

# Supporting Education Settings with Bereavement and Loss

During the Coronavirus Pandemic



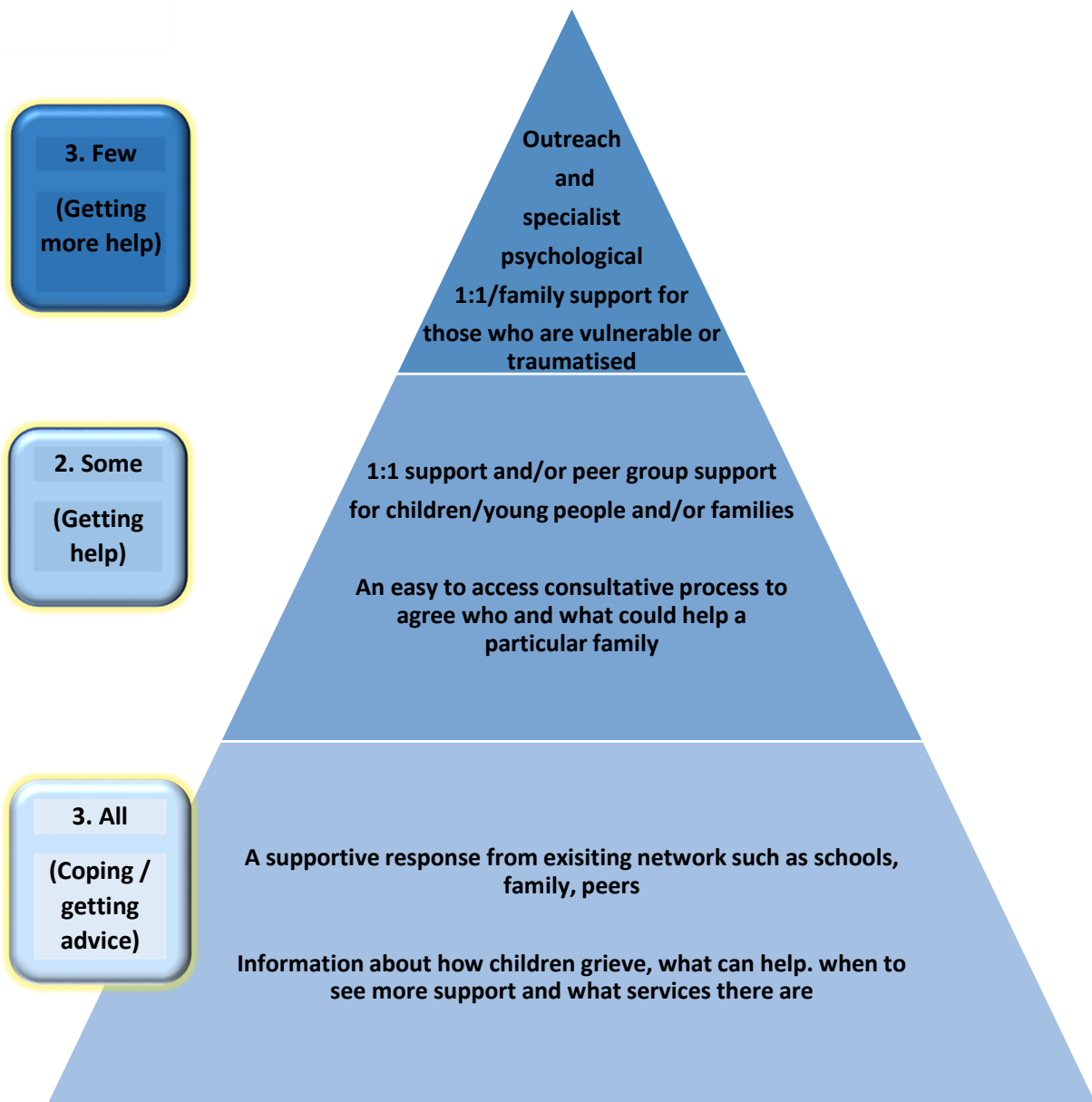
## INTRODUCTION

This resource aims to provide a framework and references for school professionals with regards to managing bereavement and loss in education settings during the coronavirus pandemic.

