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**HARROWBARROW SCHOOL**

Bereavement and Loss Policy

**Rationale**

Harrowbarrow School is fully committed to the emotional health and well-being of our pupils and staff. We are dedicated to the continual development of a healthy and thriving school community and strive to work towards this in all aspects of school life, seeking to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that support members of the school community in coping with the loss of a loved one through separation or death. Bereavement and loss affect everybody at some time and, as a close community, our school aims to provide the best support during these times.

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.

1 in 29 pupils aged 5 to 16 has been bereaved of a parent or sibling – that is one in every class. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, relative, friend or significant other person (Child Bereavement UK)

This policy will provide guidelines to be followed after 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 surrounding it is different and this policy is designed to guide school staff and governors on how to deal professionally, sensitively and compassionately in these circumstances.

It is important that pupils are helped to understand bereavement in clear unambiguous ways, and given opportunities to experience the full range of emotions that may accompany it within a safe and supportive environment.

We recognise:

* That pupil’s understanding of death and bereavement is different at different stages of development and that there are Primary and Secondary reactions to the loss or bereavement. *Appendix A*
* That SEND pupils may need additional support to enable them to better understand about death and bereavement. *Appendix B*
* The differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value. *Appendix C*
* The importance of long term support for those who are bereaved and will endeavour to provide opportunities for remembrance where appropriate.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

**Governors**

* To approve the policy and ensure its implementation.
* To review the policy every two years

**Headteacher**

The Headteacher will have overall responsibility for support and liaison in the event of a death or traumatic loss. In the event that the Headteacher is absent then Deputy Head will take responsibility.

Responsibilities:

* Implementation of the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice
* Use the expertise within the school in sharing the responsibilities
* Decide who will be responsible for communicating with the family directly involved.
* In a critical incident the Headteacher will contact the deceased person’s family to gather factual information, if not already received. From this the family’s wishes should be determined regarding the sharing of information to staff and the wider community which should then be communicated swiftly to avoid rumour and assumption that may cause the family further distress. *Appendix D*
* Decide how pupils will be informed (individually or by class), what exactly they will be told and when. *Appendix E*
* If necessary communicate with the media after seeking advice from the Local Authority.
* Support staff in seeking external professional support if needed.

**Staff**

The purpose of this policy is to give all staff the confidence in recognising and adopting a particular procedure. It should be noted that a universally accepted procedure outline will, in itself, not enable everyone to feel comfortable in dealing with the practicalities of death and bereavement. To this end, staff will have opportunity to indicate a willingness to offer support in this way when they are informed of a death.

* Bereavement awareness training will be provided for all staff
* Be familiar and guided by the policy
* To educate pupils to know about loss and bereavement
* To support pupils in school who have experienced loss and bereavement
* To liaise with the Headteacher
* To seek support for themselves if needed

**Curriculum**

Through PSHE activities, children are educated to know about loss, what feelings they might experience and how they might cope with personal loss and respond to the loss of others. Our teaching is based on an understanding of the principles stated above and a variety of approaches are used to meet the needs of our pupils, showing sensitivity to their age and experience.

Teaching methods adopted in the classroom will include:

* A range of teaching and learning styles including individual and group discussions, Circle Time, role play and drama
* Use of supporting resources such as stories, photographs, mementoes and music
* Giving clear, truthful, and accurate information, not trying to soften the blow with ambiguous language which does not tell the truth
* Practising the collaborative social skills necessary to help cope with the feelings of loss
* Giving relevant and appropriate advice and support
* Providing continuity and progression by visiting and revisiting issues as pupils develop and their needs and understanding change
* Considering the attitudes and values of pupils

**PROCEDURES**

**Procedures on learning of the death of a pupil**

Our school will:

