



St Bede's RC Primary School

Bereavement Policy

Agreed by the Governing Body on	Spring 2020
Review Date	Autumn 2022
Person Responsible	Head Teacher

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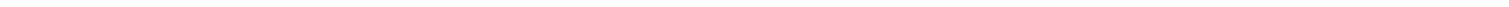
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SCHOOL POLICY STATEMENT AND PROCEDURES:

RESPONDING TO BEREAVEMENT

Mission Statement

The purpose of this school is to lead children to that place within them that only God can fill.

Aims

We believe the development of the child's self-esteem is paramount to their growth as a fully Christian person. This is the fundamental responsibility of everyone who comes into contact with the child, as is the encouragement of spiritual growth through prayer, worship and example.

The growth of self-esteem in the caring Christian environment will be encouraged through respect for others, their opinions and their differences. We seek to provide pupils with a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum suited to their individual needs within a Christian environment. We aim to encourage pupils to become caring, competent, self-reliant people with a knowledge of the world and a desire to do more. Great importance is placed on both the teaching of RE and the living out of the Gospel message in every part of the school day. We place great value on the traditional skills of literacy and numeracy while developing others skills in the National Curriculum.

We hope the child who leaves our school will be a confident, competent and caring member of the community.

To achieve this, the school will:

1. Continue to build on an atmosphere which is welcoming to children, parents, staff, visitors and members of the local community.
2. Celebrate prayer, worship and liturgy; making them real educational experiences.
3. Maintain the bond between home, parish and school which provides preparation for the pupil's entry into the wider community.
4. Value each child for their individuality and ideas, providing equal opportunities to develop their talents and potential.
5. Provide a firm, kind and consistent approach to discipline.
6. Continue to encourage staff to show an example of team spirit, mutual respect and tolerance.
7. Encourage all staff to continue their professional development.
8. Nurture an atmosphere sympathetic to all cultures.

Rationale

We acknowledge that death while being the inevitable end of life, is often unexpected and traumatic. Its unpredictability can cause severe distress and can shock and disturb the whole school community. We acknowledge that should our school community be plunged into grief our response should be a planned, tested and considered one. An impulse response could make the situation worse for all concerned; we need to ensure we are able to react sensitively and professionally. We further acknowledge our responsibility to all those who grieve as a result of a life changing significant loss in their lives.

Key Persons

Although there are several key persons (Head teacher, Class teacher, Chair of Governors, Priest, Senior Office Manager/initial parent contact); every member of staff has a duty of care to ensure that any member of St Bede's school community is supported and helped through a bereavement and their time of grief.

Receiving and Responding to News of A Death

The school may be informed of the sudden death of a parent or close relative of a pupil, or the death of a pupil, or a member of staff, during school time. This information may come into the school by telephone, email or visit by relative, friend, minister or police. Therefore, the person receiving the information needs to know what action to take should this occur.

In a school community there are a number of different bereavements that may be experienced by the individual, class group or whole school:

1. The sudden death of a parent or close relative.
2. The death of a pupil.
3. The death of more than one pupil at a time in accidental or tragic circumstances.
4. The death of a member of staff or support staff, or someone closely associated with the school.

In all these cases, even when death is expected, it is traumatic. Those suffering such loss need time to grieve. Without such a time, grief can be unresolved, and this can have a destructive and devastating influence on one's well-being.

The sudden or expected death can shock and disturb the members of the school community. A school, by its very nature, works to a daily/weekly routine. The death of a member of the school can disrupt the routine for both the individual and the community and create unusual problems. Such problems need to be solved positively for the good of all who are grieving.

Initial action to take.....

- Confirm the information, record it and check it. *It is essential to have the facts confirmed.*
- Share the news as soon as possible with the appropriate Key Person or persons.
- Take a moment to consider the action required. Check any action you take – you too may be in shock.

1 THE SUDDEN DEATH OF A PARENT OR CLOSE RELATIVE

If appropriate the Key Person should discuss with the family who should break the news to the pupil or member of staff.

In the case of the death of a pupil's parent or close relative, it is best that a parent or family member do this with the support of an appointed member of staff such as the pupil's class or form teacher. If this is not possible the Key Person or Bereavement Team Leader would request someone suitable to break the sad news to the pupil or member of staff concerned.

The news of the death should also be given to all relevant staff such as those who teach the pupil as soon as possible.

2 THE DEATH OF A PUPIL

Great support is needed in this event. On receiving the news of a pupil's death, the Key Person or Bereavement Team Leader, *after consultation with the family of the pupil to ascertain their wishes*, would call appropriate colleagues together.

The procedure would be:-

- a Gather together the staff at the earliest opportunity such as Break time or Lunch time and inform them of the news.
- b Allow time for corporate grief amongst the staff. In smaller schools the pupil concerned might be well known to all the staff.
- c Allow the staff to share how they feel about what has happened.
- d Allow the staff to voice the concerns they have about telling the rest of the pupils/students.
- e Inform the teachers that they may need to address what has happened in their classes if the pupils so wish. In the same way as the staff were given time, so the pupils should be given sharing time in class. This sort of sharing time should be allowed over the coming days and weeks if the teachers sense the class is uncomfortable or becoming emotional.
- f Impress on the staff what facts are to be announced to the pupils/students. To avoid rumours, exaggerations and development of the event, only these facts should be

stated openly and honestly without assumptions or judgements. If possible, the next of kin should consent to what is to be announced.

- g Communicate to the staff how the announcement will be made. The deceased's immediate friends and class should be told first and foremost. After that the Key Person(s) or Bereavement Team should decide on the best course of action. Should it be a full school assembly, year groups, or the more intimate surroundings of a class/form group?

It must be remembered that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotional feelings. Some will deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some even showing feelings of anger. There will be tears and distress.

3 THE DEATH OF MORE THAN ONE PUPIL AT A TIME IN ACCIDENTAL OR TRAGIC CIRCUMSTANCES.

On receiving such news, the Key Person(s) or whole Bereavement Team should be called together to be briefed with the salient facts and to decide what steps are to be taken.

