

Bereavement guidelines: support for children and staff

Introduction

These guidelines describe how we will support individual pupils and members of staff following the bereavement of a family member or other significant figure in a child or staff member's life. They are different to those following the death of a pupil or member of staff which are described in the Traumatic incidents guidelines.

Research before the pandemic indicated that 1 in 29 pupils aged five to sixteen-years old had been bereaved of a parent or sibling, which is, on average, one pupil in every class. Many more pupils were bereaved of a grandparent, relative, friend or other significant person. This does not include pupils with a seriously ill parent or carer who may experience similar reactions to those whose parent has died and may also need support. Following the pandemic, the numbers in both categories are likely to increase.

Most grieving pupils do not need a 'bereavement expert'. They need the support of familiar and trusted adults. School, with its familiar environment and routines, can be a place of comfort for a bereaved young person or a pupil whose parent has become seriously ill. We encourage parents/carers to tell the school when their child has experienced a significant loss or if somebody in their family has become seriously ill (see Appendix 2: Message to parents).

These guidelines also give an overview of how the school teaches pupils about death through the curriculum and how it supports bereaved pupils.

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1 Death, grief and bereavement as part of the curriculum

At St Aidan's we aim to prepare children for 'life in all its fullness'. As part of this we provide opportunities for children to understand bereavement as a part of life.

- 1.1 We teach about death, grief and bereavement in a variety of indirect ways. For example, through our Easter service, through fictional and news stories in Newsround, life cycles in science, celebrations and traditions in different religions in RE and so on.
 - Whilst some of this teaching is planned, some is also unplanned such as stories in the news and, more often, conversations about the death of a pet.
 - This teaching prepares children for the future by helping them develop and manage their emotional, spiritual and intellectual responses to loss and bereavement.
- 1.2 We encourage parents to let us know if their child has experienced a significant loss or if somebody in their family has become seriously ill so that we are aware when a lesson needs to be particularly sensitively handled and can alert parents to the lesson in advance.
 - We can also consider how to help peers who are supporting a bereaved friend.
 - For some recently bereaved pupils it may be helpful to be given the option to work elsewhere or step outside if they think a lesson would be too painful to attend.

2 Supporting bereaved pupils

Most grieving pupils do not need a 'bereavement expert', they need the support of familiar and trusted adults who acknowledge their loss. School, with its familiar environment and routines, can be a place of comfort for a bereaved young person.

2.1 Returning to school after a bereavement

We believe it is helpful to meet with the pupil and their family/carers to acknowledge what has happened and to discuss their return to school. If family members are in agreement, a meeting will be arranged with the headteacher and an ELSA, in the first instance (see Appendix 1 for an overview of the questions which may be covered).

- Children continue to grieve for the rest of their lives and may require ongoing support. Significant dates or anniversaries, Mother's/Father's Day, etc. may be particularly difficult.
- Notes will be made detailing all important dates, significant events, cultural and religious practices and issues which may trigger memories. These will be shared with class teachers as the child progresses through school.

2.2 Support at school

Bereavement affects everyone in different ways. For many pupils and members of staff, empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all that they require. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that grief may have an impact on the pupil's progress and behaviour. Some pupils work really hard and may put themselves under extra pressure to succeed, while others may find it difficult to focus in class and on their work. Any changes in behaviour should be monitored and sensitively managed by classroom staff.

- Some pupils will need some short-term focussed support from a trusted adult who can provide opportunities to make memory boxes and journals and provide supportive art and craft activities. At St Aidan's this can be provided by an ELSA or the school's counsellor.
- The ELSA and class teacher will have regular communication about the child.



- If a pupil is seeing an ELSA and finding things difficult in class, the pupil may initially be encouraged by their class teacher to use 'time out' with 'their' ELSA, if it is felt appropriate and practical.