### KEY MESSAGES

- Bereavement and grief is a normal response to loss. It helps individuals to readjust and cope with life without a loved one, helping them to maintain a bond with those who are no longer physically present (British Psychological Society, 2020).
- Children learn their response to loss from those around them (Heegard, 1988).
- Factors such as children's personal characteristics (ages, gender, emotional and cognitive development), their relationship to the person that has died, the circumstances around the death and the consequences of the death can influence the impact and experience of the bereavement (Rolls, 2019). Every bereavement is unique and individual to the person.
- Managing grief during the Coronavirus pandemic provides further challenges to the grieving process. People are often managing grief in a time of isolation, coping on their own with strong feelings that are associated with grief including fear, anger, guilt and sadness (Bereavement UK, 2020). Furthermore, there is possible disruption to the grieving process such as being unable to attend or hold a funeral/memorial in a way they would typically, and that sense of disconnection from loved ones because of restrictions on physical distance/contact. People may not have been able to spend time with their loved ones or had an opportunity to say goodbye (Cruise Bereavement Care, 2020).
- Supporting bereaved young people requires a careful balance of avoiding pathologizing/marginalising common and normative grief responses, but also ensuring they are supported in their adjustment to loss, preventing possible complications of unaddressed grief (Griese, Burns, Farro, Silvern, & Talmi, 2017).
- The presence of a supportive family/social circle and an understanding school environment is valuable in supporting bereaved children and it is recognised that not all young people will require specialist interventions and support (see figure 1, Rolls, 2019).
- School-based support can help ameliorate the potential negative impact of loss (Schonfeld & Demaria, 2018).

*"Grief is not an illness – it's a normal and expected response to the death of a loved one. It is a highly individualised process that involves many ups and downs"*  
(Morris, 2008)




*Figure 1 what good provision for bereaved children and young people and their parents and carers looks like (Childhood Bereavement cited in Rolls, 2019)*

## ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

When a death occurs to a close member within a school community there is usually a profound sense of shock, even if the death is expected. It is, therefore, important to have already thought through a plan of action as it is sometimes difficult to think clearly at the time of receiving such news. You may find the following guidance helpful when considering how to respond to the death of member of staff or close member of the school community.

This resource is structured into two sections. The first section provides checklists to help guide you in the event of a death for the following:

- 
- Checklist for considerations in the event of a **death of a pupil (page 4)**
  - Checklist for considerations in the event of a **death of a staff member (page 9)**
  - Checklist for considerations in the event of a **child who has been bereaved (page 14)**

Within each checklist, areas of consideration are noted to help staff members reflect and identify possible actions and ways forward. This resource is not a step-by-step manual, but provides a framework to help aid thinking with regards to how to support children, staff member and young people during these difficult times.

The second section includes further information on:

- Advice and guidance on breaking the news of bereavement to staff, pupils and families (page 17)
- Self-care for those co-ordinating the response to loss and grief (page 19)
- Resources and support are provided for complicated and traumatic bereavement. (page 20)
- Services specific to Solihull (page 20)

Within this document, links to external websites and documents have been included as potential resources for schools, families and young people. While every effort has been made to check them of their suitability, external sites are not under our control and their content may change without warning. We provide these links as a service and cannot guarantee their continued suitability.

## CHECKLIST FOR CONSIDERATIONS IN THE EVENT OF THE DEATH OF A PUPIL

Area of support and guidance	Considerations	Resources/Further Information (Click on underlined text to open links to resources)
<b>IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATIONS</b>		
Identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who are the key people that are affected?</li> <li>Take account that the impact may be felt across the community and could include students, teaching staff, families, governors etc.</li> <li>Identify a team that can support you.</li> </ul>	<a href="#"><u>Guidance on the first 30 minutes</u></a>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who is the best person to break the news e.g. Class teacher or Head teacher?</li> <li>How far through the school does the news need to spread and have the family's views been sought in this?</li> <li>What are the most appropriate channels for this sensitive news to be given to people? Consider people that may be absent from school and the potential impact of social media.</li> <li>What are the key messages that you want to give to the school and the wider community?</li> </ul> <p>Please see '<a href="#"><u>support for children</u></a>' section below with regards to communication with students.</p>	<a href="#"><u>Information regarding initial response including wording of statements</u></a>  <a href="#"><u>Information on the importance of communication during bereavement in schools</u></a>  <a href="#"><u>Guidance to help education professionals, parents and carers tell a young person that someone has died</u></a>  <a href="#"><u>Guidance on communication during a sudden death</u></a>
Communication with the bereaved family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who is the most natural member of school staff to maintain contact with the family? (Allocate a key adult with an existing good relationship who can field and filter queries to the family). Is there a direct telephone line for the family to contact the school?</li> <li>What support will this person need from the wider staff, and who will do this?</li> </ul>	<a href="#"><u>What to say when someone is bereaved</u></a>
School response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How should the school respond? Should cards/flowers be sent, a doorstep visit made? By whom? Staff, governor?</li> <li>Have cultural and religious factors been taken into consideration?</li> </ul>	