The procedure would be:-

- a The Key Person or Bereavement Team leader should gather together all known details of what has happened and ensure they are correct.
- b The first task of the Bereavement Team, on meeting together, should be to determine the likely impact on various sections of the school. For example, how many classes will be affected by the loss of a pupil; what will be the impact?
- c It may be that the Bereavement Team feel that extra help is needed. The Bereavement Team leader might consider calling in support from the Local Authority (and Diocesan authorities).
- d It is crucial that the Bereavement Team set up an effective system of communication:-
 - Who will contact parents, if necessary?
 - Who will meet with parents who arrive at school?
 - Who will inform the staff?
 - Who will inform the pupils/students?
- e Once again it is crucial that only facts are stated without comments or interpretations. It is imperative that rumours and interpretations of the truth be avoided.
- f Informing staff and pupils may follow the procedure already suggested (a-e) in the event of the death of one child.
- g With such a tragedy as multiple deaths, it is absolutely crucial that pupils be given necessary time to try to put their thoughts and feelings into words. Very young children may not fully understand what has happened. They will, however, sense the feelings of grief present in the community. Young people in the early teen years and adolescents will react more deeply. All will suffer shock.

- h In a case of multiple deaths there is bound to be some media interest. The Key Person or member of the Bereavement Team responsible for dealing with the media should prepare all necessary statements. Such statements should deal only with facts in as sympathetic a way as possible.
- i It may be necessary to have extra help in the school office. The Key Person or Bereavement Team should agree a format of response to telephone inquiries. Such a format should be as calm as possible without appearing uncaring or cold.

4 DEATH OF A MEMBER OF STAFF

Most children and young people have difficulty facing this event as the teacher or other staff members are seen as being permanent fixtures within the school community.

When such a death occurs, it is doubly traumatic for the staff that not only have to look after their children who are disturbed but also grieve on their own personal level for a colleague.

On receiving the news of a member of staff's death, the Key Person or Bereavement Team Leader would call appropriate colleagues or the Bereavement Team together.

The procedure would be:-

- a Gather together the staff and inform them of the news.
- b Allow time for corporate grief amongst the staff.
- c Allow the staff to share how they feel about what has happened.
- d Inform the teachers that they may need to address what has happened in their classes if the pupils so wish. In the same way as the staff were given time, so the pupils should be given sharing time in class.
- e Impress on the staff what facts are to be announced to the pupils/students. To avoid rumours, exaggerations and development of the event, the facts should be stated simply.
- f Communicate to the staff how the announcement will be made. Should it be a full school assembly, year groups, or the more intimate surroundings of a class/form group?
It must be remembered that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotional feelings. Some will deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some even showing feelings of anger. There will be tears and distress. Everyone will be hurting to some degree or another.
- g Under such circumstances some staff may have difficulty coping themselves with the loss. Colleagues should watch carefully those teachers who seem particularly affected by the death of their fellow member of staff.

Breaking Sad News

On receiving news of the death of a student or a member of staff:

- Consult with the bereaved family concerned to ascertain their wishes.

- The group should be gathered together in an appropriate place. This is best done in familiar groups by someone they know.
- Whoever is giving the news should prepare themselves with what to say.
- Try to be as composed as possible as this helps to reduce the possible over emotional reaction of some students. Remember, however, it is perfectly human and understandable if you are moved by the events.
- Start by acknowledging that you have some sad news to give them.
- Be honest; give the news stating simple facts which have been checked for accuracy.
- Talk briefly about the person who has died.
- Let the students know of any arrangements already in place or of any arrangements agreed by the family.
- Underline how important their support is at this most difficult time and that it may be appropriate to involve them in a school response e.g. letters, flowers, cards, funeral attendance, memorial etc.
- Keep a watching brief throughout the assembly/meeting and for a period of time afterwards to pick up and support students and staff showing signs of distress.
- Keep in contact with the family suffering the loss. Make a note to remember the anniversary.
- Confirm any agreed arrangements by letter to parents and ensure details are posted on the school's website

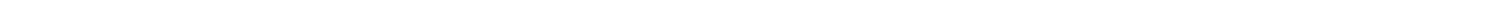
Words that might help to break the news...

- There is no easy way to say this to you and the event that has happened will affect us all in one way or another but I have to tell you.....*
- You may have heard already*
- That N... has died ... The information that we have and therefore can tell you about is that.....*

-While we are all deeply shocked at this awful, sad news, before we do anything else and while we are all together to support and help each other, may I suggest that we be still now for one or two minutes to honour and remember N...
- Thank you.....
- N... was a gift to our community here and we are so deeply grateful for the privilege of knowing him/her. In some way we are all better people because of N...
- I ask you to close your eyes for a moment and to remember the unique part that N... played in our lives. We think of good times together, training, travelling on school trips, etc. We reflect on her/his many talents and blessings. (Examples: think of her/his delight on the occasion that she sang, that he scored that goal..., that he/she represented the school at...)
- We all feel the loss of N... Place a circle of light around N... 's face now and think lots of love and thanks and hope for N...
- We do not know much about what happens after death, but it is possible that our loving thoughts and wishes and prayers this morning may help N... to a place of great happiness and peace.
- There will be many opportunities for us to show our sorrow during the next few days. As more details come to us, we will let you know what is happening and how the family would like us to be involved. There will be a variety of ways of honouring N's life and their life amongst us. Your ideas will be most welcome. Talk tobut talk to any of the staff with your thoughts and feelings. We are all here to help each other; that is what our community is about.
- A poet has written these lines to help us at a time like this; you may like it:

*N... may you continue to inspire us:
to enter each day with a generous heart;
to serve the call of courage and love,
until we see your face again
in that land where there is no more separation,
where all tears will be wiped from our mind,
and where we will never lose you again.*
- Appropriate endingperhaps the poem itself; music; a prayer; a moment of silence.....

