


Schools' Information Pack



Resources for pastoral support



Call our helpline
0800 02 888 40



Online learning

CPD certified online bereavement training for school staff.



- Example of a bereavement policy
- Further reading
- Additional resources for pupils and staff



Online resources


Visit 'For schools' on our website.



Elephant's Tea Party 

Free lesson plans and fun activities for primary and lower secondary schools, to help pupils develop coping skills for loss and bereavement.

Free App
Grief: Support for Young People



Welcome

Welcome to Child Bereavement UK's Schools' Information pack. This pack aims to provide you with support and information when a death occurs in the school community or if the school is facing an expected death.

This pack has information sheets, resources and examples you can use within your school to help support staff, pupils and the community at a difficult time.

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

- Call the helpline (9-5pm Mon-Fri) on **0800 02 888 40**
- Email support@childbereavementuk.org
- Visit our website www.childbereavementuk.org

This pack has information sheets, resources and examples you can use within your schools to help support staff, pupils and the community at a difficult time.

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

If you would like online training for the whole school, Child Bereavement UK offers an online-learning programme called Supporting Bereaved Pupils, which can be used by unlimited members of staff for an unlimited time. Cost is £250. More information can be found under the [For schools](#) section of our website: www.childbereavementuk.org

We hope you find this pack useful. Please send any feedback can be sent to: schools@childbereavementuk.org

Child Bereavement UK

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How schools can support bereaved pupils

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

Normality

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

A listening ear

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

The opportunity to be a child

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

General support

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

Be proactive

Have a selection of resources available in school on the subject. Refer to the Books and resources fact sheets in this pack for ideas. Stories are a wonderful way to gently introduce young children to the concept of death. Novels and poems offer young people a chance to learn through reading, listening and discussion. For more ideas see the [For schools](#) section of the website www.childbereavementuk.org

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

See fact sheet: [Writing a Bereavement Policy](#) and the example policies (Primary, Secondary and Specialist) on the [For schools](#) section of our website www.childbereavementuk.org

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

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

Avoiding the subject always makes matters worse. It is better to explain what has happened in a sensitive way to avoid rumours and whispers. Use the correct words 'death' and 'dead' rather than euphemisms such as 'lost' or 'gone to sleep'. Suggestions of words to use can be found in the [For schools](#) section of our website.

With a death that has affected your entire school, communicate with the family as to what they would like to be said and then share with staff first, followed by pupils, as quickly as possible. At this stage you probably need to say very little, other than expressing sadness and saying who has died. Correct any misconceptions and say that you will give more information when you have it. Some schools decide to explain in an assembly, others that each teacher individually tells their class.

When the death affects an individual pupil - and the decision has been made to communicate the death to the school - if possible, discuss with the bereaved child what you are going to say before doing so. The child may or may not wish to be present. Consider with the family how giving the news to the school community should be done. The parent, carer or child may wish to write a letter to be read out in school.

Staff and pupils may wish to attend the funeral. Check that this is OK with the family before making arrangements. Think through practical considerations such as how pupils are going to get there, and whether cover needs to be organised for staff.

Schools which board

The information in this pack will be applicable to schools which have a boarding facility or are boarding schools. Staff and pupils may require greater support when a death occurs as there may be less opportunity to discuss the implications outside school.

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

Transitions

There are many transitions that take place in a pupil's life through school; making sure there is clear protocol. Young people who have been supported by Child Bereavement UK have expressed how helpful it is when information about their circumstances can be passed on so that they do not need to repeat their story at each transition point. Transitions could include:

- Changing school
- Infant to middle to secondary to sixth form
- Moving class
- Teacher changes

Writing a Bereavement Policy

A school which takes time to formalise a response before a critical incident or tragedy occurs, will be much better placed to cope should it ever have to be put into practice. However, every school is different and every situation unique. What is deemed appropriate will vary. The policy should be viewed more as a framework to work around rather than something prescriptive. A sample policy can be viewed in the *Resources* section of this pack.

Be prepared

- Having a policy to work to will greatly help when in shock or upset, especially with sudden or multiple deaths or traumatic circumstances.
- Identify key people within your Local Education Authority.
- Try to prepare outlines of documents e.g. letter to parents, in advance.
- Collect together resources for supporting pupils.

Identify a team, define roles and responsibilities

- Use any expertise within the school and share the responsibilities.
- Decide who will take overall charge and designate substitutes should they be absent.
- Who will be responsible for communicating with the families directly involved?
- Who will give the news to the rest of the school community?
- If the press is involved, who will liaise with journalists?
- Organise training for all involved.

Breaking sad news to staff, pupils and families

- Obtaining factual information should be made a priority. Think through how this might be done, remembering that making contact with those directly involved may be difficult. State in your policy the importance of not making assumptions or repeating what has been heard through rumour.
- It is essential that all staff are informed straight away, ideally before pupils. Identify ways of doing this sensitively. Don't forget part-time and peripatetic staff.
- If a pupil dies by suicide, Samaritans provide a step-by step programme to support schools. They can be contacted on: **0808 168 2528**
- Pupils should be told as soon as possible. This is best done in familiar groups by someone they know. Staff may need guidance on words to use and the approach to take. Have something pre-prepared.
- A letter should go to families the same day if possible. A pre-prepared script will be very helpful. It is difficult to find the right words when emotional and in shock.
- Consider including guidelines for parents on supporting bereaved children with the letter. See fact sheet *Guidance for parents and carers* (included in this pack).

The first few days

- In your policy, map out the first few days after an incident. It is usually best to have minimum disruption to the timetable, but some flexibility may be required.
- Consider what the school approach will be if pupils are too upset to attend lessons. If it is a teacher who has died, what will happen to his/her class?

The funeral

- State in the policy that 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 prefer to keep it private.
- Identify which staff and pupils may want to attend and the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport. For some schools, it may be appropriate to close the school, for others, it may not be. Clear guidance on this in the policy will be helpful.
- Will flowers be sent and/or a collection made? Say if staff and pupils should be involved in the decision.
- Cultural and religious implications need consideration. See fact sheet: *Cultures and beliefs* (included in this pack).

Support for staff

- Supporting bereaved pupils will be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions. Include a list of outside agencies, and people at your Local Education Authority, whom may be able to offer help, both short and long-term.
- Plan for some sort of informal mutual support, for example, in the staffroom at the end of the school day, to give staff an opportunity to share feelings and reactions.
- The following fact sheets (within this pack) may be useful for staff: *Looking after yourself (staff)* and *Supporting a bereaved pupil* fact.

Support for pupils

- State in your policy the importance of identifying pupils who may be particularly vulnerable or likely to experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). For example, anyone who witnessed the death.
- Compile (and keep updated) a list of outside professionals and agencies who can come into the school in the event of a traumatic death to counsel pupils.
- Make sure that help offered from outside is appropriate before accepting. Pupils may find it difficult to receive support or counselling from families of fellow pupils.
- Identify 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.

Remembering

This is difficult to plan in advance, but careful thought is required. State that ideally the family of the person who has died should be consulted about plans for any memorials. Schools often find that an assembly which takes the form of a celebration of life is appropriate. See fact sheet: *Special assemblies* (included in this pack).

Children's understanding of death

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

2-5 Years

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

5-8 Years

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

8-12 Years

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

Adolescence

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

Resources - See: *Books and resources* sheets (included in this pack) highlighting various books that can support children's understanding.

Breaking sad news - a death in the school community or when a teacher dies

When someone within a school community has died, it is often difficult to know how to break the news. School communities have very active grapevines and it is better to explain sensitively what has happened rather than saying nothing.

Pupils

When the death affects an individual, it is important to take the wishes of the pupil, siblings, and the rest of the family into account. However, schools have a duty of care to all their pupils and sometimes it is necessary to say something before it has been possible to contact the family. In this situation, a simple acknowledgement of the death is all that is needed.