* Place the emotion and wellbeing of the pupils and staff centrally to their needs and support
* Speak to the family to offer condolences and support before ascertaining what they would like to happen
* Take into consideration the cultural and religious beliefs of the family *Appendix C*
* Give the family a named contact who they can communicate directly with
* Obtain factual information to avoid unnecessary speculation
* Inform staff/governors as soon as possible including current members of staff who may not be in school that day. See guidelines *Appendix D*
* Identify pupils and staff who may be particularly vulnerable, such as friends and adults who work with the child, or those who have witnessed the incident. These pupils/staff should be informed in a way most appropriate for them, either individually or as a peer group by a person they feel safe with.
* Decide how and where pupils will be told and what information should be shared with them. This should be done as soon as possible. See guidelines *Appendix E*
* Send a letter to families as soon as possible *Appendix F*
* Give guidance to parents on supporting bereaved children
* Contact Penhaligon’s Friends and Cornwall Education Psychology Service for guidance and support if necessary. *Appendix G*

**The Funeral**

Our school will

* Find out the family’s wishes and if/how they wish the school to be involved
* Identify which staff and pupils may want to attend and the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport
* Send cards/flowers if acceptable
* Consider the cultural and religious implications if appropriate
* Enable the person(s) who had the closest relationship with the child to attend the funeral - this would usually be the current class teacher but may be a staff member who had worked closely with the child in a previous class

**Support for bereaved children**

Not all the pupils will need the support of specialist practitioners; they most often need familiar people who care. Pupils will react to bereavement/loss in a variety of ways; no two reactions are the same *Appendix A*.

Adults often wish to shield children from pain and distress. Experience and research have shown, however, that children are best supported by having the incident acknowledged in an appropriate way, rather than having it ignored.

It is important to be available and receptive to pupils, to listen to them, to empathise with them and normalise their emotions, thus enabling the development of healthy coping strategies.

It is normal for adults to be upset and it can be appropriate for children and young people to be aware of this because it can help them to understand their own emotions. Staff working directly with pupils can show that they are upset, but not out of control. It is important to maintain a safe, secure and predictable environment for the pupils in their care. Staff should remember that they are modelling a response for children and young people and helping them to develop coping skills.

*The positive effect that concern and support from a caring, familiar adult can have on a pupil should never be underestimated.*

Our school will offer

* A routine, which can have a stabilising effect
* Some space, away from an emotional intense atmosphere
* Neutral space and people to share their feelings without the worry of upsetting a loved one
* Time for the pupils to be themselves without feeling guilty (being with friends, time to play in a safe space outside the home environment)
* Regular correspondence with home, providing reassurance about behaviour and general well-being, ensuring the child or young person is managing their grief
* Access to appropriate resources via class teacher or pastoral support
* Preparation time for children and young people to discuss what to say and how to behave when the bereaved child or young person returns to school
* Time for staff to be aware of changes in behaviour that may be related to the death
* An individual link person to support the pupils when necessary
* A suitable place in school for pupils who need some space if too upset to stay in the classroom and people to whom they can go for support. – TIME OUT Card may be used

**Support for staff**

Our school will:

* Support bereaved staff and acknowledge they may be struggling with their own reactions and emotions while supporting pupils
* Plan for informal mutual support to give staff an opportunity to share feelings and reactions
* Give people time to attend the funeral, if appropriate
* Offer general training for all staff
* Be aware of all supporting information and resources available.
* Provide details of support agencies *Appendix G*

**Support for parents**

Our school will:

* Communicate with the family straight away and offer support
* Send a letter/card of condolence
* Give out information to appropriate people depending on the family’s wishes
* Give parents and family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died
* Send a representative to the funeral if appropriate
* Hold a collection/flowers to be sent as appropriate
* Invite parents/carers to any commemorative events held by the school.

**Acknowledgements**

Our school will give the following opportunities to commemorate loss for parents/carers, staff, and pupils:

* Hold celebration assembly / other commemorative activity as per the wishes of the family
* Offer support to individuals who wish to talk about their experiences
* Offer support to pupils who need to explore and learn to understand their emotions
* Give pupils opportunities to talk within a group about their experiences.

**Procedures on learning of the death of a member of staff**

Our school will:

* Provide information to Governors, Staff including absent staff, pupils and parents
* Headteacher makes news statement if necessary
* Arrange for staff/pupil condolences
* Headteacher arrange support for individual/group members of staff
* Headteacher makes arrangements, as appropriate, for:

 Expression of feelings

 Personal belongings

 Card/wreath

 Death notice in local newspaper

 Services

 Funeral

 Commemoration

**Procedures on learning of the death of a parent**

Our school will:

* Convey information to staff, pupils
* Make arrangements for expression of sympathy which may include – personal visit, sympathy card or attending funeral

**Procedures on supporting a child returning to school**

Staff will refresh knowledge of supporting bereaved pupils returning to school by watching

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/for-teachers-when-a-pupil-returns-to-school-after-being-bereaved>

School will meet with the pupil and their family to discuss what has happened and their return to school.

