



Farnborough Road Infant School. **Bereavement Policy**

“Learning, Caring and Achieving Together”

“A child can live through anything so long as he or she is told the truth and is allowed to share the natural feelings people have when they are suffering” Eda Le Shan, The Compassionate Friends Newsletter.

Introduction

From time to time every school is touched by the death of a pupil, member of staff or an extended family member. Individuals and families react to bereavement in their own very unique ways. The trauma of bereavement can have a profound effect on the school community.

The main aim of this policy is to provide a framework for all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, to give guidance on how to deal sensitively and compassionately in difficult and upsetting circumstances.

Background

The Education Act (2002) emphasises the importance of promoting the Personal, Social and Health Education of children and young people. Our school is committed to the emotional health and mental well-being of its staff and pupils. We recognise that as a school we need to be proactive in preparing children and be reactive in supporting them through separation or loss of a loved one, either through death or divorce.

From 1st September 2026, Relationships, Sex, and Health Education (RSHE) statutory guidance in England will mandate teaching about bereavement, grief, and loss. The curriculum at Farnborough Road Infant School will focus on understanding grief as a natural response, the ages appropriate perspectives of death and supporting bereaved peers. It aims to foster emotional literacy and emotional, physical, and social impacts of bereavement.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Head Teacher has overall responsibility for the policy and its implementation; for liaison with the Governing Body, parents/carers, the Local Authority and appropriate outside agencies.

Responsibilities include:

- Policy development and review
- Implementing the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities.
- Co-ordinating the planned action to manage school-related incidents in and beyond the school; decide who will be responsible for communicating with the family directly involved, decide who gives news to the school community and if necessary who will communicate with the press.
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies e.g. Educational Psychologist Service, Child Bereavement UK
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary schools.
- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff e.g. Child Bereavement UK, Jenny Nock Psychology Service.
- Creating a "safe space" with clear agreements like "no right or wrong feelings".
- Emphasising staff self-care and training to manage sensitive conversations e.g. Child Bereavement UK, 2 Wish, ELSA training, Staff Supervision.
- Ensuring pupils and families know where to find support, such as trusted adults in school, ELSA trained staff, Play Therapist, Charities such as 2Wish, Child Bereavement UK

Staff support and training

It is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for pupils and mutual support for each other and in implementing this policy. We will ensure that members of staff are regularly consulted as to their training needs and training is provided as appropriate to keep up to date with developments.

Curriculum

Children and young people explore the concept of loss, bereavement and grief as part of the PSHE curriculum. It is also addressed through cross curricular opportunities such as body changes or life

cycles. Assemblies may also be used to address aspects of death e.g. Remembrance Day or commemorative occasions.

Any questions relating to loss or death will be answered in a sensitive and age-appropriate yet honest and factual way.

Children are given the opportunities to learn about and discuss cultural and religious issues around death as well as being encouraged to express their own responses and feelings.

Teaching and Learning

Our teaching will be based on an understanding of the principles stated above and that a variety of approaches should be used to meet the needs of our pupils and show sensitivity to their age and experience.

Teaching methods adopted in the classroom include:

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

Procedures

Many of the guidelines in this policy are only appropriate when the school community as a whole has experienced a death, for example a member of staff or a pupil.

Perhaps a more common experience for teaching staff is that of a pupil experiencing the death of a parent. Whole school or class activities will not normally be appropriate in this situation, but the needs of that individual pupil should still be given careful consideration.

If a child has been bereaved, it is important to involve them in decisions about how the school manages issues relating to their loss. Talk to the child about their preferred way of informing their peers about what has happened and about the support they need.

Breaking news to staff, pupils and families when member of staff or pupil has died

- Speak to the family, offer them condolences and support before ascertaining what they would like to happen. Give them a direct telephone number for someone they can contact in school.
- Obtaining factual information should be made a priority. Think through how this might be done, remembering that contact with those directly involved may be difficult. It is vitally important not to make assumptions or repeat what has been heard through rumour. This will only add to distress. It is essential that all staff are informed straight away, ideally before pupils.
- Identify ways of doing this sensitively. See suggested list of people/agencies to contact.
- Decisions need to be made about where pupils will be told if this is necessary. Identify the most vulnerable pupils and what support they might need.
- Pupils should be told as soon as possible. This is best done in familiar groups by someone they know. Staff may well need guidance on words to use and the approach to take. Have something pre-prepared.
- If necessary, send a letter 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.
- Include the guidelines for parents on supporting bereaved children from the website with the letter.