Communication with the staff team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who needs to know? (Consider everyone who would have had interactions with the family and pupil when schools were in session) how will they be informed?</li> <li>What support needs do they have?</li> <li>Is anyone vulnerable and in need of additional support?</li> </ul>	<p>Access to supervision for staff could be sought from the <a href="#">Solihull Community Educational Psychology service</a></p> <p><a href="#">Guidance on supporting school staff when a pupil dies</a></p>
Communication with parents and carers of other students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the event of a death, with the family's agreement, how many parents/carers should receive school communications giving information about <i>what has happened</i> and what action the school has taken to support the pupils? Class/whole school?</li> </ul>	<p><a href="#">Social media considerations at school in the event of a death</a></p>
<b>LATER CONSIDERATIONS</b>		
Support for parents/carers who have been bereaved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has there been discussions as to what level of contact the family want?</li> <li>How will siblings/cousins be supported if they attend the school?</li> <li>Are there community links/existing networks that can support the family during this time?</li> <li>Do they know who they can contact if they require further support?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Guidance for those supporting parents/carers:</b> <a href="#">What to say when someone is bereaved</a></p> <p><a href="#">Helping Bereaved Parents - Suggestions for Professionals and Those in Support Roles</a></p> <p><a href="#">When a Pupil or Student Dies: Suggestions for Schools and Colleges</a></p> <p><b>Guidance for parents/carers:</b> <a href="#">Grieving for a child at any age</a></p> <p><a href="#">Support for parents whose baby/young child has died</a></p> <p><a href="#">Grieving the Death of our Child During the Coronavirus Pandemic</a></p>

Support for  
parents/carers of  
other students

- Should there be communication to parents/carers telling them what support is available in school for pupils and what reactions parents/carers might expect from their child so that they are prepared and can offer support at home?

What to say when someone is bereaved

Notes for parents and carers supporting children experiencing bereavement and loss

Leaflet for parents

Parent guide for supporting grief and loss

SISS guidance - supporting your child after bereavement or loss

Bereavement booklet covid-19

Videos for Parents/carers:

- Child Bereavement UK supporting a bereaved child video
- Child Bereavement UK explaining a funeral to a young child
- Child Bereavement UK Should I be worried about my bereaved teenager
- Bridge of Bereavement video and worksheets for supporting families to discuss emotions associated with bereavement

## Support for children

- Children like adults will grieve in their own ways and very often what they need is:
  - a) To have the bereavement acknowledged and have the opportunity to talk about the person who has died if they wish.
  - b) To understand that what they are feeling is normal, and whatever they are feeling is accepted by those around them.
  - c) To know that there is someone in school who will support them if they get upset.
  - d) To have their questions answered honestly, in a way that they can understand.
- How can these considerations be addressed within the school community?
- What class-centred activities can be organised to allow for the class or group to come together?
- Initially it may be necessary to waive timetable/ learning expectations for those pupils badly affected by the news.
- Including time to be together as a group with support, talking, remembering, making cards, creating memory boards or books which could be added to over the coming days, may be most helpful for some. Others will want the 'routine' of school/ home teaching to continue. If possible offer choice.

## Information for adults supporting and communicating with children:

[How to talk to bereaved children](#)

[Supporting a bereaved child through a difficult time video](#)

[Telling a child someone has died including scripts/guiding words](#)

[Supporting pupils during the coronavirus](#)

## Information for young people to access:

[Website for young people](#)

[Resources, links, and access to support for young people](#)

[Information for young people including playlists and ways to remember someone](#)

Books/resources:

- [Cruse Booklist](#)
- [Child Bereavement booklist](#)



Commemoration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pupils are unlikely to be invited to a funeral at the present time.</li> <li>Should the school hold its own special memorial? If so, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who should be involved?</li> <li>What form should the service take e.g. favourite stories, poems, music, display of work, remembrance table, or friendship tree?</li> <li>This should be done in collaboration with the class and family.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Is a lasting memorial appropriate? If so, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What would this look like? E.g. tree, trophy, book, fundraising event?</li> <li>Who should be involved with decision – family/pupils?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><u>How to support others when they are not able to attend funerals during the coronavirus</u></p> <p><u>The challenges of grieving and isolation</u></p> <p><u>BPS guidance on supporting others during the coronavirus</u></p> <p><u>Ideas for collaborative projects in the school community</u></p> <p><u>Holding a funeral when you cannot meet</u></p> <p><u>How to say goodbye when a funeral is not possible</u></p>
The little things...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What will happen to the child's desk/chair/peg? It would be as shock to return to school to see them removed without discussion and consideration and therefore let the class has some input.</li> </ul>	
Getting further support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grief is a normal and natural response and most people will manage their grief responses through existing networks of support.</li> <li>Sometimes emotions can be intense and persistent, impairing day-to-day life and leaving people feeling that they cannot cope.</li> <li>Some people have found it beneficial to access help during these times through bereavement support/counselling services.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Services specific to Solihull</b></p> <p><u>Bereavement Support Services during COVID-19</u> – Bereavement support for all ages to people in Birmingham and Solihull 0121 687 8010</p>