Some prayers to consider...



Christian:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Eternal rest grant unto N O Lord and let perpetual light shine upon him/her May s/he rest in peace. Amen.

Remember O Lord your servants who have gone before us now in the sleep of peace. According to your promises grant to them and to all who rest in Christ refreshment, light and peace: through the same Christ our Lord.

We hold before God all those who are sad because someone, they loved has died
We hold before God all those who are sad because someone, they knew has died
We hold before God each one of us that we may support each other in the days to come.
We hold before God N who has died. May s/he rest in peace Amen.

Lord, we look up to you and receive from you
Your blessing
Your strength
Your most holy love.
In the darkest moments of our lives,
Let us remember that you are the light
You are the hope
You are the courage we need.

Lord God, help us find comfort in our sadness,
Certainty in our doubt
And courage to live.
Make our faith strong
Through Christ our Lord,
Amen

Circle us Lord
Keep hope within;
Keep fear without.

Circle us Lord,
Keep peace within,
Keep darkness out.

Circle us Lord,
Keep calm within

Keep turmoil out.

Circle us Lord,
Keep love within
Keep anger away.

World Faiths

Seek advice from your local Faith Leaders

There are many websites offering prayers and words at times of bereavement:

e.g.

Google "School assemblies at times of bereavement"

www.rainbows.org

Attitudes to Death

Among the world's many different cultures, beliefs and religions there are significant differences in belief about death and differences in marking this event by mourning. There is, however, no difference in the experience of grief that accompanies the loss of a family member or friend through death.

Teachers and all others who work with children and young people are in a position to be able to watch for the signs of grief. It would be of great value if they are also able to set this grief in its cultural or religious background. Many of the traditions and cultures of different religions, for example, may mean that bereaved children may be absent from school for longer periods than those who belong to the Christian tradition. Compassion, sensitivity and understanding need to be exercised at this difficult time.

While stating the obvious, we need to acknowledge that there is no definitive type of Christian, Sikh, Muslim, Humanist, or Hindu family, just as with any other culture or religion. The wishes of the family will always be paramount, and we need to be aware of the dangers of generalisation.

Non-religious funerals

Many people are uncomfortable with religious funerals if religion has had no meaning for the dead person and when most of the dead person's closest relatives and friends are not religious.

The British Humanist Association offers personal and dignified funerals and memorial ceremonies for those who have chosen to live without religion. A humanist funeral remembers the life of the person who has died and reflects on their contribution to the world and to others. Although it does not include hymns or prayers, the ceremony can be entirely acceptable to religious people mourning an atheist friend or colleague. It is important to acknowledge that Humanist ceremonies do not include anti-religious material whatsoever.

Buddhism

The funeral of a Buddhist is usually led by a monk. Prayers and readings are recited along with symbols such as water pouring into a bowl to signify that the dead person will receive all needed for the soul's journey.

Prior to the funeral, the body of the deceased usually remains at home. No cooking is permitted in the house during this time. Pictures are often removed from the walls of the house and the wearing of jewellery is forbidden.

After the funeral a meal is usually held at the house for family and friends. On the third day after death, alms are given and on the seventh day the monk receives alms as a symbol of merit of the dead person.

This is usually repeated after three months and every year on the anniversary of the death.

Christianity

The funeral of the deceased may take place in church or cemetery/crematorium chapel. The service includes prayers, readings and hymns. Some funerals are held within the context of the celebration of the Eucharist or Mass.

In both the Roman Catholic and Church of England traditions, the Anointing of the Sick is often given to the dying person.

There is no set period of mourning. Prayers for the deceased and/or mourning family are said in Church during the weeks following the funeral.

In some Christian traditions there is an annual service to remember the dead on All Soul's Day on the 2nd November and indeed the whole of November is set aside to remember those who have died. There is also the facility within the Catholic Tradition to have Mass said for the dead person at any time and especially at anniversary times.

Hinduism

At a Hindu funeral, the body is usually taken into the crematorium on the shoulders of six mourners. The pandit (priest) or eldest member of the family leads the mourners in prayers and after the ceremony is completed, the youngest member of the family usually leads the way home.

The mourning period may be 10 – 16 days but 'unofficial' mourning may last up to 40 days. The mourners often have no contact with outsiders, adopt a strict diet and take no part in any public activities.

On the fourth day after the funeral, the ashes of the deceased are thrown into a river. On the eleventh day, in a ceremony to help the deceased on the journey, water and rice balls are often offered as sustenance.

After this is concluded, the mourners can return to their usual lifestyle. For anniversaries, it can be the custom for many families to visit the Mandir with an offering of food to remember the loved one.

Islam

The Islamic belief is that Allah gave life and he will take it away. This belief requires a natural dignity in expressing grief as the death is the will of Allah and not to be questioned.

Usually, only men attend the Islamic funeral where the body is carried into the Mosque or burial ground on the shoulders. Prayers are said throughout.

The body is buried in the ground facing Mecca.

Mourning normally lasts up to three days but the period of mourning may last for forty days, with special ceremonies held on the third, tenth, and fortieth days, all designed to mark the progress of the soul's return to Allah.

During this time, no jewellery or make-up is worn, and no joyful celebrations may be held.

For anniversaries it may be the custom of the family to hold prayers and food served for family and friends to remember loved ones. Some families have prayer on Thursdays to remember the deceased.

Judaism

The Jewish funeral usually takes place within twenty-four hours of death. It is not common for women to attend the funeral. The coffin passes the home of the deceased during the funeral. Clothes are often torn at the funeral service to symbolise grief.

The mourning period begins after the body is buried. Cremation is not allowed. Seven days of intense mourning are followed by a further thirty days. During this time the family are supported by friends even to the extent of fulfilling domestic duties.

Work may be resumed during this period, but no celebration may be held. Mourning officially lasts until the first anniversary of the death when prayers are recited in the synagogue.

