

# Managing bereavement:

A guide for schools

Includes a framework for  
writing a bereavement  
policy for your school

Child   
Bereavement UK  
REBUILDING LIVES TOGETHER

# Welcome

This guide aims to provide you with support and information when a death occurs in the school community or if the school is facing an expected death.

This guide contains resources and examples you can use within your school to help support staff, pupils and the community at a difficult time.

If you require more support and information on a specific issue you can:

- Call our Helpline **0800 02 888 40** (9am-5pm, Monday to Friday)
- Email **[support@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:support@childbereavementuk.org)**
- Visit our website **[childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)**
- **Live Chat** via our website (9am-5pm, Monday to Friday)

If you would like to find out more about Child Bereavement UK's training or get more information for staff, please email our training team: **[training@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:training@childbereavementuk.org)**

We hope you find this guide useful. Please send any feedback to:  
**[schools@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:schools@childbereavementuk.org)**

# Contents

<b>Bereavement support and information for schools</b>		<b>Page</b>
1) How schools can support bereaved pupils		4
2) Children's understanding of death		6
3) Breaking sad news - a death in the school community		7
4) Special assemblies - saying 'goodbye'		8
5) Guidance for parents and carers		10
6) The role of the school		12
7) Supporting a bereaved pupil		14
8) Cultures and beliefs		15
9) Bereavement support groups		18
10) Looking after yourself (staff)		20
11) Practical ideas		22
<b>Specific areas of support</b>		
i) Pupils with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND)		24
ii) Pre-bereavement - when a family member is not expected to live		26
iii) Pupils with a life-threatening illness		28
iv) Suicide		29
v) Forces families		31
vi) Social media and young people's views		33
vii) Supporting children and young people bereaved by murder or manslaughter		36
viii) Responding to frightening events		38
ix) Grief and bereavement in Gypsy and Traveller families		39
<b>Books and resources</b>		
A) Books and resources - Early years		41
B) Books and resources - Primary		43
C) Books and resources - Secondary		45
D) Books and resources - Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND)		48
E) Books and resources for staff		50
F) Books and resources for parents and carers		54
G) Suicide		55
H) Murder and manslaughter		56
I) Helpful organisations		57
<b>Bereavement policy</b>		
Appendix i) Developing a school bereavement policy or charter		59
Appendix ii) Template letter to parents		65
Appendix iii) Template letter to parents and carers – death of a pupil		66
Appendix iv) Template letter to parents and carers – death of a member of staff		67

# 1) How schools can support bereaved pupils

Most grieving pupils do not need a 'bereavement expert', they need people who care. Schools, just by carrying on with their usual day-to-day activities, can do a huge amount to support a grieving pupil. By gently introducing death and grief into the classroom the fear is removed, and young people will develop coping skills should someone they know die now or in the future.

## Normality

For a child or young person whose life has been turned upside down by bereavement, the routines of school life can give a sense of normality. Everything else may feel like it has fallen apart but school and the people within it can offer a sense of security and continuity. For young children and adolescents, school can give relief from an emotionally-charged atmosphere at home. They may feel overwhelmed by a grieving family. There may be a constant stream of visitors expressing their own grief. Children and young people can find this difficult to deal with.

## A listening ear

Children can be overlooked by family members struggling to deal with their own grief. For a child who wishes to, school staff can provide an opportunity to talk about what has happened with a familiar and trusted adult in relative peace and calm. When a parent or sibling has died, children and young people can try to spare their surviving parent by hiding their own grief and appearing to be OK. School is often seen as somewhere safe to express this grief.

## The opportunity to be a child

Even when deeply sad, children still need to be children. Loss and grief are very grown up experiences. School offers the chance to play, laugh, sing and generally just be a child without feeling guilty.

## General support

Keep in contact with home. Discuss concerns, but remember that successes are equally important. The family or carers will find this reassuring. Grieving children and young people can display altered behaviours in different situations. Good communication with home will help school be aware of this and provide a more realistic picture of how the pupil is coping.

## Be proactive

Have a selection of resources available in school on the subject. Refer to the *Books and resources* in this guide for ideas. Stories are a wonderful way to gently introduce young children to the concept of death. Novels and poems offer young people a chance to learn through reading, listening and discussion. For more ideas see the *For the education sector* section of the website: [childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)

When someone dies in your school community, whether the death is one that affects an individual pupil or of someone known to the whole school community, how you respond will be remembered by everyone affected, child or adult. The school's response will depend on individual circumstances and the needs of pupils, staff and the wider school community.

Everyone, child or adult, will grieve in their own way. Try not to make assumptions about what they should be doing, how they should be feeling or what is going to help. When not sure, ask the pupil or their family what they would like to happen.

Someone from school should liaise with the family. Offer to visit if the family would find this helpful. A card or letter of condolence will reassure the family of your support.

Avoiding the subject always makes matters worse. It is better to explain what has happened in a sensitive way to avoid rumours and whispers. Use the correct words 'death' and 'dead' rather than euphemisms such as 'lost', 'passed' or 'gone to sleep'.

When the death affects an individual pupil, discuss with them how they would like the news to be shared. Do they want

everyone, no one or just their close friends to know?

Staff and pupils may wish to attend the funeral; this may depend on who has died and their relationship with the family. It is important to communicate with the family to find out whether they welcome members of the school community.

### Schools which board

The information in this guide is applicable to schools which have a boarding facility or are boarding schools. However, staff and pupils may require greater support when a death occurs as they spend more of their time in school.

Extra care needs to be taken to ensure that all staff, both teaching and in the boarding houses, are aware of the support required by the bereaved pupil (see *Supporting a bereaved pupil*) and any specific wishes the bereaved pupil may have.

### Transitions

Young people who have been supported by Child Bereavement UK have expressed how helpful it is when information about their circumstances is passed on so that they do not need to repeat their story at each transition point. If possible, prepare the pupil for the changes ahead, encourage them to share any concerns they may have and let them know who has been told about their bereavement and what was said. Transitions could include:

- Changing school
- Moving class/year group/tutor group
- Teacher changes

### Further resources

*Supporting a bereaved pupil* - A free and flexible online resource for teachers and education professionals. Available from Child Bereavement UK's website.

## 2) Children's understanding of death

Children and young people mature at different rates and their understanding and responses to bereavement are likely to be based as much on their experience of life as on their chronological age. The age categories given are guidelines only.

### 2-5 Years

Young children may be beginning to understand the concept of death, but do not appreciate its finality. Some may not appreciate the permanence of death. For example, a child could say: 'Shall we dig granny up now?' They think in literal and concrete terms and so will be confused by euphemisms for death such as 'passed away', 'lost' or 'gone to sleep'. Children of this age may well require repeated explanations of what has happened. As their thinking is very much centred on themselves, they may consider that something they did or said caused the death. They are prone to fantasise at this age and, if not told what is happening, may dream up something scarier than reality.

### 5-8 Years

At about five years of age most children are beginning to realise that dead people are different from those who are alive, that they do not feel, they cannot hear, see, smell or speak, and they do not need to eat or drink. At around seven years of age the majority of children accept that death is permanent and that it can happen to anyone. This can result in separation anxiety. As they develop, they become more able to express their thoughts and feelings but may conceal them and outwardly appear unaffected. They need to be given an opportunity to ask questions and to be given as much information as possible to allow them to adjust. They are likely to be very interested in the rituals surrounding death.

### 8-12 Years

At this age a young person's understanding of death almost matches that of an adult, although they find it difficult to grasp abstract concepts. An important factor is their deepening realisation of the inevitability of death, and an increasing awareness of their own mortality. This can result in fear and insecurity. Their need to know details continues, and they will seek answers to very specific questions.

### Adolescence

The struggle for independence at this age may cause bereaved teenagers to challenge the beliefs and expectations of others as to how they should be feeling or behaving. Death increases anxieties about the future, and they may question the meaning of life and experience depression. Teenagers may find it easier to discuss their feelings with a sympathetic friend or adult than with a close family member. They may have difficulty coming to terms with their own mortality and that of those close to them; they may cope with this by denying the possibility of death by taking part in risk-taking behaviour. Anger makes up a large part of their grief, often compounded by a sense of injustice.

### Further resources

See *Books and resources* (included in this guide) and the following areas of Child Bereavement UK's website:

- Books, films and resources
- Short guidance films

# 3) Breaking sad news - a death in the school community

When someone within a school community has died, it is often difficult to know how to break the news. School communities have very active grapevines, and it is better to explain sensitively what has happened rather than saying nothing. When the death affects an individual pupil or family, discuss whether they want to share the news and how. A simple acknowledgement of the death may be necessary, but it is important to take the wishes of the pupil, siblings, and rest of the family into account.

## Information

- Check that the information you have is correct. If possible, speak to family members as they may have specific wishes about what information they would like shared.
- Inform the family what was said and to whom.

## Communication

- Always try to communicate with staff first, then pupils.
- Be aware that news can spread rapidly and indiscriminately through social media, which may mean that some people hear the news before others.
- Consider whether some members of the school community should be told first. For example, if a teacher has died telling their tutor group first, or if a pupil dies, telling their year group.

## Guidelines for breaking sad news

- If you have a bereavement policy, refer to this.
- Whoever is giving the news should prepare what to say and consult with colleagues to agree a 'script'.
- If a pupil dies by suicide Samaritans provide a step-by-step programme to support schools in explaining this to pupils. They can be contacted on: **0808 168 2528**
- Do not feel afraid to show emotion – this just shows you are human, but it can come as a surprise if you were not expecting to react in this way.
- Start by acknowledging that you have some sad news to give.
- Be honest. Give the news stating simple facts, using the words 'dead/died'.
- If known, and with the permission of the family, explain briefly where and when the death occurred.
- If facts are not known, say so, and that you will endeavour to find out. If rumours are rife, say which of these are not correct, if known.
- If appropriate, discuss the use of social media in response to the death.
- Talk briefly about the person who died without eulogising them.
- Mention any arrangements already in place.

- Close by acknowledging that not everyone will feel sad and that is OK.
- Give pupils something practical and positive to do such as making cards, contributing to a book of condolence, writing or drawing messages, creating a piece of artwork.
- Let pupils know where and who they can go to for support.

## Families/carers

- Inform parents/carers that a member of the school community has died.
- Confirm what the pupils have been told in school and what support is available to them.
- Include some guidance information for parents/carers to talk to young people about death, and to help when answering questions. This can also include information on Child Bereavement UK website [childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)

## Breaking sad news in an assembly

A whole school assembly may not be appropriate or wanted, especially if it is an individual pupil who has been bereaved. However, sometimes this is the best way to give the news, particularly when the death has affected the whole school. The decision will be influenced by the size of the school and if the person who died was well known to the school community or not. The benefit is that the entire school receives the same news, at the same time, keeping speculation and rumour at bay.

## Support for staff

Child Bereavement UK National Helpline **0800 02 888 40** or **Live Chat** via the website, both available 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

## Further resources

*Managing a sudden death* - A free and flexible online resource for teachers and education professionals. Available from Child Bereavement UK's website.

## 4) Special assemblies - saying 'goodbye'

Most schools feel that organising some sort of special assembly or remembrance service after a death in a school community is a helpful thing to do. It can put back a sense of normality into what may have been a very unsettled time. Below are some ideas to help you organise something appropriate.

### Why hold a special assembly?

- To bring the school together to acknowledge what has happened;
- To reflect on, and remember, the life of the person who has died;
- To normalise and share grief;
- To give the message that it is OK to be sad but equally OK to not be affected;
- To inform pupils and staff of any support that is available.

### Who should attend?

Anyone who wishes to be there: teaching and non-teaching staff, pupils, any family who feel able to attend. In a very large school, it may not be possible to get everyone together and a year group assembly might be more appropriate. Many families find comfort in other people organising something special and appreciate being there. Others may not wish to participate but should be given the opportunity to do so.

### Who should be involved?

Anyone who wants to be. Pupils have produced some very moving assemblies about friends who have died. It helps them to feel involved and gives a sense of doing something positive. Very young children will need greater amounts of adult input but can still participate in a way appropriate for their age and understanding.

### How to structure a special assembly

Have a clear beginning, middle and end. Start by explaining the purpose and length of the assembly. Follow with a brief reminder of the circumstances surrounding the death and when it happened. Explain that everyone is different, and some people will be more affected than others. Whether they feel deeply sad, just a bit thoughtful, or anything in between, that is fine.

The middle section could include:

- Lighting a special remembrance candle.
- Favourite music / songs or poems of the person who has died.
- Pupils or staff taking it in turns to recount stories or memories.
- Photographs of the person or child who has died to give a visual reminder. Remember, however, that a large image can be too much for any grieving family attending.
- Placing objects associated with the person who has died into a special memory box. This can then be given to the family.
- Talking about a memory tree or collage made by sticking a collection of drawings that pupils have created onto a large sheet of paper or onto a tree outline. This can be added to during the assembly.
- Read a short story or poem.

The end needs some thought and is better if it can leave everyone with a sense of looking forward. Some suggestions include:

- Giving a memory book to the family.
- Blowing out the remembrance candle.
- After leaving the assembly, pupils who wish to might plant a bulb or plant to create a special memory garden.
- Asking pupils to bring a farewell message to the person who has died to put into a special box as they leave. This can help pupils to personalise a goodbye.
- Playing reflective but uplifting music can help to create the right atmosphere.
- Reminding pupils of what support is available to them.

## Afterwards

It is best to arrange the assembly before a break. Pupils and staff will need space to reflect before carrying on with the normal school timetable. Some schools time it for the end of lessons but the build-up throughout the day can be difficult to handle. If arranged for the end of the school day, leave time for pupils to compose themselves before leaving for home. Be prepared for different responses; some pupils may be deeply affected, others not at all, or they may behave out of character. Ensure they all know where to go for support if required.

## 5) Guidance for parents and carers

When supporting a bereaved family, or informing other families of a death within the school community, parents and carers may appreciate guidance to help them respond to questions and better understand reactions from their children. Below is information you can give to parents, which they may find helpful and reassuring.

Most children and young people affected by a death just need adults who care about them. You cannot take away their sadness, but you can acknowledge it and support them through the experience. Reactions will vary. If they were not close to the person who died, they may be unaffected.

However, it is best not to make assumptions. Any death may make children and young people anxious, as they become more aware of their own mortality and that of those around them.

Questions are healthy, as is curiosity. A good approach with any age is to acknowledge what has happened and then answer questions as they arise. Having accurate information will enable you to answer questions with facts rather than rumour; try to obtain this from a reliable source so that information is both accurate and sensitive to the wishes of the bereaved family.

Young children often do not have adult inhibitions surrounding death and you may be taken aback by some of their comments and reactions. It is not unusual for them to act out funerals or play at being dead. It is their way of trying to make sense of what has happened. Teenagers may become withdrawn and difficult to engage with. Respect their need for personal space whilst gently reminding them that you are there if they need you.

Answer questions honestly using age-appropriate language. It is better to use the words 'dead' or 'died' rather than euphemisms which can be confusing. A simple biological explanation of death can be very helpful. "When someone dies their heart stops beating, they do not breathe and their brain doesn't work anymore."