2.3 **Longer term support**

Regular contact with the family/carers and reviews with the child will be used to help build up an overall picture of how the child is coping. Progress will also be monitored through termly pupils' progress meetings involving the class teacher, head teacher and SENCo.

- Bereaved children can find change difficult, so preparing them in advance (where possible) may help them to voice their worries and ease the process. Particular thought will be given to whether vulnerable children need additional support on transition. The Y6 teacher and SENCo will ensure that details of the bereavement are shared with the secondary school in advance.
- If the impact of grief is still affecting the child's ability to cope after 6 to 8 months or where grief is more complex, referral to more specialist support may need to be considered (see Appendix 3 for helpful links).

3 Training for staff

School staff do not need specialist training but they do need to acknowledge, sympathise and understand how children's behaviour and learning may be affected by significant loss, serious illness, and bereavement. They need to be aware of important dates for the child and topics that may have to be addressed with greater sensitivity. Along with other staff closely involved, they will need to keep an eye on how the child is coping.

- Class teachers need to be in close communication with parents/carers in order to alert them to topics they intend teaching, which may prove emotionally upsetting for the child, and to discuss how to approach them.
- For those more closely involved in supporting a bereaved child eg an ELSA, consideration needs to be given to circumstances in their own lives which may make it difficult for them to offer support to a bereaved child. Under such circumstances, other staff members may be asked to help share the load.

4 Supporting bereaved members of staff

When a staff member tells you about the death

- Acknowledge their loss and offer your condolences.
- Assure them they do not need to come to work if they do not want to, and make it clear that work should come second.
- Ask how they'd like to keep in touch or be contacted while they're off, for example by phone or email, and how often.
- Check if:
 - they have a support network;
 - they want you to let others know about the death;
 - they want to be contacted by others from work, for example to offer their support or condolences;
 - they need any information or support from you. Recommend Education Support (details below) and Cruse Bereavement Care (see Appendix 3).

If someone else has contacted you on their behalf, it can help to follow up with an email, or call a few days later.



4.1 **Supporting the staff team**

When a member of staff experiences a bereavement, it can have a big impact on all other members of staff.

- It's important that you only communicate what the bereaved staff member has asked you to, sensitively and compassionately. It is also crucial that as a manager, you check in on individual members of staff's wellbeing face to face, by phone or video call. (E-mail can be impersonal and isn't always appropriate).
- Staff may want to send a condolences card.

4.2 **Bereavement Leave**

The school's leave policy allows for one week of compassionate leave upon the death of a close relative (partner, child, parent, grandparent or sister/brother-in-law), however each situation is different so it's important to:

- consider the staff member's personal circumstances, including any religious and cultural practices;
- consider what you've offered other bereaved employees to make sure you're treating everyone fairly;
- ask if they need other support.

If the staff member feels they need more time off, the headteacher will contact a member of HR for advice.

4.3 **Returning to school after a bereavement**

Keeping in touch can allow you to have an open discussion about:

- how the member of staff is coping;
- when they might be ready to return to work;
- any adjustments that might help with their return, for example a phased return or a temporary change in duties;
- aspects of the curriculum which might trigger feelings of grief.

How quickly someone returns to work will be different for everyone. The member of staff might be unsure or not be able to judge how they'll feel when they return. Keeping in touch and talking about adjustments can help.

4.4 **Support at work**

Once they've returned to work, members of staff might still need to discuss extra support or time off because of, for example:

- grief symptoms affecting their performance, such as not being able to sleep, think or concentrate;
- aspects of the curriculum which might trigger feelings of grief;
- depression or another mental health condition;
- extra responsibilities, for example helping a dependant.

There are various organisations offering support for staff including Education Support and Cruse Bereavement Care.

