



Barrowby Church of England Primary School

Bereavement and Loss Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy seeks to provide guidance for dealing with issues surrounding bereavement, and similar loss within school.
- 1.2 No two experiences of bereavement are the same, and the guidance must always be used sensitively, and with regard to the individual concerned and their family.
- 1.3 Bereavement, and the process of grieving encompasses a wide range of emotions, possible behavioural and physical changes, and impacts on the bereaved person to some extent for the rest of their lives. A bereaved person learns to deal with the loss, they do not 'get over it'. It is important to be aware that, whilst the acute feelings of grief and loss do generally lessen to some degree over time, this is not a linear process, and there are many triggers, such as significant dates, places, activities, sounds or even smells, which can revive strong feelings.
- 1.4 In general, straightforward language is best i.e. to say that person has died, rather than 'passed over' or fallen asleep (which can be frightening to a child).
- 1.5 A Resource Box for dealing with issues of death and bereavement, including resources to use with children, resources for staff, and contact details for support organisations is kept in the Staff Room, and should always be returned there after use.
- 1.6 Staff should not feel that they have to act as bereavement counsellors. Section 6 of this policy provides details of organisations who can help to support children and families through bereavement.

2. Responding to a bereavement

- 2.1 The experiences of those who have suffered a bereavement indicate that it is of the greatest importance that the bereavement is acknowledged. A child should be made aware that he/she can talk to his/her teacher, or another adult in school about what has happened. All staff should be informed of a bereavement to a child.
- 2.2 Parents/carers may not always inform the school about a bereavement. Staff should be aware that changes in behaviour or attitude may be the result of a bereavement or loss, and may need to contact the parent/carer for information.
- 2.3 How we respond will be unique to the particular circumstances. Depending on the relationship with the person who has died, the age of the child, and the circumstances of the death, children may experience a range of emotions, from a general sadness, to complete devastation. In some cases there may be additional distress, if the death has been sudden, or where the child has witnessed the death.

- 2.4 Teachers should consider whether they need to discuss what has happened with other children in the class, particularly if the bereaved child has been away from school.
- 2.5 When school becomes aware of a bereavement to a child, a letter will be sent (by post) to the Parents/carers, assuring them of the school's support for them and their child, indicating the resources we have in school for them to access, and encouraging them to share with school any matters surrounding the bereavement which are having an impact on the child. (See Appendix A for sample letter).
- 2.6 In some cases, children may not have strong feelings of grief themselves, but may need support in dealing with their reactions to their parents feelings.
- 2.7 Where appropriate, the school nurse should be made aware of the change in the child's circumstances.
- 2.8 Parents/carers may also need support, and may be struggling to cope with their child's grief as well as their own. They should be reassured that the child has someone to talk to in school, and kept informed of any issues in school.
- 2.9 Information regarding the bereavement should be passed on to the child's next teacher, and, where appropriate, next school. It is important, for example, that staff should be aware of significant dates/anniversaries which may affect the child (template at Appendix B)

3. Providing support/answering questions

- 3.1 Parents/carers will be made aware that school has books and leaflets which they may find helpful for themselves, or their children.
- 3.2 Parents/carers may ask for help in discussing the death with their children, and regarding their participation in funeral or memorial services. Work with bereaved children indicates that they need to have an opportunity to take part in the process and ceremonies of saying goodbye, and that it is important that they should be allowed to express their feelings, even if they 'get upset'. Parents/carers should be encouraged to consider their children's attendance at the funeral in the light of this, and, if it is not considered appropriate, to provide an opportunity for the child to express his/her feelings and say goodbye (see ideas sheet in Resource Box).
- 3.3 Questions regarding what happens after death must be handled with great care and sensitivity, with regard to the faith/beliefs of the child's family. Wherever possible, staff should liaise with the parents/carers about what the child has been told at home.
- 3.4 In some situations, it may become apparent that a child or family need additional help or support, either in terms of bereavement support, or practical help where the death has had an impact on financial or other areas of family life. They should be encouraged to use the contacts available in the Resource Box, and made aware of the school remission schemes.

- 3.5 Staff may also need support when dealing with a bereaved child, and should feel able to speak to a colleague about their feelings, and/or use the contacts in the Resource Box.
- 3.6 Where a death is expected, children should be encouraged to talk about their feelings in preparation for that event, and also to share their questions and anxieties about what is going to happen. It should be remembered that for some children, this is a very difficult period, and the death, when it occurs, comes almost as a relief. However, this may be followed by a sense of guilt, and children should be reassured that their feelings are normal and acceptable.
- 3.7 Although this policy is primarily concerned with bereavement of children, a bereavement to a member of staff requires similar consideration. It is important that all staff are aware of what has happened, so that they can be supportive, and avoid inadvertently tactless remarks. Bereaved staff will be made aware of the counselling and support services available to them. In some circumstances, it will be appropriate for some or all of the children to be informed about what has happened, remembering to qualify statements such as 'Mrs _____'s mum has died' by reminding children that this will be a much older person than their own parents.

