East Bierley CE (VC) Primary School

Bereavement Policy

Reviewed by: Victoria Meek Head Teacher
Approved by Governors:

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND
Diocese of Leeds

At East Bierley Primary School,
WE ARE KIND
KIND INSPIRED NURTURED DETERMINED

Our vision:
To be a vibrant and inclusive Christian School where everybody is known, valued and inspired to reach their full potential. We nurture curiosity, creativity and a love of learning, equipping our pupils with knowledge, skills and character to flourish in an ever-changing world.

Friendship, Courage, Kindness, Respect, Forgiveness, Faith

Aims

We understand that bereavement is faced by members of our school community at different times and that when the loss is of a member of our school community – such as a child or staff member, it can be particularly difficult. Pupils need to be supported when they experience family bereavements and other significant losses in the course of their lives while they are at school.

This policy will provide guidelines to be followed after a bereavement. The aim is to be supportive to both pupils and adults, and for staff to have greater confidence and be better equipped to cope when bereavement happens. Every death and the circumstances in which it occurs is different and this policy has been constructed to guide us on how to deal professionally, sensitively and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances.

This school is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and pupils. We are dedicated to the continual development of a 'healthy school'. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that support and prepare pupils for coping with separation or loss of a loved one, either through death or divorce.

The policy is based on practice that has grown over time as the school has previously experienced bereavements, and provides a resource as a working document to support our community.

Following a Bereavement:

We believe that children and adults alike have the right to:

- be given space and time to grieve
- be given support from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate – if possible, of their own choice.
- encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement.

We recognise that:

- grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real.
- differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment.
- the death of a child has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/care team of that child and every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far reaching contacts.

The Management of Bereavement in School

A universally accepted procedure outline will, in itself, not enable everyone to feel comfortable in dealing with the practicalities of death and bereavement. Each bereavement is unique and comes with its own specific challenges; however, it is helpful to have a framework on which to build. One of our main concerns must be the immediate family of the deceased and as a school we state our commitment to any such family as may need practical, emotional and ongoing support.

Transition

It is vitally important to ensure that if a child has experienced bereavement that this information is passed on to the relevant persons when they move on to a new class or school.

Death of a pupil

The school may be notified in a number of ways. Upon notification of the death of a pupil:

- If death occurs parents usually let the school know directly and the person answering the phone will put them through to the most senior member of staff on site.
- Where death occurs in the holidays or at weekends the parents will contact whoever they can – they may know someone who has the phone number of a member of staff and know that messages via the office will be seen out of hours
- In that instance the member of staff who takes the call will immediately contact the most senior member of the school team possible and that person will then assume responsibility for the dissemination of the information.

Sharing information

It is important to agree, with the parent, before the school can take on the role of informing concerned parties within, or outside, the school community. Evidence from many schools has shown that parents are often happy to have this burden taken away from them, as they have many people unconnected with the school to contact. There can be no definitive list of people to contact and, therefore, it will be different for each child. The school should ensure that all people who are close to the child are told in a sensitive and supportive manner rather than risk them hearing it 'on the grapevine'. The school needs to ensure it does not add to the sorrow by leaving people feeling marginalised.

The following people should be considered:

- Current school staff not in school that day
- Previous school staff who worked closely with the child
- Social Work team if applicable
- SEND team
- Chair of Governors
- Other professionals who work with the child – Ed Psych
- Other parents – if children have been informed, the school needs to send a note to parents informing them of the loss, and they may need to support or comfort their children. See Appendix C.

The process for telling the other pupils will be decided by the Headteacher- following consultation with the teaching staff. For example, with different aged pupils there will be different decisions made and the class teacher of the class with the loss will usually be the best person to tell the rest of the children in that class, if they feel comfortable doing so. It is important that staff avoid adding worry – for example, if the child died in hospital, we do not want to give children a fear of hospitals. Although the finality of death cannot be diminished, if there are mitigating circumstances that may help - such as that the child was in pain and now is free of pain - this can be used to help alleviate sorrow. Children must be told that, while they may feel sad, they do not have to feel guilty if they go on to have fun and pleasure in their day ahead. They must not feel obliged to assume a burden of grief. Children must be allowed to ask questions at this time or at any point in the following days or weeks. Staff must answer honestly and to the best of their knowledge. See Appendix D

The funeral

- It is essential to sound out the family's wishes. The family may well welcome involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to keep things private.
- The Headteacher and/or the Deputy Headteacher will make arrangements for the school to be represented at the funeral and identify which staff and pupils may want to attend, together with the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport. For some schools it is appropriate to close, for others it is not, consequently difficult decisions will sometimes have to be made concerning attendance.
- Will flowers be sent and/or a collection made? Involve staff and pupils in the decision.