Sikhism

At a Sikh funeral, hymns are sung and prayers said. The body is cremated and the ashes are scattered in running water. After the cremation Sikh communities may finish prayers at home or at the gurudwara and then eat. In some families children are not allowed to go to the crematorium but in others children have a choice.

A period of mourning, usually lasting from ten to thirteen days follows the initial period immediately after death when the continuous readings of the writings of Guru Granth Sahib are read. This lasts for about forty-eight hours, during which time, relatives and friends join in.

During this complete time of grieving the family is cared for by relatives. For anniversaries it may be the custom to visit the temple with an offering of food to remember the loved one.

Memorials and Funeral Services

Funerals and memorial services are a way in which the family, friends and society can say goodbye to someone who has died.

The values of funerals and memorial services are:

- They acknowledge the deceased person and provide an opportunity for the person to be remembered,
- They give the opportunity for the death to be put in a religious context, if that is appropriate for the family and/or for the school community
- They give significance to what has happened,
- They provide a time when the bereaved try to come to terms with what has happened,
- They provide a time to express sorrow. Such an occasion helps in the grieving process and should be encouraged at every opportunity.

If the funeral is that of a parent, then the school may wish to send a representative or representatives in support of the pupil who has lost a parent. Should the school wish to send children then please check with the family of the bereaved and ensure permission has been given from the parents of those attending.

If the funeral is that of a pupil or member of staff then the numbers of pupils and teachers wishing to attend may be considerable. Again, please check with the family of the bereaved and with the parents of those attending.

The following should always be considered:

- The Named Person should always contact the family of the deceased to discuss funeral arrangements and to ascertain the family's wishes regarding representation from the school.
- Such wishes are paramount and should always be respected.
- If the school is to be represented at the funeral by pupils, it would be good if the pupils received support from members of the appropriate members of staff before and after the funeral service.
- Under certain circumstances a form/class close to the bereaved may wish to send messages of sympathy to the bereaved family. These messages may be in the form of poems, cards, flowers etc. The appropriate staff should ensure that all such presents are appropriate.

Often a memorial service may be held in school. This could be a whole school assembly or within a class situation. The planning of such an occasion, choosing readings, poems, music, hymns, pictures, tributes etc. all assist in the grieving process. It might be appropriate to invite members of the bereaved family to share in such a service. Again, on

such an occasion, staff members should be on hand to lend support to the pupils who could be upset when sharing in this part of the grieving process.

Return to School

We acknowledge our responsibility to 'keep a special watch' on pupils who have been bereaved, for at least a two year period and especially at times of transition.

Managing Anticipated Death and The Terminally Ill

Anticipated Death

The anticipated death of a member of the community, whilst very difficult to manage, enables the school to establish appropriate communication with the family to support those likely to be most affected before and after the death. There may also be issues of grieving around any change or loss of independence to the patient caused by the illness.

Anticipatory Grief

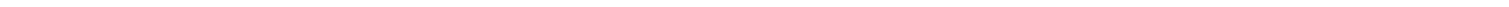
Anticipatory grief is "any grief occurring prior to the loss as distinguished from the grief which occurs after loss" [*C.K.Aldrich - The dying patient's grief. Journal of the American Medical Association*].

Many schools support adults, children and young people within their community who have to face the painful reality that a parent or someone close to them is terminally ill.

Often attempts are made to protect children from knowledge of the inevitable, which may be in the immediate or indeed long-term future. The child or young person, in such a situation, needs understanding and support far more than protection. In the vast majority of cases, the child has already perceived that something is seriously wrong and needs enlightenment. Most children do have the ability to deal with such difficult experiences. What is counterproductive are the false statements, half-truths or silences with which questions are answered. Such answers confuse, distress and lead such children into needless anxiety.

When dealing with children and young people in a school-setting who are suffering from anticipatory grief, the following advice may be useful.

- Confirm the facts concerning the pupil's sick relative.
- Communicate the information as appropriate (in line with school procedures and the family's wishes)
 - Discover what he/she has been told about the illness.
- **Never** give false hope to the child or young person.
- Allow the pupil to talk freely about the sick person.
- Enable the pupil to talk freely about how he/she is feeling.
- Be honest! If you do not know the answer to a question, say so.



- **Do not** inform the pupil about any progression concerning the illness unless the family have given permission

The Place of Death and Bereavement within the Curriculum

We acknowledge the importance of remembering anniversaries of death. During November or December each year we will hold a special mass/assembly/liturgy/ act of remembrance as appropriate, to celebrate the life of those members of our community who have died.

We will ensure we have approval from the family of the deceased to record the deceased name in our school mass folder / memorial book. We also acknowledge our responsibility to explore issues surrounding death and bereavement within the curriculum. This will take place within Religious Education during units 4.2 Trust in God, 5.3 Inspirational People and 6.3 Jesus the Bread of Life.

Long Term Support for those who Grieve

Where necessary we will offer a structured programme of peer support which will provide an opportunity for those grieving to share their feelings in an environment supported by a trained, caring and compassionate adult. We will ensure that all staff are familiar with this framework for responding to bereavement (a significant life changing loss) and where necessary we will offer training as part of our staff induction programme.

Support for Staff who Support Bereaved Pupils and Colleagues

We acknowledge the important role we play as a school community in offering long term support to those who grieve. We further acknowledge the need for realism – we accept that we alone cannot resolve other people’s grief and that we must not take on too much. Whenever necessary we will request additional support from colleagues or from external support agencies.

