



BEREAVEMENT POLICY

School Mission Statement Northbourne CEP School

VISION STATEMENT:

Together we gather and grow to bring life to our rural school community. Everyone is welcomed, known, valued and treasured as individuals. God's countryside is our classroom, where we live, breathe and connect with our evolving natural world. Through our curriculum we nurture pupils to be resilient, inquisitive and compassionate. By embracing stewardship, we recognise our shared responsibility for each other and the world. We empower each other to act and make a difference to our neighbour.

To grow in: Faith, Love, Compassion, Kindness, Respect & Forgiveness

Our six Christian Values are at the heart of our vision. Every day we aspire to grow in **Faith, Love, Compassion, Kindness, Respect and Forgiveness**, so that our school family may experience the joy and hope of "life in all its fullness" (John: 10 v10)

Review every 3 years	
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Bereavement Policy

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Supporting pupils, families and staff with bereavement.

1. Introduction.

The main aim of this policy is to provide a framework for all staff, both teaching and nonteaching, to give guidance on how to deal sensitively and compassionately in difficult and upsetting circumstances. Our school is fully committed to the emotions health and well-being of our children, families and staff. We are dedicated to the continual development of a healthy and thriving school community and strive to work towards this on all aspects of life. We are passionate about providing an ethos, environment and curriculum that can provide support during difficult time, including a time of death or dying.

This policy should be read in conjunction with

- Child Protection and Safeguarding
- Equal Opportunities
- Behaviour.
- Healthy Schools.

2. Aims and Objectives.

- We aim to meet the needs of all children and staff within a Christian Context.
- To ensure that there are designated named members of the school staff who will provide support to pupils/families/staff (where applicable) during and after bereavement.
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and the community.
- To set out an approach on how to tell pupils, families or staff about a death and what to do when you are required to tell them that someone close to them has died.
- To set out clear procedures in respect of what to do in the event of a crisis on school premises or on a school trip.
- To ensure all staff are trained and able to recognize common symptoms and behaviours associated with grief.
- To ensure that the contact details of local and national support agencies specializing in bereavement such as Child Bereavement UK and Winston's Wishes are available.
- To set out a procedure on how to deal with media interest surrounding a death designating key members of staff to act as media coordinators.
- The Children Act 1989 aimed to ensure that the welfare of the child was paramount, working in partnership with parents to protect the child from harm (www.careandthelaw.org). All intentions of this policy endorse that aim as we endeavour to counter any adverse effects of bereavement and maintain pupils' emotional well-being.

3. Rational.

- Every 30 minutes in the United Kingdom a child loses a parent.
- By the age of 16 at least one child in every classroom (1 in 29) will have experienced the death of a parent or sibling (Penny and Stubbs, 2015).
- Teachers in a primary school are certain to encounter pupils who have been deeply affected by bereavement.
- 3% of 5-15 years have experienced the death of a parent, sibling or grandparents.
- Close bereavement brings a profound effect and change to a child's life.
- There is no fixed pattern to how a child will grieve.
- The 'Five Stages of Grief' (denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance) is a useful tool when starting to understand what the child, family or adult may be experiencing.

4. Procedures

Within school, we work in partnership with parents. When children join the school, we find out as much as possible about every child to tailor the academic, social and emotional teaching in school to match their needs. Parents are encouraged to make staff aware of any previous changes that may have profoundly affected their child (divorce, bereavement, moving, new babies etc). If there has been bereavement, information on what the child has been told (in terms of religious beliefs etc.) should be sought, in order that the school does not say anything that could confuse or upset the child or family.

Family Bereavement

When school is informed of a bereavement or loss the following actions should be considered:

- Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the Head Teacher, or another appropriate key member of staff, and the wishes of the families communicated with others. The family should be asked how much or what the child already knows, and how they have been involved.
- The importance of working together and liaison will be explained – both parties assessing any changes in behaviour. (Eating and sleeping patterns may change, behaviour in school may deteriorate, or the child becomes withdrawn.)
- It should be explained to the family how the school can be involved to support the child and family and outside agencies shared, as appropriate (See Appendix 1-Winston Wish, Childhood Bereavement).
- Staff should be informed before pupils and be prepared to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.
- Pupils who are affected should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone who is known to them.
- If appropriate, a letter to all families affected should be composed at the earliest opportunity, a decision made as to whom, and how, it should be distributed. This should be completed in discussion with the family.
- Where and if necessary, a press statement should be prepared by the Head Teacher,
- The school need to be aware that the school timetable may need a degree of flexibility to accommodate the need and well-being of children and adults affected by the situation. However, minimal disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security and familiarity.
- In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance may be clarified

For a member of staff experiencing close family bereavement, absence will be arranged for attendance at a funeral and appropriate time off in line with the Absence Management Policy. Additional time may be given through sick leave as appropriate.