If you do not know the answer to their questions, say so. Children often have a surprising capacity to deal with the truth, if given information in simple, straightforward language, appropriate for their age and understanding. Young children tend to make up what they do not know, and their imaginings are often worse than the reality. Adolescents and teenagers could resent a lack of honesty from the adults around them.

Do not think that you have to hide your own sadness. Seeing adults expressing emotion can give a child of any age 'permission' to do the same, if they feel they want to. Hearing how you are feeling may help them to consider their own feelings.

Maintain routines, such as going to school. Familiar situations and contact with friends brings security and a sense of normality. Continue to expect the usual rules of behaviour. Normality with love and compassion is what to aim for.

You may notice some of the following which are all normal as long as they do not continue for too long:

- Change in behaviour, perhaps becoming unnaturally quiet and withdrawn or unusually aggressive.
- Anger is a common response at all ages and may be directed at people or events which have no connection to the death.
- Disturbed sleep and bad dreams.
- Anxiety demonstrated by clingy behaviour and a reluctance to be separated from parents or carers. Older children may express this in more practical ways, for example by expressing concerns over issues that adults may perceive as insensitive or unimportant.
- Being easily upset by events that would normally be trivial to them.

- Difficulty concentrating, being forgetful and generally 'not with it.' This makes school work particularly difficult and academic performance may suffer. Older children may feel that there is no point in working hard at school and they might lose a general sense of purpose in their lives.
- Physical complaints, such as headaches, stomach aches and a general tendency to be run down and prone to minor illness.

Grief is a natural and necessary response to a death. However, if concerned about a child, do not hesitate to seek advice.

### Further resources

See *Books and resources* (included in this guide) and the following areas of Child Bereavement UK's website:

- When a child or family grieves
- Short guidance films

Carers and parents looking for support and information may call our Helpline: **0800 02 888 40**, access **Live Chat** via our website, or email: [support@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:support@childbereavementuk.org)

## 6) The role of the school

When a child or young person experiences the death of someone important to them, they not only need to adapt to living with their grief within the family home, but also to the challenges of a changed life in the outside world. This will include school as children spend a large proportion of their time at nursery, school or college, and their social life is often centred on friends made there. The grieving children and young people we work with at Child Bereavement UK tell us that the way their school or college responds is very important to them.

Pupils feel strongly that the response works best when they are consulted and involved in any decisions that may affect them. For example, after her mother died, Fiona was visited at home by her teacher. Fiona and her teacher decided that she would arrive 10 minutes after everyone else, giving her teacher time to talk to the class.

### Guidance for staff

Most staff want to help but sometimes, when dealing with this emotive subject, they are not sure what to do or say. Teachers get little in the way of training around loss and grief, so they can feel out of their depth and unsupported. This can result in them saying or doing little or even, in some instances, nothing at all.

Visit the Education Sector area of our website under the [Support and information](#) area. Here there are dedicated sections for early years, primary and secondary schools, as well as further/higher education. We also have free resources [Supporting a bereaved pupil](#) and [Managing a Sudden Death](#). Professionals are welcome to call our National Helpline [0800 02 888 40](tel:0800 02 888 40) or [Live Chat](#) via our website, both are available Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.

### The importance of the school

Bereaved pupils often comment that going to school gives them a sense of normality, and many choose to return immediately after a death has occurred. Others need to take a few days off but, the longer they are away, the harder it can be to return. Some of the young people we have supported at Child Bereavement UK say that they sometimes find it easier to talk to someone not directly involved, such as a familiar and trusted teacher or learning mentor.

### Communication

Communication with a bereaved pupil's parents/carers is important, as this will build a clearer picture of how the young person is managing their grief. Sharing positive news about the pupil is just as important as voicing any concerns about their wellbeing or changes in behaviour.

Make sure information about the bereavement is shared sensitively with other members of staff and that the pupil is aware of this. Some pupils may be reluctant for this information to be given out but reassure them that if everyone has the basic facts, and details of any procedures in place, it will ensure that they will feel supported in school at all times.

### Grieving

When grieving, young people of any age often view school as a place where they can have some time away from overwhelming emotions and sadness. However, bereaved pupils may not always show what they feel, and many young people try to hide their emotions to 'fit in' with their peers. Pupils of all ages can find it difficult to manage strong emotions, and grief can exacerbate this.

Young people tend to oscillate between immense sadness and 'normal' behaviour; this can often be misinterpreted in school.

Certain lesson topics may bring back painful reminders of the circumstances surrounding the death. This unintended upset can cause real distress for a pupil and the member of staff concerned. Where possible, try to prepare a pupil in advance for a lesson which may be sensitive for them. It will help for a bereaved pupil to have the option of a discreet 'time-out' of the classroom for times when they feel overwhelmed by their grief.

Adults often make assumptions about what they think a grieving pupil needs, but this can differ from what the young person actually wants. Check with a bereaved pupil to find out what they would like school to do.

### What do bereaved pupils find helpful in school?

- A chance to meet and talk to the teacher/pastoral support/head/tutor to plan how their return to school will be managed.
- Being asked how they would like to break the news to their friends and classmates, and support with this, if needed.
- An acknowledgement about what has happened without making a fuss.
- Adults in school to talk to, ideally the pupil's own choice.
- A 'time out' system to have some space away from the hustle and bustle if they feel overwhelmed by powerful emotions. This should be shared with all staff to ensure support is consistent throughout the school.
- Being given simple choices, particularly with regard to managing their grief.
- Keeping a record of key dates, such as the anniversary of the death, which can often act as a trigger for pupils to revisit their grief.
- Some flexibility around deadlines for handing in work.
- Understanding that grieving is exhausting and it can be difficult to concentrate on school work.
- Adults who care and will listen to them; young people say this means more than anything to them.

All of these are very simple to put in place and take little in the way of resources; they just need a bit of thought. The most important thing that school can provide is people who care and who have a bit of understanding. It doesn't matter that they are not trained bereavement counsellors. School staff know how to listen and being heard is what the young people we work with say means more than anything to them.

### Further resources

See the following areas of Child Bereavement UK's website:

- For the education sector
- Short guidance films

*Supporting a bereaved pupil* - A free and flexible online resource for teachers and education professionals. Also available from Child Bereavement UK's website.

## 7) Supporting a bereaved pupil

People are often at a loss as to what to say or do to help a child or young person who has been bereaved by the death of someone important to them. Every situation is different, and children will be affected to a greater or lesser degree, dependent on the circumstances of the death and the nature of the relationship they had with the person who has died. The following are brief guidelines, written with the input from the children and young people Child Bereavement UK has supported.

**Try not to judge** - Grief is a very personal experience. Every child and young person will grieve differently, even those from the same family. Teenagers in particular resent assumptions being made as to how they should be feeling and what they should be doing.

**Check out the facts** - Familiarise yourself with the circumstances surrounding the death. Communicate with the family and make sure that what you say will not conflict with the family's wishes. Different information from home and school will confuse a pupil and complicate their grief.

**Acknowledge what has happened** - Do not be afraid to use the word 'death', 'I was very sorry to hear of the death of your ...'. If you find words difficult you can discreetly give the pupil a card expressing your care and concern. A card to a bereaved pupil from his/her class is usually appreciated and helps to keep up contact with school if they are not attending.

**Responses will vary** - Don't assume that a lack of reaction means that they do not care. Initially, the full reality may not have sunk in. Young people can feel that they have to be seen to be coping as a sign of maturity. Allow them to express emotion and feelings and do not be afraid to share your own feelings of sadness if you have any.

### **Children and young people need honesty**

Although sometimes difficult, it is better to answer questions truthfully. If you are faced with a difficult question, rather than answering straight away, ask the child what they think.

**Be prepared to listen** - Schools are busy places and your time may be limited, but an offer to spend a bit of quiet time with a pupil who clearly wants to talk will be greatly appreciated. Some will welcome the opportunity to just sit with you and say nothing; for others it is enough to know that you are keeping a look out for them.

If you are discussing something in class that will refer to the person who has died, don't be afraid to do so. Avoiding references to the person who died might be perceived as a denial they ever existed. If not sure, check with the bereaved pupil first, letting them know your intention..

**Give bereaved pupils time** - It may be many months before they can fully cope with the pressures of school work again. Remember that they will be grieving for life and the loss will always be with them. Explain to other pupils how the bereaved child may be feeling and encourage them to be openly supportive.

### **Further resources**

See *Books and resources* (included in this guide).

*Supporting a bereaved pupil* - A free and flexible online resource for teachers and education professionals. Available from Child Bereavement UK's website.

## 8) Cultures and beliefs

Respect for the differing needs, rituals and practices of different cultures is essential when acknowledging a death. This overview should be used as a guide only because every family will have their own unique culture. It is important to speak to the family to find out their wishes rather than make assumptions.

### Buddhism

Buddhists believe that nothing that exists is permanent and everything will ultimately cease to be. There is a belief in rebirth but not of a soul passing from one body to another. The rebirth is more a state of constantly changing being rather than a clear-cut reincarnation. The ultimate objective is to achieve a state of perfect peace and freedom. Buddhists try to approach death with great calmness, and an open-minded attitude of acceptance.

There are few formal traditions relating to funerals and they tend to be seen as non-religious events. Cremation is the generally accepted practice and the service is kept very simple. It may be conducted by a Buddhist monk or sometimes family members.

### Christianity

Christians believe that there is just one God and that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. Christians believe in an afterlife and also the idea of resurrection, but the beliefs around the afterlife vary within the different denominations. For some, as soon as a person dies, he or she is judged by God and will immediately go to Heaven or Hell, depending on how good or bad a life they led. For Roman Catholics, there is a half-way place called Purgatory, where an impure soul can stay until fit to enter Heaven. Others believe in the Day of Judgement, when the world will end, and the dead will return to life to be judged by God.

Within the different Christian denominations there are many variations on what happens at a funeral. When someone dies, the body is usually taken to an undertaker who will carry out the necessary preparations for the body to be laid out. This is to enable those who wish to view it to do so before it is placed in a coffin. The funeral, organised by an undertaker, is usually

within a few weeks of the death. This usually takes place in a church but sometimes a crematorium or a combination of the two.

Wreaths or bunches of flowers may be placed on the coffin. It is traditional to wear black, but this custom varies. The body will either be buried or cremated, dependent on the wishes of the person who has died and their family. A churchyard grave is often marked by a headstone, but for a cremation the family may choose a more informal way to mark where the ashes are buried or have been scattered. Some families keep the ashes, and some decide to scatter or bury them at a later date.

### Hinduism

Hindus believe in reincarnation and a cycle of rebirths. When a person dies, the soul is reborn in a new body, returning to earth in either a better or worse form. A person's sum total of 'Karma' (or intent and actions) influences their rebirth. Good Karma results in favourable rebirths, and bad Karma results in unfavourable rebirths.

A Hindu funeral is as much a celebration as a remembrance service. Hindus cremate their dead as it is the soul that has importance, not the body which is no longer needed. White is the traditional colour and mourners usually wear traditional Indian garments. If you are attending the funeral, it may be worth asking what appropriate dress will be. During the service, offerings such as flowers or sweetmeats may be passed around and bells rung; sound is a part of the ritual. The chief mourner, usually the eldest son, and other male members of the family, may shave their heads as a mark of respect. In India, the chief mourner lights the funeral pyre. In the UK, he will press button for the coffin to move behind the curtain and, in some instances, may be permitted to ignite the

cremator. Ashes may be taken back to India to be scattered on the River Ganges. In the UK, some areas of water have been designated as acceptable substitutes.

An intense period of mourning lasts for 13 days following the funeral and involves all family and friends. The immediate family of the person who has died is considered to be in mourning for a year. During this time some of the traditions will limit or restrict participation in events or festivals.

## Humanism

Humanists are non-religious. They follow the principle that this life is the only one we have and therefore, when you are dead, there is no moving on to another one. The focus of a Humanist funeral is on celebrating the life of the person who has died; stories are shared and memories recalled, and their favourite music may be played. This is done by friends and family who are supported by a celebrant. The ceremony, usually a cremation, will be tailored to meet the family's wishes rather than following a set pattern.

## Islam

Muslims believe in life after death when, on the Last Day, the dead will come back to life to be judged by Allah (God). Some will reside in Paradise, others in Hell. Prophet Muhammad taught that all men and women are to serve Allah and that they should try to live their lives according to the Qur'an. Muslims believe that death is a part of Allah's plan and open expressions of wailing may be viewed as disrespectful to this belief.

Muslims are always buried, not cremated, ideally within 24 hours of the death. Ritual washing is usually performed by the family or close friends at the undertakers or mortuary. They will wrap the body in a clean cloth or shroud. The coffin is often very plain as traditionally one would not have been used. The grave is aligned to enable the head of the person who has died to be placed facing the holy city of Mecca. Muslim graves are unmarked but, to meet UK requirements, a simple headstone is used as a compromise.

There is an official mourning period of three days when the family will remain at home and be brought food by friends and relatives. For forty days after the funeral, relatives may wish to make regular visits to the grave.

## Judaism

In the Jewish religion, death is seen as a natural process and as part of God's plan. Jewish practices following a death aim to ensure respect is shown to the dead but also aim to provide comfort to the living. When a Jewish person dies mourners will recite the prayer *Dayan HaEmet*, which recognises God's power as the true judge. According to Jewish law, it is believed that the body should be interred as soon as is practical after the death, which means that funeral planning begins immediately. It is believed that when a Jewish person dies, their body should not be left unattended. The rabbi or the funeral home can help coordinate a *shomer* (guardian) who can stay with the body. This may be a family member, a friend or a member of the congregation. There may be more than one *shomer*, or people taking turns in acting as *shomer* to ensure someone stays with the body at all times. The *shomer* may just sit with the body although it is traditional for the *shomer* to recite *tehillim* (psalms). Open caskets are forbidden, and bodies are buried, not cremated.

There are several periods of mourning beginning with *aninut*, which is generally just a day or two. After the burial a close friend or relative will prepare a first meal for the family of the person who has died. *Shiva* is the period following the burial which lasts until the seventh day afterwards. *Shloshim* is the next period of mourning which lasts until the 30th day after the burial, during which time the mourners do not attend celebratory events. *Avelut* is the final period of formal mourning which is observed only for the death of a parent. This period lasts for 12 months after the burial and for 11 of those months, starting from the time of the burial, the son of the person who has died recites the mourner's *Kaddish* daily.

## Sikhism

Sikhs believe the soul goes through a cycle of rebirths, with the ultimate objective being to break the cycle and be reunited with God. Mourning is done discreetly. The present life is influenced by what happened in previous ones and the current life will set the scene for the next.

The body is cremated as soon as possible after death. The coffin is taken to the family home where it is left open for friends and family to pay their respects. It is then taken to the Gurdwara where hymns and prayers are sung. A short service follows at a crematorium, during which the eldest son presses the button for the coffin to move behind the curtain. In India, the eldest son would light the funeral pyre and no coffin would be used. After the funeral, a meal may be held at the Gurdwara. The ashes may be taken back to India to be scattered. In the UK they may be sprinkled in the sea or a river.