Many schools tell the class or year group most affected first and follow this up with a brief acknowledgement during assembly. If the bereaved pupil(s) are at school, ask them if they want to be at the assembly. If not attending school, ensure they are told what was said and to whom.

When the death affects the whole school, again check that the bereaved family are aware and OK with what you are going to say.

Guidelines for Breaking Sad News

- Whoever is giving the news should prepare what to say. Staff should be offered help with this.
- If a pupil dies by suicide Samaritans provide step-by-step programme to support schools in explaining this to pupils. They can be contacted on: **0808 168 2528**
- Don't be afraid to show emotion - this just shows that you are human, but can throw you if you are not expecting to react in this way.

- Start by acknowledging you have some sad news to give.
- Be honest. Give the news stating simple facts, use the words dead/died.
- If known, explain where and when the death occurred. Only include how if family are OK with this.
- If not known, say so, and that you will endeavour to find out. If rumours are rife, say which of these are definitely not correct, if known.
- Talk briefly about the person who has died without eulogising them.
- Mention any arrangements already in place
- Close by acknowledging that not everyone will be feeling sad and that is OK.
- Give pupils something practical and positive to do, such as making cards or writing something.

Other families

It is a good idea to let other parents know, certainly the ones whose children are likely to be directly affected. Initially, the basic information is all that should be given out. Once you have checked with the bereaved family, more details can be given if felt necessary. You may wish to let them know about the fact sheet *Guidance for parents and carers* (included in this pack). This will help them answer questions from their children and understand any possible reactions.

Breaking sad news in an assembly

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

Follow the assembly with some classroom time for pupils to express any thoughts or feelings around the news they have just been given. Reactions will vary, but it is helpful for everyone to be given an opportunity to process the news and respond in some way, should they feel the need to. Classes directly affected may welcome the opportunity to write something or make cards.

Suggested words for a Primary School assembly:

I have some very sad news to tell you. Jim Jones in Year 5 died on Saturday morning in road traffic accident. An ambulance was called and Jim was taken to hospital. The doctors and nurses did all they could to try to save his life but his injuries were too severe and tragically he died. His mum is not injured.

Jim was well known throughout the school for being a Manchester United fan and a very keen member of the football team. He was only nine years old and much too young to die but sadly, very occasionally, accidents do sometimes happen.

Some of you may be feeling shocked at this news, some of you might be feeling rather frightened, some of you might be feeling nothing at all. All of these feelings are OK.

When you go to your classes after this assembly, you can spend some time thinking about what I have just told you. Your teachers will try to answer any questions that you might have. We can all help Jim's family a little bit by drawing a picture of our favourite memory of Jim or just writing a card that we can send to let them know that we are thinking about them.

The school will probably be holding a special assembly next week for Jim when we can spend more time thinking about him, remembering him, and saying a special goodbye. When I have more details I will let you all know. If any of you have ideas for this or would like to take part, I would love to hear from you.

When a teacher dies

When a staff member has died, it is often difficult to know how to break the news. School communities have very active grapevines and it is better to explain sensitively what has happened, rather than say nothing. In addition to the guidelines above there are a few additional considerations to take account of when it is a teacher who has died.

Information

Firstly, check that the information you have is correct. It is important to speak to family members, if possible, as they may have specific wishes about what information they would like shared. Check that they are happy with what you are going to say to staff and to pupils.

Staff

Always try to communicate with staff first and then pupils. Do this as quickly as possible. If the news is given early, it will help to avoid rumours and whispers. Try to do this face to face, but if that is not possible, make sure that other communication methods are followed up with personal contact. Give staff time to absorb the news. Remind them of any support available, the school procedure for such situations (it will help greatly if you have a clear bereavement policy in place), and that they can call the Child Bereavement UK helpline **0800 02 888 40** for guidance, or just a confidential chat. Staff directly affected will need support and, ideally, not be left on their own while in the classroom. It may be necessary to arrange cover for their classes.

Pupils

When the death affects an individual (e.g. if the teacher has children who are pupils in the school), if possible take the wishes of the pupil, siblings, and the rest of the family into account. Many schools firstly tell the class or year group most affected and follow this up with a wider acknowledgement during assembly. If there are bereaved pupil(s) at school, ask them if they want to be at the assembly. If the children are not attending school, ensure they are told what was said and to whom.

Secondary school

The same principles apply, but using language more appropriate for young people.

Guidance on organising a special assembly or remembrance service can be found in the fact sheet *Special assemblies* (included in this pack).

Special assemblies - saying 'goodbye'

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

Why hold a special assembly?

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

Who should attend?

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

Who should be involved?

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

How to structure a special assembly

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

The middle section could include:

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

- In a primary school, reading a story. See [Resources](#) section at the end of this pack.

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

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

Afterwards

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

Resources - see various fact sheets and books (included in this pack)

Suggested words to use for an assembly can be found in the [For schools](#) section on Child Bereavement UK's website: www.childbereavementuk.org

Guidance for parents and carers

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

Most children and young people affected by a death just need adults who care about them. You cannot take away their sadness, but you can acknowledge it and support them through the experience. Reactions will vary. If they were not close to the person who died, they may be unaffected. However, it is best not to make assumptions. Any death may make children and young people anxious, as they become more aware of their own mortality and that of those around them.

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

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

Children often have a surprising capacity to deal with the truth, if given information in simple, straightforward language, appropriate for their age and understanding. Young children tend to make up what they do not know and their imaginings are often worse than the reality. Adolescents and teenagers will resent a lack of honesty in the adults around them and the resultant loss of trust will be difficult to regain.

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

Do not think that you have to hide your own sadness. Seeing adults expressing emotion can give a child of any age 'permission' to do the same, if they feel they want to. Hearing how you are feeling may help them to consider their own feelings. Be ready to listen but don't expect your child to always want to talk. They usually will when ready, and often to people who are not immediate family. One way to create opportunities for sharing thoughts and memories is with a joint activity. Young people especially, tend to talk when they do not feel under pressure to do so.

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

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

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

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

Parents and carers can call our helpline: **0800 02 888 40** or email support@childbereavementuk.org for support and information.

Resources – See fact sheet *Books and resources for staff* (included in this pack)



Bereavement support and information for schools

Guidance for parents and carers - the role of the school

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

*I almost felt like another person,
so much had changed so quickly.*

Guy, aged 17

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

Schools are busy places and many grieving parents and carers don't want to be seen to be making a fuss, but remember that support for your child will be most effective if everybody works together.

How might my child's school respond?

Many schools will respond in a caring and appropriate way, but others may not. Most staff want to help but sometimes, when dealing with this emotive subject, they are not sure

what to do or say. Teachers get little in the way of training around loss and grief and can feel out of their depth and unsupported. This can result in them saying or doing little, or even in some instances, nothing at all. If you are concerned, give our helpline a call on 0800 02 888 40, and Child Bereavement UK staff can talk you through ways we can help you, your child, and their school.

Let your child's school know about Child Bereavement UK, even if you have no concerns. Our website has a wealth of information that you and the school may find useful. There are dedicated sections on the website: [For schools](#), [For young people](#) and [For families](#). www.childbereavementuk.org

What school can offer a grieving child just by carrying on with normal daily routines

Some children we support at Child Bereavement UK tell us that in order to protect immediate family from further upset, they sometimes find it easier to talk to someone not directly involved, such as a familiar and trusted teacher or learning mentor. They often comment that going to school gives a sense of normality, and many choose to return immediately after a death has occurred for this reason. Others need to

take a few days off, but the longer they are away, the harder it can be to return. When grieving, children of any age often view school as a place where they can have some time away from overwhelming emotions and sadness.