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLES UNDERSTANDING, NEEDS,
REACTIONS TO
DEATH (Adapted from the work of Robin Cooper)**

INTRODUCTION

Coping with Loss

Each child has to cope with the loss of a family member in his or her own individual way. There are many factors that influence how this is accomplished. It is possible, however, to suggest the following indicators as the main influences that affect the journey of grief following the death of a close friend, a parent or other family member:

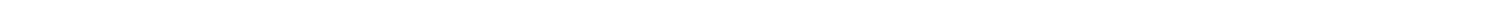
- 1 The type of death and the rituals that accompany it.
- 2 The relationship the child experienced with the deceased.
- 3 The ability of the surviving parent to care for and nurture the child.
- 4 The ability of the family members to offer emotional support to the child and surviving parent.
- 5 Other family influences such as the size of the family, its financial security and stability, and its ability to cope with change and disruption.
- 6 The support the child may receive from peers and school.
- 7 The child's own stage in understanding the concept of death.

**UNDERSTANDING, NEEDS, REACTIONS, AS A RESULT
OF DEATH
BIRTH - AGE 4**

(N.B: Ages are for general guidance only)

UNDERSTANDING

- ☐ There is little or no understanding of death.
 - ☐ Infants may sense the absence of parent.
 - ☐ Infants may miss familiar sounds, smells and touches.
 - ☐ Children may sense feelings of sadness, and become aware of any anxiety or distress around them.
 - ☐ In the second year onwards, the early understanding of grief is apparent. Children may search for the missing person.
 - ☐ There may be an increase in anger
 - ☐ There is a growing awareness of non-verbal expressions.
 - ☐ Children understand death to be temporary and reversible. The deceased is expected to return.
-
- ☐ Some children are illogical in blaming self for what has happened. They believe their actions can control events and this leads to feelings of guilt.
 - ☐ Some children think that death and sleeping are the same. This promotes fear.



NEEDS

- ☐ The child needs positive care and attention. It is imperative that (s)he receives nurturing care. If nurturing attention is absent, this can lead to an inability to establish close emotional ties in adult life.
- ☐ The child needs to feel close to primary carers. The child may fear losing the primary carer's love. If possible, time spent away from primary carer should be limited. There is a need for holding and hugging.
- ☐ It is difficult for children to cope with the many changes that can happen to the family. A consistency in environment and routines is helpful in these circumstances of change. Any changes in family circumstances affecting the child should, if possible, be gradual.
- ☐ Children of this age are unable to verbalise feelings even though they are keenly aware of non-verbal expressions. Consequently, they have a need to act out such feelings. This often results in misbehaviour or disobedience and such children need to learn appropriate ways to release hostility, frustration and aggression.
- ☐ There is the beginning of a realisation that they are missing someone that others have in their families.

REACTIONS

- ☐ In the first year, a change in mood or way of caring, or absence of carer may cause distress to the child.
- ☐ This can show itself in increased crying, irritability, disturbed sleep patterns, erratic feeding.
- ☐ The demonstration of denial in the form of shock is displayed along with despair at the prolonged absence of the person who is no longer present. Many children will consistently ask for the absent parent.
- ☐ Many children cling to the principal carer as a source of comfort. Further clinging and insatiable demands may be made for affection and approval.
- ☐ Some children become lethargic and pre-occupied.
- ☐ The infant may become withdrawn and unresponsive. This can show itself in a refusal to hold eye-contact, to smile or seek any form of physical comfort.
- ☐ There is distress manifested in disturbed sleeping and eating patterns.
- ☐ Yearning for the deceased may promote a demonstration of anger.
- ☐ There are also feelings of guilt because of the belief they are responsible for the death.
- ☐ This can promote demanding behaviour, regression to baby behaviour and language, tantrums and bed-wetting.
- ☐ Many children display physical aggression, hitting, biting, and bullying.
- ☐ Outward signs of grief are not always visible.
- ☐ Children can behave as if nothing has happened.

UNDERSTANDING, NEEDS, REACTIONS, AS A RESULT OF LOSS AGE 5-10

(N.B: Ages are for general guidance only)

UNDERSTANDING

- ☐ There is a complete realisation that someone is missing from the family unit.
- ☐ Within this age range children come to understand the permanence and irreversibility of death.
- ☐ They understand death is the result of accident or illness.
- ☐ There is a tendency to fantasise. They believe they can talk to the dead person or that the bereaved is watching over them.
- ☐ Some think that what has happened to their family is a punishment. They blame themselves for what has happened.
- ☐ Some believe their actions control the behaviour and destiny of others.
- ☐ Children become a little less egocentric and begin to show empathy to others.
- ☐ Some still believe it is right to take on an adult role, which can prevent the coming to terms with loss.

NEEDS

- ☐ There is a need for the changes that are occurring in the family to be explained. Otherwise they will be misunderstood.
- ☐ There is a need to be reassured regarding their fear of being abandoned by the remaining parent.
- ☐ The child yearns for the absent parent.
- ☐ There is a need for reassurance, attention and love.
- ☐ There is a need for children to learn appropriate ways to release hostility, frustration and aggression.
- ☐ There is a fear of the future. This can show itself in exaggerated concerns about money, food, and the home.
- ☐ Some children become self-conscious about the family being different to others. Again there is a need for explanation and reassurance.

REACTIONS

- ☐ There can be regression to the reactions of younger children:- crying, bed-wetting, thumb-sucking, disturbed sleeping or eating patterns, aggression towards or withdrawal from others.
- ☐ Children may become irritable.
- ☐ There can be present in many children a fear for their own survival and a fear that the other parent may also die.
- ☐ Many children display psychosomatic complaints such as headaches, feelings of nausea and diarrhoea.
- ☐ There can also be disruption in school attendance.
- ☐ Many children show a fall in academic achievement.
- ☐ Many children display a lack of self-esteem and self-confidence.
- ☐ The outward signs of grief are not always visible. Peer pressure may make the child feel they are not able to express their feelings.

- ☐ The fear of ridicule by peers may be strong. This may give the impression that they do not need support. Some become the target of bullying by peers who do not understand the grief being experienced.
- ☐ Many children display physical aggression, hitting, kicking, biting, and bullying.
- ☐ Other common behaviour indicators are the refusal to speak or insatiable demands for affection and approval.
- ☐ Some bereaved children turn into bullies as a way of reasserting themselves in their own confused emotional setting.
- ☐ Some can become pre-occupied with death.
- ☐ There is a real fear of the future. The child may feel that there is nowhere for him/her to feel safe.
- ☐ Some children of this age have a problem with self identity.
- ☐ There can be displayed an insatiable hunger for money and material things.