The purpose of the meeting will be to:

* Acknowledge the death
* Find out pupils views on returning to school
* Organise a safe space for the bereaved pupil to go to if they feel overwhelmed by their grief and need some ‘time out’. How they will inform staff of this? A time out card/non verbal signal or message? How will this be communicated to all staff
* Consider whether to provide time each week in the Rainbow Room or doing activities –journals, art and craft, memory boxes
* Set guidelines for communication – with the pupil, between members of staff and between home and school
* Consider providing support for peers when they have a bereaved friend

**Longer term support for bereaved pupils**

Pupils will continue to grieve for the rest of their lives and may require ongoing support. Significant dates and anniversaries may be particularly difficult.

School will continue regular contact with the family and reviews with the pupil to continue building an overall picture of how the pupil is coping

Grief may impact the pupil’s progress. Some pupils may work harder and put themselves under extra pressure to succeed, while others may find it difficult to focus in class and on their work*.*

School will continue to monitor pupil and respond accordingly.

Bereaved pupils can find change difficult, so preparing them in advance (where possible) may help them to voice their worries and ease the process*.*

School will plan changes and transitions with the child and their family.

**Supporting Pupils with SEND**

Pupils with additional needs are no different to all other pupils, in having their grief recognised, hearing the truth and being given opportunities to express their feelings and emotions, but may need extra help with their understanding and ways to express their feelings. *Appendix B*

**Supporting a Pupil/Staff with a long term illness**

School will:

* Designate one person to make contact with the pupil/staff family to find out their wishes about staff visiting
* Ensure they keep abreast of any developments without causing distress to the family
* Advise staff of family’s wishes
* Support the school community with accurate information and support

**Supporting a pupil affected by parent separation**

‘Family breakdown is not an event but a process. This process may take years to settle down’ (An eye to their future – resource pack for working with the impact of family breakdown)

It takes a long time for pupils to adjust to their parents separation/divorce and it is not usually a smooth road, but the more opportunities pupils have to express and understand their feelings, the easier this transition will be. However, some pupils may not wish to talk and this must be respected too.

School will:

* Be sensitive towards the pupil and his/her parents
* Acknowledge the pupil’s loss privately and assure them of schools support.
* Organise a safe space and adult the pupil can go to if needed
* Inform staff
* Ensure both parents are kept up to date with their child’s progress, if possible
* Address issues around family breakup in PSHE

**Confidentiality**

Although it is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure, pupils will be made aware that complete confidentiality in some circumstances cannot be totally guaranteed. This will help in retaining the trust of pupils and parents/carers and will ensure that the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. Sensitive information is only disclosed internally or externally with careful attention to the rights and needs of individuals. When the child/young person returns to school it is important to discuss with them whether they want certain people with whom they come into contact to be informed, such as after-school club leaders.

**Inclusion and equality**

Our school recognises that there is a range of cultural and religious customs and procedures concerning death and that there may be different expectations of the bereaved child and family. We will try to present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. Pupils and staff will be made aware that there are a range of different responses to bereavement and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

**Responding to the media**

Some incidents and deaths, particularly those in sudden or traumatic circumstances, may attract media attention. All members of staff will be 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 Education Authority Communications Office. Pupils will be given advice.

No member of staff will share any information about the incident/bereavement on social media.

**Staff support and training**

It is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for pupils and mutual support for each other. Bereavement awareness training will be provided for all staff. We will ensure members of staff update their skills and knowledge as required.

**Monitoring and evaluation**

This policy will be reviewed every two years to take into account any developments or changes in Statutory Guidance and also after an event. Any changes will be shared with the staff and Governers.

Agreed by governors: October 2020

To be reviewed: October 2023

# Appendices

Appendix A**:** Children’s 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.