Communication with school is important

Let the school know about the death as soon as you can. If this is too difficult for you to do, ask a friend to act as a messenger. Try to keep school aware of any arrangements, such as the date of the funeral. From then on, keep up communication. Let them know of any changed behaviour and of any particular concerns or anxieties your child may have concerning school.

Request that all staff know that your child is grieving, who they are grieving for, and when the death occurred. Some children are reluctant for this information to be given out but if everyone has the basic facts, this prevents insensitive remarks being made by teachers and others because they were unaware of what has happened. Certain lesson topics may bring back painful reminders of the circumstances surrounding the death. This unintended upset can cause real distress for your child and the member of staff concerned.

What can I expect from my child's school?

Reading the [For schools](#) section on Child Bereavement UK's website will give you a feel for what is reasonable for a school to put in place for any grieving pupil. Adults often make assumptions about what they think a grieving child needs but this can differ from what the child actually wants. So do check with your child what they would like school to do. Ask for a meeting with whoever is responsible for Pastoral Care and talk through with them what is going to be most helpful for your child.

Below are examples of what many schools will offer a grieving child:

- A chance to meet and talk to your child about how they would like their return to school managed and how best to break the news to their friends and classmates.
- An opportunity to acknowledge what has happened but without making a fuss so that your child does not feel the spotlight is on them.
- Someone of your child's choice that they can talk to, should they feel the need to do this.

- A member of staff who will keep a look out for your child while they are at school, and be the person to contact if you have any queries or concerns. Learning mentors often have this role or someone with pastoral care responsibilities.
- A 'time out' system to enable your child to have some space away from the hustle and bustle if they feel overwhelmed by powerful emotions. Some schools can organise this as time away from class, but still with an adult; others have a quiet corner in the classroom.
- A record of key dates, such as the anniversary of the death, which can often act as a trigger for children to revisit their grief.
- Some flexibility around deadlines for handing in work. Grieving is exhausting and a child or young person may struggle to concentrate on school work. A member of Child Bereavement UK's Young People's Advisory Group said: 'Everything seemed really trivial, and all of my work just didn't really matter to me anymore.'

All of the above are very simple to put in place and take little in the way of resources; they just need a bit of thought. The most important thing that your child's school can provide is people who care and who have a bit of understanding. It doesn't matter that they are not trained bereavement counsellors. School staff know how to listen, and really listening is what the children we work with say means more than anything to them. This is one of the messages on the [What teachers need to know film](#) created by our Young People's Advisory Group, which can be accessed on the [For young people](#) section of our website.

Resources – See fact sheet: [Books and resources for staff](#) (included in this pack). You may also like to watch Child Bereavement UK's other shortfilms made by bereaved young people, including [What parents need to know](#): www.childbereavementuk.org

Supporting a bereaved pupil

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

Try not to judge - Grief is a very personal experience, every child and young person will do it their way, even if from the same family. Teenagers in particular resent assumptions being made as to how they should be feeling and what they should be doing.

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

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

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

Children and young people need honesty

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

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

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

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

Resources - See fact sheet: *Books and resources for staff* (included in the pack)

Sikhism

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 be held at the Gurdwara. The ashes may be taken back to India to be scattered. In the UK they may be sprinkled in the sea or a river.

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

General points for Eastern faiths:

Within a faith there are often many variations so it is important not 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. Those who wish to pay their respects will be welcome.

Whilst the above outlines some general characteristics of different faiths, remember that all families are different and will interpret traditions in their own way. All families have their own idiosyncratic culture specific to themselves and may have particular ways they would like things to be done. It is therefore very important not to make general assumptions and always best to ask families how they will mark the death / remember the person who has died.

Resources – See fact sheet *Books and resources for Staff* (included in this pack)

Cultures and beliefs

Schools are part of a multi-cultural society in which various beliefs, religious and non-religious, are required to be taken into account. Respect for the differing needs, rituals and practices of different cultures is essential when acknowledging a death. In some cultures, extended family plays a very important role in the child's life and the death of a relative can have a profound impact.

The following descriptions give an overview of the major religions and belief systems that are found in the UK.

Buddhism

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

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

Christianity

Christians believe that there is just one God and that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. 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 judged 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 to do so 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.

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.

Hinduism

Hindus believe in reincarnation and a cycle of rebirths. When a person dies, the soul is reborn in a new body, returning to earth in either a better or worse form. What a person does in this life will influence what happens to them in the next, the law of Karma. Those who 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 you are attending the funeral, 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; sound is a part of the ritual. The chief mourner, usually the eldest son, and other male members of the family, may shave their heads as a mark of respect. In India, the chief mourner 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.

Humanism

Humanists are non-religious. They follow the principle that this life is the only one we have and therefore when you are dead there is no moving on to another one. The focus of a Humanist funeral is on celebrating the life of the deceased; stories are shared and memories recalled and their favourite music may be played. 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.

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 have been 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.

Judaism

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

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

Bereavement support groups

The bereaved children and young people we support at Child Bereavement UK often tell us that what they need is easily accessible, informal support, and that they often feel more comfortable receiving this from their peers or from trusted adults other than parents and carers. Schools are ideally placed to meet this need by running a Support Group.

What are the benefits?

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

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

Which model to use?

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

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

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

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

Who should run it?

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

Referral process

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

Confidentiality

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

Timing

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

Important things to think about

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

Resources

See the fact sheet *Books and resources for Staff* (included in this pack)

Looking after yourself (staff)

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

Share feelings

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

Anticipate that you may experience an emotional reaction

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

Professional boundaries

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

Have information on resources and organisations

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

Help others

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

Spoil yourself

Make time to do something just for you, or give yourself a treat. Physical exercise can be a great stress buster.

Factors that can contribute to overload

Supporting bereaved children is emotionally demanding. In a study by Brown (1993), teachers from five schools cited the following factors as contributing to their stress:

- Witnessing pain and distress experienced by the families.
- Feeling unskilled in dealing with emotional responses.
- Physical exhaustion as a result of emotional trauma.
- Poor communication between themselves and families or other carers.

Brown also comments on the tensions that can arise in a school setting between a member of staff's personal needs and their professional role. Being over-involved could lead to attachments that are inappropriate or impossible to sustain.

A study by Lane, Rowland and Beinart (2014) showed that teachers often feel uncertain how to respond to bereaved adolescents, particularly in relation to talking about the bereavement, yet feel an obligation to stay strong, to address the bereavement and to provide support even if distressed themselves. They found that teachers best managed their own emotions through setting boundaries in their professional role, creating emotional distance, seeking support from colleagues or using their own social networks or social agencies. They also identified the benefit of drawing on teachers' own experience of bereavement and the usefulness of bereavement training.

It does not help to offer something that you cannot deliver

No matter how well-meant or strong the desire to take the pain away, always try to be realistic with the amount of support that you can give. It is much better to offer something small but constant rather than a grand gesture that is going to be difficult to deliver. Providing a listening ear once a week and sticking to it is more meaningful than the offer of help anytime when inevitably that cannot be achieved within a busy school environment.

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

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

Try to recognise when you are running on empty

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

If staff members want further support, ring helpline on **0800 02 888 40** or email support@childbereavementuk.org

Practical ideas

Breathing space - 'time out'

The pupil is given permission to leave class for a short time when beginning to feel out of control or just to get some personal space when upset. It is important that staff are made aware to avoid embarrassing scenes for either the pupil or the teacher. It is essential that the pupil does not just wander around the school but goes to a designated place and person. Identify a way in which the pupil can comfortably show they are struggling e.g. an item/card is carried with the pupil and if the pupil signals to the teacher (item or card left on the desk/ shown to the teacher) the pupil may leave the room without having to ask.