4.5 **Longer term support**

The Education Support charity offers emotional support for staff who have suffered a bereavement to help find a good work/life balance; help with financial or debt planning; help to plan for retirement and offers personal coaching or face to face counselling to help with periods of stress. It is free to all employees and can be accessed online or by phone:

W: educationsupport.org.uk

T: 08000856148



Children returning to school after a bereavement: record of meeting

The purpose of this meeting is to:

- a. Acknowledge the death.
- b. Find out how the pupil would like to share their news.
- c. Find out whether and how the pupil and family would like this to be communicated to their peers and the wider school community.
- d. Agree on a named adult the child will have regular access to or, if the child is not seeking regular support, an adult in whom the child has intimated that they would like to confide.
- e. Set guidelines for communication – with the pupil, between members of staff and between home and school.
- f. Agree a safe space for the bereaved pupil to go if they feel overwhelmed by their grief and need a 'time-out' and agree how this will be communicated to staff. For example, a 'time-out' card, a non-verbal signal or message.

The family will be encouraged to discuss and inform us about important dates and significant events which may trigger memories such as the child's birthday and the birthday and date of death of the deceased, as well as any aspects of culture/religion that should be taken into consideration. This will be shared with class teachers as the child progresses through school.

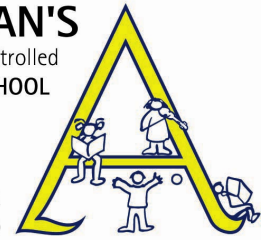


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Bereavement, loss and serious illness: a message for parents and carers

At St Aidan's we recognise that loss, bereavement and serious illness can have a great impact on children - their learning, their behaviour and their well-being. Unfortunately, following Covid, many children are likely to have been affected by these experiences. For most children, sympathy, understanding and a listening ear will be sufficient to support them and at St Aidan's, all staff can offer this.

St Aidan's has Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) who can offer short term emotional support and a counsellor for more intensive support. For a very small number of children, more specialist help may be needed. We will be able to advise whether, after six to eight months, this might be beneficial. We have added a list of relevant organisations to the school website.

We believe that death is a part of life and that all children need time and space to think about bereavement before being faced with it. We teach about death, grief and bereavement through curricular subjects in a variety of indirect ways. For example, through our Easter service, through fictional and news stories in Newsround, life cycles in science, celebrations and traditions in different religions in RE and so on. Whilst much of this teaching is planned, some is also unplanned such as stories in the news and, more often, conversations about the death of a pet.

To help us and your child, we encourage you to let us know if your child has experienced a significant loss or if somebody in your family has become seriously ill. That way we can not only offer your child the understanding and support they need but also be aware when a lesson needs to be particularly sensitively handled for your child.

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Bereavement helplines and support

LOCAL SUPPORT

Choices (Haringey CAMHS)

Offers emotional support for children, young people and their families in Haringey.

NB. This is not a crisis service.

T: 0208 702 3405

W: <https://www.haringeychoices.org>

Haringey 24/7 Crisis Line

Available 24/7 to all Haringey families and young people.

T: 020 8702 4500

Haringey Mental Health Support Team (MHST)

Telephone Support Line run by Mental Health Practitioners

For children/ young people, parents/ carers, school staff.

To listen and offer support with worries and emotions.

T: 020 8702 6035 available 9.00am – 3.00pm, Monday – Friday, or

E: Beh-tr.camhstrailblazerinbox@nhs.net

KOOTH (Haringey CAMHS)

Kooth, from XenZone, is a free, safe and anonymous, online counselling and emotional well-being platform for children and young people over the age of 11, accessible through mobile, tablet and desktop.

12.00pm – 10.00pm Monday – Friday, 6.00pm – 10.00pm Saturday and Sunday

W: <https://kooth.com/>

Mind in Haringey

The Mind Mental Health Support Team in Haringey has set up a telephone support line for young people, parents and families. Offers bereavement counselling for adults with costs on a sliding scale (from £5).