Table 1 Adapted for COVID-19 with acknowledgements to SeeSaw Oxfordshire



## CHECKLIST FOR CONSIDERATIONS IN THE EVENT OF THE DEATH OF A STAFF MEMBER

Area of support and guidance	Considerations	Resources/Further Information (Click on underlined text to open links to resources)
<b>IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATIONS</b>		
<b>Identification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who are the key people that are affected?</li> <li>Take account that the impact may be felt across the community and could include students, teaching staff, families, governors etc.</li> <li>Identify a team that can support you.</li> </ul>	<a href="#"><u>Guidance on the first 30 minutes</u></a>
<b>Communication with the family</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expression of condolence is the priority.</li> <li>Who should maintain contact with the family and is there a direct line for the family to contact the school? What support will the person contacting the family need from the wider staff, and who will do this?</li> <li>Agreement with the family about communication with the staff and the wider school community should be explored, within the first day where possible.</li> </ul>	<a href="#"><u>What to say when someone is bereaved</u></a>
<b>Communication with staff and the wider school body</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who will break the news to the wider staff body? Have you thought of everyone; part time, peripatetic staff, those on sick/ family leave?</li> <li>What are the most appropriate channels for this sensitive news to be given to people?</li> <li>Give time for everyone to absorb and process the news before coming together or discussing things further.</li> </ul>	<a href="#"><u>Death of a staff member guidance</u></a>  <a href="#"><u>Information on the importance of communication during bereavement in schools</u></a>
<b>School response</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How should the school respond? Should cards/flowers be sent, a doorstep visit made? By whom? Staff, governor?</li> <li>Have cultural and religious factors been taken into consideration?</li> </ul>	
<b>Communication with parents/carers of students attending the school</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With the consent of the family, a letter can go home for parents/carers to explain what has happened and what actions the school will take.</li> </ul> <p>See also <a href="#"><u>support for parents/carers</u></a> section below.</p>	<a href="#"><u>Information regarding initial response including wording of statements</u></a>  <a href="#"><u>Social media considerations at school in the event of a death</u></a>

Supporting those members of staff most deeply affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You will need to identify those who require time and additional support to grieve. Who is the most natural contact for them?</li> <li>How can staff support be channelled through this person and what does it look like during Covid-19?</li> </ul>	Access to supervision for staff could be sought from the <a href="#">Solihull Community Educational Psychology service</a>
Breaking the news to pupils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It may be best for the most affected group's class teacher to arrange to talk to all of the children directly, with parental consent. The person breaking the news should have a contact or phone calls with another staff member who will check in with them during this time.</li> <li>Time should be allowed for pupils to ask questions and express feelings. Reactions will vary, and many will not respond directly during a phone call. All feelings should be acknowledged and pupils will require help to understand grief is a normal response to loss.</li> </ul> <p>Example scripts that may be useful:</p> <p><i>"I have got something very sad to tell you. You all know that X has been ill with cancer for a long time and has not been well enough to come to school much lately. As you know sometimes people with cancer do not get better, and sadly yesterday X died. He was at home with his family."</i></p> <p>e.g. <i>"You may have heard about the accident on the motorway yesterday. Well Mrs Y was involved in the crash and was taken to hospital. I am sorry to have to tell you that her injuries were bad/ severe and she could not survive the accident. She died last night."</i></p>	<p><a href="#">Information regarding initial response including wording of statements</a></p> <p><a href="#">How to talk to bereaved children</a></p> <p><a href="#">Telling a child someone has died including scripts/guiding words</a></p>
<b>LATER CONSIDERATIONS</b>		
Staff support and coming together	<p>In the coming days and weeks you will need to find ways as a team to address the enormity of feeling and what has happened.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It may be that some team members want to talk, and some do not.</li> <li>It will be helpful to have a smaller group of people who come together to try and co-ordinate ideas that arise as you progress through the term.</li> </ul>	<p>Access to supervision for staff could be sought from the <a href="#">Solihull Community Educational Psychology service</a></p> <p>See <a href="#">self-care for those coordinating the response to loss and grief</a> section of this document</p>

## Support for parents/carers

- There should be communication to parents/carers telling them what support is available from school for pupils and what reactions parents/carers might expect from their child so that they are prepared and can offer support at home.