Pocket comforter

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

Diary

A way to communicate with a bereaved child who finds it difficult to verbalise feelings. The pupil leaves the diary in a mutually agreed place having written or drawn whatever they wish. The teacher responds in the diary and either leaves it to be picked up or discretely returns it to the pupil.

Happy / sad faces

The bereaved pupil has a sheet of paper or a paper plate with two drawings of faces on either side, one happy, one sad. The pupil shows the side the face that reflects how they are feeling on a particular day. This gives the teacher an idea of how they are and therefore which approach to use.

I can... you can...

A series of four postcards with ideas about how others can help. Titles include 'To My Teacher' or 'What you can do'. A helpful communication tool. Available from The Childhood Bereavement Network: [0207 843 6309](tel:02078436309).

Resources - See fact sheet: [Books and resources for staff](#) (included in this pack)

Pupils with special needs

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

Communicating the truth

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

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

Understanding the concept of death

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

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

Expressing their grief

Children do not need protection from the feelings and emotions associated with grief but do need support to express them and reassurance that these sometimes powerful

and overwhelming emotions are normal and necessary. This is even more the case for children with learning difficulties.

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

Remembering the person who has died

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

Resources - See fact sheet *Books and resources: Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND)*



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

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

Honest communication is important

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

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

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

Answering difficult questions

School staff can find themselves faced with a question such as 'Do you think that my mum is going to die?' Try to establish the pupil's understanding of what is happening by turning the question around. Respond with something like 'Tell me what you think' and take it from there. It is usually not appropriate for school to add information, but it is OK to acknowledge what the child already knows. With a young child, let the family know about the conversation, but respect a teenager's need for confidentiality.

The emotional roller coaster

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

Someone to listen to anxieties and fears

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

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

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

Helping the family

In a school that belongs to a tight knit community, organising practical help from other parents and families can be welcome. Check first that the family is OK with this, but hands-on assistance with things like taking siblings to activities or doing the ironing can be a great help for all involved. The family can contact Child Bereavement UK's helpline: **0800 02 888 40** for support and guidance or can visit the **For families** section on the Child Bereavement UK website.

Resources

See: *Books and resources*, relevant to age (included in this pack)



Pupils with a life-threatening illness

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

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

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

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

If the child is receiving treatment from a local hospice or hospital, there is often a nurse or social worker whose job

includes visiting schools to explain to pupils about a friend's illness and treatments involved. This should help alleviate any worries that fellow pupils may have. It is helpful for the school to at least identify the key professional responsible for the ill child and how to contact them for advice and support.

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

A sense of normality is further maintained by continuing to expect usual standards of behaviour within the child's limitations. This helps to reduce feelings of favouritism amongst other children. Other parents and carers at the school may have concerns surrounding their own children being upset or made anxious by a classmate who is seriously ill. Reassurance that children and young people will have fewer anxieties if presented with the truth, rather than having to make up what is happening, may help. With consent from the family of the sick child, information on the illness and treatments will help other parents and carers

to understand and feel informed. The realisation that their children are contributing to an increased quality of life for the sick child may create a more positive approach. Offer parents and carers information on what to say to children when someone is dying.

Support for professionals on life-limiting illnesses - see the [For schools](#) section on www.childbereavementuk.org

Resources

See: *Books and resources* (included in this pack)

Suicide

Whether supporting a pupil bereaved through the suicide of a family member, or trying to help the friends of someone who has decided to take their own life, schools need to think through an appropriate response. The guidelines below may be of help.

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

Ironically, when someone has been suicidal or depressed, it is often when they are feeling better that they are more likely to attempt suicide. It takes a strong character and can be a difficult physical act which requires time and planning to be successful. For a young person experiencing rapid change and lack of security in their life, suicide can sometimes seem the only way to take control. People who take their own life do not necessarily want to die, it is more that they cannot find a reason to live.

Suicide is a very public event and school communities tend to have active grapevines. The circumstances surrounding the death may well be common knowledge but added to with rumour and confusion over details. The children directly affected, if not told the truth, will eventually find out what really happened and consequently lose trust in the adults around them. In consultation with the family, it is important that a school communicates to staff and pupils through simple facts of events, as quickly as possible. Sensitive explanation of the importance of the need for honesty may help a reluctant family but, whatever approach is decided upon, school should

follow the family's wishes. (See Winston's Wish's resource: *Beyond the Rough Rock*).

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

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

Some important points:

- Children and young people bereaved through suicide are more likely to need skilled help, but the informal support of familiar and trusted adults such as teachers is still vital.
- Children and young people who witnessed any part of the suicide, or found the body, may experience recurrent and intrusive recollections of the event. This will have a major impact on their ability to concentrate and school work is likely to suffer.
- The overwhelming feelings of anger and guilt associated with suicide may cause challenging behaviour at school. Reassure that nothing the child did or said was the cause of the death. The person who died chose to take their own life.
- Suicide is the ultimate form of rejection for a young person or child and can result in very low self-esteem. School can help a child to feel better about themselves by emphasising the positive and recognising the pupil's achievements, however small.
- It is difficult to find words to use around any bereavement, let alone one through suicide. It is important to offer the same comments that might be said to any pupil experiencing the death of someone close to them. Silence will reinforce feelings of isolation and possible shame.
- Where a pupil dies by suicide, Samaritans provide a Step-by-Step programme to support schools and can be contacted on **0808 168 2528**

Resources – See fact sheet: *Books and resources for staff* (included in this pack)

Grief and bereavement in Gypsy and Traveller families

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

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

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

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

Funeral traditions

Whilst each family is individual and will have their own ways of doing things, certain traditions held amongst gypsies and Travellers may have an impact on the way each person grieves. Traditionally, the trailer (caravan) and all the possessions of the person who had died would have been burnt. Today they are more likely to be sold. This removing of memories and possessions means that any connection with the person whom has died has gone. Children and young people can find the absence of reminders of someone who they may have been close to very difficult. The practice of 'sitting up', of not leaving the deceased alone from the time of death until the funeral, is common and may impact on family

members in different ways. For many families religion may be an important aspect of Traveller life and traditionally funerals in these communities take place quickly, particularly for Irish Travellers who are Catholic. This may limit the amount of time available to discuss how different family members would like things to be done.

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

Impact on children and young people

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

Children in Gypsy Traveller communities often take part in nearly all aspects of adult life, including all the rituals surrounding a death and the funeral. However, the protective nature of Traveller families may mean that the death of someone important to a child is often not openly talked about. Children often tell us that being involved and being given choices about participation in such rituals can be very helpful. We also know that in families where there is more

open communication about the death and about the person who has died, the child's longer-term adjustment is generally better. Whilst talking about someone who has died can be difficult for these families, it is important for children to feel able to ask questions and understand what has happened. Children and young people may benefit from the opportunity to remember and share thoughts and feelings about the person who has died. However, such open discussion can often present a challenge to Gypsy and Traveller families. This can make it harder for these families to access external support agencies such as mental health or bereavement services.

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

Supporting Gypsy and Traveller Families

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

Resources – see *Books and resources for staff* (included in this pack) and *It's Different Without You* by Carol Rogers.

Forces' families

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

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

A child may have to change school mid-term. This will add to the stress, as they may face difficulties integrating into a new school, and having to make new friends when other children are in already established friendships. If a place is not available at a catchment school this may give rise to distress caused by a journey to school alone, rather than with friends or neighbours.

Many service children attend boarding schools, being the only way to maintain some continuity in their education. Following a bereavement this may no longer be a financial option, requiring a change to schooling in the state system. Every time a Forces' child has to change school, they are faced with having to explain their situation all over again. For some this may be too hard and they may choose to keep quiet. Friends

and staff can inadvertently say hurtful or inappropriate things adding to their grief.