- Cultural and religious implications need consideration.
- If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed. Experience has shown that this can be helpful in their grieving.

Memory Assemblies

It may be appropriate to hold a memory assembly for the child. Staff need to be able to show pupils that it is perfectly normal to feel upset at the loss of a friend and that helpful rituals, prayers, and remembering can be shared in a manageable way together.

If A Child Dies in School:

- If any member of staff has concerns regarding a child's health, they will contact a first aider and ideally the Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher.
- In the case of serious concern, the school will call for an ambulance. Due to the seriousness of the situation, this decision can be taken by the first aider or a member of the SLT.
- Immediately inform the Headteacher or, in her absence, the most senior member of staff on site.
- The Head Teacher will then ensure that the parents are contacted and seek their agreement to meet the ambulance at the hospital.
- If the child stops breathing, a trained school staff member will administer CPR. In some cases, parents may have given the school a protocol to be followed in the event of a serious health incidence. In rare cases, this may include a request that mechanical resuscitation is not administered. However, whilst the school respects the parents' preference in this matter, due to the statutory responsibility imposed on the school regarding "duty of care", the need for school staff to administer manual CPR overrides such preference. Once the ambulance has arrived at school, the child is given over to their care and it is the ambulance team's decision as to where the child is taken or which form of treatment is administered.
- Where the parents have given the school a protocol to be followed in the event of an emergency medical issue occurring - e.g. no resuscitation - this protocol will be handed to the paramedics.
- Any change in circumstance following the first call to parents should be reported to them as soon as possible. **NB:** Staff must not impart shocking or worrying news to a parent if they are travelling in a car alone.
- Once the child is placed in the ambulance a member of staff will be appointed to travel to the hospital either in the ambulance or in their own transport. The purpose of this is to be a familiar face to the child's family on their arrival at the hospital. This person will remain in regular contact with Headteacher and/or the Deputy Headteacher.

- The school will notify the LA if there is a death in school at the earliest opportunity. All press enquiries are to be rooted through the Headteacher, Chair of Governors and LA Media Team.

If a Child Dies on a School Trip

If a crisis situation occurs whilst a child is out on an educational trip, then the adult with the child - or the teacher in charge - should telephone for an ambulance first and then contact the school to inform the Headteacher. The school will then take the responsibility of contacting the parents. Once the ambulance team reaches the child, the child becomes the responsibility of the ambulance team, and they will direct any subsequent actions. The off-site visits protocols give guidance for such situations and should be followed. The school will notify the LA, at the earliest opportunity, if there is a death out of school. The above procedures and protocols will then apply.

Responding to the media

Some deaths, particularly those in sudden or traumatic circumstances, attract media attention. All members of staff are advised not to respond to journalists and to refer all enquiries to the Headteacher, who will make a considered response after seeking assistance from the Local Authority Media Team.

On-Going Support

For staff:

Following bereavement, it is only to be expected that some members of staff will be emotionally affected and would benefit from the provision of some time for reflection. The following support may be helpful:

- A specific room could be allocated- e.g. the Nurture Room - for the duration of a lunchtime to enable staff to meet and share their thoughts over a coffee or tea. It should be emphasised that anything shared on such occasions should be held as confidential and not for public airing.
- Access to one-to-one time with a member of staff who is trained in bereavement support.
- The Educational Psychology team offer counselling support and staff will be reminded about this service.
- Availability of information about accessing bereavement support outside of school, ie Care First

For Pupils:

Experience in many special schools has shown that most pupils can be supported by the school staff.

- In most cases, each child will have a favoured member of staff to approach.
- The HRE co-ordinator and/or Nurture Lead will ensure that we have suitable books and other materials to help children discuss death and come to terms with loss.
- Social Stories may be one way to help pupils to understand loss.
- The Educational Psychology team can offer support to pupils who may need more help.

Please see appendix E for how to support children with special Educational needs with bereavement.

