children to act with integrity, perseverance and kindness in all they do

At Newtown, we want every child to know they belong, are cherished, and are capable of great things. Through **Love, Courage and Friendship**, we grow minds, shape futures and journey together in hope.

Rationale

We understand that bereavement is faced by members of our school community at different times and that when the loss is of a member of our school community – such as a child or staff member, it can be particularly difficult. Pupils need to be supported when they experience family bereavements and other significant losses in the course of their lives while they are at school. This policy will provide guidelines to be followed after a bereavement. The aim is to be supportive to both pupils and adults, and for staff to have greater confidence and be better equipped to cope when bereavement happens. 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. This school is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and pupils. We are dedicated to the continual development of a 'healthy school'. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that support and prepare pupils for coping with separation or loss of a loved one, either through death or divorce. This policy is based on practice that has grown over time as the school has previously experienced bereavements, and provides a resource as a working document to support our community.

Following a Bereavement

We believe that children and adults alike have the right to:

- be given space and time to grieve
- be given support from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate – if possible, of their own choice.
- encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement.

We recognise that:

- grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real.
- 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.
- the death of a child has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/care team of that child and every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far reaching contacts.

The Management of Bereavement in School

A universally accepted procedure outline will, in itself, not enable everyone to feel comfortable in dealing with the practicalities of death and bereavement. Each bereavement is unique and comes with its own specific challenges; however, it is helpful to have a framework on which to build. One of our main concerns must be the immediate

family of the deceased and as a school we state our commitment to any such family as they may need practical, emotional and ongoing support.

.1 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.

.2 Death of a pupil

The school may be notified in a number of ways. Upon notification of the death of a pupil:

- Past experience has shown that if death occurs parents usually let the school know directly and the person answering the phone will put them through to the most senior member of staff on site.
- Where death occurs in the holidays or at weekends the parents will contact the main school email account adminoffice@newtown.hants.sch.uk which is periodically checked in the holiday period.
- In that instance the member of staff who checks the email account will immediately contact the most senior member of the school team possible and that person will then assume responsibility for the dissemination of the information.

.3 Sharing information

It is important to agree, with the parent, before the school can take on the role of informing concerned parties within, or outside, the school community. Evidence from many special schools has shown that parents are often happy to have this burden taken away from them, as they have many people unconnected with the school to contact. There can be no definitive list of people to contact and, therefore, it will be different for each child. The school should ensure that all people who are close to the child are told in a sensitive and supportive manner rather than risk them hearing it 'on the grapevine'. The school needs to ensure it does not add to the sorrow by leaving people feeling marginalised.

The following people should be considered:

- Current school staff not in school that day – including therapy staff
- Previous school staff who worked closely with the child
- Social Work team if applicable
- SEND team
- Medical team – the school nurse for example
- Taxi driver and escort
- Chair of Governors
- Respite centres if applicable
- Other professionals who work with the child – Ed Psych
- Other parents – if children have been informed, the school needs to send a note to parents informing them of the loss, and they may need to support or comfort their children (see Appendix C). Some parents may need to be telephoned if their relationship is closer but who may not have been informed by the family.

The process for telling the other pupils will be decided by the Headteacher following consultation with the teaching staff. For example, with different aged pupils there will be

different decisions made and the class teacher of the class with the loss will usually be the best person to tell the rest of the children in that class. It is important that staff avoid adding worry – for example, if the child died in hospital we do not want to give children a fear of hospitals. Although the finality of death cannot be diminished, if there are mitigating circumstances that may help - such as that the child was in pain and now is free of pain - this can be used to help alleviate sorrow. Children must be told that, while they may feel sad, they do not have to feel guilty if they go on to have fun and pleasure in their day ahead. They must not feel obliged to assume a burden of grief. Children must be allowed to ask questions at this time or at any point in the following days or weeks. Staff must answer honestly and to the best of their knowledge (see Appendix D).

3.4 Pre-bereavement

- A member of pastoral staff will meet with the pupil regularly to provide the pupil with an opportunity to talk about what is happening and how they are feeling.
- All staff will remain vigilant to signs that the pupil is facing challenges in relation to their psychological, physical and social development and will refer any concerns to senior leadership staff who will ensure appropriate support is put in place.

