

Bereavement Guidance for Schools and Educational Settings

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A greener place
Man gwyrddach



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1.0 Introduction

Death is a subject that nobody ever wants to address. It is almost inevitable though, that at some point, the school community will be affected by a death. This might include the death of a pupil, the death of a staff member, the death of a pupil's family member, or the death of a key member in the school community such as a governor or popular visitor to the school.

The aim of this guidance is to provide support to schools and other education settings to manage the consequences of bereavements, specifically death, to ensure that those involved (children, young people, families, communities and staff) are effectively supported. This includes developing understanding/ awareness/resilience in relation to death generally and also supporting in response to a death

Everyone will react to bereavement in their own unique way and the effects of this are dependent on their levels of awareness, understanding, emotional security and, not least, their relationship with the deceased.

Ysgol Penalltau is committed to the emotional health and wellbeing of its staff, pupils and wider school community. 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 supports and prepares pupils for coping with the separation or loss of a loved one through death.

2.0 Aims

Our aim is to help children and young people explore and develop an awareness and understanding of death as well as to support those personally affected by it.

This guidance is for all staff, pupils, parents/carers, prospective parents/carers, governors, visitors and partner agencies working within the school. It outlines practical measures to be taken when people are in shock or upset, especially with sudden or multiple deaths or traumatic circumstances.

3.0 Roles and Responsibilities

The Head Teacher, Mrs Andrea Woods, will have overall responsibility for the policy and its implementation; for liaison with the Governing Body, parents/carers, the Local Authority and appropriate outside agencies.

In addition, the designated person within the school who has overall responsibility for support and liaison in event of a death or traumatic loss is Lowri Owen.

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.

- Obtaining and sharing accurate information
- Communicating with those directly involved
- Supporting children, parents and staff
- Establishing and coordinating links with external agencies.
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary schools
- Accessing and coordinating training and support for staff

The person responsible will take into consideration the following short term support:

- Who should break the news
- What exactly will the children be told
- How they will be told (e.g. whole school, class, individual)
- When they will be told
- How the information may be communicated to parents and staff (**Appendix 1**)
- What questions might be asked by pupils, parents/carers, staff

4.0 Staff Support and Training

It is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for pupils and each other. Support is available from www.winstonswish.org.uk, www.cruse.org.uk/wales and www.stdavidshospicecare.org

The named people above should support staff to complete a checklist for supporting a bereaved child or young person (**Appendix 2**)

5.0 Curriculum

Teaching should use a variety of approaches to meet the needs of pupils and show sensitivity to age and experience.

Teaching methods may include:

- The use of photographs, mementoes, stories and music
- Using clear, truthful and accurate information
- Using a range of teaching and learning styles including individual and group discussions, role play and drama (**Appendix 3**)
- Use of stories (younger children)

Providing a curriculum that acknowledges and addresses loss, death, bereavement and grief can improve the resilience and skills of children and young people to deal with tragic events.

6.0 Saying Goodbye

Many schools organise some sort of special assembly after a death. It can put back a sense of normality into what may be an unsettling time. A special assembly serves to normalise grief, give the message that it is okay to be sad, but equally okay not to be affected, and inform pupils and staff of support available.

7.0 Procedures

1. Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the Head teacher and their wishes respected in communicating with others. Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion, whilst being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations.
2. Staff should be informed before pupils if possible.
3. A letter to all affected should be composed at the earliest opportunity and a decision made as to whom, and how, it should be distributed
4. Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate.
5. In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance may be clarified, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances.
6. Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Head Teacher
7. School should be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life so information should be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points.

7.1 Immediate Support for Pupils

Not all children and young people will need the support of specialist practitioners; they need familiar people who care and will listen:

- A routine, providing a sense of normality
- Some space, away from an emotional intense atmosphere
- Time to be themselves without feeling guilty (being with friends, time to play in a safe space without the worry of upsetting a loved one)
- Access to appropriate resources via school, Local Authority departments, Healthy Schools, libraries, and support agencies.
- An individual person to hear and support the pupils when necessary.
- A suitable place in school for pupils who need some space if too upset to stay in the classroom and people to whom they can go for support.

7.2 Long-term Support for Pupils

In the longer term it may be necessary to identify pupils who may be particularly vulnerable or likely to experience symptoms associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, for example shock, anger, guilt, depression etc. The Head Teacher and designated person, Lowri Owen, should compile and keep an updated a list of

outside professionals and agencies who can come into the school to counsel pupils if necessary.

7.3 Support for Parents

Support for parents should be handled sensitively dependent on individual circumstances but may include:

- Communicating with the family and offering support. Send a letter of condolence from the school if appropriate
- Depending on the wishes of the family, give out information to the appropriate people.
- Offering regular correspondence with home, providing reassurance that the child is managing their grief.
- Sending a representative to the funeral if appropriate.
- Holding a collection /flowers to be sent as appropriate.
- Inviting the family to any commemorative events held by the school, at the time and in subsequent years.