[What to say when someone is bereaved](#)

[Notes for parents and carers supporting children experiencing bereavement and loss](#)

[Leaflet for parents](#)

[Parent guide for supporting grief and loss](#)

[SISS guidance - supporting your child after bereavement or loss](#)

[Bereavement booklet covid-19](#)

Videos for Parents:

- [Child Bereavement UK supporting a bereaved child video](#)
- [Child Bereavement UK explaining a funeral to a young child](#)
- [Child Bereavement UK Should I be worried about my bereaved teenager](#)
- [Bridge of Bereavement video and worksheets for supporting families to discuss emotions associated with bereavement](#)

## Support for children

- Children like adults will grieve in their own ways and very often what they need is:
  - a. To have the bereavement acknowledged and have the opportunity to talk about the person who has died if they wish.
  - b. To understand that what they are feeling is normal, and whatever they are feeling is accepted by those around them.
  - c. To know that there is someone in school who will support them if they get upset.
  - d. To have their questions answered honestly, in a way that they can understand.
- How can these considerations be addressed within the school community? What class-centred activities can be organised to allow for the class or group to come together?
- Initially it may be necessary to waive timetable/ learning expectations for those pupils badly affected by the news.
  - Including time to be together as a group with support, talking, remembering, making cards, creating memory boards or books which could be added to over the coming days, may be most helpful for some.
  - Others will want the 'routine' of school/ home teaching to continue. If possible offer choice.

## Information for adults supporting and communicating with children:

[How to talk to bereaved children](#)

[Supporting a bereaved child through a difficult time video](#)

[Telling a child someone has died including scripts/guiding words](#)

[Supporting pupils during the coronavirus](#)

## Information for young people to access:

[Website for young people](#)

[Resources, links, and access to support for young people](#)

[Information for young people including playlists and ways to remember someone](#)

Books/resources:

- [Cruse Booklist](#)
- [Child Bereavement booklist](#)

<b>Commemoration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff members/students are unlikely to be invited to a funeral at the present time.</li> <li>• Should the school hold its own special memorial? If so,               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Who should be involved?</li> <li>○ What form should the service take e.g. favourite stories, poems, music, display of work, remembrance table, and friendship tree?</li> <li>○ This should be done in collaboration with the class and family.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Is a lasting memorial appropriate? If so,               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What would this look like? E.g. tree, trophy, book, fundraising event?</li> <li>○ Who should be involved with decision – family/pupils?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><u>How to support others when they are not able to attend funerals during the coronavirus</u></p> <p><u>The challenges of grieving and isolation</u></p> <p><u>BPS guidance on supporting others during the coronavirus</u></p> <p><u>Ideas for collaborative projects in the school community</u></p> <p><u>Holding a funeral when you cannot meet</u></p> <p><u>How to say goodbye when a funeral is not possible</u></p>
<b>The little things...</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What will happen to the member of staff's desk/chair/mug? It would be a shock to return to school to see them removed without discussion and consideration.</li> <li>• Let staff and the class or group have input</li> <li>• How will the staff member's items be returned to the family? Will this be done in person?</li> </ul>	
<b>Getting further support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grief is a normal and natural response and most people will manage their grief responses through existing networks of support.</li> <li>• Sometimes emotions can be intense and persistent, impairing day-to-day life and leaving people feeling that they cannot cope.</li> <li>• Some people have found it beneficial to access help during these times through bereavement support/counselling services.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Services specific to Solihull</b></p> <p><u>Bereavement Support Services during COVID-19</u> – Bereavement support for all ages to people in Birmingham and Solihull 0121 687 8010</p>