3.5 Pupils with a life-threatening illness

- The headteacher, the pupil and their family, and other relevant staff members (e.g. a member of pastoral staff) will decide how to share the news that a pupil is terminally ill with the school community.
- Other pupils will be informed about how they can best support the pupil in the most appropriate way.

3.6 Terminally Ill Pupils/Staff

- In the event of a child or member of staff becoming terminally ill, their wishes and those of their parents/guardians/next-of-kin should always be respected.
- Should the child wish to attend school, the class teacher may need to inform the class of the child's condition in a sensitive and age-appropriate manner.
- Occasionally, the child may wish to talk to their fellow classmates about their condition themselves, and this should be supported where appropriate.
- The school will work closely with the family and relevant professionals to ensure appropriate emotional support, reasonable adjustments, and safeguarding measures are in place.

4. 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 decide for the school to be represented at the funeral and identify which staff and pupils may want to attend, together with the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport. For some

schools it is appropriate to close, for others it is not, consequently difficult decisions will sometimes have to be made concerning attendance.

- Will flowers be sent and/or a collection made? Involve staff and pupils in the decision.
- Cultural and religious implications need consideration.
- If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed. Past experience has shown that this can be helpful in their grieving.

5. Memory Assemblies

It may be appropriate to hold a memory assembly for the child. Staff need to be able to show pupils that it is perfectly normal to feel upset at the loss of a friend and that helpful rituals, prayers, and remembering can be shared in a manageable way together.

6. If A Child Dies in School

- If any member of staff has concerns regarding a child's health they will contact a first aider and ideally the Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher.
- In the case of a serious concern, the school will call for an ambulance. Due to the seriousness of the situation, this decision can be taken by the first aider or a member of the SLT.
- Immediately inform the Headteacher or, in her absence, the most senior member of staff on site.
- The Headteacher will then ensure that the parents are contacted and seek their agreement to meet the ambulance at the hospital.
- If the child stops breathing a trained school staff member will administer CPR. In some cases, parents may have given the school a protocol to be followed in the event of a serious health incidence. In rare cases, this may include a request that mechanical resuscitation is not administered. However, whilst the school respects the parents' preference in this matter, due to the statutory responsibility imposed on the school regarding "duty of care", the need for school staff to administer manual CPR overrides such preference. Once the ambulance has arrived at school, the child is given over to their care and it is the ambulance team's decision as to where the child is taken or which form of treatment is administered.
- Where the parents have given the school a protocol to be followed in the event of an emergency medical issue occurring - e.g. no resuscitation - this protocol will be handed to the paramedics.
- Any change in circumstance following the first call to parents should be reported to them as soon as possible. NB: Staff must not impart shocking or worrying news to a parent if they are travelling in a car alone.
- Once the child is placed in the ambulance a member of staff will be appointed to travel to the hospital either in the ambulance or in their own transport. The purpose of this is to be a familiar face to the child's family on their arrival at the hospital. This person will remain in regular contact with Headteacher and/or the Deputy Headteacher.
- The school will notify the Local Authority (LA) if there is a death in school at the earliest opportunity. All press enquiries are to be rooted through the Headteacher, Chair of Governors and LA Media Team.

7. If a Child Dies on a School Trip

If a crisis situation occurs whilst a child is out on an educational trip, then the adult with the child - or the teacher in charge - should telephone for an ambulance first and then contact the school to inform the Headteacher. The school will then take the responsibility of contacting the parents. Once the ambulance team reaches the child, the child becomes the responsibility of the ambulance team and they will direct any subsequent actions. The off sites visits protocols give guidance for such situations and should be followed. The school will notify the LA, at the earliest opportunity, if there is a death out of school. The above procedures and protocols will then apply.

8. Support for staff returning to school after bereavement

8.1 Reintegration meeting

The Head teacher will meet with the bereaved staff member to discuss how best to manage a return to school.

