Prestbury St Mary's Federation

Bereavement Guide

At Prestbury St Mary's Federation we believe that the wellbeing of our pupils is paramount to their future happiness and success. As a school we are committed to supporting our pupils through difficulties they may face whilst in our care and this guide identifies the support we offer should a child be faced with bereavement. This guide is based on practice that has grown over time as the school has previously experienced bereavements, and provides a resource as a working document to support our community.

Rationale

Every 22 minutes in the UK a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 41,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, and, sadly, around 12,000 children die in the UK each year. Within our school community there will almost always be some recently bereaved children who are struggling with their own situation – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil.

We would hope to not encounter such circumstances, but the statistical inevitability of such an occurrence implies the necessity of having a Bereavement Guide in place in order that we might be proactive, rather than reactive, when responding to these sensitive situations. Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children, or staff require, though referral to more specialist support will be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex.

Objectives

The core intentions of this guide are:

- To support pupils and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and community
- To identify key staff within school and clarify the pathway for bereavement support
- To support children as they face the death of a loved one, including pets, and help them to understand the nature of death and ways to cope with loss

Supporting a child who has lost a member of their family

We hope that parents will always inform us of a death in the family. We work with parents to ensure appropriate support is offered to the child and the parents and also will signpost services and support agencies that parents and other family members may need. Once we are informed of a death, we offer timely, age appropriate support for the child.

Our 'Family Wellbeing' file contains many resources which can be used to support the child through the bereavement process. We understand that children may grieve in different ways so we offer many different strategies according to individual need. Through extensive research and training, we offer aids for speaking with a pupil about a death in their family, techniques for speaking with pupils about death and ideas for memorial activities.

We have key members of staff (SLT Pastoral Support TA and SENDCO) who will initially offer support for the child but will be aware of the child's requests to work with other members of staff (class teacher or TA for example) Following the immediate bereavement which will affect the child, we believe that children and adults alike have the right to:

- be given space and time to grieve
- be given support from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate

- encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement

We recognise that:

- grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real.
- differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in our school environment.

We will:

- Ensure there is always someone for the child to talk to
- Temporarily alleviate classwork/homework/assessment stress
- Help them to cope by responding to their requests and needs
- Let the child and parents know about groups for children and young people who are also coping with loss and change
- Be mindful of events and activities which may evoke strong feelings and memories
- Take time to ask the child how they are feeling. It may not be obvious
- Arrange for the child to get extra help with their work so I don't get behind, especially before tests
- Inform other teachers, especially supply teachers about the child's loss although and make them aware that the child may or may not wish to speak about it
- Give the child a note that gives them permission to leave class briefly, without having to explain themselves, if I feel overwhelmed
- Understand that they will not 'get over it' or 'put it behind them but with time they will learn to cope with all the changes
- Give them extra encouragement for all the things they are managing to do
- Find a way of getting their attention back in class, without others noticing and making them embarrassed
- Wait until they are ready to talk
- Help the child to make plans for the future
- Give strategies for coping when they feel particularly upset
- Work alongside parents to inform them of their child's wellbeing
- Continue to develop our support and advice and attend any relevant training

Bereavement of a child or member of staff

We would hope to never need this part of the guide but by ensuring careful consideration now, we may react in an appropriate way. The death of a member of staff or a student will have a profound effect on the rest of the school. As a staff team we work very closely with our pupils and form close relationships both with them and their parents. Any losses will, therefore, have a greater impact on all of the members of our school community. Advice and research suggests that it is important that as normal a routine as is possible is maintained because this will provide security and stability at a very difficult time.

We will:

- Discuss the situation with the family concerned and take their wishes into account before decisions are taken on how and what to tell pupils in school
- Seek and offer support from the Church community
- Send a letter to all parents informing them of the death
- Distribute details of the funeral arrangements, flowers, family requests etc. to all staff and Governors (and parents too if appropriate) and keep everyone up to date at all times
- Refer to outside agencies if necessary
- Release staff and students to attend the funeral if they wish to do so
- Support each other at all times. Some people will be more affected by the loss than others. Appropriate support must be offered especially to those closest to the member of staff/pupil
- Make arrangements for a memorial service in school. Invite parents and outside agencies who have known the pupil/staff if appropriate. At an appropriate time we may consider a permanent memorial in school.

When informing the children about the death of a child we will:

- Inform the children as soon as possible about the death
- Where possible, the pupils should be informed in small groups i.e. class groups
- Identify those children who had a long term and/or close relationship with the person who has died so they can be told separately
- If appropriate, a special assembly may be held at a later time in the day to remember the person who has died
- Allow the children to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms that they will understand – see Family Wellbeing file
- Allow the children to verbalise their feelings
- Allow the children to discuss the situation and share their experiences of death
- Be honest about our own feelings and talk about our relationship with the person
- Avoid using euphemisms and metaphors e.g. they have gone to sleep
- Give children who have had more involvement with the person the opportunity to share their feelings and experiences either within the group or on a one-to-one situation
- Ensure the children understand that the death is nothing to do with anything they have said or done. It is in no way their fault
- Reassure them that not all people who are ill or have had an accident will die and that many people get better
- Put an appropriate time limit on the discussion. It is preferable to resume normal school activities as soon as possible thus ensuring minimal disruption within the school
- Conclude the discussion with a prayer to remember the person who has died and their family
- Seek and offer support from the Church community
- Be available for any child who needs additional help and support.

Responsibilities

The designated person within the school who has overall responsibility for support and liaison in event of a death or traumatic loss is the Executive Headteacher. In the event that this person is absent then the Executive Deputy Head will take responsibility.

Their responsibilities are:

- Guide development and review, involving pupils, staff, governors, parents/carers and relevant local agencies.
- Implementing the guide and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities.
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies.
- Cross-phase liaison with nursery schools and feeder secondary schools.
- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff.
- To support the SLT in overseeing the way in which bereavement is managed.
- To support PSHCE lead and Curriculum Team in overseeing the way in which bereavement is tackled in the curriculum.
- To review practice.