Table 2 Adapted for COVID-19 with acknowledgements to Seesaw Oxfordshire



## CHECKLIST FOR CONSIDERATIONS IN THE EVENT OF A STUDENT WHO HAS EXPERIENCED BEREAVEMENT OR LOSS

Area of support and guidance	Considerations	Resources/Further Information (Click on underlined text to open links to resources)
<b>IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATIONS</b>		
<b>Identification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who are the key people that are affected?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the child have siblings in school?</li> <li>Are there members of school staff who may be impacted by this?</li> <li>Are there other adults in the school community who might be impacted, i.e. other family members and/or other people who know the child well?</li> </ul> </li> <li>-</li> </ul>	
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who in school might need to know? i.e. Class teacher, dinner supervisor, pastoral support staff, and children in the child's friendship/peer group.</li> <li>Who is going to share the news?</li> <li>What are the most appropriate channels for this sensitive news to be given to people? i.e. does this need to be shared in person? Can it be communicated via email?</li> </ul>	<p><a href="#"><u>Information regarding initial response including wording of statements</u></a></p> <p><a href="#"><u>Information on the importance of communication during bereavement in schools</u></a></p> <p><a href="#"><u>Guidance to help education professionals, parents and carers tell a young person that someone has died</u></a></p> <p><a href="#"><u>Guidance on communication during a sudden death</u></a></p>
<b>Communication with the bereaved family</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who is the most natural member of school staff to maintain contact with the family? (Allocate a key adult with an existing good relationship who can field and filter queries to the family).</li> <li>What support will this person need from the wider staff, and who will do this?</li> <li>Is there a direct telephone line for the family to contact the school?</li> </ul>	<a href="#"><u>What to say when someone is bereaved</u></a>
<b>School response</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How should the school respond? Should cards/flowers be sent, a doorstep visit made? By whom? Staff, governor?</li> <li>Have cultural and religious factors been taken into consideration?</li> </ul>	

Communication with the staff team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who needs to know? (Consider everyone who would have had interactions with the family and pupil when schools were in session) how will they be informed?</li> <li>Is anyone likely to be impacted by this news? Are they likely to require any additional support?</li> </ul>	Access to supervision for staff could be sought from the Community Educational Psychology service. Further information can be found here
Communication with parents/carers and carers of other students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the event of a death, with the family's agreement, how many parents/carers should receive school communications giving information about <i>what has happened</i> and what action the school has taken to support the pupils? How can this be communicated? I.e. letter, phone call, email, social media?</li> </ul>	<u>Social media considerations at school in the event of a death</u>
<b>LATER CONSIDERATIONS</b>		
Support for the child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children like adults will grieve in their own ways and very often what they need is:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To have the bereavement acknowledged and have the opportunity to talk about the person who has died if they wish.</li> <li>To understand that what they are feeling is normal, and whatever they are feeling is accepted by those around them.</li> <li>To know that there is someone in school who will support them if they get upset.</li> <li>To have their questions answered honestly, in a way that they can understand.</li> </ol> </li> <li>Would it be helpful for the child to receive support as part of a friendship group or whole-class? (I.e. circle time activity).</li> <li>Initially it may be necessary to reduce timetable/learning expectations and offer additional support during the school day (i.e. accessing pastoral support from a learning mentor).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Information for adults supporting and communicating with children:</b></p> <p><u>How to talk to bereaved children</u></p> <p><u>Supporting a bereaved child through a difficult time video</u></p> <p><u>Telling a child someone has died including scripts/guiding words</u></p> <p><u>Supporting pupils during the coronavirus</u></p> <p><b>Information for young people to access:</b></p> <p><u>Website for young people</u></p> <p><u>Resources, links, and access to support for young people</u></p> <p><u>Information for young people including playlists and ways to remember someone</u></p> <p>Books/resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Cruse Booklist</u></li> <li><u>Child Bereavement booklist</u></li> </ul>



<b>Support for bereaved families</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has there been discussions as to what level of contact the family want?</li> <li>How will siblings/cousins be supported if they attend the school?</li> <li>Are there community links/existing networks that can support the family during this time?</li> <li>Do they know who they can contact if they require further support?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Guidance for those supporting parents/carers:</b>  <a href="#">What to say when someone is bereaved</a></p> <p>See section below '<a href="#">Getting further support</a>'</p>
<b>Commemoration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Due to the current pandemic families and loved ones may be prevented from coming together in the way that they would usually, and it is important to hold this mind when thinking about supporting bereaved children and their families.</li> </ul>	<p><a href="#">How to support others when they are not able to attend funerals during the coronavirus</a></p> <p><a href="#">The challenges of grieving and isolation</a></p> <p><a href="#">BPS guidance on supporting others during the coronavirus</a></p> <p><a href="#">Ideas for collaborative projects in the school community</a></p> <p><a href="#">Holding a funeral when you cannot meet</a></p> <p><a href="#">How to say goodbye when a funeral is not possible</a></p>
<b>The little things...</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being mindful about things within the school environment that might trigger difficult feelings for the child, i.e. school work on the wall about their family, celebrations such as mother's day/father's day</li> </ul>	
<b>Getting further support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grief is a normal and natural response and most people will manage their grief responses through existing networks of support</li> <li>Sometimes emotions can be intense and persistent, impairing day-to-day life and leaving people feeling that they cannot cope.</li> <li>Some people have found it beneficial to access help during these times through bereavement support/counselling services.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Services specific to Solihull</b></p> <p><a href="#">Bereavement Support Services during COVID-19</a> – Bereavement support for all ages to people in Birmingham and Solihull 0121 687 8010</p>