The family remains in mourning for several days after the funeral and may listen to readings from the *Guru Granth Sahib* (Holy Book).

## General points

Within a faith there are often many variations, so it is important not to be prescriptive.

Some families may be much more involved in preparing the body and the funeral arrangements than others. For some people, it is important that the whole body is retained. Post-mortems could therefore be viewed as unwelcome procedures.

In some cases, the coffin may be kept at home until the funeral and it might be open. This allows for those who wish to pay their respects to do so.

Whilst the above outlines some general characteristics of different faiths, remember that all families are different and

will interpret traditions in their own way. All families have their own individual culture specific to themselves and may have particular ways they would like things to be done. Members of the same family may follow different faiths. It is therefore very important not to make general assumptions. It is always best to ask families how they will mark the death and remember the person who has died.

## 9) Bereavement support groups

The bereaved children and young people we support at Child Bereavement UK often tell us that what they need is easily accessible, informal support, and that they often feel more comfortable receiving this from their peers or from trusted adults rather than parents and carers. Schools can be ideally placed to offer support

### What are the benefits?

The adults in a family are often struggling with their own grief and they may have neither the emotional nor the physical capacity to support their bereaved children, even if they would like to. For this reason, support may need to come from somewhere other than home. Schools that have set up bereavement groups tell us that pupils who attend:

- Build their own coping strategies and naturally start to support one another;
- Feel less isolated through meeting others in similar circumstances, normalising their experience;
- Have an opportunity to express emotions in a safe place and in a safe way;
- Can find it easier to talk to an adult who is not emotionally involved;
- Are easier to manage in class and are less likely to become school refusers;
- And appreciate an alternative to counselling which, for some children, is not what they need.

### Which model to use?

There are no right or wrong models, it is very much about what fits with your school. Options that you may wish to consider include:

- Open groups, which provide the flexibility that some pupils require, enabling them to attend sessions intermittently and for as long as they feel the need. However, dependency can build up and endings can be difficult to achieve.
- Closed groups can run for a fixed length of time with a set group of pupils. The group dynamics are not disturbed by new members joining half-way through

- A group for a fixed length of time with a set group of pupils but with the option of attending the next one for pupils who feel they need more support.

A semi-structured approach appears to work well. Each session has a loose theme with a simple related activity but with the freedom to allow pupils to do as much, or as little, of the bereavement work as they feel able to cope with. Many bereaved children and young people who attend groups tell us that just being there, in itself, can be immensely helpful.

Sometimes schools run groups just for pupils who are bereaved of a parent. Others open the groups to anyone who has been affected by the death of someone important to them. For the pupils, it is the shared grief experience that is important rather than the circumstances of the death, so a mixture of experiences is usually not a problem, even when traumatic such as a death by suicide. Small numbers are not a problem but too large a group can be. A ratio of around four pupils to each adult generally works well.

### Who should run it?

Any staff member with commitment, time and who is secure with their own experiences of loss. Learning mentors and school counsellors are often involved. Bereavement professionals are not required, but some training on loss, death and grief and the impact on children and young people will give staff confidence. Child Bereavement UK runs training on a range of relevant subjects, including how to facilitate support groups.

### Referral process

This can be pupil-led by putting up posters in the school and letting anyone come along who wishes to. Some schools invite pupils considered to be most in need of the support. This may exclude pupils who might be affected by a death of which the school is unaware. It is also important to remember the quiet pupils as well as those more obviously displaying their grief.

## Confidentiality

Confidentiality needs careful thought, especially for adolescents and teens. Primary schools normally let parents/carers know that their child is attending a group. For older pupils, a similar approach to that used with visits to a school counsellor may be more appropriate, with parents being aware that a bereavement group exists but not necessarily that their child is attending. Pupils will need to be reassured that confidentiality extends to the staffroom and that information will not be shared between staff without permission from the pupil concerned.

## Timing

Lunchtime works for many schools, with pupils either attending after eating lunch or bringing lunch with them. Some schools consider the support so important that their groups are timetabled into the school day. A pupil's absence from class is accepted by peers once the reason why is explained, and staff appreciate that a pupil distracted by their grief from learning will benefit by attending the group. Consideration does need to be given to pupils who find the attention unwelcome. Groups held once a fortnight seem to have a good balance between contact and space to think, but timing is often dictated by the demands of the school timetable.

## Important things to think about

- Think through how to respond and who to go to when pupils reveal 'tough stuff' or if child protection issues arise
- Identify where to go for help when you feel out of your depth or when a child might need more support. You can always contact Child Bereavement UK's bereavement support team for guidance on **0800 02 888 40**
- Be wary of overstepping your professional boundaries by getting too involved
- Be aware of the impact on yourself and the possibility of your own losses being brought to the surface. It is essential to look after yourself. Make sure all staff involved have some sort of regular and compulsory support or supervision.

## Further resources

See *Books and resources* (included in this guide).

# 10) Looking after yourself (staff)

Being alongside anyone experiencing a loss can be emotionally draining but supporting a bereaved pupil particularly so. The need for support for yourself is not a sign of an inability to cope or of professional incompetence, but a recognition that everyone needs help to carry out this demanding role. Below are some ideas for ways to look after yourself.

## Share feelings

Use friends and colleagues to talk about how you are feeling and to share experiences. Just knowing that others are affected can help you to feel less alone and better able to cope. Informal peer support in the staffroom can be a welcome opportunity to talk through issues and concerns and reduce feelings of inadequacy by jointly talking through strategies to help.

## Anticipate that you may experience an emotional reaction

It is perfectly normal and OK to be emotionally affected. However, recognise that in order to help others you need to feel reasonably strong yourself. You may become aware of previous losses in your own life that have resurfaced. If it all feels too close to home, do not be afraid to say so. This is not a sign of weakness but merely a recognition that we all have our limits.

## Professional boundaries

When working in a school environment, it is very easy to let the carer in us take over and forget our professional boundaries. Getting over-involved is not helpful to either yourself or to the bereaved pupil or adult. Remember that you cannot carry their grief for them, but you can share their journey by being there for them and being aware.

## Have information on resources and organisations

Sharing contact details of bereavement organisations will enable you to do something practical to support a grieving family. You will be helping by putting them in touch with people who are qualified and experienced in offering the support they might need. See: *Helpful organisations* section in this guide.

## Help others

If you become aware that a colleague is stressed or affected by a death in your school community, or know that they have experienced a bereavement themselves, try to find the time to offer them your support.

## Looking after yourself

Make time to do something just for you or give yourself a treat. Physical exercise can be a great stress buster. There may be times when, due to your own personal circumstances, you feel less able to support a bereaved pupil. There are many reasons for an increased vulnerability such as:

- Your own bereavement experiences;
- Caring for elderly relatives;
- Carrying a particularly heavy workload;
- A recent experience of separation or loss such as a divorce; or
- Having a child that is the same age as the bereaved pupil.

It is important to let someone know if you are finding it too demanding to support a bereaved pupil.

### It does not help to offer something that you cannot deliver

No matter how well-meant or strong the desire to take the pain away, always try to be realistic with the amount of support that you can give. It is much better to offer something small but consistent, rather than a grand gesture that is going to be difficult to deliver.

### You do not need to be an expert to provide effective help

Many people feel inadequate and out of their depth when faced with adults or children experiencing deep sadness or trauma. Being alongside children who are hurting can remind us of our own vulnerability and mortality. Most teachers and school staff are caring individuals who naturally have the characteristics required to support bereaved young people. It is more about being there for them whilst in school and building a relationship with them in your classroom, than being a bereavement professional.

### Try to recognise when you are running on empty

Working in the education profession is very much about giving in terms of time and energy; supporting a bereaved pupil may compound this, resulting in depleted resources. It can be difficult to ask for help when we most need it as to do so requires energy and strength. Some of the signs to look out for include feeling physically exhausted and overworked, an inability to delegate and generally not feeling on top of things.

School staff may call our Helpline: **0800 02 888 40**, access **Live Chat** via our website, or email: **[support@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:support@childbereavementuk.org)**

# 11) Practical ideas

## Breathing space - 'time out'

The pupil is given permission to leave class for a short time when they begin to feel overwhelmed by their grief, or just to get some personal space when upset. It is important that staff are made aware as this will avoid embarrassing scenes for either the pupil or the teacher. It is essential that the pupil does not just wander around the school but goes to a designated place and person. Identify a way in which the pupil can comfortably show they are struggling. For example: placing an item or bag on the desk; showing a card; or any other non-verbal signal to a member of staff so the pupil may leave the room without having to ask.

## Pocket comforter

A pupil can discreetly carry in their pocket a soft piece of fabric or a pebble or stone. Holding on to something solid can help a pupil to remain grounded and in control if upset. Equally, touching a piece of garment that belonged to the person who has died can provide a comfort.

## Diary/journal

A way to communicate with a bereaved child who finds it difficult to verbalise feelings. The pupil leaves the diary in a mutually agreed place having written or drawn whatever they wish. The teacher responds in the diary and either leaves it to be picked up or discreetly returns it to the pupil. For some pupils this may also be a way to communicate with the family/carers.

## Happy/sad faces

The bereaved pupil is given images of emotions, a strip of paper with a range of feelings or a paper plate with two drawings of faces on either side, one happy, one sad. The pupil shows the image to reflect how they are feeling on a particular day. This gives the teacher an idea of how they are and therefore which approach to use.

## I can... you can...

A series of four postcards with ideas about how others can help. Titles include 'To My Teacher' or 'What you can do'. A helpful communication tool is available from The Childhood Bereavement Network: **0207 843 6309**. The National Children's Bureau [ncb.org.uk/shop](http://ncb.org.uk/shop)

## Creative ideas for capturing memories

An activity can support a child to communicate. Engagement in an activity often negates the need for a child to have eye contact and may help free them up to share their thoughts, feelings and memories. It also affords you an opportunity to work alongside the child to support them.

- **Memory bracelet** - Make a 'friendship bracelet' by plaiting together coloured threads. Each thread could represent a different memory or special quality of the person who has died.
- **Pom-pom** - create a small pom-pom using different colour/texture wool, again representing different memories. This pom-pom can also act as a small fidget toy as well as a reminder of the person who died.
- **Weaving** - weaving different threads representing different memories to create a small wall-hanging piece of art. Offering a selection of items to incorporate into the design can add to the detail and give individual meaning to the final piece. Weaving natural materials through some twine or grasses can make this an outdoor activity.
- **Dream-catcher** - create one of these colourful pieces in memory of a person who has died. Originally created by tribes of Native Americans using natural materials, these were hung above the beds of family members, particularly children. The belief is that all sorts of dreams get caught in the web of the dream catcher but only the good ones can pass through and slide down the feathers to the sleeper below. Bad dreams become

tangled in the protective net and are held until morning, when they burn up in the sunlight. The basis for a dream catcher can be as simple as a thin twig or flexible wire which can be shaped into a circle, or cut out the rim of a paper plate. Wool or twine is traditionally knotted in an intricate pattern but can be simply wound around the frame to create the 'web'. Using natural resources, this could make a great outdoor activity.

The activity may be used to focus on a dream for the future or a goal they wish to achieve.

- **Worry dolls** - According to legend, children in Guatemala tell their worries and fears to the Worry Dolls and place them under their pillow when they go to sleep at night. The doll 'looks after' the worry or problem during the night, so the child can sleep peacefully.

Dolls can be made by simply wrapping coloured wool around lolly sticks, pipe cleaners or sticks. As an alternative, small pom-pom pets or tassel dolls can be created with wool or fine thread or even cut out of paper and coloured in.

As they create their own worry dolls, children and young people can acknowledge their own feelings and share any worries they may have. Adults can help pupils to identify 'big' worries or issues and support them when they need additional help.

- **A memory comfort object** - Sewing something special to the inside of a piece of clothing or into a pocket can be a discreet reminder for a bereaved pupil. This could be a button, small swatch of fabric or piece of ribbon from clothing owned by the person who died, or it could be one of these items chosen by the bereaved pupil to represent a special memory.

### Further resources

See *Books and resources* (included in this guide).

## i) Pupils with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND)

All children and young people, regardless of their circumstances, have a right to have their grief recognised, to hear the truth and to be given opportunities to express their feelings and emotions. Children with learning difficulties are no different, but they may need extra help with their understanding and ways to express feelings.

### Communicating the truth

Young people with learning difficulties are sometimes assumed to need more protection from death and dying than others, or not to have the capacity to understand. Whilst to a certain extent this is true, we often underestimate their abilities to cope with tough things in life. The challenge is finding creative ways to communicate when words are sometimes not appropriate.

- If using words, use the real ones e.g. 'dead' and 'dying', not euphemisms.
- Use as many real life examples if you can, e.g. pictures of funerals and coffins to aid understanding.
- Acknowledge any death. To ignore what has happened implies that this is an unimportant event and denies the existence of the person who has died.
- Pre-grief work is especially important to help prepare for an expected death.

### Understanding the concept of death

All children struggle with the concept of death and its permanence. Pupils with learning difficulties may find this particularly difficult to grasp, especially the permanence, and may benefit from simple, practical examples to illustrate the difference between dead and living things. Very visual explanations are particularly important for pupils on the autistic spectrum. Some of these ideas may seem a bit macabre but it is what many children with Special Educational need.

- Buy a bunch of flowers, put them in a vase and observe them wilt, wither and die. Compare to a fresh bunch of the same type. If kept, the dead flowers will illustrate that death is permanent, the flowers do not return to life.
- Buy a dead fish from the supermarket and compare it to a live one. Even when put into a bowl of water the dead one will not move, breathe, eat or swim.
- Give the dead fish a burial that replicates as far as possible a real one. Explain a cremation by burning leaves and mixing the resulting ashes with some earth.
- Take photographs of the above and put into a book. This will act as a visual reminder for the many times when the explanation will need to be repeated.
- If appropriate, viewing the dead body will help with the concept of no life, but this will need careful preparation. Feeling that it is cold, and observing no breathing or movement, can aid understanding that the body is no longer working.

### Expressing their grief

Children do not need protection from the feelings and emotions associated with grief, but they do need support to express them and reassurance that these sometimes powerful and overwhelming emotions are normal and necessary. This is even more the case for children with learning difficulties.

- Use a simple workbook such as *When Someone Very Special Dies* by Marge Heegard. This can easily be adapted for various ability levels.
- Looking at photographs or watching videos of the person who has died can facilitate expressions of sadness or anger.
- Act as a role model, shed tears if genuinely felt, use symbols to communicate how you are feeling but also reassure that you are OK, and your response is natural.
- Carrying a comfort object such as a small piece of warm furry blanket can be an aid for getting through difficult moments.
- Reassure that being angry is OK. Offer opportunities for safe ways to express frustration and anger, feelings which are common in grief for many bereaved young people. For example, they can punch a pillow as a focus for their anger.

## Remembering the person who has died

- A piece of fabric from an item of clothing carried in a pocket or made into a cushion can be comforting.
- Placing their favourite perfume or after shave on a hanky.
- Putting together a memory box of tangible reminders chosen by the child. This can help give some insight into factors and events that are key to the relationship with the person who has died.
- Listening to audio recordings of the voice or favourite music of the person who has died may help the visually impaired.
- Use a timeline to spark off memories of significant events and pictures to build the life story of the person who has died.