The purpose of the meeting will be to:

- Determine whether the staff member is ready to return to work and the best way to make that return (e.g. a phased return to work or a temporary change in duties)
- Address any concerns the staff member may have about the return to school
- Consult with the staff member about how or even if they want their pupils and colleagues to know of the death (where relevant)
- Set guidelines for communication between the staff member and their line manager to monitor and support the staff member

8.2 Ongoing support

We acknowledge that grief can have an impact on a staff member's physical and mental health, which can then go on to impact their performance. We also recognise that grieving is highly personal and that there can't be a one-size-fits-all solution for monitoring and supporting a bereaved person. We will work with each individual to create a system of monitoring and support that works for that person. Whenever necessary we will request additional support from colleagues or from external support agencies (see Appendix).

- A specific room could be allocated- e.g. the Meeting Room - for the duration of a lunchtime to enable staff to meet and share their thoughts over a coffee or tea. It should be emphasised that anything shared on such occasions should be held as confidential and not for public airing.
- Access to one to one time with a member of staff.
- Connection with the Church for reflection and support. The Church will offer pastoral care
- The Educational Psychology team offer counselling support and staff will be reminded about this service.
- Hampshire County Council Confidential Wellbeing Helpline by telephone 02380 626606 or email counselling@hants.gov.uk

- Availability of information about accessing bereavement support outside of school, eg: CRUSE

9. Support for pupils returning to school after bereavement

9.1 Reintegration meeting

A member of the senior leadership team will meet with the bereaved pupil and their parents/carers to discuss how best to manage a return to school. The purpose of the meeting will be to:

- Determine whether the pupil is emotionally ready to return to the classroom either full-time or with adjustments to the timetable to allow for a phased return
- Address any concerns the pupil and their parents/carers have about the return to school
- Consult with the pupil about how or even if they want their classmates to know of the death (where relevant)
- Consider any additional support needed for a pupil who is vulnerable or has special educational needs (SEN) or a disability

9.2 Ongoing support

We will maintain regular contact with the pupil's parents/carers to monitor how the pupil is coping. We acknowledge significant dates or holidays may be especially difficult. The dates will be monitored, and additional support will be available.

We know that grief may impact a pupil's progress and affect their behaviour. To manage this, we will;

- Address behaviour using our behaviour Policy
- A record will be made of anniversaries and days with regards to the death which may act as a trigger for challenging behaviour.
- Any incidents of bullying, where a bereaved pupil is the victim or perpetrator, will be addressed in line with the behaviour and anti-bullying policy, considering the pupil's needs and circumstances.
- All staff members will remain vigilant to signs that a bereaved pupil is facing difficulties in relation to their psychological, physical and social development and will refer the pupil to pastoral staff who will put appropriate support in place.
- We will take care to manage changes for bereaved pupils by preparing them in advance (where possible) and taking extra steps to support necessary transitions.
- In most cases, each child will have a favoured member of staff to approach.
- The PDL co-ordinator will ensure that we have suitable books and other materials to help children discuss death and come to terms with loss. (See Appendix A and B)
- Social Stories may be one way to help pupils to understand loss.
- The Educational Psychology team can offer support to pupils who may need more help.

9.3 For the Family

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support. Send a letter of condolence from the school.
- Give parents and family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died.

- Connection with the Church for reflection and support. The Church will offer pastoral care
- Send a representative to the funeral.
- Hold a collection /flowers to be sent as appropriate.
- Invite parents/family to any commemorative events held by the school, both at the time and in subsequent years.
- If memorial work has been completed, for example a remembrance wall or book, then this should be returned to the parents at an appropriate time, and pupils informed where it has gone.
- If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed. Parents will be told that they are welcome in the school and will be encouraged to come and visit. Past experience has shown that this can be helpful in their grieving. The first visit to the school is often difficult and will be arranged sensitively in accordance with the parents' wishes. It will then be for the parents to decide if they wish to maintain on going links. Each family will be different, with differing needs. Therefore, the school will always be there to act as a source of support and information.

9.4 The Death of a Member of Staff

All of the principles and procedures listed above apply to the death of a staff member. For a letter template see Appendix C. In addition to the above, 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.