For The Family:

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support. Send a letter of condolence from the school.
- Give parents and family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died.
- Send a representative to the funeral.
- Hold a collection /flowers to be sent as appropriate.
- Invite parents/family to any commemorative events held by the school, both at the time and in subsequent years.
- If memorial work has been completed, for example a remembrance wall or book, then this should be returned to the parents at an appropriate time, and pupils informed where it has gone.
- If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed.

Parents will be told that they are welcome in the school and will be encouraged to come and visit. This can be helpful in their grieving. The first visit to the school is often difficult and will be arranged sensitively in accordance with the parents' wishes. It will then be for the parents to decide if they wish to maintain on-going links. Each family will be different, with differing needs. Therefore, the school will always be there to act as a source of support and information.

The Death of a Member of Staff

All the principles and procedures listed above apply to the death of a staff member. For a letter template see Appendix C.

In addition to the above, the school will notify the LA as employer. Where appropriate to the wishes of the staff member's family, the Headteacher will arrange for staff members to attend the funeral.

Responsibilities

The designated person within the school who has overall responsibility for support and liaison in event of a death or traumatic loss is the Headteacher. If this person is absent then another Senior Leader will take responsibility.
His/Her responsibilities are:

- Policy development and review, involving pupils, staff, governors, parents/carers and relevant local agencies.
- Implementing the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities.
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies.
- Liaison with other primary or secondary schools.
- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff.

The nominated Governor with responsibility for bereavement is:
There responsibilities are:

- To contribute to generating and updating the policy.
- To support the Head Teacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is managed.
- To support the Head Teacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is tackled in the curriculum.
- To review practice.

Preparing and responding to a suspected suicide in school

At East Bierley, we follow guidance from the document 'how to prepare and respond to a suspected suicide for schools and colleges', see appendix G.
We follow the Samaritans step by step service and will access their postvention advisor support if needed.
We follow a response plan- see below and respond to a suspected suicide within 48 hours, this is necessary to maintain the structure and order of the school routine, facilitate the expression of grief and reduces the risk of imitative behaviour.

Response plan-

In the event of a suspected suicide of a pupil or member of staff East Bierley Primary will:

- Establish the facts first- this will be the responsibility of the Headteacher
- Notify the school incident management team, this will be the responsibility of the Headteacher

- Notify staff first, a statement may need to be prepared first to ensure consistency of information across the school. The Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher will be responsible for this.
- Identify any at risk staff or pupils
- Where possible, the news will need to be broken to pupils in small groups, this will be done by the senior leadership team. The school will follow guidance from Samaritans in terms of how to break the news and the appropriate language. See further details in appendix G
- Provide immediate counselling or emotional support to staff and then pupils. This will be arranged through the local authority. A room may need to be prepared and set aside for where they can go
- Staff will be asked not to comment to any media interest. The local Authority have a media team and will liaise with them regarding a statement. The Headteacher will be responsible for this
- If the school community has been affected, a letter will be sent with a brief overview of what has happened, what support the school is putting in place, what action the school will take in response to school memorials and funerals, where they can find further information and support about suicides, where they can access support for themselves and what to do if they are worried about someone else.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THE FACT OF A DEATH CAN BE DISCLOSED IMMEDIATELY, HOWEVER THE NATURE AND CAUSE OF A DEATH CANNOT BE DISCLOSED UNTIL THE FAMILY HAS BEEN CONSULTED. IF A FAMILY REFUSES TO PERMIT DISCLOSURE, EAST BIERLEY PRIMARY WILL SIMPLY STATE THAT THE FAMILY REQUEST THAT NO INFORMATION IS SHARED. AT EAST BIERLEY PRIMARY, WE WOULD STILL HAVE A DUTY OF CARE AND WOULD HAVE TO RECOGNISE THE RUMOURS AND ADDRESS THE TOPIC OF SUICIDE IN A RESPONSIBLE WAY.

Responding to an attempted suicide

Anyone who has attempted suicide is appropriately referred to and cared for by mental health professionals.

A support plan will be put in place to support the pupil before the student returns to school.

