

BeyondAutism Schools' Bereavement Policy

Section 1

Introduction

A death can affect the school community in many differing ways. Adults and pupils benefit from being kept informed of a death. Children and young people have a healthy curiosity and if they are not informed of the circumstances or feel they are unable to ask questions, their normal grief process can be obstructed. It is important that children are helped to understand bereavement in clear and unambiguous ways and given opportunities to experience the full range of emotions that may accompany bereavement within a safe and supportive atmosphere.

Rationale

At BeyondAutism Schools we believe that bereavement and loss are an inevitable part of living and growing. We believe that the ethos of the school based on openness and mutual support, provides a framework in which these experiences can be realised in a supportive manner. Bereavement affects everyone in different ways and for different periods of time. Whatever the level of understanding about bereavement, we have a duty to help support anyone when they could be feeling their most vulnerable, in the way that best meets their needs. By adopting a planned and considered approach the schools can support the emotional well-being of the child, family and staff.

Aims

- To provide a framework for all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with difficult and upsetting circumstances.
- To meet the needs of all its' pupils and staff and to be a place that both pupil and family can rely on and gain much needed support.
- For the whole school community to work together, with outside agencies as appropriate, to support each other.
- For staff to have time and space to work through their own feelings and be aware of the (changing) needs of the pupils.
- For pupils to have the opportunity to tell their story, express their feelings, share their memories and develop coping strategies through support by sensitive staff.
- To have clear expectations about the way school will respond to the death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.
- The family will feel supported and be given an opportunity to express their feelings of loss.

Section 2

Guidelines

The following guidelines will provide a framework for informing staff, governors and pupils following a death.

Informing staff and governors of a death in the school community

- Where possible discussions should take place with the bereaved family and their wishes should be taken into account before decisions are taken on how and what to tell the staff in school. (We need to be mindful of the use of social media sites and their impact throughout this time as rumour and gossip spread quickly).
- All staff should be informed, including all part time staff, of a bereavement as soon as possible, with factual information. Meetings will be arranged with staff as soon as practicable and absent staff will be identified. Staff directly affected by the bereavement to be told separately to all staff. Arrangements will be made to inform absent staff over the telephone.
- Senior leadership team will be prepared for reactions to this news including staff being visibly upset and feelings of anger/guilt. People may connect the incident to their own personal experience of bereavement, so feelings about past bereavements may need to be discussed. This is a perfectly natural response.
- Senior Leadership team will be available to talk things through with a member of staff, parent or child if they are finding the situation particularly hard. Advice for families will also be provided of support services available to them.
- Bereavement support or counselling should be available to all as necessary.
- Where possible all staff that have requested to attend the funeral or memorial service will be released from class.
- Where there is media interest no member of staff should engage with the media. All comment should be made through the Executive Head or Deputy Head/ CEO if the Executive Head is unavailable.

Informing pupils of a death in the school community

Pupils of all ages can experience grief and loss.

- With parental permission, pupils should be told by their 1:1 tutors or an adult that knows them well. This should be supported using a social story or any preferred communication devices.

- Correspondence e.g. email or letter should go to families within school the same day if possible.
- Staff will be provided with guidelines of how to inform pupils (Appendix 2).
- Time and space will be provided for the pupils
- Staff will be as honest as possible about their own feelings and experiences and talk about their relationship with the person.
- A bereavement support pack will be available for classes to access and will include resources such as social stories.

Ongoing support

- The pupils and staff will be given an opportunity to celebrate the life of the child with a special assembly held in school at an appropriate time.
- School will provide ongoing support children to explore their feelings and memories through identified activities. Some opportunities may include storytelling, remembering activities, and expressing feelings activities.
- Where a member of the school community has died, the school will endeavour to provide additional space and time for those staff or pupils most likely to be particularly affected. Staff will be expected to be particularly vigilant regarding the emotional wellbeing of pupils close to the deceased.
- We will ensure long term support for the pupil by keeping a diary of significant days and ensuring that this information is communicated (with consent) to the pupils next school. We will endeavour to include the child in commemorative days such as mother's/father's day, by sensitively providing time for reflection and remembrance where appropriate.

Supporting pupils of a death outside of the school community

When school is informed of a bereavement that is linked to a school pupil e.g. family member, close family friend, pet:-

- The family should be asked how the school can be involved to support the child and family.
- It should be explained to the family how school can provide resources to support the pupil.
- Both parties will monitor any changes in child's behaviour and share any information.
- If a child has been bereaved, it is important to involve them in decisions about how the school manages issues relating to their loss. The pupil should be communicated with about informing their peers, in case they would appreciate some peer support and about the support looks like for them.

- In the case of terminal illness the school will liaise with the family to arrange for a member of staff to be the main point of contact throughout the illness. This member of staff will support the family regarding school procedures to support them during the illness and will help keep the pupil informed about events at school during any prolonged periods of absence. A member of staff will support the pupil during their time in school, and be available to the family before, during, and after the death. Staff members will also co-ordinate attendance at the funeral, and any memorials the family may wish the school to facilitate. Where possible this may be a staff member who has an existing relationship with the family. In turn, this staff member will be given close support by the Deputy Head, and will be supported in developing their professional practice in this regard.

Section 3

Monitoring

- The policy will be monitored and updated every two years.
- The guidance and resources will be reviewed at regular intervals to enable any new resources or information to be included.

Appendix 1

Useful 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.childbereavement.org.uk-a bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss
- bhf.org.uk/smallcreature British Heart Foundation site to help children come to term with loss using carton creatures.

Books on Bereavement

- Granpa – John Burningham
- When Dinosaurs Die – L & M Brown
- Liplap's Wish – Jonathan London And Sylvia Long
- The Memory Tree – Britta Teckentrup

Appendix 2

Guide for how to inform pupils

- Be honest

- Use clear language
- Expect questions
- Recognise every death and reaction to it is unique
- Don't assume
- Allow time
- Acknowledge that some days will be better than others

Suggested script

"I've got some really sad news to tell you today that might make you sad. (Name)died yesterday. This means that we won't see (Name) again. We have lots of memories of (Name) that we can think about and we can celebrate those together"

Last reviewed: May 2020
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Review group: Governing Body