

Townhill Infant School



Bereavement Policy.

Rationale:

'Every 22 minutes a parent of a child dies that's around 23,600 bereaved children each year. Almost one in every class. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend, teacher or other significant person in their life'. (child Bereavement UK, 2017 statistics)

We understand that bereavement is faced by members of our school community at different times and that when there is a loss experienced such as a child or member of staff, it can be extremely challenging. Pupils need to be supported when they experience family bereavements and other significant losses in their lives whilst they are in our care. It is also understood that the impact of bereavement impacts everyone in different ways and for different periods of time.

This policy will provide guidelines to be followed after a bereavement so that staff are proactive rather than reactive when responding to sensitive issues. The aim is to be supportive to both pupils and adults and to develop staff's confidence and understanding in dealing with these difficult situations. Every death that occurs is in different circumstances and this policy will guide us through to deal professionally and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances but it will need to be adapted to meet the specific situation.

Townhill Infants is committed to supporting the emotional health and well being of all its pupils and staff. We strive to provide an environment and curriculum that support pupils to cope with separation or death of a loved one.

The policy is based on practice that has developed over time as the school has experienced bereavements in the past and provides a working document to support our whole school community.

Following a bereavement:

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

- Be given time and space to reflect and grieve.
- Be given the most appropriate support for them as individuals and if possible to state their own preference for the support that they would like.
- Be given a caring supportive environment in which they feel safe and allowed to express their grief.

We recognise that:

- Grief may not always be obvious to others.
- Different religions and cultures may view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all points of view should be valued equally.

- The death of a child has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/care of the child and every effort should be taken to inform others and dealt with sensitively.

The management of bereavement in school.

Each bereavement is unique and comes with its own specific challenges. It *is* helpful to have a framework to build upon for each situation. One of our main concerns must be the immediate family of the deceased and as a school we state our commitment to the family for any practical, emotional and ongoing support. The ongoing wellbeing of pupils and staff in school are paramount and will be supported by a planned, open and considered approach. In times when pupils and staff may be in shock and upset, this policy will ensure effective communication takes place and everyone feels supported.

Transition:

We believe that is important to ensure that any child who has experienced bereavement that this information is passed to any new relevant schools or new class/teacher within our own setting.

Death of a pupil:

1. When school is notified of the death of a pupil the person who answers the call initially will put them through to a member of the SLT. It will be ensured that factual information is collected rather than assumption/rumour.
2. This information will then be shared to all the members of the SLT.
3. School staff to be informed sensitively of what has occurred and allowed time to process this information. (Remembering part time staff)
4. Pupils will be told as soon as possible. This will be done by a familiar adult within a familiar group. Staff will be guided what to say and will be given book resource suggestions to support them. Prior to this children who are most likely to be impacted by this news will be identified eg if they had a close relationship to the pupil. It might be deemed more appropriate to inform these children of the news in a smaller group and with an adult who knows them best.

Sharing of information:

It will need to be agreed by parents that they are happy for school to inform all concerned parties that this bereavement has occurred. This list will be different in each situation. The school will ensure that all people who are close to the child are told in a sensitive and supportive manner. Ensure that all current school staff, remembering part time staff are told. Any previous school staff who may have worked closely with that child are informed, children's services if appropriate, SEND team if appropriate, medical outside agencies, governors, Hamwic Trust, local authority, other parents.

The process of telling the other pupils will be decided by the Head Teacher following consultation with SLT. Different decisions will be made depending on the year group that the child belonged to, who will be the best person to talk to the children, which children may require ELSA support. It is important that staff do not add extra concerns to the children. For eg if a child died in hospital we need to ensure that children do not develop a fear of hospitals. Children must be allowed time to ask questions and staff must answer honestly and to the best of their knowledge. Children will be allowed to react in their own way and we appreciate that this may take many different forms. Try to end this discussion on amore positive note eg not all people who are ill die and many get better. Consider having some thinking time to reflect on the child and the family. Ask children if they would like to do an activity to express their thoughts and feelings?

The funeral.

Parents will be consulted over their wishes for the funeral ie whether they are happy for members of the school community to attend. It is also understood that the family may prefer to keep it private. SLT will discuss who will be the best person to represent the school at the funeral. It is also understood that more than one member of staff may go so that staff can support each other. Practical arrangements will also be made eg class cover, transport etc. It will be discussed whether it is appropriate for the school to close on this occasion.

Head Teacher and SLT will decide if flowers/collection will be made.

Cultural and religious implications will be considered.

If Parents ask to visit the school afterwards as part of their grieving process school will agree to support them.