Forces' families can experience a loss of identity. When someone close dies, Forces' families lose not just their own former family unit but also their belonging to a much wider one, i.e. their Regiment or Battalion. The family's identity is very bound up with the role of the parent and, if that person dies, everyone is forced to rethink their place in the world. All bereaved children are vulnerable but adolescents and teenagers especially may feel a huge sense of loss around who they thought they were, and may struggle with what feels like a whole new identity.

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

Understanding the difference between dead and alive can be more difficult. For young children, as long as they are well prepared and given a choice, seeing the dead body can help them begin to understand what being dead means and the difference between dead and alive. For understandable reasons, children in Forces' families may be denied this opportunity. This can make a reality which is already difficult to grasp even more so.

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

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

How to help in school

Everything throughout this Information Pack applies but the following extra suggestions for Forces' families may be helpful:

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

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

Resources – See fact sheet: *Books and resources for staff* (included in this pack)

Social media and young people's views

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

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

It needs to be remembered that a school cannot 'contain' information that is being shared within the community; it will 'leak out'. Bearing this in mind, consideration needs to be given to the use of social media and how to deal with some of the repercussions it can have.

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

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

High profile / upsetting events

Media can approach the school for information and their views when reporting on a high profile/upsetting event. When faced with this situation, the local authority may be able to offer help in relation to processes and protocol.

Young People's views on social media

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

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

Young people's views by Child Bereavement UK's Youth Ambassadors Rebecca, aged 17

How do you use social media?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Kayleigh, aged 19

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

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

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

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

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

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

A useful Beginners' Guide to Social Media can be found here: www.moz.com/beginners-guide-to-social-media

Supporting children and young people bereaved by murder or manslaughter

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When the perpetrator is known

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

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

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

How to break the news

A child is going to find what they hear difficult. In their helpful booklet *Hope Beyond the Headlines* Winston's Wish make some recommendations on ways to tell children that someone has died in these circumstances.

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

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

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

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

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

Speaking to others. The young people we work with who have been bereaved by murder or manslaughter say that support from peers who have been bereaved in the same way is vital. The shared experience creates an understanding and empathy they feel no one else can offer. To see films made by young people about their experiences of being bereaved by murder or manslaughter, visit the For young people section of the website: www.childbereavementuk.org

Resources – See fact sheets (included in this pack):

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

Responding to frightening events

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

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

- Sticking to their normal routines and activities as much as possible is reassuring and helps children to feel safe and makes events feel predictable
- Try to manage your own anxiety so that you can provide calm reassurance to the child about their own safety
- Give them the opportunity to talk about events and to ask questions without forcing them to talk
- Answer their questions openly and honestly using language appropriate to their level of understanding
- Try to answer only the question asked and avoid giving extra detail. There is a fine line between being honest and overloading a child with information they do not want. Try to give just enough information to enable the child to start to put together a story that makes some sense to them
- Children may also start to worry about themselves or

others close to them being hurt. Although you cannot offer definite reassurance that this will not happen, it can be helpful to say something like 'There are some very bad people in this world but not many - most are good and kind'. This might help redress the balance. Being heavy users of social media, adolescents and teenagers are more aware of the realities of life, and much of what they hear about is skewed towards the bad. A death by murder or manslaughter reinforces the feeling that the world is a scary and dangerous place

Look on the website www.childbereavementuk.org For families section to find the Information Sheet: After the event – supporting children after a frightening event

World events

Schools need to be aware that if a large scale disaster has happened in a particular area/country, and is shown in the news/media, there may be repercussions within the school, depending on the backgrounds and cultures of the individuals in the school.

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

TV deaths and deaths of celebrities

TV programmes can have a big impact on pupils' feelings and understanding of the world around them. Different programmes have various story lines of disasters and death, and being aware that these may trigger a reaction in some pupils, due to the nature of the situation, should be taken into consideration. Pupils may form close attachments to celebrities. The death of someone well known and the subsequent media response may need to be considered. Some acknowledgement of the event, and possibly a quiet space or time out, may be needed throughout the day.

Books and resources - early years

The suggestions below are suitable to use with very young children to introduce the life cycle including the end of life, or to use when someone they know has died. Children under five may not fully understand the concept of death but will be very aware that something important has happened. They need simple and honest explanations, possibly repeated many times. The books below will help with this.

General books

I Miss My Sister

Sarah Courtauld

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

A young girl's sister has died and the impact on her and her family is sensitively illustrated with minimum text. Designed to be shared with an adult, it will help to start conversations, answer questions and allay any fears.

Missing Mummy

Rebecca Cobb

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

Beautifully illustrated and with moments of wonderful warmth, this is a touching, honest and helpful book about the death of a parent. With minimum text, it touches on some of the worries and fears that a young child may have after a death, offering reassurance and hope.

I Miss You: a First Look at Death

Pat Thomas

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

Goodbye Mousie

Robie H Harris

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

When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death

Laurence Krasny Brown and Marc Brown

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

Granpa

John Burningham

This award-winning book is a beautifully written tale about the close and imaginative relationship between a little girl and her Granpa. The last page is an illustration of Granpa's empty chair with the little girl beside it looking very thoughtful. No explanation is offered but his death is implied. This non-directive approach enables the book to be used for a variety of situations.

Pre-bereavement

My Brother and Me

Sarah Courtauld

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

This pre-bereavement book is designed to help children understand how they and the rest of their family might feel when someone in that family is seriously ill. It offers opportunities to share concerns and fears and ways to manage difficult feelings such as jealousy. Age 4-10 but could be used with younger children.

Sudden death

Is Daddy Coming Back in a Minute?

Elke Barber and Alex Barber

Alex is only three when his father suffers a heart attack. All on his own, Alex manages to get help but his beloved Daddy dies at the scene. This is a good book to explain sudden death to pre-school children using words and illustrations they will understand.

Death of a baby

We were gonna have a baby, but we had an angel instead

Pat Schwiebert

For age two upwards. A children's book told from a young child's perspective about the excitement and dreams of a coming baby, and the disappointment and sadness of a miscarriage. Beautiful ink and watercolour illustrations.

Goodbye baby – Cameron's Story

Gillain Griffiths

Cameron cannot understand why his brother died and he gets angry. He creates a special scrapbook so that he will not forget his brother. Written by the author to help her 3-year-old son understand what a miscarriage is.

All Shining in the Spring

Siobhan Parkinson

Matthew is looking forward to the new baby but there is bad news, the baby is not growing properly and will not live after it is born.

Workbook for pupils to use

Someone I know Has Died

Trish Phillips

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

This activity book is designed to be used with adult help by very young children who need assistance to understand what being dead means, what we do, and how we might feel when someone dies. Some pages are interactive in ways familiar to children.

Religion

Pip and the edge of Heaven

Elizabeth Liddle

Pip is very young when he first asks his mother a question about Heaven. His mother encourages him to think through an answer of his own. Together, Pip and his mother try to find their own answers to many more questions about Heaven. As Pip grows older, his questions and answers begin to show a more mature understanding. By the time Pip is almost five years old, he and his mother have come to a view of love, God and Heaven that is both simple yet sophisticated, endearing yet profound. This book is perfect for encouraging children to formulate and answer questions about life, death, love, God and Heaven.

Books and resources - Key Stage 1 / P1-2 / 5-7yrs

The suggestions below are suitable to use with young children to introduce the life cycle including the end of life, or to use when someone they know has died. Books can help children experiencing loss make some sense of confusing and sad emotions. They can also help children to feel less alone. Different books can be selected, appropriate for individual circumstances. The books marked * are particularly suitable for reading during circle time. Always be prepared for children who may become upset. It is a good idea to let parents/carers know that you are introducing the subject of loss and bereavement.

