



Bereavement Strategy – Covid-19

This strategy provides guidance for primary and secondary schools on supporting those bereaved during Covid-19. It is based on the best practice being developed nationally, with particular thanks to Salford and Tameside Educational Psychology Service and ASCL. It also takes into account the fact that all our schools already have effective systems and processes in place to support bereaved children.

The words child/children are used to reflect pupils of all ages attending schools in the Trust.

The coronavirus pandemic has had an impact on schools, families and communities. There was little time to prepare for the lockdown, and this, alongside the uncertainty of how Covid-19 may affect people, has led to increased levels of anxiety.

Staff, students and parents have had to adjust very quickly to school closures. This has meant that familiar structures and routines have stopped, and our daily lives have changed dramatically. There is an increased risk of unexpected bereavement, and the feelings of loss and insecurity which this can generate. In normal circumstances schools would come together physically to support anyone in the community who was bereaved. This is clearly impossible while schools are only open to a very few, and whilst social distancing needs to be observed.

The Trust recognises the role it has to play in developing the response by leaders at all levels. There is a network of support in place to ensure that no leader has to face any incident on their own. Our approach is to ensure that all headteachers are supported to act effectively in the best interest of staff, students and families. We aim to maintain a strong sense of safety across our school communities, combined with a sense of order, unity, and hope for the future.

This guidance takes into account that the effects of social distancing, isolating vulnerable individuals, and disruption to our day-to-day routines will require a different approach to how settings support their staff and students.

Things to consider following a bereavement during Covid-19

- Bereavements linked to Covid-19 are likely to be less expected and the family will have had little time to prepare.
- The people and routines that usually support people following a bereavement e.g. friends and the routine of school may not be accessible whilst social distancing measures are in place.
- Family members of the person who has died may have particularly strong emotions around feelings of guilt as well as feelings of loss. They might be wondering if they should have done anything differently, or if they need to change their behaviour now.

- They may have been socially isolated from the person who has died, and not had recent or usual levels of contact.
- The person may have died in hospital and the family may not have been able to say goodbye.
- There may have been restrictions on the funeral and so the bereaved may have had this healing ritual denied to them.
- There may also be other members of the family who have become ill and there may be fears about their health.
- The bereaved may feel anger and blame, e.g. towards others who may not have self-isolated quickly.
- It may be difficult to avoid reminders such as the news.
- If there are several deaths linked to Covid-19, the bereaved may struggle with the lack of specialness that their loved one receives.
- It is also important to be aware that staff themselves may have bereavement and loss of their own to process.

General Bereavement Guidance

Key points to support best practice following a bereavement:

- Remember that help and support for those are best provided by a trusted, familiar adult.
- Be as honest and open as you can with children, appropriate to their age and developmental level.
- Remember that children are all different and they will all react to the loss and bereavement in their own unique way. The differences in their levels of awareness, understanding, age, emotional maturity, security and not least, their relationship with the deceased, will also have significant effects.
- For further information on children's developmental understanding of death go to <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-parents/childrens-understanding-of-death#keypoints> .
- When someone dies, use the words dead or died, not euphemisms like "passed away".
- Be guided by what a bereaved child or adult is prepared to share.

Things to do to prepare for bereavements during Covid-19

- Identify the named lead(s) who can take responsibility for sharing key messages with staff about how to support children with loss and grief, and can coordinate responses to bereavements, e.g. supporting members of staff who are acting as key adults when contacting bereaved families. This means there will always be a nominated lead available to oversee bereavement support work for families and staff. A key adult should also be prepared to support the family to make decisions about how best to support their child, including how to talk to them about the loss and mourning processes.
- Encourage all school staff to familiarise themselves with the information, advice and guidance provided on the Winston's Wish website: (<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus/>).
- Have a notice on your website to indicate to parents that the school has a bereavement protocol. This should include signposting to parents agencies which provide counselling and support. These are listed in the appendix. It

should also offer to support the family to talk to their child about loss and mourning processes.

- Invite parents to let the school know if they are impacted by a loss; explain how they can do this.
- Let families know what you will then do; e.g. identify a key person to maintain contact with the family/ send the child a letter/ card. Check with the family first that it would be okay to send a letter to the child. An example of a letter is included in the appendix.
- Check-in with the family/child by phone.
- Be alert and sensitive to whether children have received any negative/abusive comments on social media.
- Make sure class teachers are made aware of children impacted by a loss so they can welcome them back to school appropriately when the time comes. Consider how, in the longer term, events such as assemblies can be used to help and support children.
- Leaders and nominated leads will be holding and containing levels of anxiety from across different parts of their community. The Trust is committed to maintaining its programme of meetings, including 1:1 meetings, by phone or google hangout, to monitor the wellbeing of leaders at all levels and provide or source support as required.

Appendix 1

Resources

Winston's Wish 08088 020 021

Child Bereavement UK 0800 02 888 40

Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership

<https://www.kscmp.org.uk/training/e-learning-courses>

Winston's Wish

<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-supporting-bereaved-children-and-young-people/>

Coronavirus: information and guidance for supporting bereaved children and young people.

<https://www.winstonswish.org/telling-a-child-someone-died-from-coronavirus/>

Information and scripts to use if someone the child knows has died from Covid-19.

<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-funerals-alternative-goodbyes/>

Saying goodbye when children cannot attend the funeral.

Grief Encounter

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/professionals-schools/>

Support for bereaved children and their families. Includes downloadable documents at the bottom of the webpage on the following:

- Children's concepts of death by age
- Supporting a grieving child in the classroom
- Informing the school community of a death
- Download grief talk posters
- Preparing students for the return of grieving classmate

Child Bereavement UK

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=bc9f3d7d-7b43-421a-8ed4-4335f9c23b35>

Downloadable information sheet with tips for supporting bereaved children through difficult times.

CRUSE

<https://www.cruse.org.uk>

Support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies. There's a section for schools <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-schools>

British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy

www.bcap.org.uk

A directory of registered counsellors and some advice on coping with the coronavirus epidemic.

Not Too Young to Grieve is a film created with Childhood Bereavement Network and explores how very young people respond to loss

<https://www.leedsanimation.org.uk/films/15>

Appendix 2

Model letter to a bereaved child

(personalise this based on the age of the child, and your knowledge of the family and context)

Dear (name),

I am so sorry that (name/relative) has died.

I am wondering how you are feeling. It might be a strange and confusing time for you. All feelings are normal and OK. There is no right way to feel when someone has died.

I am thinking about you. (In this paragraph, you may want to mention something special or memorable that the child has done in the past, and say that you look forward to seeing them do this again in the future).

I plan to phone you and your family, to find out more about how you are doing. You can choose whether you would like to speak to me.

I hope to speak to you soon.

Best wishes,

(Name)

Appendix 3

Supporting SEND / lower ability children

The organisations listed in Appendix 1 will be able to provide advice and guidance. Winston's Wish is particularly recommended.

The SEND Gateway has helpful resources:

<https://www.sendgateway.org.uk/r/bereavement-plan.html>

Books which help children process loss and grief:

Duck, Death and the Tulip by Wolf Erlbruc - primary upwards

The Cat Mummy by Jacqueline Wilson - primary

The Heart and the Bottle by Oliver Jeffers - primary

Goodbye Mog by Judith Kerr - primary

The Goodbye Book by Todd Parr - primary

Sad Book by Michael Rosen - secondary

My Sister Lives on the Mantelpiece by Annabel Pitcher - KS3

Vicky Angel by Jacqueline Wilson - KS3

Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson - KS2/KS3

A Monster Calls by Patrick Ness - secondary