10. Responding to the media

Some deaths, particularly those in sudden or traumatic circumstances, attract media attention. All members of staff are advised not to respond to journalists and to refer all enquiries to the Headteacher, who will make a considered response after seeking assistance from the LA Media Team.

11. 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 member of the SLT will take responsibility. Their responsibilities are:

- Policy development and review, involving pupils, staff, governors, parents/carers and relevant local agencies.
- Implementing the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities.
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies.
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary school.
- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff.

There is a Lead Governor with responsibility for bereavement. Their responsibilities are:

- To contribute to generating and updating the policy.
- To support the Headteacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is managed.
- To support the Headteacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is tackled in the curriculum.
- To review practice.

Policy review date: November 2027

Appendix A - List of Online Resources and Information

www.simonsays.org.uk A local bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss. Contact Simon says on 023 8064 7550 for more information and details of forthcoming groups. Support groups are located at Haven Children Centre, Harris Road, Bridgemary, Gosport, PO13 OUY.

www.chums.info A bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

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.

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

<https://childbereavementuk.org/> Child Bereavement UK

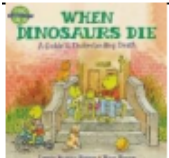
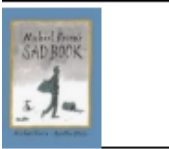
Appendix B - Books on Bereavement

EYFS/KS1

	<u>Why do things die?</u>- Katie Daynes A beautiful and gentle lift-the-flap book that looks at the circle of life, using animals characters to explore the emotions and facts around death, with questions such as Is it ok to talk about dying? What happens when someone dies? Can I shout and cry and hide away? and How can I stop feeling sad? Chinese Version available.
	<u>The Colour Monster</u>-Anna Llenas One day, Colour Monster wakes up feeling very confused. His emotions are all over the place; he feels angry, happy, calm, sad and scared all at once! To help him, a little girl shows him what each feeling means through colour.
	<u>Missing Mummy: A book about bereavement</u>- Rebecca Cobb This book explores the many emotions a bereaved child may experience. And importantly, the book also focuses on the positive – the recognition that the child is still part of a family, and that his memories of his mother are to be treasured.
	<u>Daddy's Rainbow</u>- Lucy Rowland Erin's daddy sees the colour in everything. Even on the greyest days, they put on their wellies and go splashing in puddles because, Daddy says, 'We can't see rainbows without rain!' But what happens when the greyest day of all comes, and Daddy isn't there any more? This deeply sensitive picture book about the loss of a parent is the ideal starting point for conversations about love, loss and learning to live again.
	<u>Always and Forever</u>- Alan Durant When Fox dies the rest of his 'family' are absolutely distraught. How will Mole, Otter and Hare go on without their beloved friend? But, months later, Squirrel reminds them all of how funny Fox used to be and they realise that Fox is still there in their hearts and memories.
	<u>The Invisible String</u>- Patrice Karst This heart-warming story delivers a very simple approach to overcoming the fear of loneliness or separation from parents. Specifically written to address children's fear of being apart from the ones they love.

	<u>The Hare-Shaped Hole</u>- John Dougherty When Hertle the Hare dies, Bertle can only see a Hertle-shaped hole where his friend should be. He pleads with it, get angry with it, but the hole still won't bring his Hertle back. It seems like hope is lost... until Gerda the kindly bear finds him. She explains that he must fill the hole with his memories of Hertle. And slowly... Bertle begins to feel a little bit better.
	<u>Goodbye Mousie</u>- Robie H. Harris One morning a boy finds that his pet, Mousie, won't wake up. The truth is Mousie has died. At first the boy doesn't believe it. He gets very mad at Mousie for dying, and then he feels very sad. But talking about Mousie, burying Mousie in a special box, and saying good-bye helps this boy begin to feel better about the loss of his beloved pet.