## Further resources

See *Books and resources* (included in this guide).

*Supporting a bereaved pupil* - A free and flexible online resource for teachers and education professionals, including a section on SEND. Available from Child Bereavement UK's website.

## ii) Pre-bereavement - when a family member is not expected to live

When a family member is not expected to live, supporting the pupils affected can be challenging and distressing. How children and young people react will vary enormously but, whatever the response, staff in school can do a lot to help a child or young person build resilience and develop coping strategies for what may lie ahead.

### Honest communication is important

Facing illness and change in a family can bring to the surface difficult emotions for both the children and adults. To protect young people, the subject is often avoided. This can result in a child or young person feeling excluded from something that feels very important, but they are not sure what. Staff in school can sometimes find themselves caught in the middle, without the knowledge and information needed to offer effective and timely support. Encourage the family to keep you in the picture and think about a simple way for them to do this. Some families use email, others ask a family friend or neighbour to act as a liaison with the school.

Children and young people are usually far more aware of what is going on than family members realise. They will often, at some level, be aware that the situation is very serious. Physical changes, adults behaving out of character and medical interventions are all clues. The older the pupil, the more likely that they will have worked out that death is a possibility.

If a family member is attending a hospice, they often have staff that can assist with what to say, and when and how to say it. If this is not the case, Child Bereavement UK's Helpline can offer guidance to the family concerned and to school staff: **0800 02 888 40**

### Answering difficult questions

School staff can find themselves faced with a question such as 'Do you think that my mum is going to die?' Try to establish the pupil's understanding of what is happening by turning the

question around. Respond with something like 'Tell me what you think' and take it from there. It is usually not appropriate for school to add information, but it is OK to acknowledge what the child already knows. With a young child, let the family know about the conversation, but respect a teenager's need for confidentiality.

### The emotional roller coaster

In many cases the course of the illness will be unpredictable and there is often much uncertainty about when a child or adult is likely to actually die. Children and young people can find it very hard to live with this emotional roller coaster of uncertainty. It is equally stressful for staff in school trying to tread a very careful line between acknowledging distress and encouraging normality, whilst managing their own emotional response to the situation. Unless the death is clearly very close, concentrate on the fact that the dying person is alive and talk about them in school as you normally would.

### Someone to listen to anxieties and fears

Try to provide opportunities for a pupil to voice anxieties and fears. It can be easier for them to do this at school with someone who is familiar but removed from the overwhelming mix of emotions being experienced at home. It is common for children and young people to feel in some way responsible for the situation, so give lots of reassurance that there was nothing they said or did to cause the illness.

Challenging behaviour, or being withdrawn or depressed, can all result from unvoiced and unanswered questions. Using one of the workbooks suggested in the *Books and resources* section of this guide is one way to help a pupil express any concerns they have.

It is very common and normal for a sibling who is well to be jealous of all the attention a sick brother or sister is receiving, and then to feel very guilty as a result. Reassure the pupil that this is OK and understandable. Their self-esteem may well be low, so acknowledging positive behaviours or achievements in school, however small, will help. Try to do this discreetly without singling them out.

### Helping the family

Maintaining a good relationship with the family and having regular updates will help staff to understand some of their challenges. Find out what the pupil needs and consider how school may be able to help at this difficult time.

Further information for the family can be found on the Child Bereavement UK website [childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)

### Further resources

See *Books and resources* (included in this guide) and the following areas of Child Bereavement UK's website:

- When someone is not expected to live
- Short guidance films

## iii) Pupils with a life-threatening illness

Children who are not expected to live may benefit enormously from normal routines such as attending school whilst they are still able to do so. This can present challenges for the school community. Sensitive but honest communication between the family and professionals involved will help overcome most of these challenges.

Pupils who are constantly in and out of hospital usually welcome attending school as an opportunity to have some normality in their lives. Continuing to take part in school routines as much as possible can give a feeling of achievement, with the emphasis on living rather than dying. It can also give back a sense of identity as a person rather than a patient.

Classmates who have had the situation explained to them are usually supportive. It often helps to involve them by giving them jobs such as wheelchair pushing. Try to ensure these tasks are shared and do not become the responsibility of just one pupil.

The school and family, including the sick child, need to decide together how to share the news that a pupil is terminally ill. It is not easy, but an open and honest approach is usually the best way. However, as much as adults try to hide what is happening, young people often instinctively know something is wrong and may well have worked out that a class member is dying before being officially told. Telling only the immediate peer group may seem like a good idea but the grapevine will take over, resulting in gossip and half-truths throughout the rest of the school.

If the child is receiving treatment from a local hospice or hospital, there is often a nurse or social worker whose job includes visiting schools to explain to pupils about a friend's illness and treatments involved. This should help alleviate any worries that fellow pupils may have. It is helpful for the school to at least identify the key professional responsible for the ill pupil and how to contact the professional for advice and support.

Young people deal with difficult situations much better when truthful explanations are given regarding absences, changing appearance, lack of energy, treatments and exclusion from activities such as sport. Being naturally curious, classmates will ask questions, and these should be answered sensitively but factually. Seriously ill pupils are often extremely knowledgeable about their illness and may well be happy to provide the answers themselves.

A sense of normality is further maintained by continuing to expect usual standards of behaviour within the pupil's limitations. This helps to reduce feelings of favouritism amongst other pupils. Other parents and carers at the school may have concerns surrounding their own children being upset or made anxious by a classmate who is seriously ill. It can help to give reassurance that children and young people will have fewer anxieties if presented with the truth, rather than having to make up what is happening. With consent from the family of the sick child, information on the illness and treatments will help other parents and carers to understand and feel informed. The realisation that their children are contributing to an increased quality of life for the sick pupil may create a more positive approach. Offer parents and carers information on what to say to children when someone is dying.

### Further resources

See *Books and resources* (included in this guide) and the following areas of Child Bereavement UK's website:

- When someone is not expected to live
- Short guidance films

## iv) Suicide

Whether supporting a pupil bereaved through the suicide of a family member or trying to help the friends of someone who has died by suicide, schools need to think through an appropriate response. The guidelines below may help.

Suicide is a traumatic, sometimes violent, event and in our society, it is still a taboo subject. Suicide rates for teenagers are on the increase. In the secondary sector, it is one of the most common types of violent death in teenage boys and 75% of suicides are carried out by males.

For a young person experiencing rapid change and lack of security in their life, suicide can sometimes seem the only way to take control. People who die by suicide do not necessarily want to die, it is more that they cannot find a reason to live, or that they want to stop feeling the way they do.

Suicide is a very public event and school communities tend to have active grapevines. The circumstances surrounding the death may well be common knowledge but added to with rumour and confusion over details. The children directly affected, if not told the truth, will eventually find out what really happened and consequently lose trust in the adults around them. In consultation with the family, it is important that a school communicates to staff and pupils the simple facts of the events, as quickly as possible. It may help the family to sensitively explain the benefits for them of the school being able to share the very basic facts of what has happened, to avoid painful gossip or half-truths. However, whatever approach is decided upon, school should follow the family's wishes.

With suicide there are many questions but few answers. Those left behind are often desperate to try to make some sense of the events and find a reason for what might appear to them to be a meaningless or even selfish act. Lack of answers can complicate the grief process. Children and young people bereaved by suicide, or any traumatic or violent death, are more likely to need professional help. If unsure, never hesitate to seek advice from your educational psychologist or a bereavement organisation.

Guilt and anger are common reactions in bereaved young people but are likely to be felt more intensely or go on for longer with a suicide than with other causes of death. This is especially so with teenagers, who may feel huge amounts of anger around the destructive effect the suicide has on themselves and the devastating consequences for others in their lives. If the family bereaved by suicide has had to cope with severe mood swings and depression of the person who has died for many years, they may feel a sense of relief, followed by overwhelming guilt as a result of the death. Family tensions of one sort may be replaced by others; this can be extremely difficult for a child to deal with.

### Some important points:

- Children and young people bereaved through suicide are more likely to need skilled help, but the informal support of familiar and trusted adults such as teachers is still vital.
- Children and young people who witnessed any part of the suicide, or found the body, may experience recurrent and intrusive recollections of the event. This will have a major impact on their ability to concentrate and school work is likely to suffer.
- The overwhelming feelings of anger and guilt associated with suicide may cause challenging behaviour at school. Reassure that nothing the child did or said was the cause of the death.

- Suicide is the ultimate form of rejection for a young person or child and can result in very low self-esteem. School can help a child to feel better about themselves by emphasising the positive and recognising the pupil's achievements, however small.
- It is difficult to find words to use around any bereavement, let alone one through suicide. It is important to offer the same comments that might be said to any pupil experiencing the death of someone close to them. Silence will reinforce feelings of isolation and possible shame.
- Where a pupil dies by suicide, Samaritans provide a Step-by-Step programme to support schools and can be contacted on **0808 168 2528**

### Further resources

On Child Bereavement UK's website you will find free, downloadable information sheets and short guidance films on a range of topics including:

- *Supporting children and young people bereaved by suicide*
- *When someone may have died by suicide*

## v) Forces families

The death of someone important can be devastating for any child but for the children of families in the Armed Forces there are additional challenges. Civilians do not always appreciate the very different way of life associated with being in the Forces. The following has been written with input from some of these families to help you understand what they and their children may need from school.

Bereaved Forces children experience multiple losses. Service children may have already faced disruption to their schooling due to postings every two years or so. Therefore, having to move to a new house, or even country, quite quickly as the result of a death is doubly hard at what is already a very difficult and stressful time. Leaving familiar surroundings, schools and friends can be stressful and isolating for the children and their families at a time when understanding from those around them is crucial.

A child may have to change school mid-term. This may be stressful as they may face integrating into a new school, and having to make new friends when other children are in already established friendships. If a place is not available at a catchment school, they may need to journey to school alone, rather than with friends or neighbours, which may be an additional challenge.

Many service children attend boarding schools, this being the only way to maintain some continuity in their education. Following a bereavement this may no longer be a financial option, requiring a change to schooling in the state system. Every time a Forces child has to change school, they are faced with having to explain their situation all over again. For some this may be too hard, and they may choose to keep quiet. Without the knowledge of the bereavement, new friends or staff may inadvertently say tactless or inappropriate things, which may add to the pupils' grief and isolation.

Forces families can experience a loss of identity when someone close dies. Forces families lose not just their own former family unit but also their belonging to a much wider one, i.e. their Regiment or Battalion. The family's identity is very bound up with the role of the parent and, if that person

dies, everyone is forced to rethink their place in the world. All bereaved children are vulnerable, but adolescents and teenagers especially may feel a huge sense of loss around who they thought they were and may struggle with what feels like a whole new identity.

Understanding the permanence of death can be difficult. It is well recognised that young children can struggle to understand that death is permanent and final. Forces children are used to their father/mother being away for long periods of time, and therefore they may find it particularly difficult to accept that the person who has died is never going to come back. This can inhibit their ability to begin to deal with the reality of what has happened, and this may complicate their grief.

Understanding the difference between dead and alive can be more difficult. For young children, as long as they are well prepared and given a choice, viewing the dead body can help them begin to understand what being dead means and the difference between dead and alive. For understandable reasons, children in Forces families may be denied this opportunity. This can make the fact that someone has died even more difficult to accept.

A death in action can often be totally unexpected, sudden and traumatic, heightening the sense of shock and disbelief. This disbelief may be strengthened by the death happening far away from home. Visiting the scene after a traumatic death can help those affected to make some sense of what has happened and to start to work out answers to 'how?' and 'why?'. The opportunity to do this is limited if it happens in a distant or inaccessible place. Without answers to those questions a child may make up their own, based on unhelpful fantasies about what happened.

Being in the public eye can add to the difficulty. Forces families may have to cope with intrusive media coverage. Even once the funeral has taken place, the family may have to face Service Inquiries into what happened or a coroner's inquest. These events can happen a time after the death, reawakening feelings of shock and trauma for all family members. Ongoing coverage of the conflict can have a big impact on children and act as a constant trigger to their grief.

### How to help in school

All sections of this guide apply but the following extra suggestions for Forces families may be helpful:

- For any grieving child, school offers an opportunity to forget about their grief for a while. This is even more the case for children of Forces families, who face regular reminders in the media of a conflict or military action. Be aware of this and try to create space and time in school for them to escape from overwhelming emotions. For further information, see *Supporting a bereaved pupil*
- Encourage resilience by helping bereaved Forces pupils to practice a response to questions or comments from peers such as 'how did your dad / mum die?'

- Sensitive remind peer groups that talking about what they see in the media about any conflicts might be particularly upsetting for their friends from Forces families.
- Be aware that Forces families are more likely to experience multiple losses in other aspects of their lives after a death, such as a change of home, schools or friends etc. As a result, bereaved Forces children may be more susceptible to low self-esteem and a loss of identity. They may find the expected changes that happen within any school environment difficult to cope with and may require more support than usual around times of change. Any positive feedback and recognition of their achievements, however small, will be helpful.
- Be aware that bereaved Forces families lose a very structured way of life and all the support mechanisms that go with it. Consider any practical help that school can offer the family, such as getting the PTA involved with school runs etc.

### Further resources

See *Books and resources* (included in this guide).

## vi) Social media and young people's views

When a school receives news of a death that will impact on the whole school community, the senior management team need to decide on their strategy and way forward. First, the family will need to be contacted, the situation clarified, and their wishes and preferences taken into consideration. Then the school will need to break the news to staff and pupils. (See *Breaking sad news*)

The school needs to protect pupils, parents and staff from the glare of any publicity, particularly just after the event has happened. Keeping communication lines open between the school community and family/carers is crucial and any communication with media should be agreed with the family/carers permission.

It needs to be remembered that a school cannot 'contain' information that is being shared within the community; it will 'leak out'. Schools need to consider the use of social media and how to deal with some of the repercussions it can have.

Social media is instantaneous, and there may be other sources spreading the news or an incorrect version of events around the community. Informing the school and the school community as soon as possible with correct information (with the family's consent), in language appropriate for the audience, will reduce anxieties and, hopefully, prevent the spread of rumours.

As well as communicating the news, social media can be used by the school community and family for information and bereavement support. However, be aware that social media can be abused, for example through online bullying or negative comments, which can be very hurtful to bereaved families and young people.

### High profile / upsetting events

The press may approach the school for information and their views when reporting on a high profile/upsetting event. The local authority may be able to offer help with processes and protocol when dealing with the press.

### Young People's views on social media

Young people are more likely to use social media as a way of communicating than previous generations. In today's society it is difficult to keep up with the implications of social media. Young people supported by Child Bereavement UK discussed the pros and cons of social media in two groups. One focused on advantages and the other on the disadvantages for bereaved young people. (See young people's views below.)