UNDERSTANDING, NEEDS, REACTIONS, AS A RESULT OF LOSS AGE 11-18

(N.B: Ages are for general guidance only)

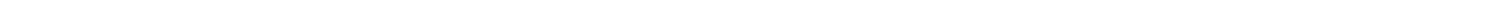
UNDERSTANDING

- ☐ At this age, young people begin to think abstractly about death.
- ☐ The concept of death becomes accepted as something totally irreversible.
- ☐ Many tend to think about the justice and injustice of death.
- ☐ Adolescents begin to contemplate their own mortality.
- ☐ Some begin to explore the different beliefs about an after-life.
- ☐ **There is a consciousness, and sometimes, shame that the family is different.**
- ☐ **Changes in family situations can cause anger, fear, a loss of personal identity, and low self-esteem.**

NEEDS

- ☐ There is a need to hide the intense emotional pain. This is often expressed in extreme anger.
- ☐ There is a need for security as there is often a feeling of vulnerability. All questions should be answered honestly.
- ☐ This can be a time of depression and loneliness.
- ☐ Many young people feel the need to busy themselves with activities and friends, seeking approval. There is a need for peer approval.
- ☐ There is an acute sensitivity to family tensions.
- ☐ There may be a desire to compensate feelings of loss with more possessions.
- ☐ Parental illness is a great fear.
- ☐ Authority is often challenged.

REACTIONS



- ☒ Adolescence is already a time of transition, from the security of childhood to the independence of self and personal identity. Loss adds pressure to this natural progression.
- ☒ Bereavement can add to the young person's unwillingness to communicate with adults.
- ☒ They may become over-sensitive amongst their peers.
- ☒ The predominant reaction at this age is one of anger, which may be a cover for the pain being experienced. With some the anger they feel makes them aggressive and anti-social towards their families and within their different community groupings.
- ☒ Some have difficulty coping with the loneliness they may feel and their own inability to reach out for support.
- ☒ Some young people may withdraw from friends and activities.
- ☒ Some have continual experience of nightmares.
- ☒ School work may suffer as the young person tries to come to terms with his/her feelings. Some may begin cheating in an attempt to keep up with work. Absence and lateness may increase.
- ☒ Often the young person may resort to lying. Some may resort to stealing / shoplifting.
- ☒ Many young people suffer from psychosomatic illnesses such as headaches or stomach aches.
- ☒ There may be frequent mood swings in this adolescent period. There is a great sensitivity to emotional tension in the family which is often expressed negatively.
- ☒ Many young people are overwhelmed with additional responsibility of substituting for the missing parent in family matters.
- ☒ Typical adolescent fears are:
 - illness of parent,
 - inadequate money,
 - being different to others,
 - being ridiculed,
 - being lonely, and,
 - being unpopular.
- ☒ Many adolescents suffer from mood swings; from elation to severe depression, and withdrawal from family or friends.
- ☒ There may be an increased attitude of violence and aggression to self or others.
- ☒ Some display eating, obsessive and self-harming disorders.
- ☒ Some resort to alcohol, drugs and sexual promiscuity.
- ☐ In extreme cases, suicidal tendencies may be displayed.

REACTION TO GRIEF / THE GRIEVING PROCESS

(This article is based upon the work of Robin Cooper, author of “Young People and Loss – A Handbook for Schools” and used with the kind permission of his widow, Lucy Cooper)

Grief is the intense response to loss. The compulsory work of grieving, according to Freud, is mourning. This is inescapable and painful but has to be endured if the necessary adjustment is to be made to living life once again.

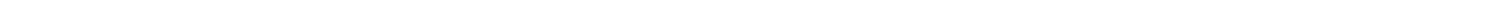
There are discernable grief reactions displayed by those who grieve. Based on the findings of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, many professionals have named the fundamental reactions as:

Denial	the refusal to accept what has happened. “This cannot be happening!”
Anger	the random direction of highly charged emotion against others.
Bargaining	the making of agreements with self/others in order to reverse the situation.
Depression	the feeling of utter futility.
Acceptance	the feeling that one can live now, positively, with memories of the past.

(These well known and acknowledged ‘grief reactions’ are often named ‘the five stages of grief’. However, from our shared experiences, we believe that grief, which is unique to every individual, is not simply an experience of moving through these named ‘stages’ but of moving forward in and out of these ‘experiences’, until with time, ‘acceptance’ comes along with the ability to live with the memories of the past. The reality is that life will never be the same again and ‘acceptance’ will only come with much adjustment.)

Further to these five basic reactions, are a number of common emotions which characterise grief:

Shock	the feeling that such a thing is unreal.
Fear	the feeling of apprehension about the present and the future.
Guilt	the irrational blaming of self.
Helplessness	the feeling that there is no hope at all.
Despair	the feeling that there is little point in trying to go on with life.
Loneliness	the feeling of being convinced nobody else feels the way you do.



Loss
Hope

the pain filled days of memory
the feeling, however fleeting, that the grief stage will
pass.

The following offers an outline of the emotional turmoil often experienced.

Denial (Shock - Confusion – Disbelief - Guilt)

Denial is the immediate reaction to any sort of loss. It is an instinctive psychological defence the mind uses to drive away the pain or threat of loss. It produces numbness where everything seems unreal, which, in turn, leads to confusion. It is the inability to face the reality of the situation; a refusal to believe what has happened.

Coupled with denial is a sense of confusion where the bereaved young person may act irrationally. They may, for example, expect the person who has died to suddenly arrive home. They may think they hear familiar sounds such as a key turning in the door.

In the short term this denial can be helpful in protecting the bereaved as they adapt to the confusion and immediacy of change. It can, however, be unhealthy if the response of denial continues indefinitely.