Appendix A - List of Online Resources and Information

www.winstonswish.org.uk A useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community.

www.keech.org.uk The website of Keech Hospice Care, our local Children's Hospice. Gives details of its facilities and the support it offers.

www.chums.info A bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

www.childbereavement.org.uk A bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

www.juliesplace.com A support resource for bereaved siblings

www.bhf.org.uk/smallcreature British Heart Foundation site to help children come to terms with loss using cartoon creatures. An animated film and we have a printed pack to go with it.

www.bbc.co.uk/.../bereavement/bereavement_helpchildren.shtml Information on the way bereavement affects children

http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk An organisation offering local bereavement support to both adults and children

http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/index.htm Federation of organisations

Appendix B - Books on Bereavement

GRANPA
John Burningham (Puffin, 1998, ISBN 0099-43408-3)
Designed to stimulate discussion rather than to tell a story, the book has a series of scenes of a little girl and her grandad, with comments from each or both of them. At the end, she is shown staring at his empty chair, without comments. The book allows the adult to direct discussion about not only the good things that the child remembers, but also the not so happy memories.

WHEN DINOSAURS DIE
L & M Brown (Little, Brown, 1996, hb, ISBN 0-316-10197-7)
Charming busy anthropomorphic pictures of dinosaurs illustrate topics and questions and a range of answers about death: Saying Goodbye; Customs and beliefs about death; Why do people die? What does "dead" mean?. It is also quite acute psychologically, acknowledging that disbelief, anger, fear, and sadness are common feelings when someone dies. Expensive, but attractive and appealing to children.

REMEMBERING GRANDAD
Sheila and Kate Isherwood (Oxford, ISBN 0-19-272368-5)
A girl's grandfather has died and looking back over the happy times they enjoyed together helps her to cope with the loss. Very specific episodes and illustrations give it a life-like feel. Sensible and sound if a little stereotyped in its pictures of family life, it could help children to think about how to remember someone.

FRED
Posy Simmons (Jonathan Cape, 1987, ISBN 0-2240-2448-5)
When Fred the cat dies, his owners Nick and Sophie attend his funeral and learn about his secret life as a famous singer. The story raises the idea of celebrating a life in a good-humoured and touching way, with entertaining pictures and not much text.

GRANDAD, I'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER YOU
De Bode and Broere (Evans / Helping Hands, 1997, ISBN 0237-51755-8)
A picture book about loss and memories, and potentially a good stimulus to talk about a bereavement.

LIFETIMES
Beginnings and endings with lifetimes in between – a beautiful way to explain life and death to children
Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen (Belitha Press, 1997, ISBN 1-85561-760-9).
places human life and death firmly in the natural world, and the tone is quietly reflective: "All around us everywhere, beginnings and endings are going on all the time. It may be sad, but it is the way of all things. For plants; for people; and for birds”.

BADGER'S PARTING GIFTS
Susan Varley (Collins Picture Lions, pb, 1992)

An old favourite, a charming illustrated book in which a very old and much loved badger dies. The forest animals gather and reminisce about the important part Badger played in their lives, and as time passes memories of Badger make them smile. These memories were different for each of them, including very recognisable things like a favourite recipe or showing someone how to knot a tie - Badger's "parting gifts"

WE LOVE THEM
Martin Waddell (Walker Books,1990, ISBN 0-7445-7256-8)
Death is seen very much as part of life in this nicely illustrated story of life in the country, which conveys the idea that life goes on and that old creatures give way to young ones. But it is a bit too matter of fact about loss - barely is the old dog dead than the children have found a new one, is there an implicit message that dead pets (and people?) are easily replaced.

GRANDMA'S BILL
Martin Waddell (Macdonald Young Books, pb, ISBN 0- 7500-0307-3)
Bill's grandma is a widow, and he learns about her "other Bill" by looking through her photo album with her. A bit too stereoptypically suburban and middle class for general appeal perhaps. Some like its ordinariness, gentleness and factual accuracy, and couldn't fault what it had to say about death and living on in memories and in the family.

I'LL ALWAYS LOVE YOU
H Wilhelm (Hodder & Stoughton, 1985)
A touching story of the love between a little boy and his dog, who have grown up together. When the dog dies, the boy says that, although he is very sad, it helps that he used to tell the dog "I'll always love you" every night. An opportunity to discuss the importance of telling how you feel. Aimed at 4 to 7 year olds and delightfully illustrated.

A BIRTHDAY PRESENT FOR DANIEL
Juliet Rothman (Prometheus Books, ISBN 1-57392-054-1)
This story of a little girl whose brother has died is intended for children aged 8-12. "A difficult subject handled very well and movingly".

Appendix C

Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a pupil

Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the child's parents.

The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the parents and school.

<Address>
<Date>

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>.

(<Name> died from an illness called cancer. As you may be aware, many children who have cancer get better but sadly <Name> had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday.)