7.4 Support for Staff

It is important to acknowledge that staff may be struggling to manage their own emotions and reactions when supporting pupils dependent on experience or involvement. It may be appropriate to:

- Openly acknowledge their grief
- Give time to attend the funeral if appropriate
- Offer specific training and/or support

8.0 Confidentiality

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

9.0 Inclusion and Equality

It is important to recognise that there is a range of cultural and religious customs and procedures surrounding death and that the child and family may have different

expectations. It is important to present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. Children should 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.

10.0 Resources

There are a number of organisations to support bereavement (**Appendix 4**)

Appendix 1a – Suggested letter to parents following the death of a member of staff

Dear Parents

Today we have had the sad task of informing the children of the tragic death of _____ who has been a teacher at this school for ____ years. Our thoughts are with _____ family at this time.

When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of feelings – sadness, anger and confusion – all of which are normal. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try to answer any questions that they may have but I have made available some information which may help to answer your child's questions as they arise. You can obtain this from the school office.

The funeral will take place at _____. Your child may wish to attend the funeral. If this is the case you may collect your child from school and accompany them to the church.

Yours sincerely,

Appendix 1b – Suggested letter to parents following the death of a child at your school

Suggested letter to parents following the death of a child at your school

Dear Parents

Today we have had the sad task of informing the children of the death of _ a pupil in <Year>. They were told that <Name> died from <Name of illness>. Sometimes people who have <Illness> can get better but other times people are so poorly that they die from it. <Name> had been ill with <Illness> for a long time and died on <Day and Date>.

When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of feelings – sadness, anger and confusion – all of which are normal. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try to answer any questions that they may have but I have made available some information which may help to answer your child's questions as they arise. You can obtain this from the school office. If you feel your child needs extra support then please contact the school and I will try to organise this.

The funeral will take place at <Named church or crematorium> on <Day and Date> at <Time>. Your child may wish to attend the funeral. If this is the case you may collect your child from school and accompany them to the church. Please inform your child's teacher if this is the case.

Yours sincerely,

Appendix 2 – Checklist for supporting a bereaved child/ young person in school

Action	Tick when completed
1.Head teacher to obtain factual information when informed of the death	
2.Head teacher to identify appropriate family member, make contact to offer condolences and ask family what information they wish to be shared at school	
3.Head teacher to brief all staff (including secretary/ancillary staff) and give factual information	
4.Head teacher to give factual information to relevant classes/year groups	
5.Head teacher to arrange for a member of staff to be actively involved in supporting the child’s return to school	
6.Plan the support system needed with the child e.g. time out, access to support agency	
7.Record loss in pupil’s record file	
8.Allocate staff member to monitor pupil in school, especially on significant dates e.g. birthday and anniversary dates	
9.Ensure that information is passed on to new school at transition or if moving schools	
10.Continue to liaise with support agencies for months and years as necessary	

Appendix 3 – Ideas for supporting individual pupils

Time out cards

The pupil is given permission to leave the class for a short time when beginning to feel out of control or just to get some personal space when upset. A card is carried in their pocket and the pupil may leave the room without having to ask. It is important that staff are made aware to avoid embarrassing scenes for either the pupil or the teacher. It is essential that the pupil does not wander about the school but goes to a designated place and person.

Secret Diary

This is a good way to communicate with a bereaved child who finds it difficult to verbalise feelings. The pupil leaves the diary somewhere mutually agreed having written or drawn whatever they wish. The teacher responds in the diary and either leaves it to be picked up or returns it to the child.

Happy/Sad Faces

The bereaved child has a sheet of paper/paper plate with two drawings of faces on either side; one happy, one sad. The pupil shows the side that reflects how they are feeling on a particular day. This gives the teacher an idea of how they are and therefore what approach to use.

Appendix 4 – Contacts/ Resources

LA contacts

Care First Service

Educational Psychologists

School Based Counsellors

Inclusion Support Officer/Behaviour Support Officer

Safeguarding

Health and Safety Officer

Communications

Other services e.g. Social Services, Police as appropriate.

Organisations

Cruse Bereavement Care

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Tel: 020 8939 9530

Cruse Cymru

www.cruse.org.uk/wales

Ty Energlyn, Heol Las, Caerphilly, CF83 2TT

Tel: 02920 860339

Winston's Wish

The Clara Burgess Centre, Bayshill Road, Cheltenham, Gloucester, GL50 3AW

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Tel: 01242 515157

Childhood Bereavement Network

8 Wakley Street, London EC1v 7QE

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

Tel: 0207 843 6309

Penhaligons Friends

www.penhaligonsfriends.org.uk

Child Bereavement Trust

Aston House, High Street, West Wycombe, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP14 3AG

www.childbereavement.org.uk

Tel:0845 357 1000

Information

Loss and the Development of Resilience (2007) Gloucester Educational Psychology Service

(A training pack for primary schools but can be adapted for secondary provision).

When Someone Dies (2007) Speaking Up

(An accessible guide to bereavement for people with learning disabilities and their carers).

SEAL Teaching Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning

(This provides a framework for explicitly promoting social, emotional and behavioural skills, with built –in progression for each year group within a school).

DVDs

Not Too Young To Grieve - Leeds Animation Workshop