KS1/KS2

	<u>When Dinosaurs die: A Guide to Understanding Death</u> Laurence Krasny Brown and Marc Brown The authors explain in simple language the feelings people may have regarding the death of a loved one and the ways to honour the memory of someone who has died.
	<u>A Shelter for Sadness</u>- Anne booth A small boy creates a shelter for his sadness, a safe space where Sadness is welcome, where it can curl up small, or be as big as it can be, where it can be noisy or quiet, or anything in between. The boy can visit the shelter whenever he needs to, every day, sometimes every hour, and the two of them will cry and talk or just sit, saying nothing. And the boy knows that one day Sadness may come out of the shelter, and together they will look out at the world, and see how beautiful it is. Beautifully illustrated!
	<u>The Memory Tree</u>- Britta Teckentrup Fox has lived a long and happy life in the forest, but now he is tired. He lies down in his favourite clearing, and falls asleep for ever. Before long, Fox's friends begin to gather in the clearing. One by one, they tell stories of the special moments that they shared with Fox. And so, as they share their memories, a tree begins to grow, becoming bigger and stronger with each memory, sheltering and protecting all the animals in the forest, just as Fox did when he was alive.
	<u>Grandad's Island</u>- Benji Davis The story deals with the emotional topic of losing a grandparent. Subtly told, this beautifully illustrated book tackles a difficult subject with great sensitivity and depth for children dealing with grief in EYFS or KS1.
	<u>Waiting for Wolf</u>- Sandra Dieckmann Fox and Wolf spend all their perfect days together - talking and laughing for hours, swimming together in the big blue lake, and watching the stars come out, one by one. Until one day, Wolf is gone. A beautiful and moving picture book about learning to carry on after the death of a loved one.
	<u>Vicky Angel</u>- Jacqueline Wilson Jade is used to living in the shadow of her best friend, Vicky. Vicky's sparkly, hilarious and full of life. And, she's certainly not going to let a small thing like being dead stop her from living life to the full. But as Jade attempts to move on, Vicky is determined to make her presence felt. 9-12 Yrs
	<u>Sad Book</u>- Michael Rosen Michael Rosen talks of his sadness after the death of his son. A personal story that speaks to adults and children. Minimal text with moving illustrations. KS2/Teens

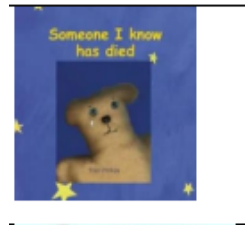
An Exception—While most books about who died can be interchanged (cats for grannies etc), there is one exception. If a mother has died by suicide, it may well raise too many questions and anxieties to read a story book about a father dying this way – and vice versa. But there are two good books written for 4-8 year olds about the suicide of a parent. Firstly, *Luna's Red Hat* by *Emmi Smid* deals gently about a mother's death by suicide and, secondly, *The Little Flower Bulb* by *Eleanor Gormally* does the same about a father's death.

	<i>Luna's Red Hat</i>- Emmi Smid This beautifully illustrated storybook is designed as a tool to be read with children aged 6+ who have experienced the death of a mother by suicide.
	<i>The Little Flower Bulb</i>- Eleanor Gormally The Little Flower Bulb tells the story of Jamie, his mum, and his twin sisters, and of how Jamie comes to deal with the death of his father. Suitable for children aged 3-10, this beautifully illustrated book will be helpful for parents when talking to children bereaved by the suicide of a father.

SEND

	<i>Remembering Lucy</i>- Sarah Helton Children with SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) often experience grief at a much younger age than other children. This touching short story will help children with SEND aged 3+ understand feelings caused by death and loss in a simple and clear way. The book is set in an SEN school.
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Activity Books

	<i>Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine</i>- Winston's Wish This activity book offers invaluable practical and sensitive support for bereaved younger children. It aims to help children make sense of their experience by reflecting on the different aspects of their grief. At the same time, the book manages to find a balance between remembering the person who has died and having fun. Primary Aged Children
	<i>Remembering Me</i>- Child Bereavement UK Part book and part scrapbook, Remembering was created to help keep a child's memories alive after the loss of someone special and to give children a place to return to whenever they wish. It was highly recommended by Richard & Judy. Primary Aged children https://www.childbereavementuk.org/shop/remembering-book
	<i>Someone I know has died</i>- Child Bereavement UK An innovative activity book with many unusual and interactive features, written for bereaved children to help them understand what it means when someone dies and to explore their thoughts and feelings with an adult. Although designed with primary-aged children in mind, some older children may also enjoy this book. Primary aged children https://www.childbereavementuk.org/shop/someone-i-know-has-died-book
	<i>Out of the Blue</i>- Julie Stokes & Paul Oxley This book has been written and designed specifically for teenagers with aim of supporting them through their bereavement using a range of activities. Narrated throughout by teenagers words and stories, the book talks openly about the real feelings they may struggle with when someone important in their life dies. Secondary aged children

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.