Table 3 Adapted for COVID-19 with acknowledgements to Seesaw Oxfordshire



## ADVICE AND GUIDANCE ON BREAKING THE NEWS OF BEREAVEMENT TO STAFF, PUPILS AND FAMILIES

When a death occurs to a close member within a school community there is usually a profound sense of shock, even if the death is expected. Finding what to say and how to say it is never easy in such situations. There are several overriding principles to bear in mind:

- **Acknowledging the bereavement by saying or doing something is important.** However you choose to, reach out to the person who is bereaved. **It is better to say something than do nothing or avoid that person.**
- **Prepare yourself, and take care of yourself throughout.** Being alongside people's pain and distress is very difficult. You cannot shoulder people's burden and take it from them; but you can be there to help them with their journey. Such strong emotions will mean you will need to create time and space for yourself (please see [self-care section of this document](#)).

### **Remember** (Guidance Adapted from Schonfeld & Quackenbush, 2010)

- **Be present and be authentic.** Speak about your feelings. Avoid manufacturing an emotional response. For example if you did not know the person it would not be appropriate to say that you will miss them but you can empathise with the feelings and let that person know you recognise that they were important to that person
- **Grief lasts beyond the delivery of the news.** It may be a good idea to put important dates in your calendar now so that you remember in the lead up to these events that some people will be finding things difficult.
- **You cannot make someone cry.** If it happens it is because the person was feeling that way already and it is important not to avoid these situations. These emotions can feel very intense for us and you will be tempted to want to 'fix' the situation. Try to resist this temptation.
- **Allow for emotional expression.** People are too often told to 'be strong' or 'toughen up' to cover their feelings. A more helpful form of support is to allow them to express and talk through their emotions
- **Listen.** This can be enough. Allow the person affected to talk, to reminisce and express their emotions.
- **Try to be comfortable with silences.** Do not feel you have to talk and/ or try to make people feel better. Remember it is often enough that you are there.
- **Monitor your own non-verbal communication.** If you begin to feel stressed it will show; try to stay calm and relaxed as much as you can.
- **Demonstrate empathy.** As Brené Brown (PhD) notes "empathy has no script. There is no right or wrong way to do it. It's simply listening, holding space, withholding judgement, emotional connecting and communicating that incredibly healing message that you are not alone". Please see Brené Brown's [video](#) on the importance of empathy and why it is different to sympathy.



### **Breaking bad news**

- This is often best done as soon as the family have said it is okay to do so.
- What happened should be told simply and factually – don't stray into conjecture and try to avoid clichéd phrases.  
e.g. "I have got something very sad to tell you. You all know that X has been ill with cancer for a long time and has not been well enough to come to school much lately. As you know sometimes people with cancer do not get better, and sadly yesterday X died. He was at home with his family."  
e.g. "You may have heard about the accident on the motorway yesterday. Well Mrs Y was involved in the crash and was taken to hospital. I am sorry to have to tell you that her injuries were so bad that she could not survive the accident and she died last night"

- People will naturally ask for more information and more details. You can remind people that it is still very soon and not all information is known and not all decisions have been made yet.
- For children, it is likely that you will need to check their understanding

### **What can you say to someone who is experiencing bereavement and grief?**

There is no right or perfect phrasing. Be honest and share your thoughts about the person who has died. Share your condolences and your thoughts on how hard this loss must be for their friends and family.

**If you are stuck for words, here are some phrases that you may find useful (with thanks and acknowledgements to Cruse Bereavement Care):**

- I don't know what to say but I am so sorry to hear this news
- I'm so sad to hear this and I'm here if you need to talk.
- He/she was such a wonderful person/so selfless – full of positivity/kindness [whatever feels appropriate] – they will be hugely missed.
- He/she will be missed so much – they were an important part of our team. You are in my thoughts
- I am so very sorry to hear this sad news. I cannot imagine how devastated you are.
- I cannot imagine the hole that she/he will have left. If you need anything, let me know.
- So very shocked and saddened by this sad news. Hard to believe [name] has gone. I am here when you need me.
- This is so heart-breaking – I wish I could be there to give you a hug.