Advantages	Disadvantages
Keeps you updated with friends and news	Raising anxieties
Sense of control	Negative comments
Memorials	No immediate support
Provides information	Not all information is there
Fundraising campaigns	Not everyone is on social media
Comforting messages	Shock factor - and impersonal way to find out
Brings people together	Can't control
Sharing stories and pictures	False information
Saves time	Bad hashtags
Reaches a bigger audience	Bullying
Free to use	Fake feelings / messages
Keeps memories alive	Photos being stolen / used illegally
Keeps up with trends	Rumours/Presumptions
Easy to access	Longevity/obsolete platforms

## Young people's views by Child Bereavement UK's Youth Ambassadors

Rebecca, aged 17

### How do you use social media?

*I use Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter. I'm not friends with any of my family on Facebook because social media is a part of my life that I keep separate from them and use solely to connect with friends or to read articles online. It's not something I particularly want to share with my family as I feel it isn't something they would understand, and it also contains personal conversations.*

### How supportive did you find social media when somebody you knew died?

*When my mother died, I was only 5 years old and obviously didn't use any social media. However, as I grew older and began to create social media accounts there was a distinct lack of people talking about bereavement, perhaps because it is not a topic that directly affects everybody but partly, I imagine, also because it is a highly stigmatised topic and one many people feel awkward addressing or talking about. Personally, I have seen YouTube as the platform most people use to talk about bereavement and the experience of being bereaved as it can act as a diary of your inner thoughts and a useful way to express yourself.*

### Would you choose a particular platform over others to express your grief or support for a bereaved person?

*In the past I have openly spoken about my bereavement on Facebook as it reaches hundreds of people and makes them more aware of my personal experience and how to help someone else who has experienced grief. However, I also believe that YouTube is a good social network to talk about grief on, as it can help people who have experienced grief and maybe don't know anyone in their personal life who can help them. YouTube is the best medium for this as you can hear about the experiences of anyone who has published a video, not just a 'friend' you know from your personal life.*

### What are the pros and cons of expressing grief via social media?

*Pros – more people can learn about your experiences and you can connect with people you may not necessarily be close with, but you can bond over your shared experiences. I have also found that it starts conversations about grief, which I personally find cathartic since talking about grief helps alleviate some of the pain and means that other people can respond more appropriately and helpfully to their peers.*

*Cons – being so open can be awkward and daunting as it makes you vulnerable, especially since grief is such a personal issue, and having your peers know all your inner feelings can be scary.*

## Young people's views by Child Bereavement UK's Youth Ambassadors

### Kayleigh, aged 19

*The main social media platforms that I use are Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat. I find security paramount when using social media and the majority of my online security settings are set as high as possible. It is important to understand how posting things online can be manipulated and can come across in a different way; because of this I find that knowing the legal aspect of what is right and wrong important. It is hard to control who has access to your personal profile and who can private message you, I found this out the hard way.*

*When mum first died, I found that being able to talk to friends and family on social media was quite helpful and comforting. It showed me how much people cared about me and my family. I think that using social media to express grief allows you to see that you are not alone and can also be used to help others. However, any situation can have its good and bad side.*

*When using social media to express grief, others can express their opinion freely regardless of how this can impact on the person who has lost a loved one. The biggest problem with using social media is the expectation.*

*When someone dies, it feels like you have to post something online, otherwise people will think that you are in denial or just don't care. When you post something, there could be negative comments or other people feel that you should have gotten over it by a certain point.*

*As social media is now a massive part of daily life, and it is so hard to get away from, it plays a big part in how the grieving process for an individual can change. I occasionally post things on social media, for example on my mum's birthday or the anniversary of her death. Sometimes I find it a comfort as I know people will understand how I feel and why I have posted it, whereas some years, when I don't post anything, I feel that people judge and think that I don't care. This isn't the case; it is mainly that I want to feel the emotion of the day by myself and don't want to be constantly getting notifications from people who only appear when it is suitable for them.*

*This is how social media is helpful for me and my grief, however, I am aware this might not be the case for others.*

A useful *Beginners' Guide to Social Media* can be found here: [www.moz.com/beginners-guide-to-social-media](http://www.moz.com/beginners-guide-to-social-media)

## vii) Supporting children and young people bereaved by murder or manslaughter

Supporting a child or young person around the death of someone important to them is one of the hardest things for any adult to do. When the death was by murder or manslaughter, this adds yet more emotional pain and trauma to an already devastating situation.

The requirements of the criminal justice system can cause lengthy delays to rituals such as the funeral, which may hinder or complicate grieving. Trying to meet the needs of any children or young people affected is an enormous and challenging task.

### What is different about this type of death for children and young people?

Every child is different; their response will be influenced by their age, their relationship with the person who died and also with the accused, if known.

To a child, the world can now feel like a very unsafe place where the natural order of things is completely disrupted. Without a secure foundation to life, a child's emotional development and psychological health can be affected.

With this type of death, young people can be at significant risk of developing post-traumatic stress symptoms, particularly if they witnessed the crime or were involved in the incident in some way.

The death is also likely to be reported in the local or national news. There may be intrusion from the media or questions from people about what happened. For young people, and often adults, this can feel invasive and difficult to manage.

### When the perpetrator is known

When the person responsible for the killing is known to the young person, this can complicate responses and reaction. Government statistics state that 75% of victims aged under sixteen knew the main suspect.

A family member may be a suspect, but to the young person they are still a parent, brother or sister.

When one parent has killed another, in effect a young person has lost both parents in a manner that is both sudden and shocking. The death may mean that the young person has to move from their home and be looked after by relatives or by someone they are not familiar with, or do not know at all. This can add to feelings of insecurity and confusion.

### How to break the news

As with any death, keep any information you give to the school community brief and in accordance with the family's wishes..

**Rehearse managing difficult questions.** Children and young people can find it difficult to answer questions from others about what has happened. Work out together what they might choose to say in the face of difficult questions and practise beforehand. This will help them to feel more prepared.

**Give lots of reassurance.** For a child or young person who feels that they are somehow responsible for what happened, emphasise that there was nothing they could have done to prevent it.

Young people may also start to worry about themselves or others close to them being hurt. Although you cannot offer definite reassurance that this will not happen, it can be helpful to say something like 'There are some very bad people in this world but not many - most are good and kind.'

**Try to give them a sense of control.** The young people bereaved in this way tell us the sudden nature of the death, and the disruption and uncertainty caused by the legal processes, increases their sense of powerlessness and lack of control.

**Time to have fun.** As with any death, it is important that children and young people feel able to continue with activities that they enjoy and give themselves permission to have fun. Don't be surprised if one minute younger children are very distressed but the next they are laughing and playing. Teenagers may appear to be totally focused on their social life but, in reality, may be using it to blot out difficult feelings.

**Speaking to others.** The young people we work with who have been bereaved by murder or manslaughter say that support from peers who have been bereaved in the same way is vital. The shared experience creates an understanding and empathy they feel no one else can offer.

### Further resources

See the following sections of this guide:

- *Books and resources for staff*
- *Responding to frightening events*
- *Breaking sad news - a death in the school community*
- *Children's understanding of death*
- *Supporting a bereaved pupil*

You may also wish to refer to the following areas of Child Bereavement UK's website:

- For young people - films made by young people about their experiences of being bereaved by murder or manslaughter
- Short guidance films
- Sudden death - including accidents, suicide and homicide

## viii) Responding to frightening events

Events in the news can cause parents, school staff and pupils to worry about themselves and others and can lead to adults feeling unsure as to what information they should give to young people. Frightening events can lead a child to feel that the world is now a very unsafe place where the natural order of things is completely disrupted. Sometimes adults try to protect young people by avoiding talking about the event. They worry about upsetting them or making things worse. Some people hope that by not talking about it, children and young people will forget all about the event. However, young people are likely to benefit from talking about what has happened, but they may need adult help to do this.

Here are some practical things you can do to support children and young people when there are worrying events happening in the world that they may hear about:

- Stick to their normal routines and activities as much as possible as this is reassuring and helps young people to feel safe and makes events feel predictable.
- Try to manage your own anxiety so that you can provide calm reassurance to the pupil about their own safety
- Give them the opportunity to talk about events and to ask questions without forcing them to talk.
- Answer their questions openly and honestly using language appropriate to their level of understanding.
- Try to answer only the question asked and avoid giving extra detail. There is a fine line between being honest and overloading a young person with information they do not want. Try to give just enough information to enable the pupil to start to put together a story that makes some sense to them.
- Young people may also start to worry about themselves or others close to them being hurt. Although you cannot offer definite reassurance that this will not happen, it can be helpful to say something like 'There are some people in this world that do bad things but not many - most are good and kind'. This might help redress the balance. If they use social media, adolescents and teenagers will be more aware of the realities of life, but much of what they hear about may be sensationalised. Repeated references to deaths, terrorism or conflicts reinforces the feeling that the world is a scary and dangerous place.

### World events

Schools need to be aware that if a large-scale disaster has happened somewhere in the world, and is shown in the news/media, this may have an impact within the school.

Anxieties within the school may need to be reduced and, dependent on the school/age and situation, there may need to be an assembly or form time discussion. Setting aside an area where pupils can come to have a chat with a member of staff if they are worried or anxious may also be useful. Pupils may have some ties to the event, or the event may trigger memories of a personal traumatic event or of the death of a significant person in their own lives.

### TV deaths and deaths of celebrities

TV programmes can have a big impact on pupils' feelings and understanding of the world around them. Different programmes have various story lines of disasters and death, which may trigger a reaction in some pupils. Young people may form close attachments to celebrities. The death of someone well known, and the subsequent media response, may need to be considered. Some acknowledgement of the event, and possibly a quiet space or time out, may be needed throughout the day.

### Further resources

On Child Bereavement UK's website you will find free, downloadable information sheets and short guidance films on a range of topics including:

- *Supporting children after a frightening event*

## ix) Grief and bereavement in Gypsy and Traveller families

Few of us go through life without experiencing the death of someone close. Each situation is unique and how we respond to such a death is very individual. How we cope with bereavement is dependent upon many things, including our previous experience, our individual vulnerability and aspects of our lifestyle. People living in Gypsy and Traveller communities are no exception. However, there are aspects of their lives that may make coping with death and bereavement more challenging. There are an estimated 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers (including English Romany Gypsies, Welsh Gypsies, Scottish and Irish Travellers, Fairground Travellers, Barge or Boat Dwellers, European Roma and New Travellers) living in the UK. This information has been written to help increase understanding of the factors facing Gypsies and Travellers following the death of someone close. It also aims to identify what support might be helpful to this community.

Gypsy and Traveller communities have a higher death rate than average. Figures show that they have the poorest life chances of any ethnic group in the UK. The nature of Traveller lifestyles increases their risk of poor health and death. Gypsies and Travellers have a shorter life expectancy (by 10 years for men and 12 years for women), are more likely to experience the premature death of a child (17% compared to just under 10% of the wider population) and have a high suicide rate, particularly amongst young men.

There are many reasons behind these statistics. These include the mobile lifestyle of Gypsies and Travellers, limited access to healthcare and the lack of safe stopping places. This means that they may be living in poor environments, increasing the risk of illness, road traffic accidents and fire hazards. Some Gypsies and Travellers live in static houses where they may feel restricted by a fixed and immobile lifestyle. This can result in an increased risk of mental health problems and risk-taking behaviour.

The close-knit nature of these communities, with families who see each other on a daily basis, means that the death of an individual can be felt with great intensity, impacting a wide network of people. This makes death a very important part of Gypsies' and Travellers' lives, with a death becoming both a personal and a social loss, and influencing their approach to the rituals surrounding death, such as funerals.

### Funeral traditions

Whilst each family is individual and will have their own ways of doing things, certain traditions held amongst Gypsies and Travellers may have an impact on the way each person grieves. Traditionally, the trailer (caravan) and all the possessions of the person who had died would have been burnt. Today they are more likely to be sold. This removing of memories and possessions means that any connection with the person who has died has gone. Children and young people can find the absence of reminders of someone who they may have been close to very difficult. The practice of 'sitting up', of not leaving the person who has died alone from the time of death until the funeral, is common and may impact on family members in different ways. For many families, religion may be an important aspect of Traveller life and traditionally funerals in these communities take place quickly. This may limit the amount of time available to discuss how different family members would like things to be done.

Gypsy and Traveller funerals may be extremely lavish and headstones ornate. These are seen as an expression of the very respected and valued place the individual held within both the family and the wider community. It is not unusual for people to travel a great distance across the country to attend a very elaborate event, with a perception that the larger the funeral, the greater the respect shown. The showing of such respect and the holding of extravagant services is seen as an illustration of the importance of the place that is held by the dead in the lives of the living.

### Impact on children and young people

Children and young people grieve just as deeply as adults, but they may show it in different ways. They learn how to grieve by mirroring the responses of the adults around them and rely on adults to provide them with what they need to support them in their grief. It is normal for children and young people to react strongly to the death of someone close, even if the resulting feelings and behaviours look and feel far from normal. Children in Gypsy and Traveller communities are no different in this way. However, differences in cultural expectations in these communities highlight a general reluctance in some Gypsy and Traveller families to discuss bereavement and loss following a death. This may be a protective strategy and designed to shield family members from upset, but can inadvertently lead to difficulties in managing their grief. For children, this means that they may not have the emotional support they need to understand their feelings and to make sense of what has happened. At Child Bereavement UK, the children we support tell us that they need honest, simple explanations of how we might feel and what we do when someone dies.

Children in Gypsy Traveller communities often take part in nearly all aspects of adult life, including all the rituals surrounding a death and the funeral. However, the protective nature of Traveller families may mean that the death of someone important to a child is often not openly talked about. Children often tell us that being involved and being given choices about participation in such rituals can be very helpful. We also know that in families where there is more open communication about the death and about the person who has died, the child's longer-term adjustment is generally better. Whilst talking about someone who has died can be difficult for these families, it is important for children to feel able to ask questions and understand what has happened. Children and young people may benefit from the opportunity to remember and share thoughts and feelings about the person who has died. However, such open discussion can often present a challenge to Gypsy and Traveller families. This

can make it harder for these families to access external support agencies such as mental health or bereavement services.

A book based on a series of workshops held with grieving Gypsy Traveller children has been written by Carol Rogers (see below). It has been designed to be read by an adult and child together and can act as a gentle way in to start conversations about the person who has died. The book is illustrated using photographs of members of Gypsy Traveller communities. The aim is that by reading the book together, the adults will find it easier to talk to children about something that their culture may not encourage, and that the children will receive the emotional support they need from close family members.

### Supporting Gypsy and Traveller Families

As with any family, when supporting Gypsy and Traveller families it is important to keep in mind the cultural attitudes and behaviours relating to death. Each family experiencing a death will have their own way of managing the bereavement and each individual within the family may differ greatly in terms of the kind of support they need.

### Further resources

See [Books and resources](#) (included in this guide).

# A) Books and resources - Early years

Children under the age of five may not fully understand the concept of death but will be very aware that something important has happened. Books can be very helpful to share with a bereaved child to help develop their understanding of death. They need simple and honest explanations, possibly repeated many times.

For a list of books which may be useful to share with a bereaved child see Resources for children and young people on our website: [childbereavementuk.org/resources-for-children-and-young-people](http://childbereavementuk.org/resources-for-children-and-young-people)

The books below are more suited for general use within your setting. These books can help to introduce topics such as death, grief and the life cycle to young children.