* Birth to six months

Babies do not cognitively understand the notion of death; however, that does not mean to say that they do not respond to the loss of someone close, or that they don’t experience grief. A baby up to six months old experiences feelings of separation and abandonment as part of their bereavement. The bereaved baby is aware that the person is missing, or not there and this can cause the baby to become anxious and fretful. This can be heightened if it is the baby’s primary caregiver who has died and the baby is able to identify that the one who is now feeding them, changing them and cuddling them is not the deceased person. Similarly, if it is the baby’s mother who is grieving a loss, the baby can pick up on these feelings and experience grief too.

* Six months to two years

At this developmental stage the baby is able to picture their mother or primary caregiver internally if she/he is not present. If it is the primary caregiver who has died the baby will protest at their absence by loud crying and angry tears. It is common for babies to become withdrawn and lose interest in their toys and feeding and they will likely lose interest interacting with others. At the more mature end of this developmental stage bereaved toddlers can be observed actively seeking the deceased person. For instance, if granddad spent much of his time prior to death in his shed the toddler might persistently return to investigate the shed in the hope that they will find him there.

* 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.

* Teenagers

Young people or teenagers have developed a greater understanding of death, the long term implications of losing someone close and are more keenly aware of the emotional aspects than their younger counterparts.

Due to the developmental changes taking place within the young person at this time their reactions to death are likely to be extremely intense. Many young people will reflect on the injustice of the death asking why the person who has died had to die and they will be considering in greater depth the notion of fate.

The bereaved young person is likely to become concerned about who will pay the bills or care for them if the person who has died was their primary caregiver. The bereaved young person is likely to have a wider social network which they are more likely to seek support from them than their immediate family as they struggle to create an identity independent from that of their family.

The young person’s tasks of grieving are very similar to that of an adult but the young mourner is often unable to manage the strong emotions that bereavement entails and can therefore present as being extremely angry and even end up in physical fights. Some bereaved young people can revert to childish behaviour in order to relocate some security and normality in their lives where as others might try to “grow up too fast” and see themselves as taking on adult roles.

It is essential to remember that young people are not adults and should therefore not be burdened with adult roles. Like all children and young people, bereaved teenagers need to be allowed and encouraged to share how they are feeling and what frightens them.

There can be a tendency for young people to try and avert their emotions or bottle them up by avoiding the family or by assuming the role of an adult. If this happens, gentle encouragement is needed for the young person to open up and communicate their feelings. Sometimes a bereaved young person may become involved in risky behaviours in an attempt to manage their grief and its associated emotions.

For example, some bereaved young people may use alcohol or drugs as a way of self soothing. Often the alcohol / drugs act as an anaesthetic to the pain they are experiencing. Self-harming can also be employed by bereaved young people in an attempt to help them cope with their sadness. If the bereaved young person is self-medicating or harming themselves help should be sought.

**Primary Reactions**

First reactions to bereavement or loss may be:

* Disbelief
* Anger
* Panic
* Anxiety
* Fear
* Crying
* Talking – repeating what they have experienced/heard
* Inability to process information well – they may not hear or take in what has happened or what has been said to them
* Regression – we all regress when we hear bad news, we want to be looked after and protected
* Sadness
* Withdrawal
* Aggression

**Secondary Reactions**

Associated with the above Primary Effects are Secondary Effects which all staff should be aware of:

* Change in behaviour
* Change in peer groups
* Loss of motivation
* Lack of achievement
* Poor hygiene
* Change in family role
* Effects on relationships

Staff are aware that grief may be delayed or may re-emerge years later. Feelings and needs of bereaved children will vary. Some children see school as a haven of peace and normality in contrast to the trauma at home. Other children may find school is the place to freely express their feelings.