<Date>

<Address>

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> Headteacher

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

<Date>

<Address>

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

Appendix D Supporting pupils

The following guidelines are taken from CRUSE bereavement care website. They are general principles, and need to be thought about whatever the needs of the child are. Adapt and aid communication as appropriate.

Loss from a child's perspective

For many children and young people, the death of a parent, caregiver, sibling or grandparent is an experience they are faced with early in life. It is sometimes incorrectly assumed that a child or young person who is bereaved by the death of someone close at a young age will not be greatly affected as they are too young to understand the full implications of death. This is untrue and unhelpful. Even babies are able to experience loss. A baby cannot cognitively process the implications of the bereavement but that does not mean that they do not feel the loss.

Accepting the child's experience

Children and young people need to be given the opportunity to grieve as any adult would. Trying to ignore or avert the child's grief is not protective, in fact it can prove to be extremely damaging as the child enters adulthood. Children and young people regardless of their age need to be encouraged to talk about how they are feeling and supported to understand their emotions. It is also important to remember that children and young people grieve in different ways. Grief is unique and therefore it is not wise to assume that all children and young people will experience the same emotions, enact the same behaviour or respond similarly to other grieving children and young people. A child or young person's grief differs from that of an adult's grief because it alters as they develop.

Time to grieve

Children and young people often revisit the death and review their emotions and feelings about their bereavement as they move through their stages of development. Children and young people do not have the emotional capacity to focus on their grief for long periods of time and therefore it is not uncommon for grieving children and young people to become distracted by play. This is a protective mechanism which allows the child or young person to be temporarily diverted from the bereavement. Bereaved children and young people need time to grieve and in order for them to address the bereavement they need to be given the facts regarding the death in language appropriate to their age or level of comprehension. Avoid using metaphors for death such as, "Daddy has gone to sleep", this will make the child or young person believe that Daddy will come back to them and may constantly ask when he is going to wake up. Similarly, the child or young person might encounter problems with bedtime and not wanting to sleep for fear of not waking up.

Talking to children

It is understandable that many caregivers are reluctant to talk to the child or young person about the death as they do not want to cause distress or fear. Children and young people who are bereaved need to know that their loved one has died, how they died and where they are now. Failure to be honest with the grieving child or young person means that their grief is not being acknowledged and this can cause problems later on. If the bereaved child or young person wants to ask questions about death and what

dying means, answer them truthfully and if you do not know the answer to a specific question don't be tempted to make the answer up. Assure the child or young person that although you do not know the answer to their question you will find out for them.

Key points to remember

- Babies can experience feelings of loss
- Be honest with the bereaved child or young person
- Avoid using metaphors for death
- Every child and young person's grief is unique
- Encourage the child or young person to talk about the death and how they feel
- Children and young people may 'revisit' the death and review their feelings about the bereavement as they develop
- Use language that is appropriate to the child or young person's age and level of comprehension.

<http://www.cruse.org.uk/Children/loss-from-childs-perspective>

Children's understanding of death

The following information is based on developmental chronology, and is taken from CRUSE bereavement care website. It is helpful to consider these developmental levels when thinking about how children with special needs may experience grief. The nature of a child's understanding of death and bereavement will be different at different stages of development. Although a child's grief is individual, their understanding of the loss of a loved one progresses as they mature. In this section you will find the most common understandings of death by children at certain stages of their development. Do bear in mind that a child's understanding of death during their development will differ in circumstances where the child may be experiencing educational difficulties.

