



## Coronavirus

### Bereavement & Loss Support for Schools

Children, their families and school staff are likely to have experienced bereavement and loss due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The death of someone can be an extremely difficult and distressing experience for both adults and children. It can have a significant impact on the school community in different ways.

This leaflet is aimed at school staff to support them to cope with and support others who have experienced loss and bereavement in the school community.



### How do children of different ages understand and react to death?

#### Early Years

Children may not understand that death is permanent. They will often ask many questions in an effort to help them understand. They may believe that their thoughts, words or actions can bring a person back to life. It is important to give them simple, factual information. They might react through sleep disturbances, nightmares and violent play.

#### Key Stage 1

Children are beginning to understand that death is permanent. They might express concerns about themselves, become clingy to parents or carers and express somatic complaints.

#### Key Stage 2

Children are beginning to understand more about death. They might become anxious about the health of their family and feel responsible for their safety. They might show curiosity about death. They may find it difficult to talk about bereavement, express their feelings behaviourally and experience difficulties in their interactions with friends.

#### Key Stage 3 & 4

Young people are able to understand death as concrete and abstract. They are aware of the finality of death and start to think about the longer term consequences of death. They are likely to feel powerful and heightened difficult emotions, and display risk taking behaviour.

### How can the school support bereavement in the school community?

#### Talk to children

Don't be afraid to provide opportunities for children to talk about their experiences of bereavement or the person who has died – not talking about something can sometimes make children worry more. Most children who have had a bereavement will be glad to have an opportunity to talk through what has happened.

- Create a safe space for children to talk about their experience and listen carefully.
- Be open and honest by calmly talking about death at an age appropriate level.
- Attend to the child's use of language and use their language when talking to them.
- Ask them how they are feeling rather than projecting feelings that you might expect them to have.
- Acknowledge their worries and reassure them that it is okay and normal to feel upset.
- Use clear language such as 'dead' rather than 'gone to sleep'.

#### Opportunities to communicate feelings

Bereaved children may find it difficult to talk about their feelings. Give them opportunities to express their feelings through a variety of methods.

- Feelings cards
- Drawing how they are feeling
- Write how they are feeling and put it in a post box in the classroom

Respond to their feelings by reassuring them that it is okay and normal to feel like this.



## Offer consistency and routine

Children who have experienced loss and bereavement will benefit from having consistency of routine and structure. Visual timetables could be used for younger children to help them settle back into the school routine.

## Support the return to school

The return to school is likely to be challenging for all children and particularly children who have experienced loss and bereavement. It is particularly important for these children that you prepare for their first day back. It can be helpful to gather information from their parent/carer beforehand. Offer regular opportunities to check in with them. Allow them to access a quiet space.

It is important to acknowledge that their behaviour might have changed. They might show lower levels of concentration, irritability and heightened sensitivity to comments from others. Be patient with them.



## Whole class, small group and individual pupil activities

It can help children to have the opportunity to process their experiences and feelings of bereavement through creative, age appropriate approaches. See the series of 'Strategies to support children cope with loss and bereavement' leaflets for further information.

## Staff wellbeing

There may be members of staff who have experienced their own loss and bereavement due to coronavirus. It can be challenging supporting a bereaved pupil, particularly if you have experienced your own bereavements. It is important to prioritise staff wellbeing so that you are able to support others effectively. You may find it helpful to:

- Opportunities to debrief with others
- Be active
- Connect with family and friends
- Take the time to relax
- Mindfulness practices

## Debriefing

Those who are in contact with bereaved children and families need regular opportunities to debrief and process their feelings. Staff supervision groups can provide a safe space for school staff to talk about and reflect on their experiences. Try to schedule a regular timeslot for this. Consider how this could be arranged in your school.

## Useful Websites

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

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/>

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief>

<https://www.thegoodgrieftrust.org/>

## Books

### To read together

**The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back.** Margot Sunderland and Nicky Armstrong. (Therapeutic story).  
**Someone Has Died Suddenly.** Mary Williams. ([www.suddendeath.org](http://www.suddendeath.org))  
**Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine.** (Activity book) Diana Crossley

### For younger children

**Goodbye Mousie.** Robie H.Harris  
**When Uncle Bob Died.** Althea  
**Dear Grandma Bunny.** Dick Bruna  
**Are You Sad, Little Bear?** A Book about **Learning To Say Goodbye.** Rachel Rivett

### For older children

**Flamingo Dream.** Donna Jo Napoli  
**Fred.** Posy Simmonds  
**Granpa.** John Burningham

## Who can I talk to?

Contact your school's Educational Psychologist for advice and support

[edpsychology@octavopartnership.org](mailto:edpsychology@octavopartnership.org)