## **I Miss You: A First Look at Death**

**Pat Thomas**

This helps children understand that death is a natural complement to life, and that grief and a sense of loss are normal feelings for them to have. It briefly covers a range of issues such as why people die, how you may feel when someone dies and what happens afterwards. A good one to use to introduce the subject.

## **Goodbye Mousie**

**Robie H Harris**

The story of a young boy dealing with the death of his pet mouse is handled with the sure touch of an author familiar with children's tender emotions. Simply told by the boy, in a matter-of-fact tone with a dash of humour, he recounts his reactions to the death of his pet mouse.

## **When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death**

**Laurence Krasny Brown and Marc Brown**

The authors explain in simple language the feelings people may have regarding the death of a loved one and the ways to honour the memory of someone who has died.

## **Dogger**

**Shirley Hughes**

A sensitively written story, with which adults and children will identify. It is about a little boy who loses his favourite toy 'Dogger' and describes his feelings and responses as a result. Useful as a gentle introduction to the subject of loss.

## **What does dead mean?**

**Caroline Jay and Jenni Thomas**

A beautifully illustrated book that guides children gently through 17 of the 'big' questions they often ask about death and dying. Suitable for children aged 4+, this is an ideal book for parents and carers to read with their children, as well as teachers, therapists and counsellors working with young children.

## **Always and Forever**

**Alan Durant**

When Fox dies the rest of his 'family' are absolutely distraught. How will Mole, Otter and Hare go on without their beloved friend? But, months later, Squirrel reminds them all of how funny Fox used to be and they realise that Fox is still there in their hearts and memories.

## **Rabbityness**

**Jo Empson**

This is the story of a very special rabbit. He enjoys doing rabbit things, but he also loves – well, un-rabbity things. His boundless creative talent is a source of joy and inspiration to the other rabbits. When Rabbit suddenly disappears, no one knows where he has gone. His friends are desolate. But, as it turns out, Rabbit left behind some very special gifts for them, to help them discover their own un-rabbity talents!

## **No Matter What**

**Debi Gliori**

'I'll always love you no matter what...' 'No matter what?' Small asks. But what if he turns into a bug, or a crocodile, or even a grizzly bear? Small has all sorts of questions about love, and his mummy must reassure him that her love will never, ever run out - no matter what.

## **Waterbugs and Dragonflies**

**D Stickney**

Written from a Christian perspective, this book can be used to help explain the concept of death to young children. The story illustrates that death is inevitable, irreversible but natural. It is presented as something sometimes difficult to understand but a happy experience for the person who has died.

## **Lifetimes**

**Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen**

A beautifully illustrated book which aims to help explore the subjects of life and death.

## B) Books and resources - Primary

Books can help pupils experiencing loss to make some sense of confusing and sad emotions. Young people need simple and honest explanations of death, possibly repeated many times. They can also help children to feel less alone.

For a list of books which may be useful to share with a pupil who has been bereaved see Resources for children and young people on our website: [childbereavementuk.org/resources-for-children-and-young-people](http://childbereavementuk.org/resources-for-children-and-young-people)

The books below are more suited for general use within the classroom. These books can help to introduce topics such as death, grief and the life cycle to pupils in primary school.

### **Badger's Parting Gifts**

**Susan Varley**

(also available in Urdu and Arabic)

When old Badger dies, his friends think they will be sad forever. Gradually they are able to remember Badger with joy and to treasure the gifts he left behind. Sensitively written, this book will help children identify and begin to understand feelings associated with the death of someone they love.

### **The Lonely Tree**

**Nicholas Halliday**

A story based on the life cycle in the natural world. The young tree is sad when his old friend the Oak dies but Spring brings joy to the little tree.

### **Waterbugs and Dragonflies**

**D Stickney**

Written from a Christian perspective, this book can be used to help explain the concept of death to young children. The story illustrates that death is inevitable, irreversible but natural. It is presented as something sometimes difficult to understand but a happy experience for the person who has died.

### **Lifetimes**

**Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen**

A beautifully illustrated book which aims to help explore the subjects of life and death.

### **When Dinosaurs Die:**

#### **A Guide to Understanding Death**

**Laurence Krasny Brown and Marc Brown**

The authors explain in simple language the feelings people may have regarding the death of a loved one and the ways to honour the memory of someone who has died.

### **What does dead mean?**

**Caroline Jay and Jenni Thomas**

A beautifully illustrated book that guides children gently through 17 of the 'big' questions they often ask about death and dying. Suitable for children aged 4+, this is an ideal book for parents and carers to read with their children, as well as teachers, therapists and counsellors working with young children.

## The Memory Tree

**Britta Teckentrup**

Fox has lived a long and happy life in the forest. One day, he lies down in his favourite clearing, takes a deep breath, and falls asleep for ever. Before long, Fox's friends begin to gather in the clearing. One by one, they tell stories of the special moments that they shared with Fox. And, as they share their memories, a tree begins to grow, becoming bigger and stronger, sheltering and protecting all the animals in the forest, just as Fox did when he was alive. This gentle and comforting tale celebrates life and the memories that are left behind when a loved one dies.

## Always and Forever

**Alan Durant**

When Fox dies the rest of his 'family' are absolutely distraught. How will Mole, Otter and Hare go on without their beloved friend? But, months later, Squirrel reminds them all of how funny Fox used to be and they realise that Fox is still there in their hearts and memories.

## Rabbityness

**Jo Empson**

This is the story of a very special rabbit. He enjoys doing rabbit things, but he also loves – well, un-rabbit things. His boundless creative talent is a source of joy and inspiration to the other rabbits. When Rabbit suddenly disappears, no one knows where he has gone. His friends are desolate. But, as it turns out, Rabbit left behind some very special gifts for them, to help them discover their own un-rabbit talents!

## No Matter What

**Debi Gliori**

'I'll always love you no matter what...' 'No matter what?' Small asks. But what if he turns into a bug, or a crocodile, or even a grizzly bear? Small has all sorts of questions about love, and his mummy must reassure him that her love will never, ever run out - no matter what.

## The Copper Tree

**Hilary Robinson and Mandy Stanley**

'When Olivia's teacher dies, the children at her school are encouraged to think of everything that reminds them of her. Sprinkled with light-hearted moments, The Copper Tree approaches grief with sensitivity and sound judgement. A delightful and touching short story.

## The Invisible String

**Patrice Karst**

This heart-warming story delivers a very simple approach to overcoming the fear of loneliness or separation from parents. Specifically written to address children's fear of being apart from the ones they love, The Invisible String delivers a particularly compelling message in today's uncertain times, that although we may be separated from the ones we care for, whether through anger, or distance or even death, love is the unending connection that binds us all, and by extension, ultimately binds every person on the planet to everyone else.

## The Tenth Good Thing About Barney

**Judith Viorst**

A short story that by dealing with the death of a pet, takes a child through the rituals associated with any death, addressing the feelings children have when faced with loss. This book does not have religious overtones, so it can be used by pupils with different sets of beliefs.

## Sad Book

**Michael Rosen**

Michael Rosen talks of his sadness after the death of his son. A personal story that speaks to adults and children. Minimal text with moving illustrations.

## What on Earth do You do When Someone Dies?

**Trevor Romain**

Written by Trevor Romain after his father died, this book suggests ways of coping with grief and offers answers to questions such as 'Why do people have to die?' and 'How can I say goodbye?' Friendly, accessible text and illustrations aimed at ages 8-14.

## The Huge Bag of Worries

**Virginia Ironside**

Bereaved children and those in families where someone is expected to die often have worries that they feel unable to share. This reassuring story will encourage them to voice their fears and concerns.

## C) Books and resources - Secondary

The suggested titles below deal with the subjects of death and grief. Young people can find reading about others in similar situations reassuring and sometimes easier to do than talking about their loss. The books, films and resources below will help with this.

### **Sad Book**

**Michael Rosen**

Michael Rosen talks of his sadness after the death of his son. A personal story that speaks to adults and children. Minimal text with moving illustrations.

### **Sometimes Life Sucks:**

#### **When someone you love dies**

**Molly Carlile**

Teenagers can experience death in all kinds of ways. Full of tips and stories, this will help them to make some sense of their shock and grief.

### **The Grieving Teen**

**Helen Fitzgerald**

Written about, but also for teenagers, this book covers the entire range of situations in which grieving teens and their friends may find themselves. It offers explanations and guidance in a very accessible format.

### **What on Earth do You do When Someone Dies?**

**Trevor Romain**

Written by Trevor Romain after his father died, this book suggests ways of coping with grief and offers answers to questions such as 'Why do people have to die?' and 'How can I say goodbye?' Friendly, accessible text and illustrations aimed at ages 8-14.

### **The Thing About Jellyfish (Book and film)**

**Ali Benjamin**

After her best friend dies in a drowning accident, Suzy is convinced that the true cause of the tragedy was a rare jellyfish sting.

### **The Lie Tree**

**Frances Hardinge**

Faith's father has been found dead under mysterious circumstances and, as she is searching through his belongings for clues, she discovers a strange tree. The tree only grows healthily and bears fruit if you whisper a lie to it. The fruit of the tree, when eaten, will deliver a hidden truth to the person who consumes it.

### **My Sister Lives On The Mantelpiece**

**Annabel Pitcher**

To ten-year-old Jamie, his family has fallen apart because of the loss of someone he barely remembers: his sister Rose, who died five years ago in a terrorist bombing.

### **The Savage**

**David Almond**

Blue's father has died suddenly, and finding that the school's counselling increases his anguish, he turns to writing a story instead.

## **Out Of The Blue**

### **Winston's Wish**

Written and designed specifically for teenagers with aim of supporting them through their bereavement using a range of activities.

Narrated throughout by teenagers words and stories, the book talks openly about the real feelings they may struggle with when someone important in their life dies. The activities in the book allow those feelings to be worked through and safely explored.

## **When Your Mum or Dad has Cancer**

### **Ann Coultrick**

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

This is a useful booklet for younger children (7+) to teenage children. It has an introduction for parents but then explains cancer in a simple way children can relate to. It also covers many questions children ask, such as whether the person will die and what exactly happens, and tackles the answers with insight and honesty.

## **Us Minus Mum**

### **Heather Butler**

The boys think Mum is invincible. But they're wrong. Because Mum is ill. Really ill. It's up to George and Theo to keep Mum (and everyone else) smiling – which will almost probably definitely involve willies, shepherd's pie and Goffo's victory at the pet talent show. This book is both funny and sad.

## **The Fault In Our Stars (Book and film)**

### **John Green**

The story follows the main character, Hazel Grace Lancaster, as she battles cancer. Not only is Hazel trying to live the normal life of a 16-year-old girl, but she is also struggling with what it will be like for her parents after she dies.

## **Ways to Live Forever**

### **Sally Nicholls**

A boy's last months with leukemia. 1. My name is Sam. 2. I am eleven years old. 3. I collect stories and fantastic facts. 4. I have leukemia.

## **A Monster Calls (Book and film)**

### **Patrick Ness and Siobhan Dowd**

Connor's mum has cancer and life is irrevocably, disturbingly changing. First there is the nightmare, filled with screaming and falling; then there is school, where people avoid him (not knowing what to say), or persecute him.

## **If Only**

### **Carole Geithner**

Corinna's world is crushed after her mother dies of cancer. How does she get through the funeral, trays of ziti, a father who can't communicate, the first day of school, Mother's Day, people who don't know what to say, and the entire eighth-grade year?

## **LAD – A Yorkshire Story**

### **A film by Dan Hartley**

When 13-year-old Tom Proctor's dad dies his world falls apart; his brother joins the army, his mum is threatened with eviction and Tom gets into trouble with the police. Tom comes to terms with the loss of his dad through the friendship he forms with national park warden, Al Thorpe. This enchanting coming-of-age story is set in the stunning Yorkshire Dales.

## **From a Clear Blue Sky**

### **Timothy Knatchbull**

A powerful survivor's account of the IRA bomb that killed the author's 14-year-old twin brother, his grandparents and a family friend, published on the 30th anniversary of the atrocity.

## Leaflets

### **A Teenage guide to coping when someone dies** Child Bereavement UK

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

This pocket-sized leaflet contains practical advice and guidance for a young person managing confusing emotions when someone important in their life dies.

## Websites

### **Child Bereavement UK** [childbereavementuk.org/young-people](http://childbereavementuk.org/young-people)

A dedicated area for young people, created by bereaved young people.

### **Cruse** [hopeagain.org.uk](http://hopeagain.org.uk)

A website run by CRUSE Bereavement Care.

### **Grief Encounter** [griefencounter.org.uk](http://griefencounter.org.uk)

Has a dedicated section for young people with videos.

### **Winston's Wish** [winstonswish.org.uk](http://winstonswish.org.uk)

Videos, guidance and case studies.

## Free app

### **Grief: Support for Young People** Child Bereavement UK

Available from the Apple App Store and Google Play.

Designed by bereaved young people for young people. Can also be used by friends, parents and professionals supporting bereaved people.



## D) Books and resources - Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND)

Bereavement affects everyone and children and young people with special educational needs and disability are no different. Books can be a useful tool to aid communication but helping these children may present issues that mainstream literature does not address. The following are suggestions that may assist children and young people with learning difficulties to understand difficult concepts such as the permanence of death, to have some knowledge of bereavement rituals, and to help them to make sense of confusing feelings.

### **When Somebody Dies**

**Hollins, Dowling and Blackman**

Using pictures, the book tells the story of Mary who is very upset when someone she loves dies. She is encouraged by a friend to go to regular bereavement counselling sessions, which help her to feel less sad. John also loses someone he is close to. He is given comfort and companionship by friends and is shown learning to cope better with life.

### **Helping Children Think About Bereavement**

**Heather Butler**

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

This fun story and related short activities are presented as four lesson plans including one for pupils with learning difficulties. It helps pupils develop resilience and coping skills should someone they know die.

### **When Dad Died and When Mum Died**

**Hollins and Sireling**

Both books take an honest and straightforward approach to death and grief in the family. The pictures tell of the death of a parent in a simple but moving way. When Dad Died illustrates a cremation, When Mum Died shows a burial. The approach is non-denominational.

### **How to break bad news to people with intellectual disabilities**

**Irene Tuffrey Wijne**

A guide for professionals and carers.

### **How People with Autism Grieve, and How to Help: An Insider Handbook**

**Deborah Lipsky**

Explores how people with autism feel and express the loss of a loved one and how they process and come to terms with their feelings of grief. Includes clear instructions on how best to support someone with autism through the grieving process, how to prepare them for bad news and how to involve them in the funeral or wake.

### **All About Me**

**Barnardos**

A colourful board game which can be used for bereavement, divorce or family breakdown. It is designed to be used by someone who already has a trusting relationship with the child. The child and adult use cards which contain statements designed to provoke conversation. The game can easily be adapted as some of the statement cards are blank for you to create your own.

## When Someone Very Special Dies

**Marge Heegard**

A simple workbook that could be adapted for use with SEND children and young people. With adult help, users are invited to illustrate and personalise their loss. It also encourages the identification of support systems and personal strengths.

## Let's Talk About DEATH Down's Syndrome Scotland

A booklet with photos about death and funerals for young people and adults who have a learning disability. Includes text on why people die, what happens at funerals and possible grief reactions.