Birth to six months

Babies do not cognitively understand the notion of death; however, that does not mean to say that they do not respond to the loss of someone close, or that they don't experience grief. A baby up to six months old experiences feelings of separation and abandonment as part of their bereavement. The bereaved baby is aware that the person is missing, or not there and this can cause the baby to become anxious and fretful. This can be heightened if it is the baby's primary caregiver who has died and the baby is able to identify that the one who is now feeding them, changing them and cuddling them is not the deceased person. Similarly, if it is the baby's mother who is grieving a loss, the baby can pick up on these feelings and experience grief too.

Six months to two years

At this developmental stage the baby is able to picture their mother or primary caregiver internally if she/he is not present. If it is the primary caregiver who has died the baby will protest at their absence by loud crying and angry tears. It is common for babies to become withdrawn and lose interest in their toys and feeding and they will likely lose interest interacting with others. At the more mature end of this developmental stage bereaved toddlers can be observed actively seeking the deceased person. For instance, if granddad spent much of his time prior to death in his shed the toddler might persistently return to investigate the shed in the hope that they will find him there.

Two years to five years

During their development between the age of two to five, children do not understand that death is irreversible. For instance, a four-year-old child may be concerned that although nanny was dead she should have come home by now. This example illustrates how children at this stage do not understand the finality of death and nor do they understand what the term “dead” actually means. It is common for a young child to be told that their aunt has died and still expect to see them alive and well in the immediate future. Children do not understand that life functions have been terminated and will ask questions such as:

“Won’t Uncle Bob be lonely in the ground by himself?”

“Do you think we should put some sandwiches in Grandpa’s coffin in case he gets hungry?”

“What if Nan can’t breathe under all that earth?”

“Will Daddy be hurt if they burn him?”

As the cognitive understanding of children in this age range is limited they can sometimes demonstrate less of a reaction to the news of the death than might be observed by an older child and might promptly go out to play on hearing the news of the death. Children aged between two and five years old have difficulty with the abstract concepts surrounding death. For instance, they might be confused as to how one person can be in a grave and also be in heaven at the same time. They will become further confused if they are told that the deceased person is simply sleeping and this in turn could make them fearful of falling asleep or seeing anyone else asleep. They might insist on waiting for the person who has died to wake up or similarly if they have been told that the person who has died has gone on a long journey they may await their return.

At this age bereaved children can become involved in omnipotence or magical thinking. This refers to the concept that bereaved children believe that their actions, inaction, words, behaviours or thoughts are directly responsible for their loved one’s death. This form of thinking is not exclusive to this particular age group and can be experienced by many bereaved children and young people of older ages. It is essential that you explain to the bereaved child that the death was not in any way their fault or responsibility. The need to reassure the grieving child that nothing they said / didn’t say, did or didn’t do caused the death is paramount.

Five years to ten years

Children at this developmental stage have acquired a wider understanding of death and what it entails. They begin to realise that death is the end of a person’s life, that the person who has died won’t return and that life functions have been terminated. By the age of seven the average child accepts that death is an inevitability and that all people including themselves will eventually die. This understanding can also increase a child’s anxieties regarding the imminent deaths of other people who they are close to. Children of this age are broadening their social networks by attending school and are therefore open to receive both information and misinformation from their peers and social circles. With this in mind it is important that the cause of death, the funeral and burial process and what happens to the deceased person’s body are explained in a factual and age appropriate manner to the bereaved child. Children will ask many questions and may want to know intricate details pertaining to the death and decomposition of the body. Again, it is vital that children have such details explained to them clearly so that they understand. At this developmental stage children can empathise with and show compassion for peers that have been bereaved. Children aged between five and ten often

copy the coping mechanisms that they observe in bereaved adults and they may try to disguise their emotions in an attempt to protect the bereaved adult. The bereaved child can sometimes feel that they need permission to show their emotions and talk about their feelings.

The important thing is to let them do this. Avoid remarks such as, “Come on be a big brave girl for mummy” or “Big boys don’t cry”, such comments however well-meant can make children feel they need to hide their feelings or that what they are feeling is wrong. This can cause complications as the bereaved child develops.

<http://www.cruse.org.uk/Children/children-understanding-death#birth>