Memory assemblies:

It may be appropriate to hold a memory assembly for the child at a later date. Staff will show pupils that is normal to feel upset at the loss of a friend and that they will be supported in school by others.

Responding to media:

Some deaths in sudden circumstances attract media attention. All members of staff are advised not to respond to journalists and to refer all enquiries to the Head teacher who will refer them to Hamwic Trust.

On going support:

For staff:

Following a bereavement, it is expected that some members of staff will be emotionally affected and will need to be given support. This can be offered within school from other members of staff, counselling support from the Educational Psychology team or 'Bright EAP.' Information regarding accessing bereavement support from outside of school will be made available eg CRUSE, Simon Says.

For pupils:

It is felt that most pupils will be able to be supported within school by school staff who know the children best. Children will be given time to talk, ask questions. ELSA support will be offered. Social stories and appropriate books can be shared with the children. The Education Psychology service will be called upon to offer further support if needed.

For the family:

School will communicate straightaway with the family to offer support. A letter of condolence will be sent from school.

Personal belongings for the child will be collected together for the parents to collect. A

school representative will attend the funeral if that meets with the family's wishes. A

collection for flowers/monetary donation will be organised.

Parents will be invited to any future school events if deemed appropriate and supportive for parents.

If any memorial work has been completed eg a remembrance book, then this should be returned to parents when appropriate.

If Parents ask to visit the school on future occasions as part of their own grieving process then this will be agreed. For each family this process will be different and school will deal with them sensitively and in a supportive way.

Parents will be directed to simonsays.org.uk for child/adolescent bereavement support.

Death of a member of staff:

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

In addition, the school will notify Hamwic Trust and the local authority. Where appropriate in line with the wishes of the staff member's family, the Head Teacher will seek permission from the chair of Governors and the Trust to close the school so that all members of staff are able to attend the funeral if they wish.

Death of a child's parent/close relative:

If a child has been impacted by the death of a close family member then the school will support that child by allowing the child time to grieve and ask questions. We appreciate that each of the circumstances will be different and will be dealt with sensitively by the school and by supported by the adults who know the child best. ELSA support will be offered, appropriate book resources shared and if needed social stories can be made. Access to the Educational Psychology service can be offered.

Parents will be directed to simonsays.org.uk for child/adolescent bereavement support.

Responsibilities:

The designated person within the school who has overall responsibility for support and liaison in the event of death is the Head Teacher. In the event that she is absent then the Deputy head teachers will take responsibility. SLT will review policy development and reflect on its effectiveness. They will use the expertise within school to assign responsibilities. They will coordinate the planned school action in line with the policy and appropriate for the individual situation.

The nominated governor with responsibility for bereavement is Claire Pearce.

Her responsibilities are:

To support the Head Teacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is managed.

To support the Head Teacher in overseeing how bereavement is covered in the curriculum through for EG SMSC.

To review practice.

Appendix: A Online resources and information.

Appendix B - Books to support bereavement.

Appendix C Template of a letter to inform parents of the death of a pupil.

Template of a letter to inform parents of the death of a member of staff.
Appendix b: Supporting pupils information.

Children's understanding of death.

This policy was written by W. Jones 11th March 2022

To be reviewed March 2023

Appendix A - List of Online Resources and Information

www.winstonswish.org.uk A useful website offering practical ideas for helping

those bereaved in the family and school community.

www.keech.org.uk The website of Keech Hospice Care, our local Children's Hospice. Gives details of its facilities and the support it offers.

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

www.childbereavement.org.uk A bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

www.juliesplace.com A support resource for bereaved siblings

www.bhf.org.uk/smallcreature British Heart Foundation site to help children come to terms with loss using cartoon creatures. An animated film and we have a printed pack to go with it.

www.bbc.co.uk/.../bereavement/bereavement_helpchildren.shtml
Information on the way bereavement affects children

<http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk> An organisation offering local bereavement support to both adults and children

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/index.htm> Federation of organisations

Appendix B - Books on Bereavement

GRAN PA

John Burningham (Puffin, 1998, ISBN 0099-43408-3)

Designed to stimulate discussion rather than to tell a story, the book has a series of scenes of a little girl and her grandad, with comments from each or both of them. At the end, she is shown staring at his empty chair, without comments. The book allows the adult to direct discussion about not only the good things that the child remembers, but also the not so happy memories.

WHEN DINOSAURS DIE

L & M Brown (Little, Brown, 1996, hb, ISBN 0-316-10197-7)

'Charming busy anthropomorphic pictures of dinosaurs illustrate topics and questions and a range of answers about death: Saying Goodbye; Customs and beliefs about death; Why do people die? What does "dead" mean?. It is also quite acute psychologically, acknowledging that disbelief, anger, fear, and sadness are common feelings when someone dies. Expensive, but attractive and appealing to children.