He/She was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try to answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we would be more than happy to help you.

(We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating <Name..'s> life.)

Yours sincerely

<Name> Head Teacher

Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a member of staff

<Address>
<Date>

Dear Parents

---------- (member of staff) had the sad task of informing the children of the tragic death of <Name> who has been a teacher at this school for a number of years.

Our thoughts are with <Name …….'s> family at this time and in an effort to try to respond to his/her death in a positive way, all the children have been informed.

When someone dies it is normal for family and friends to experience many different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion, and children are likely to ask questions about the death that need to be answered honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.

The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school but if there is anything else you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we will be more than happy to help you.

(We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating <Name..'s> life.)

Yours sincerely

<Name> Head Teacher

Appendix D

Supporting pupils

The following guidelines are taken from CRUSE bereavement care website. They are general principles, and need to be thought about whatever the needs of the child are. Adapt and aid communication as appropriate.

Loss from a child's perspective

For many children and young people the death of a parent, caregiver, sibling or grandparent is an experience they are faced with early in life. It is sometimes incorrectly assumed that a child or young person who is bereaved by the death of someone close at a young age will not be greatly affected as they are too young to understand the full implications of death.

This is untrue and unhelpful. Even babies are able to experience loss. A baby cannot cognitively process the implications of the bereavement but that does not mean that they do not feel the loss.

Accepting the child's experience

Children and young people need to be given the opportunity to grieve as any adult would. Trying to ignore or avert the child's grief is not protective, in fact it can prove to be extremely damaging as the child enters adulthood. Children and young people regardless of their age need to be encouraged to talk about how they are feeling and supported to understand their emotions.

It is also important to remember that children and young people grieve in different ways. Grief is unique and therefore it is not wise to assume that all children and young people will experience the same emotions, enact the same behaviour or respond similarly to other grieving children and young people. A child or young person's grief differs from that of an adult's grief because it alters as they develop.

Time to grieve

Children and young people often revisit the death and review their emotions and feelings about their bereavement as they move through their stages of development. Children and young people do not have the emotional capacity to focus on their grief for long periods of time and therefore it is not uncommon for grieving children and young people to become distracted by play. This is a protective mechanism which allows the child or young person to be temporarily diverted from the bereavement.

Bereaved children and young people need time to grieve and in order for them to address the bereavement they need to be given the facts regarding the death in language appropriate to their age or level of comprehension. Avoid using metaphors for death such as, “Daddy has gone to sleep”, this will make the child or young person believe that Daddy will come back to them and may constantly ask when he is going to wake up. Similarly, the child or young person might encounter problems with bedtime and not wanting to sleep for fear of not waking up.

Talking to children

It is understandable that many caregivers are reluctant to talk to the child or young person about the death as they do not want to cause distress or fear. Children and young people who are bereaved need to know that their loved one has died, how they died and where they are now. Failure to be honest with the grieving child or young person means that their grief is not being acknowledged and this can cause problems later on.

If the bereaved child or young person wants to ask questions about death and what dying means, answer them truthfully and if you do not know the answer to a specific question don’t be tempted to make the answer up. Assure the child or young person that although you do not know the answer to their question you will find out for them.

Key points to remember

- Babies can experience feelings of loss
- Be honest with the bereaved child or young person
- Avoid using metaphors for death
- Every child and young person’s grief is unique
- Encourage the child or young person to talk about the death and how they feel
- Children and young people may 'revisit' the death and review their feelings about the bereavement as they develop
- Use language that is appropriate to the child or young person’s age and level of comprehension.

http://www.cruse.org.uk/Children/loss-from-childs-perspective **Childrens' understanding of death**

The following information is based on developmental chronology, and is taken from CRUSE bereavement care website. It is helpful to consider these developmental levels when thinking about how children with special needs may experience grief.

The nature of a child's understanding of death and bereavement will be different at different stages of development. Although a child's grief is individual, their understanding of the loss of a loved one progresses as they mature. In this section you will find the most common understandings of death by children at certain stages of their development.

Do bear in mind that a child's understanding of death during their development will differ in circumstances where the child may be experiencing educational difficulties.

Two years to five years

During their development between the age of two to five, children do not understand that death is irreversible. For instance a four year old child may be concerned that although nanny was dead she should have come home by now. This example illustrates how children at this stage do not understand the finality of death and nor do they understand what the term "dead" actually means. It is common for a young child to be told that their aunt has died and still expect to see them alive and well in the immediate future. Children do not understand that life functions have been terminated and will ask questions such as:

"Won't Uncle Bob be lonely in the ground by himself?"