4. Bereavement affecting the school or wider community

- 4.1 The death of someone in the school community, or a well known person in the local community impacts on all children and staff. This is especially so if the death is sudden, or the result of an accident. Staff may have to deal with their own distress, and possibly shock, as well as supporting the children.
- 4.2 Honest and effective communication is essential:
- It is important to establish the facts as soon as possible
 - All staff should be kept fully informed
 - Pupils should be told as soon as possible, ideally in class groups, where they will be able to respond, and express their feelings with the support of their own teacher.
 - A letter should be sent home to families the same day, or as soon as possible, providing clear factual information about what has occurred, and the school's response.
- 4.3 In the event of a teacher dying, practical arrangements will need to be made for the class. If possible, a teacher well known to the children should take the class, or a Teaching Assistant who is well known to the children should be present.
- 4.4 Where possible the normal timetable should be followed. However, children and staff may need opportunities to reflect on what has happened.
- 4.5 Staff should identify any children likely to be particularly affected – for example those closest to the person who has died, and any children who have suffered a previous bereavement.
- 4.6 Other agencies should be contacted and invited into school where appropriate.

- 4.7 School representation at the funeral should be considered, and a suitable commemoration held in school. It may be appropriate to have an assembly, or arrange a more permanent commemoration, such as a tree or bench. Where appropriate the family of the person who has died should be invited.

5. Other life events with similar impact to bereavement

- 5.1 Although the loss of an important person in a child's life through death cannot be exactly compared to any other experience, there are similarities between:
- Divorce of parents, especially when contact with one parent is lost or becomes infrequent. In addition, feelings of anger or guilt may be stronger when the loss is the result of parental choice.
 - Death of a pet. To a child, the loss of a much loved pet, especially if they have known it all their lives can be more distressing than, for example, the death of an infrequently seen elderly relative.
- 5.2 As with bereavement, in the above circumstances the child's distress should be acknowledged, and they should know that they can talk about it to their teacher or another member of staff.

6. Resources (kept in the Bereavement Resource Box)

- 6.1 **Contacts:** A copy of the Lincolnshire Bereavement Forum Directory is kept in the Bereavement Resource Box. This provides contact details for a wide range of organisations which may prove useful to staff or parents.
- 6.2 **Books for staff:**
- 'When Someone Dies' (Cruse Bereavement Care): A useful booklet giving background information, including reactions to death of different ages of children, and practical advice.
 - 'Grief in Children' Atle Dyregrov.
- 6.3 **Books to use with children:**
- '**When Dinosaurs Die** – a guide to understanding death' – addresses general questions about what it means to be alive, or dead, and how we deal with death.
 - '**Michael Rosen's Sad Book**' – helps children to understand their feelings, and also that adults feel the same way and find it hard to cope.
 - '**Milly's Bug –Nut**' – story of a girl finding ways to come to terms with the loss of her father.
 - '**Water bugs and dragonflies**' – explores life after death in terms of insect metamorphosis
 - '**The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back**' –explores feelings of grief and loss, and ways of remembering.
 - '**Badger's Parting Gifts**' – Explores how feelings of sadness can gradually become more positive memories. Also useful where someone is known to be dying, as it explains that death need not be feared.
 - There are also books in the 'Living Faith/Relationships' Topic Box in the library e.g 'Journey's End (multi faith look at attitudes to death and dying) 'Jenny and Grandpa' (growing old/approaching end of life) and topics such as divorce, feeling angry etc.

- 6.4 Ideas for remembering the person who has died (Winston's Wish).
- 6.5 **Websites:** These may be useful to staff, and can be signposted to parents/carers to use and share with their children.
- www.winstonswish.org.uk Sections for schools, parents/carers, and young people.
 - www.childbereavement.org.uk As above. Printable leaflets/handouts
 - www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk Useful regional directory
 - www.cruisebereavementcare.org.uk Useful to support bereaved adults as well as children. Advice on practical arrangements after a death.
 - www.Samaritans.org
 - www.giftshospice.org.uk/services/bereavement-counselling

7. Bereavement and Loss Policy Review

This policy is reviewed by the Head teacher, staff and Governors in accordance with Barrowby School's Policy and Review Cycle for approval by the Full Governing Body, every 5 years.

Last reviewed: November 2023

Next review: November 2028

Appendix A – Sample letter to Parents/Carers.
N.B details will be typed to personalise the letter.

Dear _____

I am writing to tell you how sorry I was to hear that _____ has died.

Please be assured that we will do our best to support _____ in school during this difficult time. His/her teacher, and other adults who work with him/her are aware of what has happened; he/she _____ can talk to them at any time if he/she wishes to, and we will make sure that he/she knows this.

We have a variety of resources, and contact information available in school which you may find helpful. Please let me know if there is any particular area where we might be able to provide information. You may also find the following websites helpful:

- www.winstonswish.org.uk Sections for parents/carers, and young people.
- www.childbereavement.org.uk As above. Printable leaflets/handouts
- www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk Useful regional directory
- www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk Useful support for bereaved adults and children. Advice on practical arrangements.
- www.Samaritans.org
- www.giftshospice.org.uk/services/bereavement-counselling

Please contact your child's teacher if there is anything you would like us to know about the way _____'s death is affecting _____, either now, or in the future, so that we can work together to support him/her.

If you would like to talk to me, your child's teacher, or someone from Barrowby Church, please let me know.

Once again, please be assured that our thoughts are with you, and that we will do all that we can to help _____ at this difficult time.

Yours sincerely

Mr L Batey

Headteacher

APPENDIX B

Form to record information regarding a bereavement, to go with the child to the next class or school.
This can be completed with the child, where appropriate.

Barrowby Church of England Primary School

Name _____ Date of birth _____

To _____

This is to let you know about something very important that happened to me.

This is what happened:

This happened on (date) _____

Because of what happened I sometimes:

It helps if I can:

These dates are very important to me:

_____ because _____

_____ because _____

_____ because _____

_____ because _____