Death of a child or member of staff

When the school is informed of the death of a child or member of staff, the following action should be considered:

- Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the Head Teacher, or another appropriate key member of staff, and the wishes of the families communicated with others.
- Discussion should take place with the family and their wishes taken into account before decisions are taken on how and what to tell the children in school .
- If appropriate, a letter to all families affected should be composed at the earliest opportunity, a decision made as to whom, and how, it should be distributed. This should be completed in discussion with the family.
- It should be explained to the family how the school can be involved to support the child and family and outside agencies shared, as appropriate (Winston Wish, Childhood Bereavement)

- Counselling should be available if necessary e.g. in cases of sudden or violent death (outside agencies should be involved with this e.g. Psychological Service).
- The school may be closed, or as many people as possible released to attend a funeral or memorial services should it be appropriate and they wish to do so.
- Pupils and staff may express a wish to attend, or take part in the service, but they should only do so with the prior agreement of the deceased's family, relatives or next of kin, as well as the agreement of their own parents/carers.
- The class most affected might like to write down their thoughts and feelings; these could then be given to the bereaved family to assist in the planning of the service.
- After the service, staff and pupils should be encouraged to meet and express their thoughts and feelings as such services are important in the grieving process.
- Staff and children should be supported throughout the grieving period; anyone displaying signs of stress should be offered appropriate support.

Terminally Ill Pupils/Staff

- In the event of a child or member of staff becoming terminally ill, their wishes and those of their parents/guardians/next-of-kin should always be respected.
- Should the child wish to attend school, the class teacher may need to inform the class of the child's condition. Discussion should take place with the family and their wishes taken into account before decisions are taken on how and what to tell the children in school.
- Occasionally, the child may wish to talk to their fellow classmates about their predicament themselves. Honesty about death and dying may be the best line of approach. Sometimes there is just no other way

Return to School

- For the bereaved child or member of staff, returning to school may be traumatic.
- Where there has been a close family bereavement, in most cases everyone (teaching, support staff, volunteers if appropriate and pupils) should be made aware of the situation before the pupil returns (providing the parents/guardians of the bereaved pupil agree).
- Staff should show appropriate compassion and allow expression to those suffering grief.
- Teachers should try to foster an environment that is compassionate, yet disciplined.
- Family life at this traumatic time can be particularly distressing, routines upset, relationships strained, and the future uncertain. For this reason, school routines should be kept as normal as possible in order to provide a respite.
- Staff should be aware of anniversaries as this can spark a revival of feelings of bereavement.
- Staff might keep an eye on those particularly affected by the death of a close associate.

Support for the bereaved Pupil

- Try to be available to listen and support if possible, arrange a one-to-one session with a trusted adult within school, as soon as possible after the pupil returns to school.
- Keep a routine, provide a sense of normality.
- Offer a 'Safe Space' and a Trusted Adult away from an emotionally intense atmosphere.
- Time to be themselves without feeling guilty (being with friends, time to play in a safe space)
- Establish regular correspondence with home, providing assurances about behaviours and general well-being. This will support the grief process.
- Access to appropriate resources- Trusted Adult in school, bereavement counselling or other appropriate agencies.
- Be calm and show them that you are listening and understanding by occasionally repeating what they have said and by acknowledging their emotions.
- If people feel like crying they should cry – crying is not a sign of weakness, but often a sign of deep feeling.

- When speaking with the child beware of using platitudes eg “I know how you feel”, (young people may feel offended that you presume how they feel).
- Be aware that children’s age will affect their understanding of death. (Appendix 2 for the Developmental Stages relating to an understanding of death.)

Do

- Let the child know that you genuinely care
- Make time to be available and listen
- Accept all that the child is saying
- Allow them to express their feelings their way
- Let them know their feelings are normal
- Let them know that it is OK to cry
- Talk honestly and share your feelings
- Be honest
- Have eye contact
- Have appropriate physical contact
- Let them know that it is not their fault
- Be aware of the home situation

Don’t

- Stop the child talking
- Tell them how they should or should not feel
- Avoid contact
- Change the subject
- Deny your pain and feelings
- Point out things for which they should be grateful
- Be frightened of sharing your own feelings

Support for other pupils/ staff

- Support may be need to be offered to other pupils or staff. Books and outside agency support should be available if needed.
- Bereavement awareness training will be provided for all staff. We will ensure that members of staff are regularly consulted to their training needs, and training is provided as appropriate to keep up to date with developments.

Appendix 1- useful websites for dealing with loss and bereavement.

www.childbereavementuk.org

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

www.winstonswish.org.uk

www.mind.org.uk

www.cruse.org.uk

Useful telephone numbers:

- Winston's Wish family line- 08088 02000- email ask@winstonswish.org. A national helpline offering guidance, information and support to anyone caring for a bereaved child, including professionals and family members.
- Childhood Bereavement UK- 0800 0288840- a network of child bereavement services.
- CRUSE- 0808 8081677- support for families and children suffering from bereavement.

Useful story books to support with death and loss:

Grandpa- John Burningham

Always and Forever- Alan Durant.

The Huge Bag of Worries- Virginia Ironside.

Badgers Parting Gifts- Susan Varley

Saying Goodbye to Daddy- Judith Vigna

Waterbugs and Dragonflies- Explaining Death to Young Children.

Childrens' understanding of death

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.