## Brief Interventions with Bereaved Children Barbara Monroe and Frances Kraus

A useful resource with lots of practical ideas. Chapter 9 is titled Loss for Children with Learning Disability. This explains how children with learning disabilities understand death and how they are likely to communicate feelings with behaviour rather than words.

## Training for schools Seesaw

PDF supporting bereaved children who have special needs.

## What happens when someone dies? Jenny Armstrong

**Seesaw**

Photographs give clear simple explanations of what happens at funerals and the people who take part.

## Autism and Loss

Available from Jessica Kingsley

People with autism often experience difficulty in understanding and expressing their emotions and react to losses in different ways or in ways that carers do not understand. In order to provide effective support, carers need to have the understanding, the skills and appropriate resources to work through these emotional reactions with them. Autism and Loss is a complete resource that covers a variety of kinds of loss, including bereavement, loss of friends or staff, loss of home or possessions and loss of health. It includes a wealth of fact sheets and practical tools that provide formal and informal carers with authoritative, tried and tested guidance.

## Finding your own way to grieve

**Karle Helbert**

Available from Jessica Kingsley

Creative workbook for kids and teens on the autistic spectrum.

## Bereavement and Loss: Supporting bereaved people with PMLD\* and their parents Pamis - promoting a more inclusive society

\* Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities

A learning resource pack with helpful guidance and practical ideas. Includes a DVD with real life stories.

## Websites

### National Autistic Society [autism.org.uk](http://autism.org.uk)

Available from the National Autistic Society, a helpful information sheet on death, bereavement and Autistic Spectrum Disorders, with case studies and ideas about ways to support those on the autistic spectrum, with a specific section on children.

### Child Bereavement UK [childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)

The following Information Sheets on Child Bereavement UK's website can be downloaded for free:

- *Supporting bereaved children and young people with Autistic Spectrum Difficulties*
- *Supporting bereaved children and young people with Additional Needs through grief*
- *Viewing a body with a child and explaining funerals, burials and cremation to children*

Further information on SEND can be found on our online resource for schools called *Supporting a bereaved pupil* - see our website for more information: [childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)

## E) Resources for staff

### Two free online learning modules for schools:

- Supporting a bereaved pupil
- Managing a sudden death in the school community

Created in collaboration with London Grid for Learning to offer information and guidance for education professionals.

[childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)

### Elephant's Tea Party

An activity workbook for schools from Child Bereavement UK

[childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)

An activity workbook with lesson plans to help pupils to develop coping skills for loss and bereavement.

### Activities for working with bereaved young people

By Mark Denney in partnership with Child Bereavement UK

[childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)

Activities developed and used while working with young people in UK bereavement support services. Includes activity session plans with photocopyable resources.

### Professional training and conferences

Child Bereavement UK

We provide training to professionals in health and social care, education, and the voluntary and corporate sectors, equipping them to provide the best possible care to bereaved families.

We offer workshops, conferences, supervision and reflective practice, bespoke packages and more.

Visit the [Training](#) section of our website for more information: [childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org) or email: [training@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:training@childbereavementuk.org)



### Child Bereavement UK's website

[childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)

Our website has a dedicated section for the education sector which provides information, guidance and resources for primary, secondary and further/higher education.

It also holds Information Sheets which are free to download and a series of short guidance films which cover a range of topics including a number of films relevant to those working in the education sector.

### Conversations About Loss and Change

- a card deck from Fink Cards

Child Bereavement UK

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

A resource developed by Child Bereavement UK with input from bereaved children and young people designed to help teachers to encourage pupils to talk more openly about bereavement, explore feelings and better understand and empathise with others.

## **Supporting Young People Coping with Grief, Loss and Death**

**Weymont and Rae**

A teaching programme for students aged 11-18. The aim is to enable them to understand about loss, grief and death but also to promote emotional health and literacy. Includes information on loss and grief and facilitator notes and activities.

## **Childhood Bereavement: Developing the curriculum and pastoral support**

**Job and Francis**

Using case studies and drawing on best practice, this very useful resource aims to help those working in schools address death, dying and bereavement from both a pastoral care and educational perspective. It provides lesson ideas on how to achieve this through the curriculum. Available

- The National Children's Bureau: **020 7843 6000**

## **The Little Book of Bereavement for Schools**

**Ian Gilbert**

A short, personal account of the way various educational establishments tried and succeeded, tried and failed, and sometimes didn't try at all after the death of his children's (aged 9, 13, and 18) mother. It opens with a 15 point, straightforward guide which would be a helpful starting point for any school wondering what to do after the death of a parent.

## **Then, Now and Always**

**J Stokes**

Available from Winston's Wish

More suitable for those with pastoral care responsibilities, this guide for supporting children as they journey through grief includes a section on enabling a school community to respond positively to a death.

## **Grief in Children: A Handbook for Adults**

**A Dyregrov**

Available from Jessica Kingsley

A short book which looks at children's understanding of death and outlines practical ways in which adults can respond. It deals with both physical and psychological responses.

## **Remembering**

**Dianne Leutner**

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

A workbook for children when someone important to them has died. Sensitively illustrated, it will help a child to talk about their memories and make some sense of how they are feeling.

## **Helping Children Think About Bereavement**

**Heather Butler**

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

This fun story and related short activities are presented as four lesson plans, including one for pupils with learning difficulties. It helps pupils develop resilience and coping skills should someone they know die.

## **Grief in School Communities:**

### **Effective support strategies**

**Louise Rowling**

This book is an essential guide for all members of a school community and other professionals who need to know how to be supportive in times of crisis; it takes a different approach and uses the school community as the organising supportive framework.

## **Finding a way through when someone close has died**

**Mood and Whittaker**

Available Jessica Kingsley

A workbook by young people who have experienced the death of someone close. They offer advice based on their own experiences. The activities encourage young people to express their feelings and responses.

## **When Someone Very Special Dies**

**Marge Heegard**

A simple workbook that could be adapted for use with SEND children and young people. With adult help, users are invited to illustrate and personalise their loss. It also encourages the identification of support systems and personal strengths.

## **Talk to My Gran About Dying – My School Project**

**Gina Levete**

Available Jessica Kingsley

Teacher resource written in an illustrated diary format. An excellent way to talk to children about dying. Questions to the reader throughout help discussions and allow the child to safely explore their thoughts and feelings. Ideal resource for teachers and parents to read with children aged 8-11.

## **We will meet again in Jannah**

**Zamir Hussain**

This book helps children make sense of their experience following the death of a sibling and can be a valuable resource for schools in the field of bereavement care for pupils. Lesson plans can be customised according to the topic and activities adapted around the needs and backgrounds of the children. As the children work through the book they will learn about the Islamic perspective on death.

## **Talking about death and bereavement in school**

**Ann Chadwick**

Available Jessica Kingsley

This short, easy-to-read book offers simple but important advice and guidance for school teachers and staff on what to do when a child is grieving. It includes advice on explaining death to children, insights into how children may be feeling, and ways in which they can be supported. For ages 4-11.

## **Good grief: Exploring feelings, loss and death with under 11s**

Available Jessica Kingsley

With twenty educators contributing ideas piloted with children of different abilities and backgrounds in their care, 'Good Grief' has been designed to explore and demystify the experience of loss - in different contexts - within the framework of the National Curriculum.

## **As big as it gets**

**Winston's Wish**

Supporting a child when a parent is seriously ill. This booklet provides a range of ideas for parents and carers so that they feel able to involve their children in what is happening. The book also includes some suggestions about what parents might say to children and how to offer support.

## **The Invisible String**

**Patrice Karst**

This heart-warming story delivers a very simple approach to overcoming the fear of loneliness or separation from parents. Specifically written to address children's fear of being apart from the ones they love, The Invisible String delivers a particularly compelling message in today's uncertain times, that although we may be separated from the ones we care for, whether through anger, distance or even death, love is the unending connection that binds us all, and by extension, ultimately binds every person on the planet to everyone else.

## **A Teacher's Handbook of Death**

**Jackson and Colwell**

Available Jessica Kingsley

Offering ideas for including death and bereavement in the curriculum, it is factual and informative around rituals and processes associated with death and dying.

## **The Forgotten Mourners: Guidelines for working with bereaved children**

**Susan C Smith**

Available Jessica Kingsley

This book raises awareness of sensitive issues for bereaved children, highlighting their needs and their emotional and behavioural responses when a bereavement occurs.

## **Grief Encounter Workbook**

**Shelley Gilbert**

A workbook to encourage conversations with children, young people and adults about death. Grieving is hard work, especially for parents and children in deep grief. This book is full of creative activities and offers comfort to mourners old and young.

## **Supporting Children through Grief and Loss: Practical ideas and creative activities for schools and carers**

**Anna Jacobs**

A wealth of advice and helpful suggestions for those helping children through bereavement and loss. The book gives an overview of different behaviours you may encounter in school and how to respond, as well as discussing questions children may ask and how to answer them.

## F) Books and resources for parents and carers

### **Child Bereavement UK** [childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)

Visit our website for downloadable information sheets and short guidance films on the following subjects:

- *Children's understanding of death at different ages*
- *Telling a child that someone has died*
- *Supporting children after a frightening event*
- *How children and young people grieve*
- *What helps grieving children and young people?*
- *Building resilience in bereaved children*

### **A Child's Grief** **Winston's Wish**

Useful and informative short book for any adult who is supporting a bereaved child. It covers a variety of issues and offers practical suggestions and activities.

### **When Your Partner Dies: supporting your children** **Child Bereavement UK**

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

A booklet of information and guidance for surviving parents and carers who are trying to manage their own grief and that of their children.

### **Death and Bereavement Across Cultures** **Murray, Laungani, Pittu and Young**

Covers rites, rituals and mourning traditions for adults and children from the major religious and secular belief systems, their own grief and that of their children.

## G) Suicide

### **Red Chocolate Elephants**

Book with DVD from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

The pages include drawings, memories and words of children bereaved by suicide. A valuable tool for supporting children in schools and other settings.

### **Beyond the Rough Rock Winston's Wish**

A sensitively written booklet which offers practical information and advice, and looks at ways in which death through suicide can be explained to children and young people.

### **SOBS (Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide) uksobs.org.uk**

A self-help organisation which runs a number of support groups around the UK.

Helpline: **0300 1115 065** Open 9.00am-9.00pm every day.

### **Papyrus – Prevention of Young Suicide papyrus-uk.org**

A comprehensive website with information for teachers and parents with guidance for those worried about a suicidal friend and support for those contemplating suicide. Various resources and leaflets for schools.

Helpline: **0800 068 4141** for practical advice on suicide prevention.

## H) Murder and manslaughter

### **For young people film clips** [childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)

See short films and film clips in the For young people section on Child Bereavement UK's website made by bereaved young people, including messages from young people bereaved by murder or manslaughter.

### **SAMM (Support after Murder and Manslaughter)** [www.samm.org.uk](http://www.samm.org.uk)

SAMM is a national UK charity supporting families bereaved by murder and manslaughter. **0845 872 3440**

### **Hope Beyond the Headlines: Supporting a child bereaved through murder or manslaughter** [www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)

Offers support, guidance, and words to use when explaining to a child what has happened.

### **The Overlooked Casualties of Conflict** [www.basw.co.uk](http://www.basw.co.uk)

A report commissioned by The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund - including a section on dealing with a parent's death.

# I) Helpful organisations

## Child Bereavement UK

Helpline **0800 02 888 40**

**Live Chat** via the website  
[childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)

The Helpline is for families and professionals to receive support, information, guidance, and signposting to other helpful organisations. The website also has a dedicated area for the education sector under the *Support and information* tab, and a link to Child Bereavement UK's free resources, *Supporting a bereaved pupil* and *Managing a sudden death*.

## Childhood Bereavement Network

**0207 843 6309**

[www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk)

Website has a link to a directory of childhood bereavement organisations across the UK which provide open access support services such as bereavement groups. It is also a source of data, research and information.

## Winston's Wish

Helpline **08452 030405**

[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)

Offers a range of resources and publications including activity sheets, books and leaflets. The interactive website has a section for young people where they can email questions to bereavement support staff; an area that answers frequently asked medical questions on topics such as 'What is a heart attack?'; and a section for schools.

## CRUSE Bereavement Care

[www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk)

Offers various resources including books for children and adults, leaflets and DVDs. Nearly 200 local branches provide one to one bereavement support and social groups. Some have specially trained children's counsellors.

## Hope Again

[www.hopeagain.org.uk](http://www.hopeagain.org.uk)

Hope Again is the youth website of Cruse Bereavement Care. It is a safe place where young people who are facing grief can share their stories with others. Here you will find information about their services, a listening ear from other young people, and advice for anyone dealing with a bereavement. Teaching staff should view it before recommending to a child.

## The Compassionate Friends

Helpline **0345 123 2304**

[www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk)

A charitable organisation of bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents dedicated to the support and care of other bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents when a child dies. Offers support by befriending initiatives, one-to-one and group support, publications and a programme of informal weekend retreats and annual weekend gatherings.

## SAMM (Support After Murder & Manslaughter)

Helplines **0845 872 3440 / 0121 451 1618**

[www.samm.org.uk](http://www.samm.org.uk)

SAMM is a national charity supporting families bereaved by murder and manslaughter. They also provide advice and training to many agencies on issues relevant to those who have been traumatically bereaved.

## WAY Widowed and Young

[www.widowedandyoung.org.uk](http://www.widowedandyoung.org.uk)

WAY is the only national charity in the UK for men and women aged 50 or under when their partner dies. It's a peer-to-peer support group run by a network of volunteers who have been bereaved at a young age themselves, so they understand what other members are going through.

## Brake Care

Victim Helpline **0808 8000 401** (10 am - 4 pm, Mon-Fri)  
[www.brake.org.uk](http://www.brake.org.uk)

A road safety charity that offers emotional support and practical information to anyone bereaved, or seriously injured, in a road crash. This includes advice and information for families, friends, children and young people.

## Sudden

[www.suddendeath.org](http://www.suddendeath.org)

For people bereaved by sudden death whether it's through a road crash, suicide, disaster, war, accident, or undiagnosed medical reasons, who are often left isolated, bewildered and traumatised and need specialist support to help them cope and move forward with their lives. Sudden is a global charitable initiative by Brake (above) aiming to help ease the suffering of people bereaved by any kind of sudden death.

## Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide SOBS

Helpline **0300 111 5065**  
[www.uk-sobs.org.uk](http://www.uk-sobs.org.uk)

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide exists to meet the needs and break the isolation experienced by those bereaved by suicide. This self-help organisation aims to provide a safe, confidential environment in which bereaved people can share their experiences and feelings, gaining support from each other. It offers a unique and distinct service for bereaved adults across the UK, run by the bereaved, for the bereaved.

## Papyrus

Helpline **0800 068 4141**  
[www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)

National charity dedicated to the prevention of young suicide. It delivers awareness and prevention training, provides confidential support and suicide intervention through its helpline, by campaigning, through influencing national policy, and empowering young people to lead suicide prevention activities in their own communities.