Staff should be alert to:

* Changes in behaviour
* Mood swings
* Low self-esteem
* Psychosomatic symptoms – headaches, stomach aches etc
* Insecurity, feeling unwanted, friendship difficulties
* Depression
* Isolation and withdrawal

Useful responses from staff:

* Acknowledge the event to pupils, in a confidential way, letting them know that you are available to help and support them, or refer them to another emotionally available adult.
* Be willing to listen and give them time
* Be willing to answer questions if able to, but always bearing in mind the information you already know about that child and family i.e religion, cultural beliefs. However, don’t feel that all questions need answering, it’s more important that staff listen to pupil’s worries and fears and take their queries seriously
* Be genuine, professional and non-judgemental
* Give information to them including the ‘normalisation’ of their reactions i.e their reactions are normal
* Encourage pupils to talk, share their feelings and seek help as appropriate
* Maintain a routine in school; flexible, caring and containing
* Offer sensitivity, care and empathy

Appendix B: Talking about death to children with learning difficulties

When talking about death and bereavement with a child with learning difficulties it

might be helpful to consider: -

* WHO should be key worker working with the child and family - inform parents who this person will be and keep in contact.
* WHERE is the child most receptive to new ideas? – quiet room, pool, outside. Use this space for talking with the child.
* WHAT should be talked about? (as agreed with parents). Ensure that you use the same language and ideas as the family to avoid confusing the child.
* HOW is new information normally given? - signs, verbally, pictures. Use the same format to talk about illness and death.
* HOW is new information normally reinforced? – you will probably need to repeat information a number of times over a long period.
* PROCEED at a level, speed and language appropriate to the child
* BUILD on information given – small bites of the whole, given gradually will be easier to absorb.
* REPEAT information as often as needed.
* WATCH for reactions to show the child understands – modify and repeat as needed.
* FOLLOW child’s lead – if indicating a need to talk or have feelings acknowledged, encourage as appropriate.
* WATCH for changes in behaviour to indicate the child is struggling more than they can say and offer support as needed.
* LIAISE with other agencies involved with the child to ensure accuracy and continuity of information.

All children benefit from being given simple, honest “bite size” pieces of information

about difficult issues - often repeated many times over. For some children with

special needs, it might be more appropriate for symbols to be used to convey ideas

rather than language. This can include the use of ‘talking mats’ or other symbol support resources.

Appendix C: Cultural and religious considerations

Different Cultures and Beliefs

Schools have to function within an increasingly multi-cultural society, in which various beliefs, religious and non-religious, require to be taken into account. Respect for the differing needs, rituals and practices is essential when acknowledging a death. It is this diversity that enriches our lives.

General points for Eastern Faiths:

Within a faith there are often many variations and it is wrong to be prescriptive beliefs can be moderated by life in a Western Culture. This is especially so for the younger generation, who may find it difficult to fit in with the stricter requirements of older members of a family or community. Families tend to be much more involved in preparing the body and the funeral

arrangements than in Christian faiths.

Because of belief in an afterlife, it is important that the whole body is retained. Post-mortems therefore tend to be viewed as unwelcome procedures. The coffin is likely to be kept at home until the funeral and may well be open. All who wish to pay their respects will be very welcome. The following descriptions merely give an overview of the major religions and belief systems that are found in the UK.

***Christianity***

Christians believe that there is just one God and that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. They believe that Jesus died on the cross (The Crucifixion), and that three days later, God raised him from the dead (The Resurrection).

Christians believe in an afterlife and also the idea of resurrection but the details around what actually happens at the time of death and afterwards, varies within the different denominations. For some, as soon as a person dies, he or she is judge by God and will immediately go to Heaven or Hell, dependent 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 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 before it is placed in a coffin. The funeral, organised by an undertaker, is about one week after the death. This usually takes place in a church, but sometimes a crematorium, or a combination of the two. The coffin will remain closed. Wreaths or bunches of flowers may be placed on the coffin. It is traditional to wear black but this custom varies. If held in a church, the funeral service may include a Holy Communion, Eucharist or Mass. The body will either be buried or cremated, dependent on the wishes of the deceased and the 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.

***Islam***

Muslims believe in life after death when, on the Last Day, the dead will come back to life to be judged by Allah. The good will reside in Paradise, the damned in Hell.

Muhammad teaches that all men and women are to serve Allah and that they should try to live perfectly, following the Qur`an. Devout Muslims believe that death is a part of Allah’s plan and open expressions of grief may be viewed as disrespectful to this belief.

As cremation is forbidden, Muslims are always buried, 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 be used. The grave is aligned to enable the head of the deceased 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 on Fridays.