The first few days.

- 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 or staff are too upset to attend lessons.
- If the death happens within the school holidays consider opening the school to provide a drop in service and safe space for children and families offering support from other professionals eg therapists, school health, educational psychologist service.

The funeral

- It is essential to sound out the family's wishes. The family may well welcome involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to keep things private.
- Identify which staff and pupils may want to attend and the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport.
- Flowers may need to be sent. Involve staff and pupils in the decision.
- Cultural and religious implications need consideration.

"It is impossible not to communicate with children ...The way in which children are helped to deal with loss will have a profound impact on their future emotional development..."

Barbara Monroe (Brief Interventions with Bereaved Children)

Support

Support for bereaved children

Not all children and young people will need the support of specialist practitioners; they need familiar people who care.

Schools can offer children and young people:

- A routine, providing a sense of normality
- Some space, away from an emotional intense atmosphere
- Neutral space and people to share their feelings without the worry of upsetting a loved one (i.e. a surviving parent)
- Time to be themselves without feeling guilty (being with friends, time to play in a safe space outside of the home environment).
- Regular correspondence with home, providing reassurance about behaviours and general well-being, will ensure the child or young person is managing their grief.
- Access to appropriate resources, therapists, ELSA support, resource library in school, spiritual or other support agencies. (see contact details in pack)
- Preparation time for children and young people to discuss what to say and how to behave when the bereaved child or young person returns to school. This can help young people to see death as a common experience for us all at different times and places.
- Time for staff to be aware of changes in behaviour that may be related to the death.
- An individual link person to support the pupils when necessary.
- A suitable place in school for pupils who need some space if too upset to stay in the classroom and people to whom they can go for support.
- Education and Health Pastoral Passport to support trauma related behaviour, emotional regression and transition.

Support for pupils generally

- It is important to identify pupils who may be particularly vulnerable or likely to experience symptoms associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, 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 the help offered from outside agencies are appropriate before accepting. Pupils may find it difficult to be receptive to support or counselling from families of fellow pupils.
- Remembering/commemoration: this is difficult to plan in advance, but careful thought is required. The dead person's family and the young person need to be consulted.

Support for staff

- Supporting bereaved pupils will be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions.
- 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, and/or staff supervision sessions
- Give people time to attend the funeral if appropriate.
- Training before events happen – general for all staff and specific to bereaved children and young people e.g. Child Bereavement UK
- Awareness of available resources and time to become familiar with what is available.

Support for Parents

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support. Send a letter of condolence from the school.
- Depending on the wishes of the family, share information to appropriate people.
- Give parents and family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died.
- Send a representative to the funeral.
- Send flowers or collection for a chosen charity as appropriate.
- Invite parents/family to any commemorative events held by the school, both at the time and in subsequent years.

Responding to the media

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

Transition

It is vitally important to ensure that if a child has experienced bereavement that this information is recorded using CPOMS and passed on to the relevant persons when they move on to a new class or school so they don't need to retell their story from the start. Staff should consider an Education and Health Pastoral Passport to support transition.

Confidentiality

Although it is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure, pupils will be made aware that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. This will help in retaining the trust of pupils and parents/carers and will ensure that the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. Sensitive information is only disclosed internally or externally with careful attention to the rights and needs of individuals.

Inclusion and Equality

We promote an inclusive, caring, supporting ethos and maintain a highly effective pastoral system. We recognise that there is a range of cultural and religious customs and procedures concerning death and that there may be different expectations of the bereaved child and family. Some of these may affect matters of school organisation.

We try to present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. Children will be made aware that there are a range of different responses to bereavement and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

Monitoring and review

This policy will be monitored by the governing body

February 2026

Signed

Date

Headteacher

Signed

Date

Chair of Governors

Appendix 1 : Understanding Bereavement for Children (Advice from Queenscourt hospice, Winston's Wish and Sefton Educational Psychology Service)

Consider your own wellbeing

Given the nature of this advice, it may be upsetting for some people to access. Please consider your own wellbeing and access this at your own pace.

If you need any support relating to the topic, please reach out to a family member, friend or trusted colleague.

If you would like further support, the following contacts may be useful:

Education Support, 08000 562 561

The National Cruse helpline on 0808 808 1677

Qwell – an online emotional wellbeing support service.