"Do you think we should put some sandwiches in Grandpa's coffin in case he gets hungry?"

"What if Nan can't breathe under all that earth?"

"Will Daddy be hurt if they burn him?"

As the cognitive understanding of children in this age range is limited they can sometimes demonstrate less of a reaction to the news of the death than might be observed by an older child and might promptly go out to play on hearing the news of the death.

Children aged between two and five years old have difficulty with the abstract concepts surrounding death. For instance they might be confused as to how one person can be in a grave and also be in heaven at the same time. They will become further confused if they are told that the deceased person is simply sleeping and this in turn could make them fearful of falling asleep or seeing anyone else asleep. They might insist on waiting for the person who has died to wake

up or similarly if they have been told that the person who has died has gone on a long journey they may await their return.

At this age bereaved children can become involved in omnipotence or magical thinking. This refers to the concept that bereaved children believe that their actions, inaction, words, behaviours or thoughts are directly responsible for their loved one's death. This form of thinking is not exclusive to this particular age group and can be experienced by many bereaved children and young people of older ages. It is essential that you explain to the bereaved child that the death was not in any way their fault or responsibility. The need to reassure the grieving child that nothing they said / didn't say, did or didn't do caused the death is paramount.

Five years to ten years

Children at this developmental stage have acquired a wider understanding of death and what it entails. They begin to realise that death is the end of a person's life, that the person who has died won't return and that life functions have been terminated. By the age of seven the average child accepts that death is an inevitably and that all people including themselves will eventually die.

This understanding can also increase a child's anxieties regarding the imminent deaths of other people who they are close to. Children of this age are broadening their social networks by attending school and are therefore open to receive both information and misinformation from their peers and social circles.

With this in mind it is important that the cause of death, the funeral and burial process and what happens to the deceased person's body are explained in a factual and age appropriate manner to the bereaved child. Children will ask many questions and may want to know intricate details pertaining to the death and decomposition of the body. Again, it is vital that children have such details explained to them clearly so that they understand.

At this developmental stage children can empathise with and show compassion for peers that have been bereaved. Children aged between five and ten often copy the coping mechanisms that they observe in bereaved adults and they may try to disguise their emotions in an attempt to protect the bereaved adult. The bereaved child can sometimes feel that they need permission to show their emotions and talk about their feelings.

The important thing is to let them do this. Avoid remarks such as, “Come on be a big brave girl for mummy” or “Big boys don’t cry”, such comments however well meant can make children feel they need to hide their feelings or that what they are feeling is wrong. This can cause complications as the bereaved child develops. http://www.cruse.org.uk/Children/children-understanding-death#birth



Appendix F

Grief and Children with Special Needs *Some thoughts to keep in mind when working with young people with special needs who are bereaved*

The information provided is adapted from the NAS (National Autistic Society) and Grief Speaks

Be open and honest. Use appropriate words such as “dead” and “death” and avoid euphemisms (e.g. telling a child that the person is “just sleeping”).

Be available to listen, to talk or simply spend time with the child.

Be patient as the same questions may be asked over and over again.

Allow the child to show their grief in whatever way they want, as long as it is safe. Some want to just ignore it and have fun. That is okay too.

Rituals associated with death (e.g. attendance at funerals) often help young people to understand that someone important in their life has died. Children with developmental disabilities need more concrete rituals and explicit directions, and simplified activities. Rituals that are abstract may be confusing and frustrating.

Make available time and space for young people to express their feelings. Perhaps have a place available where children can have some quiet time and chance to speak with an adult. Try to support and reassure a young person who is expressing their grief, acknowledge their losses and help them to find healthy ways to express their feelings. Often those who lack the grief vocabulary to talk about feelings, tend to express their feelings through their behaviour.

Try to avoid too much change at this confusing and distressing time, if possible. Remember it is important to keep doing activities that the young person enjoys.

Grief issues specific to people with autism:

It is difficult to predict anyone’s reaction to the death of someone close to them, and individuals on the autism spectrum will be no different. Each person's reaction will be unique to them. You may not recognise the person with ASD's displays of grief, but any difference in their behaviour may be an expression of their confusion and loss. These behavioural changes may not coincide with the death of a relative or friend, but may occur perhaps three months, six months, or a year afterwards. This will need to be recognised so these behaviours are appropriately understood and supported. You may notice a reoccurrence of these or other behaviours at significant dates after the persons death; for example, at an anniversary, Christmas or birthdays. Support from a trusted adult is an important factor in helping individuals move through their grief.