General books

I Miss My Sister

Sarah Courtauld

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

A young girl's sister has died and the impact on her and her family is sensitively illustrated with minimum text. Designed to be shared with an adult, it will help to start conversations, answer questions and allay any fears.

Missing Mummy

Rebecca Cobb

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

Beautifully illustrated and with moments of wonderful warmth, this is a touching, honest and helpful book about the death of a parent. With minimum text, it touches on some of the worries and fears that a young child may have after a death, offering reassurance and hope.

When your mum or dad has cancer

Ann Couldrick

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

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

The secret C by Straight Talking About Cancer

Julie Stokes and Vicky Fullick

This illustrated guide for children provides a sensitive introduction for a child when a parent, sibling or a person close to them is diagnosed with cancer. It is aimed at children aged 7 to 10 years and will work best when an adult is present to expand on the simple messages in the text.

* *Badger's Parting Gifts*

Susan Varley

(also available in Urdu and Arabic)

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

* *The Lonely Tree*

Nicholas Halliday

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

Am I Like My Daddy?

Marcy Blesy

This beautifully illustrated and poignant book will help children bereaved when very young who struggle to remember the parent who died. Grace is in the process of learning about who her father was. Through the eyes of others, she learns about who she is today. This book is American, but relevant to all.

Heaven

Nicholas Allan

While he is waiting for the angels to collect him, Dill the dog explains to Lily what he thinks heaven is like: hundreds of lampposts to pee against, lots of whiffy things to smell and bones everywhere. Lily completely disagrees. Luckily, they agree to disagree just in time for a poignant, last goodbye.

* *Waterbugs and Dragonflies*

D Stickney

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

Josh – coming to terms with the death of a friend

Stephanie Jeffs and Jacqui Thomas

Josh's friend Max has died. The book explains with simple clarity not only what happens to the body of a dead person but also the Christian belief that we will be safe in heaven.

* *Lifetimes*

Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen

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

* *Dogger*

Shirley Hughes

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

When Uncle Bob Died

Althea

A helpful book which in a simple way explains the facts surrounding death. It is honest but reassuring. A good book to read to a young child to prepare them for the death of someone close. Realistic illustrations.

When Dinosaurs die: A Guide to Understanding Death

Laurence Krasny Brown and Marc Brown

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

What does dead mean?

Caroline Jay and Jenni Thomas

Available Jessica Kingsley www.jkp.com

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

Pre-bereavement

My Brother and Me

Sarah Courtauld

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

This pre-bereavement book is designed to help children understand how they and the rest of their family might feel when someone in the family is seriously ill. It offers opportunities to share concerns and fears and ways to manage difficult feelings such as jealousy. Age 4-10 but could be used with younger children.

The Saddest Time

Norma Simon

Explains death as the inevitable end of life and provides three situations in which children experience powerful emotions when someone close has died. The scenarios are an uncle with a terminal illness, a classmate killed in an accident and a grandparent who dies of old age.

Support if a teacher dies

The Copper Tree

Hilary Robinson and Mandy Stanley

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

Books to support staff

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

Available from Jessica Kingsley www.jkp.com

With twenty educators contributing ideas piloted with children of different abilities and backgrounds in their care, to explore and demystify the experience of loss within the framework of the National Curriculum.

As big as it gets

www.winstonswish.org.uk

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

The Invisible String

Patrice Karst

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

Workbooks to use with pupils

Someone I know has died

Trish Philips

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

This is an innovative activity book with many unusual and interactive features, written for bereaved children to help them understand what it means when someone dies and to explore their thoughts and feelings with an adult. Designed with pre-school and early years age groups, some older children may also enjoy this book too.

Helping Children Think About Bereavement

Heather Butler

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

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

We will meet again in Jannah

Zamir Hussain

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

Remembering

Dianne Leutner

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

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

Books and resources - Key Stage 2 / P3-7 / 7-11yrs

The suggestions below are suitable to use with children to introduce the life cycle including the end of life, or to use when someone they know has died. Books can help children experiencing loss make some sense of confusing and sad emotions. They can also help children to feel less alone. Different books can be selected, appropriate for individual circumstances.

General books

Always and Forever

Alan Durant

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

The Tenth Good Thing About Barney

Judith Viorst

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

Remembering Mum

Ginny Perkins

A simple photo journey of a real family whose Mum died. It shows how that family coped with the anniversary of Mum's death, and how they are living without her but still including her in their daily lives. Very real and one with which children will identify.

Sad Book

Michael Rosen

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

Am I Like My Daddy?

Marcy Blesy

This beautifully illustrated and poignant book will help children bereaved when very young who struggle to remember the parent who died. Grace is in the process of learning about who her father was. Through the eyes of others, she learns about who she is today. This book is American, but relevant to all.

What On Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies?

Trevor Romain

Child-friendly, accessible text, this short book deals with the many questions that bereaved children of this age have when someone dies.

What does dead mean? By Caroline Jay and Jenni Thomas.
Available Jessica Kingsley www.jkp.com

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

Pre-bereavement

Us Minus Mum
Heather Butler

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

When your mum or dad has cancer
Ann Couldrick

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

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

The secret C by Straight Talking About Cancer
Julie Stokes and Vicky Fullick

This illustrated guide for children provides a sensitive introduction for a child when a parent, sibling or a person close to them is diagnosed with cancer. It is aimed at children aged 7 to 10 years and will work best when an adult is present to expand on the simple messages in the text.

The Huge Bag of Worries
Virginia Ironside

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

Support if a teacher dies

The Copper Tree
Hilary Robinson and Mandy Stanley

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

Workbooks to use with pupils

Remembering
Dianne Leutner
Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

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

Helping Children Think About Bereavement
Heather Butler
Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

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

Someone I know has died
Trish Phillips
Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

An activity book written for bereaved children to help them understand what it means when someone dies and to explore their thoughts and feelings with an adult. Although designed with pre-school and early-years age groups in mind, some older children may also enjoy this book.

Talk to My Gran About Dying – my school project
Gina Leveté
Available from www.jkp.com

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

Finding a Way Through When Someone Close Has Died
Mood and Whittaker

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

When Someone Very Special Dies
M Heegard

A simple workbook designed to be used by a bereaved child with adult help. It will help a child or young person to understand and express the many feelings they will have. Communication is increased and coping skills developed as they work their way through it.

We will meet again in Jannah
Zamir Hussain

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

Books to support staff

Talking about death and bereavement in school

Ann Chadwick

Available from www.jkp.com

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

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

Available from Jessica Kingsley www.jkp.com

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

As big as it gets

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

The Invisible String

Patrice Karst

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

Books and resources - KS3 & 4 / S1- 4 / 11-18yrs

The suggestions below are suitable to use with young people, looking at the life cycle including the end of life, or to use when someone they know has died. Young people can find reading about others in similar situations reassuring and sometimes easier to do than talking about their loss. The books, films and resources below will help with this.

General books (some have been made into films)

Sad Book

Michael Rosen

Michael Rosen talks about his sadness after the death of his son. A simple, personal story that speaks to everyone, adult or young person.

Sometimes Life Sucks: When someone you love dies

Molly Carlile

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

Still Here With Me: Teenagers and Children on Losing a Parent

Suzanne Sjoqvist

In their own words, children and young people of a variety of ages talk openly and honestly about the death of their mother or father. They describe feelings of pain, loss and anger, the struggle to cope with the embarrassed reactions of others and the difficulties involved in rebuilding their lives.

The Grieving Teen

Helen Fitzgerald

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

What On Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies?

Trevor Romain

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

The Year Of The Rat

Clare Furniss

Grappling with grief is hard enough without repeat visits from the deceased. Pearl deals with death, life, and family in this haunting, humorous, and poignant debut. The world can tip at any moment, a fact that fifteen-year-old Pearl is all too aware of when her mum dies after giving birth to her baby sister.