T: 020 8702 6035 Monday – Friday 9.00am – 3.00pm

W: <https://www.mindharingey.org.uk>

North London Samaritans based in Bounds Green

To speak to a trained Samaritan, call at any time

T: (free on) 116 123 or

E: jo@samaritans.org

National support

Child Bereavement UK

Helpline: 0800 028 8840

W: <http://www.childbereavementuk.org/>



Grief Encounter – supporting bereaved children and families

Support for bereaved children and their families to help alleviate the pain caused by the death of someone close.

Helpline: 0800 028 8840

T: 0808 802 0111

W: <https://www.griefencounter.org.uk>

Winston's Wish – Supporting bereaved children and young people

National services includes Family Line 0808 802 0021

W: <https://www.winstonswish.org.uk>

Cruse Bereavement Care

T: 0808 808 1677

E: helpline@cruse.org.uk

W: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/helpline>

Books and activities for children recommended by ELSA Support Network

<https://www.elsanetwork.org/resources/free-resources/>

Whilst we can't take the sadness away, we can support children with ways to express their emotions. Our instinct is to protect our children whenever we can, but when it comes to bereavement, shielding them may not be possible. With 41,000 children bereaved each year in the UK, a staggering 92% of young people will experience a significant loss by the age of 16. However, there are many things we can do to help our children to work through their emotions, understand what's happened, and cope with their loss.

Create a memory box

Working together to create a memory box can be a great way to remember your loved one and keep treasured keepsakes from that person safe. Photos, gifts, ornaments, or mementos make good additions. For younger children, try including hand-drawn pictures, or write down their favourite memories of the person.

Read together

Books can help children explore and understand their emotions. By reading about loss and grief through characters, events, and situations in a safe environment, they may be more able to recognise their own feelings.

Working through a grief or bereavement activity book together can be an effective way to get children thinking, talking or drawing about what's happened. Picture books explaining death can be a gentle way to initiate conversation with them about their feelings and understanding of the situation.

Encourage Journaling

Accepting that a loved one is not there anymore can be tough. Talking out loud about their loss can be hard. By encouraging journaling, children can write letters, poems, draw pictures, or make collages to put on paper things they may have trouble expressing verbally. For younger children, a bereavement activity book can provide a great, structured way to work through their thoughts and feelings.



Make a photo album

Children may worry that they'll forget the person who's died. Looking at photos can be a good way to talk about happy times. Decorating a frame, or creating an album together, can also give your child the time to open up, think and talk about happy memories of the person.

Make a bracelet

It can feel pretty lonely when someone close dies. Some children may feel like there isn't anyone they can talk to, or worry about upsetting others by talking about their lost loved one. One simple, visual reminder of the people who are there for them is a friendship bracelet.

Get your child to list five or six people who care about them, and taking a different coloured piece of thread for each person, plait them together, and help your child tie it on. Now, whenever they feel low or unsure, they'll have a visual reminder of the people they can talk to.

Book recommendations from ELSA

Always and Forever (EY)
Badgers Parting Gifts (EY)
Bridge to Terabithia (KS2)
Goodbye Mog Judith Kerr Ages 2+ Death of a family pet
Grandad's Island (EY)
Luna's Red Hat: A Storybook to Help Children Cope with Loss and Suicide (KS1)
Michael Rosen's Sad Book (KS1)
Missing Mummy: A Book About Bereavement Rebecca Cobb Ages 3+ Death of a parent
Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine: An activity book to help when someone has died (EY)
The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back (EY-KS2)
The Dragonfly Story (KS1)
The Fox and the Star (All ages)
The Huge Bag of Worries (EY -KS2)
The Invisible Leash (KS1/KS2)
The Invisible String (KS1)
The Invisible String Workbook (KS1)
The Memory Tree (EY)
Vicky Angel (KS2)
Vicky Angel Jacqueline Wilson Ages 9+ Death of a friend or classmate
When Dinosaurs Die (KS1-KS2)
When Dinosaurs Die: A guide to Understanding Death (KS1)
When Someone Has a Very Serious Illness (KS2)
When Someone Very Special Dies (KS2)