**Remember that it is always better to say or do something, but here are some phrases that may not be as useful (Morris, 2008; Schonfeld & Quackenbush, 2010):**

- They had a good life
- At least ...
- They are in a better place now
- You have to pull yourself together
- You have to get on with your life
- It's been six weeks, I thought you'd be better by now
- You've got to be strong
- You've got to snap out of it
- I know how you feel/exactly what you are going through
- Both of my parents died as well when I was your age/another student's brother died last year
- I know it is difficult but you need to remember the good things in life as well
- You must be feeling [name of feeling]

For children, avoid ambiguous phrases such as 'they have gone to a better place' or 'they have gone to sleep' 'we have lost'. Younger children in particular will be very concrete and literal in their thinking and they may try to find that person or believe that the person will wake up (Understanding Childhood, 2020)

## SELF-CARE FOR THOSE CO-ORDINATING THE RESPONSE TO LOSS AND GRIEF

Supporting bereaved people can be very stressful. It is made more difficult because the support may have to continue over a long period of time, remotely, and there is no “quick fix” solution to the pain and distress. You may also be concerned about the inevitable disruption to school plans at this difficult time. Sometimes the circumstances of the death may have resonances for you too, and you will have a personal connection to the person who has died.

Whatever the situation, it may help to remember the following:

- Being alongside a team’s pain and distress is very difficult, but you are not responsible for the grief and you cannot carry it for them. What you can do is offer them support on their journey
- Offering support is made easier if you understand how people may react to bereavement and if you have strategies in your mind to help them cope in the current context. So read up about grief and bereavement or seek advice from other professionals. Being prepared gives you more confidence and reduces stress levels!
- Remember that the Local Authority provide support in the even to the death of a staff member and you can ask for immediate support.
- *You* may experience a reaction in response to the news of a bereavement – this is to be expected –and, like the team and the children in your school, you need to know where and to whom you can go for support.
- It is both helpful and necessary when working with bereaved people, or experiencing your own feelings of grief, to have a supportive management structure or specific colleagues with whom you can talk through any issues which cause you concern, or which have a personal impact on you. Knowing your support network lightens the load and enables clearer thinking about ways forward.
- It is helpful to know your limitations, so do not offer more than you can deliver. Best to offer something small but be constant in its delivery, than to go for the grand but unsustainable gestures! This will help keep things manageable.
- At the end of a difficult day, take time for yourself – do something you enjoy and don’t feel guilty about it! You will be better able to face tomorrow if you are kind to yourself today.

### **Information regarding supporting others experiencing loss:**

[Supporting a grieving friend guidance](#)

[Supporting someone who has been bereaved guidance](#)

[How to help someone bereaved](#)

[Taking care of yourself](#)

### **Information regarding self-care:**

[Five Steps to Wellbeing](#)

[Information on wellbeing in Solihull CEPS Guidance for Educational Settings regarding transitions](#)

[Anna Freud Self-Care](#)

**Information and Resources on understanding grief and loss:**  
[NHS information on grief and loss](#)

[BPS guidance on supporting others during the coronavirus](#)

[Winston's Wish free online bereavement training in schools](#)

[Child Bereavement UK Guidance Films](#)

[Dr Karen Treisman individual and collective grief during Covid-19](#)

[The Impact of Bereavement and Loss On Young People](#)

Table 4 Adapted for COVID-19 with acknowledgements to Seesaw Oxfordshire





## LINKS TO RESOURCES AND ORGANISATIONS THAT PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR COMPLICATED/TRAUMATIC BEREAVEMENT

### Death through Suicide

Winston Wish – includes information such as resources, how to talk to a child about suicide and the potential impact of suicide

Child Bereavement UK – includes information on supporting children who have bereaved by suicide or possible suicide including an information sheet and video and recommended books

Survivors of Bereavement of Suicide – includes information of how to talk to a child about suicide, possible changes in behaviour, returning to school and links to resources

Papyrus – charity dedicated to the prevention of young suicide

Support After Suicide – information and practical guidance for those bereaved by suicide including Implications of the current lockdown which also includes guidance booklet Help is at Hand

### Death through Homicide

Winston Wish – includes information for those supporting children bereaved by murder and manslaughter

Child Bereavement UK – includes information for those supporting children bereaved by homicide including an information sheet

## SERVICES SPECIFIC TO SOLIHULL

Bereavement Support Services during COVID-19 – Bereavement Support Services for Solihull and Birmingham for all ages - 0121 687 8010, [support@crusebirmingham.co.uk](mailto:support@crusebirmingham.co.uk)

Solgrid Educational Information – provides information and links to resources

Solihull's Specialist Inclusion Support Service (SISS) - a Local Authority Service which supports children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities. Information with regards to supporting your child after bereavement and loss can be found here



## REFERENCES

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