Some children with a very limited number of close relationships experience the death of a friend or family member sometimes as a catastrophic loss and the idea of re-investing in other

people is very difficult. Many children become highly attached and dependent to their teachers or school staff so when a staff member leaves the job or has died, it may be very difficult for the child.

Sometimes anger is directed at the person who shared the news of the death or it may be generalized. Anger may also be apparent when activities provided by the deceased are no longer available. Enable students to express this anger without hurting themselves, others or property,

When explaining why that person died, you may need to reassure the child with Autism that this will not happen to them. You may like to set a boundary on age, for example: usually only people over seventy years of age die, and it is rare for children or people younger than that to die.

There are recognised approximate stages of bereavement (Allison 2001):

- Shock, numbness, denial
- Despair,turmoil and acute grieving, including:
  - anger
  - guilt
  - anxiety, fear
  - depression
  - pain, appetite disturbance, breathlessness, illness
  - more than usual need for sleep, sleeplessness, hyperactivity
  - nightmares
- Recovery, including
  - acceptance
  - resolution of grief
  - when the bereaved can think of the deceased without pain or anger and can recall the times they had together in a positive way.

These stages might merge together, and not everyone will experience all of them. A child may have all of these feelings, and others too. For example, they may experience confusion over why they do not see the person any more, or anxiety about why people they know seem to be acting differently. You may like to use a Social Story to explain how people become upset and cry when someone has died, and perhaps that it is okay that they have/have not cried (see Social Stories™ and Comic Strip Conversations information www.autism.org.uk/16261). Discuss with children that it is common to have upsetting thoughts, get headaches, feel numb, ask many questions, feel different etc. Remind them that the adults around them are available to help them with worrying thoughts and strong emotions if they become overwhelming.

When it is appropriate, you might also consider making a 'Memory Book' (Allison 2001). This could be a book or box which is used as a record and reminder of the individual or pet who has died; it could also be used more generally to highlight significant moments in your child's life. They might choose mementos which show "...happy incidents in their lives, family holidays, previous homes, photographs of family members and pets..." (Allison 2001).

In Summary, when dealing with death and bereavement:

- prepare your child as much as possible

- keep routine changes to a minimum
- use clear, simple language
- use visual supports where appropriate
- show understanding for unfamiliar displays of grief, such as challenging or obsessive behaviour or an increased reliance on routines. Any reactions may be delayed.

Some ideas to help bereaved children with learning disabilities:

- Encourage the grieving child to think of and keep a linking or comfort object to the person who died or is gone
- Light a candle on special days and share memories
- Make a memory box. Child chooses what memories go inside
- Read books, Badgers Parting Gifts: sadness and joy in memories. There is a series of books available called 'Books Beyond Words' which explains burial, cremation and bereavement counselling. These books are not specifically written for people with ASD, but they use only pictures and are therefore ideal for use with individuals who have autism
- If a young person is attending a funeral, help to prepare them, by explaining what they will experience and how to behave using visual resources where necessary to help them understand

The use of photographs.

Find a photo of the person who died and share memories.

Using storytelling.

Write a story about the person who has died.

Use of memory objects.

Put a group of objects together that remind them of the person who died, such as photos, books, clothing articles, papers etc. For someone less verbal, let child choose what goes in pile.

Use of Drawing.

Have the child draw a picture of the person who died or memories of the person and share it with others. Even if the child has limited fine motor skills, encourage the child to draw what he/she remembers.

Use of Music.

Listen to music that the person who died liked or that reminds her of the person who died. The song may relate to the person's job or personality trait. Can listen, or move to music or draw.

Use of Writing**.**

The child can write or dictate a letter to or about the person. It can be helpful to provide the child with sentence starters, or a template in which they can fill in their own key words.

Use of Stones**.**

Share a memory of the person and then place a small stone in a decorative fountain or paint the rock or write a word on it. Take time daily to remember the person.

Use of Daily Memory

Choose an activity that the person used to do with or to the child. This may be self-care or taking a walk, cooking or playing a game together. Talk about the person who has died. This can occur immediately after the death or delayed for weeks. Pay attention to student's cues in order to help the child in the healing process.