One of the commonest reactions to grief is to blame ones self. Many young people blame themselves for not preventing the loss that causes them to grieve. They also feel that they are blamed by others. The thought, “If only . . .” can be followed by an endless number of alternatives which were not at all plausible or possible. Guilt is a most distressing feeling that needs to be recognised and dealt with.

Anger (Fear and anxiety)

This anger is a deepseated rage over what has happened. Mixed with the anger is resentment and even envy at what has happened. There is also a frustration that there is nothing that could be done to prevent what has happened. Anger is a normal reaction. It is not wrong to express anger in appropriate ways. It can be expressed in different ways, projected at random against anybody who is in the way, family, friends, teachers, and self because of guilty thoughts and self recriminations that often accompany a young person’s anger. Even God suffers such anger from those with religious beliefs.

Some children and young people fear for their own safety after the loss of a friend or relative. There is also a great fear that the loss they have suffered will be repeated. Another friend or the other parent may die and the pain will start all over again.

Bargaining

This is a time when an attempt is made to exchange something willing to be given up for something wanted. An attempt is made to come to some agreement with anyone considered to be in charge of the situation. The child or young person tries to make agreements with self, others and even God. “If I do well at school, then my daddy will come back” sums up this emotion. Such bargaining is doomed to fail.

Depression (Loneliness - Despair - Hopelessness – Helplessness)

There is a mistaken belief among children and young people who are bereaved that they are the only ones who are experiencing such emotions. They are unaware that such

emotions are common and are experienced by others. This leads to a loneliness and withdrawal from friends and family.

This is a feeling of utter powerlessness. The grief overwhelms the bereaved with waves of inadequacy, and despair. There is often a great struggle to come through this stage. "Nothing matters anymore" characterises this emotion.

Sometimes life for the grieving seems out of control and depression sets in. The bereaved person may become apathetic. They may take less interest in themselves or others around them. There is a lack of purpose. This can have a devastating effect on young people. There is a danger that escapism could be sought in alcohol or drugs as young people seek to obliterate the feelings of loneliness and helplessness in the face of what has happened. There is also the real possibility, in a minority of cases, of the bereaved seriously contemplating suicide as an answer to their pain.

Physical illness

It is not unusual for there to be a feeling of physical illness amongst those who grieve. Some young people go through a period of ill health after grief. The symptoms may be those of a cough or cold, choking sensations and breathlessness, head and stomach aches. There may be a loss of appetite as well as insomnia. Some young people may become withdrawn.

Pain of Loss

When a young person has been bereaved through parental death or family breakdown, there will be times when the pain of loss will be particularly sharp. These times of difficulty can be identified as:

- 1 The anniversary of a death
- 2 Birthdays
- 3 Christmas
- 4 Holidays
- 5 Other special festivals such as Mothers' or Fathers' Day.

Many children will still want to send or make a card for the parent who has died. They may wish to mark such days with some ritual such as a visit to the graveyard or looking at photographs.

Acceptance (Hope)

In the early days of the journey through grief it is hard to see a time in the future when the grief will not be there, preventing any chance of happiness. Most young people who go through the stages of grief reach a time when they learn how to live with the loss they have experienced. They come to believe that they will be able to cope. It is a time when the present is no longer governed by the past but where there is a looking forward to the future. It is a time when the event of loss can be accepted without negative influence; still with feelings of loss but feelings that are positive. Life can be faced with renewed hope and optimism.

W. Worden has described four specific tasks that must be completed before acceptance may be reached.

- 1 The reality of the loss must be accepted.
- 2 The pain of loss must be experienced.
- 3 The adjustment to an environment in which the missing person is no longer present must be made.
- 4 Ways must be found to remember the person who is no longer present.

It must be remembered that grief does not follow a strict time frame and the journey is not a smooth transition through various stages, ending with a time of acceptance of what has happened. These stages or tasks can be revisited and experienced time after time, and some young people may remain in one of the stages for a considerable time.

1 The reality of the loss must be accepted.

When the death of a loved one occurs, it is a natural reaction for adults to express disbelief at the event. Such disbelief manifests itself in behaving, at times, as if the dead person is still present. Gradually the adult adjusts to the reality that the loved one has gone for ever.

Children, also, have to come to terms with this disbelief. They spend a long time thinking the dead person will return. They have to be led to a realisation that death is final and irreversible. This is virtually impossible for children aged 0-5 (*all ages indicated are for general guidance only*) as they have little concept of the reality of death or that it is irreversible. The best way for children to be helped is to be told about the death and to talk about it using simple but appropriate language. Such conversations should be repeated often.

A child who does not receive this sort of help may well lapse into times of fantasy where their perceived understanding of what has happened is more frightening than the reality of the situation.

2 The pain of loss must be experienced.

A whole range of emotions awaits the bereaved. These must be experienced as part of the grieving process. Children between 5-7 years old are a particularly vulnerable group. Their understanding of the permanency of death is not fully formed and they lack the necessary skills to deal with the full intensity of loss.

Nevertheless, they may well experience sadness, anger, guilt, yearning, loneliness, anxiety and other feelings associated with loss.

3 The adjustment to an environment in which the missing person is no longer present must be made.

It is inevitable that daily life and family routines will change following the death of a loved one. For a child, learning to live without a deceased parent is difficult. Adjustments have to be made to the loss of the role that parent played. It is essential for the family to follow routines as much as possible so that a child may identify with daily life. Talking about the deceased can be of great value at this stage. Gradually the child may adjust to life without the loved one and learn new coping strategies.

4 Ways must be found to remember the person who is no longer present.

It is not true that the bereaved child or young person needs to “let go” of the person who is no longer present.

The task facing the bereaved is not to let go of the relationship they enjoyed but to find new and appropriate ways in which to remember.

St Bede’s offers RAINBOWS - a structured programme of support for such children and young people.