***Hindu***

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. What a person does in this life will influence what happens to them in the next, the law of Karma. Those that have performed good deeds in this life will be reborn into higher order families, those whose behaviour has been bad will be born again as outcasts. 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 attending, it may be worth asking what will be appropriate dress. During the service, offerings such as flowers or sweetmeats may be passed around and bells rung so noise 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 would light the funeral pyre. Here, he will press the button to make the coffin disappear 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. The mourning period lasts between two and five weeks.

***Sikhs***

Sikhs believe the soul goes through a cycle of rebirths, with the ultimate objective being to reach perfection, to be reunited with God and, as a result, break the cycle. Thus death holds no fear and mourning is done discretely. The present life is influenced by what happened in previous ones and the current life will set the scene for the next.

The deceased 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 held at the Gurdwara. The ashes may be taken back to India to be scattered. Here they may be sprinkled in the sea or river. The family remain in mourning for several days after the funeral and may listen to readings from the Guru Granth Sahib (Holy Book).

***Buddhist***

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 nonreligious

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.

***Humanist***

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 deceased. The person people knew is talked about, stories shared, and memories recalled. Their favourite music may be played, whatever it is. This is done by friends and family who are supported by an Officiant. The ceremony, usually a cremation, will be tailored to meet the family’s wishes rather than following a set pattern.

Appendix D: Guidelines for breaking news about a death to staff and Governors

• Arrange a staff meeting which should take place as soon as possible.

• Impart factual information. Never make assumptions or repeat what has been said by rumour.

• Give news sensitively and empathetically, being aware that people may react in different ways.

Be cognisant of the relationships staff may have had with the person who has died.

• Ensure that there is someone responsible for telling people who are unable to attend the staff meeting i.e. part time staff, peripatetic staff, lunch time supervisors. Consider the best way of imparting the information to those absent e.g. by doing home visit, by telephone, text or e-mail etc.

• Identify individual members of staff who feel able to:

a) support members of staff b) support groups of children

The most appropriate person to support the children should be well known to them and trusted.

• Identify a member of staff who will liaise with the individual’s family, to deal with staff condolences and any funeral arrangements (if necessary).

• Identify an appropriate member of staff who will take ‘phone calls and/or direct them as appropriate. Try to establish a “protected” telephone line to ensure free flow of accurate information.

 Telephone line providers may provide an additional line if the situation requires one.

• Identify a member of staff who will provide a newsletter for parents (see examples of letter templates) which should be sent the same day.

• Arrange a staff meeting at the end of the day to ensure staff are coping with the situation.

 Identify any unresolved problems or ongoing issues.

 Ensure that those staff who live alone have contact numbers of friends in case of need.

• Identify sources of advice and support to access for help in coming to terms with the bereavement

Appendix E: Guidelines for breaking news of the death to the children/young people

• Inform the children/young people as soon as possible about the death.

• Where possible, the pupils should be informed in small groups i.e. class or tutor groups.

 Identify those children who had a long term and/or close relationship with the person who has died so they can be told separately.

 If appropriate, a special assembly could be held at a later time in the day to remember the person who has died.

• Allow the children/young people to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.

• Allow the children/young people to verbalise their feelings.

• Allow the children/young people to discuss the situation and share their experiences of death.

• Be honest about your own feelings and talk about your relationship with the person.

• Avoid using euphemisms.

• Those children/young people who have had more involvement with the person should be given the opportunity to share their feelings and experiences either within the group or on a one-to-one situation.

• Ensure the children/young people understand that the death is nothing to do with anything they have said or done. It is in no way their fault.

• Reassure them that not all people who are ill or have had an accident will die and that many people get better.

• Put an appropriate time limit on the discussion. It is preferable to resume normal school activities as soon as possible thus ensuring minimal disruption within the school.

 • Conclude the discussion with a prayer or special poem to remember the person who has died and their family.

• Be available for any child/young person who needs additional help and support.

Appendix F: Suggested template for letter to parents / families –

Before sending a letter home about the death of a pupil, permission should be gained from the child’s parents / guardians and the contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the family and school.

All letters can be changed and personalised dependent on circumstance.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

Sample letter on death of a pupil:

Dear

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

They were told that <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.