The Thing About Jellyfish

Ali Benjamin

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

The Lie Tree

Frances Hardinge

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

My Sister Lives On The Mantelpiece

Annabel Pitcher

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

The Savage

David Almond

Blue's father has died suddenly, and finding that the school's counselling increases his anguish, he turns to writing a story instead. Recommended 8+.

Out Of The Blue

www.winstonswish.org.uk

This book has been written and designed specifically for adolescents and teenagers with the aim of supporting them through their bereavement using a range of activities.

Leaflets

A Teenage Guide To Coping With Bereavement by Sarah Darwen. Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

This pocket-sized leaflet contains practical advice and guidance for a young person managing confusing emotions when someone important in their life dies. Devised by teenager Sarah Darwen following her father's death.

When Your Mum Or Dad Has Cancer

Ann Couldrick

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

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

General books (some have been made into films)

Us Minus Mum

Heather Butler

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

The Fault In Our Stars

John Green

(Book and film)

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

Ways To Live Forever

Sally Nicholls

(Book and film)

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

A Monster Calls

Patrick Ness and Siobhan Dowd

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

If Only

Carole Geithner

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

Websites

Cruse www.hopeagain.org.uk

A safe and moderated website run by CRUSE Bereavement Care. Has a message board, fun zone, ask a question, lads only, and an interactive section.

Winston's Wish www.winstonswish.org.uk

A safe and well moderated section on the Winston's Wish website. It includes a graffiti wall, ask a question, leave a message, and fun activities.

Grief Encounter www.griefencounter.org.uk

A dedicated section for young people with good videos.

Short films

Several films created and made by Child Bereavement UK's Young People's Advisory Group (YPAG) including *A Message for bereaved young people* and *A Message For Friends*. Other topics include: What is grief? Stories from other young people. How to find help. Contributed to and created by bereaved adolescents and teenagers. On Child Bereavement UK's website www.childbereavementuk.org

LAD – A Yorkshire Story

A film by Dan Hartley

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

Free app for Apple and Android

'Grief: Support for Young People'

An app designed *by* bereaved young people *for* bereaved young people. Can also be used by friends, parents and professionals supporting bereaved young people.

Includes:

- Information about bereavement, grief, feelings
- Stories from bereaved young people and short films that they have written and made
- Links to search for local support organisations



The app enables you to get the support that you want in your own space and your own time.

Charlie, aged 17



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

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

General Books

Helping Children Think About Bereavement

Heather Butler

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

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

When Somebody Dies

Hollins, Dowling and Blackman

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

When Dad Died and When Mum Died

Hollins and Sireling

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

SAD

Lucy Finch

Available directly from author

www.behance.net/lucy_finch

A beautifully designed creative resource, including a story, emotion stickers and a pot of memories.

How to break bad news to people with intellectual disabilities

Irene Tuffrey Wijne

A guide for carers and professionals.

How People with Autism Grieve, and How to Help: An Insider Handbook
By Deborah Lipsky

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

Workbooks and activities

All About Me by Barnardos
www.Barnardos.org.uk

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

When Someone Very Special Dies
By Marge Heegard

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

Let's talk about DEATH
Down's Syndrome Scotland www.dsscotland.org.uk

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

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

Training for schools
By Seesaw www.seesaw.org.uk

PDF supporting bereaved children who have special needs.

What happens when someone dies?
By Jenny Armstrong

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

Autism and Loss
Available from Jessica Kingsley www.jkp.com

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

Finding your own way to grieve
By Karle Helbert
Available Jessica Kingsley www.jkp.com

Creative workbook for kids and teens on the autistic spectrum.

Bereavement and Loss: Supporting bereaved people with PMLD and their parents*
* Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities
www.pamis.org.uk

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

Websites and information sheets

www.autism.org.uk

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

www.bereavementanddisability.org.uk

Useful guides for carers and professionals to download, offering ideas for support and information on SEND adults and bereavement. Much of what is said could be adapted for children and young people.

www.childbereavementuk.org

Fact sheets to download from the **For families** section of the website:

- *Supporting bereaved children and young people with Autistic Spectrum Difficulties*
- *Viewing a body with a child and explaining funerals, burials and cremation to Children.*

Books and resources for staff

Online learning for schools

Supporting Bereaved Pupils

Child Bereavement UK

www.childbereavementuk.org For schools

Supporting Bereaved Pupils is an award-winning online-learning programme for teachers, head teachers and support staff, designed by Child Bereavement UK with input from families and schools. A CPD certified, low-cost solution to ensure your school has the skills and confidence to support bereaved pupils and their families

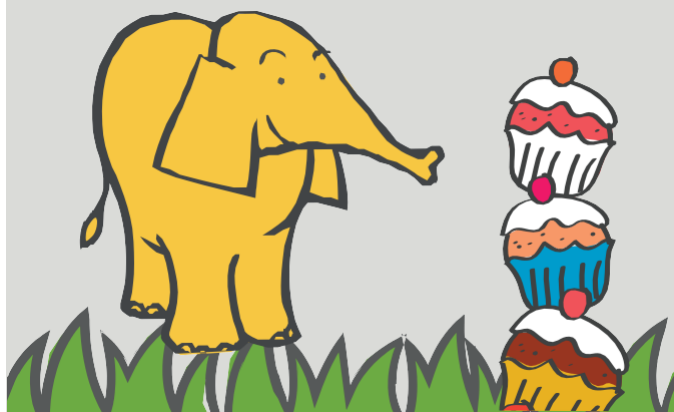


Elephant's Tea Party

Child Bereavement UK

www.childbereavementuk.org For schools

A free programme of fun resources, lesson plans and activities for primary and lower secondary schools, to help equip pupils to develop coping skills for loss and bereavement, now and in later life.



Child Bereavement UK's professional training

We are recognised as the leading provider of bereavement training in the UK. Our experienced training facilitators are available to deliver training to schools nationwide.

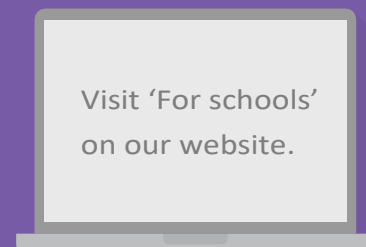
Visit the For professionals section of our website: www.childbereavementuk.org or email: training@childbereavementuk.org

**CPD certified
bereavement
workshops**

Child Bereavement UK's website

A dedicated section for schools (early years, primary and secondary) containing a breadth of information, publications, resources and lesson plans.

www.childbereavementuk.org



Visit 'For schools'
on our website.

Other lesson plans and teaching resources

Helping Children Think About Bereavement

Heather Butler

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

This fun story and related short activities are presented as four, differentiated, lesson plans including English as a second language and for pupils with learning difficulties. It helps pupils develop resilience and coping skills.

Mind Matters: A Resource Bank on Loss and Grief 'It hurts'

M Harvey

Available from www.ukyouth.org

Includes guidelines on facilitating sessions around loss and grief with 11 activities which can be photocopied, brief information about the nature of loss and grief and its impact on young people. Good for Personal, Social, Health and Economic education.