REMEMBERING GRANDAD

Sheila and Kate Isherwood (Oxford, ISBN 0-19-272368-5)

A girl's grandfather has died and looking back over the happy times they enjoyed together helps her to cope with the loss. Very specific episodes and illustrations give it a life-like feel. Sensible and sound if a little stereotyped in its pictures of family life, it could help children to think about how to remember someone.

FRED

Posy Simmons (Jonathan Cape, 1987, ISBN 0-2240-2448-5)

When Fred the cat dies, his owners Nick and Sophie attend his funeral and learn about his secret life as a famous singer. The story raises the idea of celebrating a life in a good-humoured and touching way, with entertaining pictures and not much text.

GRANDAD, I'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER YOU

De Bode and Broere (Evans / Helping Hands, 1997, ISBN 0237-51755-8)

A picture book about loss and memories, and potentially a good stimulus to talk about a bereavement.

LIFETIMES

Beginnings and endings with lifetimes in between — a beautiful way to explain life and death to children

Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen (Belitha Press, 1997, ISBN 1-85561-760-9).

places human life and death firmly in the natural world, and the tone is quietly reflective: "All around us everywhere, beginnings and endings are going on all the time. It may be sad, but it is the way of all things. For plants; for people; and for birds".

BADGER'S PARTING GIFTS

Susan Varley (Collins Picture Lions, pb, 1992)

An old favourite, a charming illustrated book in which a very old and much loved

Badger dies. The forest animals gather and think about the important part Badger Played in their lives, as time passes the memories make them smile.

WE LOVE THEM

Martin Waddell (Walker Books, 1990, ISBN 0-7445-7256-8)

Death is seen very much as part of life in this nicely illustrated story of life in the country, which conveys the idea that life goes on and that old creatures give way to young ones. But it is a bit too matter of fact about loss - barely is the old dog dead than the children have found a new one, is there an implicit message that dead pets (and people?) are easily replaced.

GRANDMA'S BILL

Martin Waddell (Macdonald Young Books, pb, ISBN 0- 7500-0307-3)

Bill's grandma is a widow, and he learns about her "other Bill" by looking through her photo album with her. A bit too stereotypically suburban and middle class for general appeal perhaps. Some like its ordinariness, gentleness and factual accuracy, and couldn't fault what it had to say about death and living on in memories and in the family.

I'LL ALWAYS LOVE YOU

H Wilhelm (Hodder & Stoughton, 1985)

A touching story of the love between a little boy and his dog, who have grown up together. When the dog dies, the boy says that, although he is very sad, it helps that he used to tell the dog "I'll always love you" every night. An opportunity to discuss the importance of telling how you feel. Aimed at 4 to 7 year olds and delightfully illustrated.

A BIRTHDAY PRESENT FOR DANIEL

Juliet Rothman (Prometheus Books, ISBN 1-57392-054-1)

This story of a little girl whose brother has died is intended for children aged 8-12. "A difficult subject handled very well and movingly".

Appendix C

Template of a letter informing parents

of the death of a pupil

Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the child's parents.

The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the parents and school.

<Address>

<Date>

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>.

(<Name> died from an illness called cancer. As you may be aware, many children who have cancer get better but sadly <Name> had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday.)

He/She was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try to answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we would be more than happy to help you.

(We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating <Name..>'s life.)

Yours sincerely

<Name> Head Teacher

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

<Address>

<Date>

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the tragic death of <Name> who has been a teacher at this school for a number of years.

Our thoughts are with <Name >'s> family at this time and in an effort to try to respond to his/her death in a positive way, all the children have been informed.

When someone dies it is normal for family and friends to experience many different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion, and children are likely to ask questions about the death that need to be answered honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.

The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school but if there is anything else you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we will be more than happy to help you.

Yours sincerely

<Name> Head Teacher

Supporting pupils

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

Loss from a child's perspective

For many children and young people the death of a parent, caregiver, sibling or grandparent is an experience they are faced with early in life. It is sometimes incorrectly assumed that a child or young person who is bereaved by the death of someone close at a young age will not be greatly affected as they are too young to understand the full implications of death.

This is untrue and unhelpful. Even babies are able to experience loss. A baby cannot cognitively process the implications of the bereavement but that does not mean that they do not feel the loss.