**SAMPLE LETTERS, MEMOS AND SCHOOL
WEBSITE NOTICES**

Introduction:

The death of a pupil, member of staff, governor or other close member of the school community can cause great shock and distress to all concerned.

Mobile phones, social networking internet sites and email can all quickly be the means of effective and speedy communication but they can also be a cause of great speculation, often before the school has had chance to provide the information. If members of staff responsible for communicating to parents are in shock, then the situation is more difficult to manage.

The following letters are offered as samples, simply to support and guide colleagues if faced with communicating to governors, staff and parents, the death of a member of the school community.

ACTION: If faced with having to write such a letter, or post the information on the school website, please just take a moment to check the accuracy of the information before beginning and please ensure other colleagues proof read what you have prepared.

Parents need to know how a school has responded to the death of a member of the community and what information has been given to their child. This will no doubt include:

- Factual information about the circumstances of the death**
- Information about how their child may respond to the news**
- Practical suggestions to help their child to understand the news**

Four sample letters are offered:

- 1. To inform parents of the death of a member of staff**
- 2. To inform parents of the death of a pupil**
- 3. To inform governors and staff of the death of a pupil**
- 4. To thank parents after a time of support following the death of a pupil**

1. TO INFORM PARENTS OF THE DEATH OF A MEMBER OF STAFF.

Dear Parents,

It is with great sadness that I write to inform you that over the weekend, N..., a highly respected and much loved member of our teaching staff, has died. S/he had become increasingly poorly over the last few days and in the end died peacefully, with his/her family at his/her side.

The children/young people have been told of her/his death today in their own classrooms and as anticipated, a number of them are experiencing some significant distress. They were told the name of the illness was cancer and it was also explained to them that many times people with cancer do get better, but other times people die from it.

On behalf of the school community I have expressed our sympathy to her/his family.

I hope in the weeks to come we will find an appropriate way to celebrate the life that s/he had with us here at our school, together with the significant contribution s/he has made.

Personal end.....

2. TO INFORM PARENTS OF THE DEATH OF A PUPIL

Dear Parents,

It is with great sadness that I write to inform you of the tragic death of one of our pupils, N.... from Year/Mrsclass. We learned this morning that N.....had died after (*a short illness/tragic accident or other appropriate phrase*). Mr and Mrs have told me that N..... died peacefully in hospital last night.

Members of staff have informed the pupils in school this morning and lessons were suspended for a short time to allow us to gather to express our individual and shared sorrow.

It is our intention, with Mr & Mrs’s permission, to hold a ‘Celebration of N’s.....Life’ on the same day as the funeral will be taking place in order for the whole school to be part of this time. You are more than welcome to join us at this service and we will post details on our school website as soon as times have been confirmed.

I enclose a book list with one or two suggestions that might help you to help your child with their grief.

3. **TO INFORM ALL GOVERNORS AND STAFF OF THE DEATH OF A PUPIL (VIA EMAIL, MEMO OR SECURE AREA OF SCHOOL WEBSITE) NB**
Remember to inform ALL staff including absent colleagues and peripatetic staff:

URGENT INFORMATION FOR ALL STAFF AND GOVERNORS:

TITLE: >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>

Further to staff briefing and phone calls made to governors may I confirm the sad news ofN's death As colleagues were informed at briefing at *(time)*, N died (*provide factual information.....*). I or ANO has spoken to *(the deceased next of kin)* and expressed our deepest sorrow and sympathy.

All pupils in school have been informed during the day (*state how pupils have been informed*). Parents will be informed by letter this evening and a notice will be placed on the school website. (Copy below) Mrs N will respond to any requests from the media for information. Please provide her details to anyone requesting information and do not offer any comment yourself to external requests.

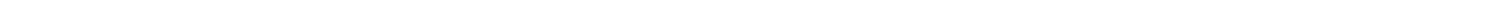
Needless to say we are all deeply shocked to receive this news. Arrangements have yet to be made for the funeral and for a school memorial service but we will of course inform all staff and governors once these are known. In the meantime the school chapel / quiet area is available for quiet reflection. Our bereavement team will ensure that this area is always staffed.

May I remind staff and governors that you will find the '*bereavement guidance*' that we approved for such times as this, on the school network headed.....

Further information will be made available through our daily staff briefings and via the secure

Please take care

Personal end



4. TO THANK PARENTS AFTER A TIME OF SUPPORT FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF A PUPIL

Dear Parents,

On behalf of all the staff I would like to express our sincere thanks to everyone for the support, sympathy and concern we received throughout last week. The letters, words and flowers have helped ease our sadness here in school and for that we are all most grateful.

Our hearts go out to Mr & Mrs and their family. They will need our support for many months to come. I know that despite their pain and sorrow they were greatly comforted by the love and genuine compassion shown by the whole school and the local community. The special assembly and funeral service gave tangible evidence of this compassion. The remembrance book will remain in the hall for the remainder of this half-term. Please do continue to add to it or visit the garden/chapel at any time. Its presence has been a tremendous release and comfort for many of us.

As at other times of the school year, please do not hesitate to talk to me, or any member of staff if you are concerned about your child's reaction to N's tragic death. However, we also enclose some practical guidance for parents which you may find helpful and our school website lists a number of books and websites which may be useful

Thankfully, what we have experienced as a school is extremely rare. I have no doubt that the experience has drawn us closer and has created new bonds but it will also leave a lasting heartache. Together I know we will ensure that it is also a positive experience, which will enable us all, children and adults to be more sensitive and compassionate human beings.

Above all else, perhaps this tragedy has helped us all put things into perspective and recognise our own and each others' humanity.

With our sincere thanks for your on-going support and understanding

Yours sincerely

**Emergency Contact
Numbers**

Name	<u>Position</u>	Contact Numbers
Mary Maplesden	<u>Chair of Governors</u>	
Father Chris Jackson	<u>Parish Priest</u>	(0191) 388 2302
Eve McMann	<u>Head Teacher</u>	01914165439