## SANDS – Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Charity

**020 7436 5881**

[www.uk-sands.org](http://www.uk-sands.org)

Sands supports anyone who has been affected by the death of a baby before, during or shortly after birth. It offers emotional support and information for parents, grandparents, siblings, children, families and friends, health professionals and others.

## Grandparentsplus

[www.grandparentsplus.org.uk](http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk)  
**0300 123 7015**

National charity which champions the vital role of grandparents and the wider family in children's lives – especially when they take on the caring role in difficult family circumstances and when they have lost contact with children.

## BACP (British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy)

[www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk)

BACP is a professional body for counselling and psychotherapy. The website has a directory of counsellors and therapists, enabling a geographic search for who is available within a given area. It lists charges and issues in which each counsellor specialises.

# Appendix i) Developing a school bereavement policy or charter

A school with a bereavement policy is prepared and has plans in place to deal with death, grief and bereavement. This applies to supporting a bereaved pupil or member of staff as well as reacting to a critical incident or tragedy, such as the death of someone within the school community. A bereavement policy should be a useful working document which will enable a school to:

- Consider the impact of a death within the school;
- Use expertise and share responsibilities;
- Make appropriate plans, produce guidelines and draft letters;
- Collect resources for support;
- Prepare staff and organise any training; and
- Create a bereavement-aware culture within the community.

Every school is different, so it is important that the bereavement policy is appropriate for the size, structure and organisation of the school as well as reflecting the school's culture and ethos.

The procedure following the death of a pupil or member of staff will be different to managing and supporting individual bereaved pupils and the policy should reflect this.

The following is a suggested framework for structuring a school bereavement policy.

## Bereavement Policy - a suggested framework

- Aims and Ethos
- Rationale
- Objectives

### Section 1 - The death of a pupil or member of staff

- Roles and responsibilities
- Procedures
- The first few days
- The funeral
- Support for pupils
- Support for staff
- Remembering

### Section 2 - Supporting a bereaved pupil

- Returning to school after a bereavement
- Longer term support
- Death, grief and bereavement in the curriculum
- Support for staff

The following tables provide key questions and points for your school to address to help shape your bereavement policy.

Section of policy	Questions/Points to address	Points to consider/useful information
<b>Aims and Ethos</b>	How will this bereavement policy fit with your school ethos?	<p>Are there any links to other relevant policies? (<i>for example, critical incident policy</i>)</p> <p>Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support that some pupils, or members of staff, require. Where the impact of the grief is more complex, referral to more specialist support may need to be considered.</p> <p>Additional information and resources can be found at:  <a href="http://childbereavementuk.org">childbereavementuk.org</a></p>
<b>Rationale</b>	Why have a bereavement policy for your school?	<p>1 in 29 pupils aged five to sixteen-years olds has been bereaved of a parent or sibling – that is one in every class. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, relative, friend or other significant person.</p> <p>Within a school community there will almost always be some pupils who are struggling with bereavement – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil.</p>
<b>Objectives</b>	How will your policy help to create a bereavement aware culture?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A framework for all staff to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with the bereavement.</li> <li>• To support pupils and/or members of staff before (where applicable), during and after bereavement.</li> <li>• To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between members of staff, pupils, the family/carers and the community.</li> <li>• To identify key staff within school and the governing body/Local Authority/academy trust.</li> <li>• To have clear expectations about the way school will respond to a death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.</li> </ul>

## Section 1 : The death of a pupil or member of staff

See also our Managing a Sudden Death resource: [childbereavementuk.org/managing-a-sudden-death](http://childbereavementuk.org/managing-a-sudden-death)

Section of policy	Questions/Points to address	Points to consider/useful information
Roles and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who will take overall charge?</li> <li>Who will be responsible for communicating with the family or families?</li> <li>How will the news be shared with the school community?</li> <li>How will the news be shared with the pupils? Classes, tutor groups, year groups, whole school assembly</li> <li>If the press is involved, who will liaise with journalists?</li> <li>What support is available for staff/pupils?</li> </ul>	<p>Consider the size, structure and organisation of your school. If the head will take charge, how might this impact the day to day running of the school? Who will deputise if the head is not available?</p> <p>In the case of sudden or traumatic death of a pupil, the school may be called upon to be a part of a multi-agency review. If this were to be the case, who would you appoint as representative?</p> <p>The best person to liaise with the family may depend on the specific situation, relationship with the pupil/family and experience of the member of staff. The policy can reflect this and cite Headteacher/Deputy/Class Teacher/SENCO/Head of Year/Pastoral Support depending on circumstances.</p> <p>The indiscriminate spread of news via social media may mean that some members of the school community hear the news before others. How will your school let members of staff know about the death? What method of communication would be most appropriate for staff in your school? Telephone 'pyramid' (out of hours), staff meeting, text, email, school social media. Consider the impact of hearing the news via text message/social media/email.</p> <p>When delivering news to pupils, some schools prefer to do this in smaller groups with a familiar adult, while others choose a whole school assembly. If a pupil has died, it may be more appropriate to share the news with their class/year group first.</p> <p>Can school provide a safe place and time to grieve? What pastoral support is available? Can you include details of external bereavement support organisations? Support and information can be found on the Child Bereavement UK website <a href="http://childbereavementuk.org">childbereavementuk.org</a></p> <p>If a pupil dies by suicide, Samaritans provide a Step-by-Step programme to support schools. They can be contacted on: <b>0808 168 2528</b></p>
Procedures	<p>Create a school procedure which will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify information and the wishes of family/families.</li> <li>Share the news with staff and pupils.</li> <li>Prepare a script.</li> <li>Inform parents/carers.</li> </ul>	<p>Some families may want to share information with the school community while others may not. A simple confirmation of the death may be required until more details are available, and/or the family consulted. The school can help to prevent speculation and rumours, as well as be a source of support for the family and the school community.</p> <p>It helps to feel prepared when delivering sad news, so a script will be particularly useful. Do not be afraid or surprised to show emotion, this is a human reaction. Suggestions for writing a script:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Start by acknowledging you have some sad news to give.</li> <li>Be honest. Give the news stating simple facts, use the words dead/died.</li> <li>If known, and with the family's permission, explain briefly where and when the death occurred.</li> <li>If not known, say so, and that you will endeavour to find out. If rumours are rife, say which of these are definitely not correct, if known. Where appropriate, remind pupils of their responsibilities and the impact when posting on social media.</li> <li>Talk briefly and positively about the person who died without eulogising them.</li> <li>Mention any arrangements already in place, including for those needing support.</li> <li>Acknowledge that not everyone will be feeling sad and that is OK.</li> <li>Allow a break in the timetable for pupils to process the news and take a little time-out.</li> <li>A template letter to parents/carers is provided (in the appendices). Our website provides information for parents to help them discuss a death with their children. They may also be directed to guided support from Child Bereavement UK's Helpline on <b>0800 02 888 40</b> or <b>Live Chat</b> on the website, available 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.</li> </ul>

Section of policy	Questions/Points to address	Points to consider/useful information
<b>The first few days</b>	<p>Is it appropriate for the timetable to remain the same or will some adjustments be needed for all, or some, pupils?</p> <p>Will school provide a space for grieving pupils? Will support be available for them?</p> <p>What support will be available to staff?</p> <p>Will there be somewhere within the school grounds for pupils and staff to pay their respects/contribute to a book of condolence?</p>	<p>Although school can provide stability and normality for staff and pupils, some flexibility may be necessary.</p> <p>Bereaved young people may need time to grieve and manage overwhelming feelings, being able to leave a classroom and take time out in a safe space can be very welcome.</p> <p>The location for a temporary tribute/book of condolence needs to be safe, accessible and ideally where pupils can be supervised. Offer the family the opportunity to visit, if they wish to, or take photographs to share with them later.</p> <p>Consult with staff and pupils before removing any temporary tribute, giving notice to prepare them beforehand.</p>
<b>The funeral</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What will the arrangements be for the funeral?</li> <li>• Will school send flowers or make a collection?</li> <li>• How will pupils be supported?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rather than making assumptions, consult the family to find out whether members of staff and/or pupils are welcome to attend.</li> <li>• Can/will pupils be involved in choosing flowers or organising a collection?</li> <li>• Identify the practicalities of issues such as staff cover to allow all those wishing to attend the funeral to do so. (For some circumstances, it may be appropriate to close the school, for others, it may not).</li> <li>• Consider any arrangements for pupils attending the funeral, and how they will be supported/supervised.</li> </ul>
<b>Support for pupils</b>	<p>What support will be provided for pupils?</p>	<p>Consider whether this can be provided by school staff, external agencies or local services? Compile a list of outside agencies and people who may be able to provide support.</p>
<b>Support for staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will the wellbeing of staff be monitored when managing this stressful situation?</li> <li>• Consider training requirements for all staff.</li> <li>• How will staff welfare be reviewed?</li> </ul>	<p>Supporting bereaved pupils can be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions. At certain points in time, some members of staff may be more vulnerable due to circumstances in their own lives.</p> <p>Further information about training can be found at <a href="http://childbereavementuk.org">childbereavementuk.org</a> or contact Child Bereavement UK's Helpline on <b>0800 02 888 40</b> or <b>Live Chat</b> on the website, available 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.</p>
<b>Remembering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will the pupil/member of staff be remembered by the school?</li> <li>• Will there be a permanent memorial, assembly, event?</li> <li>• How will pupils be involved in the plans?</li> </ul>	<p>Consult the family of the person who died about any plans for a memorial, assembly or other tribute.</p> <p>A more permanent memorial (a tree, a special garden, a piece of artwork, a bench) may be appropriate, but in future the removal, relocation or replacement will need to be managed sensitively.</p>

## Section 2: Supporting a bereaved pupil

See also resource: <https://childbereavementuk.org/online-learning-for-schools>

Section of policy	Questions/Points to address	Points to consider/useful information
<p style="color: red;">Returning to school after a bereavement</p>	<p>Who will meet with the pupil and their family/carers to discuss their return to school or upon their return to school following a bereavement?</p>	<p>Most grieving pupils do not need a 'bereavement expert', they need the support of familiar and trusted adults. School, with its familiar environment and routines, can be a place of comfort for a bereaved young person.</p> <p>It can be helpful to meet with the pupil and their family/carers to establish what has happened and to discuss their return to school. This could be a familiar adult, such as the class teacher, form tutor, SENCO, a member of the pastoral support team or it could be the head of year, Deputy or Headteacher.</p> <p>The purpose of this meeting should be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledge the death.</li> <li>• Find out how the pupil would like to share their news.</li> <li>• Organise a safe space for the bereaved pupil to go if they feel overwhelmed by their grief and need a 'time-out'. How will they inform staff of this? For example, a 'time-out' card, a non-verbal signal or message. How will this be communicated to all staff?</li> <li>• Consider whether to provide 'time-out' activities – journals, art and craft, books, screen time, memory boxes etc.</li> <li>• Set guidelines for communication – with the pupil, between members of staff and between home and school.</li> <li>• Consider providing support for peers when they have a bereaved friend.</li> </ul> <p>A short film is available on the Child Bereavement UK website:  <a href="https://childbereavementuk.org/for-teachers-when-a-pupil-returns-to-school-after-being-bereaved">childbereavementuk.org/for-teachers-when-a-pupil-returns-to-school-after-being-bereaved</a></p>
<p style="color: red;">Longer term support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a method within school to record significant dates for the bereaved young person?</li> <li>• Who will communicate with the family/carers and pupil?</li> <li>• How will communication with pupils, members of staff, the family/carers and the wider community be managed and reviewed?</li> <li>• How will the progress (both in learning and emotional wellbeing) of the pupil be monitored?</li> <li>• Who will be responsible for passing on details of the bereavement at transition points?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The pupil will continue to grieve for the rest of their life and may require ongoing support. Significant dates or anniversaries, Mother's/Father's Day, etc. may be particularly difficult. Regular contact with the family/carers and reviews with the pupil will help to build up an overall picture of how the pupil is coping.</li> <li>• The grief may impact the pupil's progress. Some pupils work really hard and may put themselves under extra pressure to succeed, while others may find it difficult to focus in class and on their work. There may be changes in their behaviour, how will these be managed?</li> <li>• Bereaved young people can find change difficult, so preparing them in advance (where possible) may help them to voice their worries and ease the process.</li> <li>• Consider vulnerable pupils as they may need additional support, particularly on transition.</li> </ul>

Section of policy	Questions/Points to address	Points to consider/useful information
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Death, grief and bereavement in the curriculum</b></p>	<p>How could death, grief and bereavement be included in the curriculum?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching the topic of death, grief and bereavement will help pupils to understand feelings of grief and prepare them for the future. Informing parents and carers in advance will help to gather information about previous bereavements so that vulnerable pupils can be prepared for the lesson. Recently bereaved pupils may find it helpful if they are given the option to work elsewhere or step outside, if they think it would be too painful to attend.</li> <li>• See Elephant's Tea Party resource on Child Bereavement UK's website</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Support for staff</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will staff be trained and supported? What process is in place to identify vulnerable members of staff?</li> <li>• How will staff welfare be reviewed?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being alongside anyone experiencing a loss can be emotionally draining, and supporting a bereaved pupil particularly so. At certain points in time, some members of staff may be more vulnerable due to circumstances in their own lives. Consider how school can support these members of staff and whether there is capacity to utilise other staff members to help share the load.</li> <li>• Provide details of support agencies for staff.</li> <li>• Further information about training can be found at <a href="http://childbereavementuk.org">childbereavementuk.org</a> Or contact Child Bereavement UK's Helpline on <b>0800 02 888 40</b> or <b>Live Chat</b> on the website, available 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.</li> </ul>

## Appendix ii) Template letter to parents and carers

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear the sad news of <Name's> death. There are no words to express our sadness and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through.

As a school community, we will miss <Name> very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to <his/her> friends, classmates and teachers. <Name> was a <valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly> member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help as you plan <Name's> funeral, please let us know.

We will continue to keep in touch and will support you in any way we can.

With sympathy

# Appendix iii) Template letter to parents and carers - death of a pupil

Dear parents and carers

Your child's class teacher/form tutor/head teacher/head of year had the sad task of informing the pupils of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>.

<Name> died suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness yesterday/last week/over the weekend/during half term.

He/She was a <valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly> member of the class/school community and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some pupils may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

We have tried to answer their questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Child Bereavement UK website [childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)

Our thoughts are with <Name's> family and friends at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember <Name's> life.

Sign-off

Headteacher

## Appendix iii) Template letter to parents and carers - death of a member of staff

Dear parents/carers

I am sorry to inform you that a <well-respected/long-standing/well-loved/popular/well-known> member of our staff, <Name>, died <suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness>.

The pupils were told today by their <class teacher/tutor/head of year/in assembly> and many will be reacting to this news. When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some pupils may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

We have tried to answer their questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Child Bereavement UK website [childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)

Our thoughts are with <Name's> family at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember <Name's> life.

Sign-off

Headteacher

Freya (6) with one of our bereavement support practitioners in Buckinghamshire



Call our Helpline: **0800 02 888 40**  
[schools@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:schools@childbereavementuk.org)

**[childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)**

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