Accepting the child's experience

Children and young people need to be given the opportunity to grieve as any adult would. Trying to ignore or avert the child's grief is not protective, in fact it can prove to be extremely damaging as the child enters adulthood. Children and young people regardless of their age need to be encouraged to talk about how they are feeling and supported to understand their emotions.

It is also important to remember that children and young people grieve in different ways. Grief is unique and therefore it is not wise to assume that all children and young people will experience the same emotions, enact the same behaviour or respond similarly to other grieving children and young people. A child or young person's grief differs from that of an adult's grief because it alters as they develop.

Time to grieve

Children and young people often revisit the death and review their emotions and feelings about their bereavement as they move through their stages of

development. Children and young people do not have the emotional capacity to focus on their grief for long periods of time and therefore it is not uncommon for

grieving children and young people to become distracted by play. This is a protective mechanism which allows the child or young person to be temporarily diverted from the bereavement.

Bereaved children and young people need time to grieve and in order for them to address the bereavement they need to be given the facts regarding the death in language appropriate to their age or level of comprehension. Avoid using metaphors for death such as, "Daddy has gone to sleep", this will make the child or young person believe that Daddy will come back to them and may constantly ask when he is going to wake up. Similarly the child or young person might encounter problems with bedtime and not wanting to sleep for fear of not waking up.

Talking to children

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

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

Key points to remember

- Babies can experience feelings of loss
- Be honest with the bereaved child or young person
- Avoid using metaphors for death
- Every child and young person's grief is unique

- Encourage the child or young person to talk about the death and how they feel
- Children and young people may 'revisit' the death and review their feelings about the bereavement as they develop
- Use language that is appropriate to the child or young person's age and level of comprehension.

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

Childrens' understanding of death

The following information is based on developmental chronology, and is taken from CRUSE bereavement care website. It is helpful to consider these developmental levels when thinking about how children with special needs may experience grief.

The nature of a child's understanding of death and bereavement will be different at different stages of development. Although a child's grief is individual, their understanding of the loss of a loved one progresses as they mature. In this section you will find the most common understandings of death by children at certain stages of their development.

Do bear in mind that a child's understanding of death during their development will differ in circumstances where the child may be experiencing educational difficulties.

Birth to six months

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

Six months to two years

At this developmental stage the baby is able to picture their mother or primary caregiver internally if she/he is not present. If it is the primary caregiver who has died the baby will protest at their absence by loud crying and angry tears. It is common for babies to become withdrawn and lose interest in their toys and feeding and they will likely lose interest interacting with others. At the more mature end of this developmental stage bereaved toddlers can be observed actively seeking the

deceased person. For instance if granddad spent much of his time prior to death in his shed the toddler might persistently return to investigate the shed in the hope that

they will find him there.

Two years to five years

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

"Won't Uncle Bob be lonely in the ground by himself?"

"Do you think we should put some sandwiches in Grandpa's coffin in case he gets hungry?"

"What if Nan can't breathe under all that earth?"

"Will Daddy be hurt if they burn him?"

As the cognitive understanding of children in this age range is limited they can sometimes demonstrate less of a reaction to the news of the death than might be observed by an older child and might promptly go out to play on hearing the news of the death.

Children aged between two and five years old have difficulty with the abstract concepts surrounding death. For instance they might be confused as to how one person can be in a grave and also be in heaven at the same time. They will become further confused if they are told that the deceased person is simply sleeping and this in turn could make them fearful of falling asleep or seeing anyone else asleep. They might insist on waiting for the person who has died to wake up or similarly if they

have been told that the person who has died has gone on a long journey they may await their return.

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

Five years to ten years

Children at this developmental stage have acquired a wider understanding of death and what it entails. They begin to realise that death is the end of a person's life, that the person who has died won't return and that life functions have been terminated. By the age of seven the average child accepts that death is an inevitability and that all people including themselves will eventually die.

This understanding can also increase a child's anxieties regarding the imminent deaths of other people who they are close to. Children of this age are broadening their social networks by attending school and are therefore open to receive both information and misinformation from their peers and social circles.

With this in mind it is important that the cause of death, the funeral and burial process and what happens to the deceased person's body are explained in a factual and age appropriate manner to the bereaved child. Children will ask many questions and may want to know intricate details pertaining to the death and decomposition of the body. Again, it is vital that children have such details explained to them clearly so that they understand.

At this developmental stage children can empathise with and show compassion for peers that have been bereaved. Children aged between five and ten often copy the coping mechanisms that they observe in bereaved adults and they may try to disguise their emotions in an attempt to protect the bereaved adult. The bereaved

child can sometimes feel that they need permission to show their emotions and talk about their feelings.

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

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