Supporting Young People Coping with Grief, Loss and Death

Weymont and Rae

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

Childhood Bereavement - developing the curriculum and pastoral support

Job and Francis

Using case studies and drawing on best practice, this very useful resource aims to help those working in schools address death, dying and bereavement from both a pastoral care and educational perspective. It provides lesson ideas on how to achieve this through the curriculum. Available - The National Children's Bureau, [020 7843 6000](tel:02078436000)

Conversations About Loss and Change - a card deck from Fink Cards

Child Bereavement UK

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

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

Support and Information

The Little Book of Bereavement for Schools

Ian Gilbert

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

Then, Now and Always

J Stokes

Available from www.winstonswish.org.uk

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

Grief in Children: A Handbook for Adults

A Dyregrov

Available from Jessica Kingsley www.jkp.com

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

A Teacher's Handbook of Death

Jackson and Colwell

Available from www.jkp.com

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

The Forgotten Mourners: Guidelines for working with bereaved children

Susan C Smith

www.jkp.com

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

Grief in School communities: Effective support strategies

Louise Rowling

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

Workbooks to use with pupils

Finding a way through when someone close has died

Mood and Whittaker

Available from www.jkp.com

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

When Someone Very Special Dies

M Heegard

A simple workbook designed to be used by a bereaved child with adult help. It will help a child or young person to understand and express the many feelings that they will have. Communication is increased and coping skills developed as they work their way through it.

Grief Encounter Workbook

Shelley Gilbert

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

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

Anna Jacobs

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

DVDs and film clips

When a Child Grieves

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

This has a section called Someone Died – It Happened To Me in which children aged 7 to 18 years talk about their feelings when someone special dies. Includes a primary school case study describing when two pupils died in different circumstances. Useful for classroom discussion or training staff.

A death in the lives of...

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

A group of young people discuss the support they needed to help them cope with bereavement. Includes a section where they talk about what was, and what was not, helpful at school. A good one for Personal, Social, Health and Economic education.

www.childbereavementuk.org For young people

A dedicated section for young people with short films and film clips made by bereaved young people, including: What teachers need to know; A message to parents; A message to friends; and messages from young people bereaved by murder and manslaughter.

What Teachers Need To Know

A short film created by the Child Bereavement UK's Young People's Advisory Group in which they talk about good, and not so good, experiences at school when someone close to them died. See the [For young people](#) section of the website or on YouTube.

Parents and Carers

Child Bereavement UK Information Sheets and publications - www.childbereavementuk.org

Information sheets, including:

- *Children's understanding of death at different ages*
 - *How children and young people grieve*
 - *What helps grieving children and young people?*
-

Talking About Death: A dialogue between parent and child

Earl Grollman

A guide for adults and children to read together which helps with words and explanations around some of the questions children might ask.

A Child's Grief

Available from www.winstonswish.org.uk

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

When Your Partner Dies: supporting your children

Booklet available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

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

Cultures and beliefs

Death and Bereavement Across Cultures

Murray, Laungani, Pittu and Young

Covers rites, rituals and mourning traditions for adults and children from the major religious and secular belief systems.

Supporting Young People Coping with Grief, Loss and Death

Weymont and Rae

A programme designed to be delivered to groups or whole classes of secondary school students which includes a section on Beliefs and Customs. The session encourages students to explore how the concept of death varies according to different religions and cultures. Information is given on the main world religions and belief systems. Worksheets and handouts are included.

Suicide

Red Chocolate Elephants

Book with DVD Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

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

After a Suicide Death

Published by The Dougy Centre www.dougy.org

A workbook for children and teens who have known someone who died by suicide.

Beyond the Rough Rock

Available from www.winstonswish.org.uk

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

SOBS (Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide)

www.uk-sobs.org.uk

A self-help organisation which runs a number of support groups around the UK. Helpline: 0300 1115065. Open 9.00am-9.00pm every day.

Papyrus – Prevention of Young Suicide

www.papyrus-uk.org

Comprehensive website with information for teachers and parents with guidance for those worried about a suicidal friend and support for those contemplating suicide. Various resources and leaflets for schools. Helpline: 0800 068 4141 for practical advice on suicide prevention.

Forces Families

Service Children

Joy O'Neill

A guide for Education and Welfare Professionals. Particularly useful for School Governors and Senior Management Teams. Covers a wide number of issues including a chapter on Bereavement and Trauma.

The Overlooked Casualties of Conflict

A report commissioned by The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund - including a section on dealing with a parent's death - can be downloaded from <http://rnmchildrensfund.org.uk/about-us/research/>

Gypsy and Traveller Families

It's different without you.

Carol Rogers. Self-published.

This is a book for children based on the results of Carol's research looking at the bereavement experiences of Gypsy and Traveller families.

Murder and manslaughter

See short films and film clips in the [For young people](#) section on www.childbereavementuk.org made by bereaved young people including Messages from Young People Bereaved by Murder and Manslaughter.

SAMM (Support after Murder and Manslaughter)

www.samm.org.uk SAMM is a national UK charity supporting families bereaved by Murder and Manslaughter.
0845 8723440

Hope Beyond the Headlines: Supporting a child bereaved through murder or manslaughter

Winston's Wish www.winstonswish.org.uk

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

After a murder: A workbook for grieving kids
Available from the Dougy Centre

Through the stories of other children who have experienced a murder, this hands-on workbook allows children to see that they are not alone in their feelings and experiences.

A Children's Guide to Inquests at a Coroner's Court

Short simple leaflet produced by Nelson's Journey which can be download from:

www.norfolk.gov.uk/view/NCC110782

Helpful organisations

Child Bereavement UK

Helpline 0800 02 888 40

www.childbereavementuk.org

The helpline is for families and professionals to receive support, information, guidance, and signposting to other helpful organisations. Information and support of particular relevance to schools is available. The comprehensive website has helpful sections: For families, For young people, [For schools](#) and For professionals including details of courses and workshops on a breadth of issues. There is a link to Child Bereavement UK's online learning programme for schools: *Supporting Bereaved Pupils* www.eleaningschools.co.uk and a searchable map of local bereavement organisations. Publications can be bought online, and information sheets freely downloaded. A discussion forum for families provides online support.

Childhood Bereavement Network

0207 843 6309

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

Website has a link to a directory of childhood bereavement organisations across the UK which provide open access support services such as bereavement groups. Facility for county by county search for any local help.

Winston's Wish

Helpline 08452 030405

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Offers a well-produced range of resources and publications including activity sheets, books and leaflets. The interactive website has a special section for young people where they can email questions to a bereavement counsellor and share experiences with other bereaved children. There is an area that answers frequently asked medical questions on topics such as what is a heart attack. The website has a helpful section for schools.

CRUSE Bereavement Care

www.cruse.org.uk

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

Hope Again

www.hopeagain.org.uk

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

The Compassionate Friends

Helpline 0345 123 2304

www.tcf.org.uk

A charitable organisation of bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents dedicated to the support and care of other bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents who have suffered the death of a child/children, at any age. Offers support by befriending initiatives, one-to-one and group support, publications and a programme of informal weekend retreats and an annual weekend gatherings.

SAMM (Support After Murder & Manslaughter)

Helplines 0845 872 3440 / 0121 451 1618

www.samm.org.uk

SAMM is a national charity supporting families bereaved by Murder and Manslaughter. They also provide advice and training to many agencies on issues relevant to the traumatically bereaved.

WAY Widowed and Young

www.widowedandyoung.org.uk

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

Brake Care

Victim Helpline 0808 8000 401 (10-4, Mon-Fri)

www.brake.org.uk

A road safety charity that offers emotional support and practical information to anyone bereaved, or seriously injured, in a road crash. This includes advice and information for families, friends, children and young people. An excellent booklet called *Someone Has Died Suddenly* can be downloaded free. This is a guide for adults and children to read together after someone close has been killed.

Sudden

www.suddendeath.org

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

Suicide of Bereavement by Suicide SOBS

Helpline 0300 111 5065

www.uk-sobs.org.uk

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

Papyrus

Helpline 0800 068 41 41

www.papyrus-uk.org

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

SANDS – Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Charity

020 7436 5881

www.uk-sands.org

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

Grandparentsplus

www.grandparentsplus.org.uk

0300 123 7015

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

BACP (British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy)

www.bacp.co.uk

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