When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of feelings of sadness, anger,

and confusion - these are all normal. The children have been told that their teachers

are willing to try and answer their questions at school, but I have made available

some information which may help you to answer your child’s questions as they arise.

You can obtain this from the school office.

Yours sincerely

<Name> Head teacher

Sample letter on death of a staff member:

Dear

I am sorry to have to tell you that a much loved member of our staff / school community <NAME> who has been a teacher at this school for several years has died.

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.

Yours sincerely,

<Name> Headteacher

Sample letter to a bereaved family in circumstances the loss of a family member (Sibling, Parent, Guardian, Grandparent??)

**Initial contact should be made via telephone or face to face wherever possible**.

Dear <Name>

We are so very sorry to hear of <NAME / FAMILY MEMBER> death. There are no words to express the sadness of losing a child / loved one and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through.

As a school community, we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to <CHILDS NAME> and be assured that you are in our thoughts at this very sad time.

Do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of support in any other way.

With Sympathy,

<NAME> Headteacher

Appendix G: Support agencies, useful websites and Books on bereavement

**Penhaligon’s Friends – Children’s Bereavement Support Charity in Cornwall**

Support for schools and settings when faced with bereavement

Tel: 01209 210624 or 01209 215889 Mon – Fri 9am – 5pm

Email: enquires@penhaligonsfriends.org.uk

Website: [www.penhaligonsfriends.org.uk](http://www.penhaligonsfriends.org.uk)

Free advice, guidance, support and resources via telephone helpline/email/video calls, group session for young people online, group sessions online for parents and carers of bereaved children, resources. Support and advice for professionals and schools

**Cornwall Council Local Authority**

To request support in the event of a critical incident impacting school, contact:

Mandy Owen, Senior Manager, Children’s Psychology Services:

07891 840354 or mandy.owen@cornwall.gov.uk

Niki Beechey: 07483 332961 or nicolete.beechey@cornwall.gov.uk

Jacqueline Piper: 07968 892850 or Jacqueline.piper@cornwall.gov.uk

**The Educational Psychology Service**

Free telephone advice service for staff in schools/educational setting.

EPS.Advice@cornwall.gov.uk

If the Early Years Setting has experienced a bereavement then get in touch with the Senior Locality SENCO. There are resources available on their website.

Email: eyis@cornwall.gov.uk

Jeremiah’s Journey - offers support to children and young people who have experienced or are anticipating the death of someone special.

Email: [www.jeremiahsjourney.org.uk](http://www.jeremiahsjourney.org.uk)

Tel: 01752 424348

Child bereavement UK – a bereavement and support service for children and families who have suffered a loss.

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

Winston's Wish - is a childhood bereavement charity in the UK. The charity offers a wide range of practical support and guidance to bereaved children, their families and professionals.

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

Helpline: 08088 020 021

CHICKS - allows children to make magical childhood memories, to relax and have fun, free from the troubles they may be facing back at home. The children that visit CHICKS come from a variety of backgrounds - some live in poverty, others are victims of abuse, have been bereaved or are young carers for sick and disabled relatives.

Email: [www.chicks.org.uk](http://www.chicks.org.uk)

Tel: 01822 811020

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.

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.

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.

LIPLAP'S WISH

Jonathan London and Sylvia Long (Chronicle Books, 1994, ISBN 0-8118-0505-0)

Liplap the rabbit's grandma has died, and his mother tells him of the rabbit legend that "long ago, when the first rabbits died, they became stars in the sky. And to this day, they come out at night and watch over us. And they remind us that our loved ones shine forever in our hearts… When Liplap asks if a star might be his grandma, his mother replies, "I think you could wish it were”.

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.

LIFETIMES

Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen (Belitha Press, 1997, ISBN 1-85561-760-9)

full title: Beginnings and endings with lifetimes in between – a beautiful way to explain life and death to children. This book 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. For birds”. Whilst not exactly comforting, it tells the truth, puts death in perspective, Don't let the rather murky cover put children off - it belies the attractive illustrations within of plants and creatures, alive and dead.

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.

I FEEL SAD

(Wayland, ISBN 0-7052-1406-6)

Not specifically about death, but about different ways of expressing sadness. Could be a useful opening for a conversation about a bereavement, or about coping with feelings.

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"