Select 'Sefton' from the dropdown menu when signing up. <https://www.qwell.io/>

The aims of this advice:

Understanding death at different ages and stages

The grieving process at different ages and stages

Ways to talk to children about death

How to support children who have been bereaved

Helping children to remember people who have died

Balancing truth and reassurance

Understanding death – a developmental perspective

Here are some broad guidelines and generalisations about how children may respond to death at different ages and stages. However, it is important to remember that all children will develop at their own pace and in different ways.

Children aged 0-2 years: Experience the loss as a separation, they may become withdrawn with increased crying. Children of this age will be influenced primarily by a parents' / carers emotional states and may be unsettled for a few weeks. Normality and routine are very important at this stage.

Children aged 2-5 years: Death is seen as reversible by children of this age and they find it difficult to comprehend the finality of loss. Experts believe children at this age believe death is temporary as if the person who has died has gone away and they are waiting for them to come back. Young children tend to see themselves as the centre of the universe and so believe their own wishes, thoughts and actions can cause what happens to themselves and others. Children this age may experience a compelling urge to recover the lost one (which fits in with their experience of fairy stories).

At this age it is important to use precise terms when talking about death not 'you've lost a loved one' – a child interprets this literally and assumes the person can be found.

Sometimes they blame themselves or believe if they are 'good' enough perhaps the person will come back. They may become fearful that they themselves will die. They may react quite casually to the loss at first but then become upset or ask about loss/death at a later time.

Often, they will experience nightmares, eating disturbances, confusion, revert to earlier stages of development or even seem unaffected.

At this stage, children are greatly affected by the sadness of family members.

Attending funerals helps children even the very young to accept their loss, children may even re-enact some aspect of it. This can be distressing for the adults but serves an important function for the child. Play is a means of understanding and integrating life's experiences.

Spending time with family members and sharing memories is really important this strong social support and providing opportunities to talk can help with the pain

Children benefit from the distraction and normality of routine and school and are supported by their friends and family. Grief may also resurface at different developmental milestones

Children aged 6-12 years: Children at this age want to see death as reversible but are beginning to understand it as final. They may not understand their own involuntary emotional response to loss, which might include feelings of fear and guilt. Behaviour may include immature reactions or outwardly challenging behaviour. Physical manifestations of emotional pain may also develop, eg. headaches or stomach aches. Children may experience difficulties in their interactions with their peers. The death of someone important can make them feel different at the very time they want to be the same as everyone else.

Adolescence 13-18 years: Young people at this age usually have an adult concept of death but their response and emotions may be heightened and very powerful. Reactions may include anger, depression and non-compliance. The loss may cause them to reflect on the meaning and purpose of life, or they may hide their feelings.

Understanding Grief

Although there are common features in the grieving process, every child will respond to loss in their own unique way. It is important just to be attentive to the child's individual needs, thoughts and preferences.

Shock - This is the first response to death. In adults this brings a barrage of sensations -resulting in either physical collapse or numb apathy. A child's reaction may be a silent withdrawal or a wild outburst of screaming. A very young child may feel a bewildering sense of confusion rather than shock. They can't quite understand what is going on. Let the child collapse, cry, sit or lie down. Hug them. They need time to be sad and to talk about the death. Adults in shock are usually able to cope, albeit in a state of unreality, with practical affairs such as arranging the funeral. For children who do not have anything specific to attend to, it can become a lonely time.

Denial - This is often experienced by adults and children in the early days of their bereavement. They know their loved one is dead, but their every thought is so centred on that person that they cannot believe he or she is not around.

Growing awareness:

Searching: For children this is perhaps the most logical part of their grieving. They have lost something, now they have to find it. The fact that they never do find it builds up inside them as a huge fear. After such an enormous loss, the child will be terrified of losing other people and things.

Despair: Once it is realised that no amount of searching or longing is going to find that lost person, then despair may follow. For a child, the crying may start again, the screaming and the rejection of love from any other person.

Anger: Even a tiny child can feel anger towards a parent/carer who has left them, or anger at God who has taken them away. Real fury may show itself, not in words, but in physical toughness - perhaps breaking toys or lying kicking on the floor. In adolescence, the same anger may be expressed in more outspoken or aggressive ways, such as hitting out at others verbally or physically, or stealing. Whether a child or adolescent is able to express anger will depend greatly on whether they feel that their feelings will be accepted by the adults around them.

Depression (anxiety and guilt): The phases of anxiety and guilt become entwined, especially in children. Children's minds are often filled with practical anxieties such as "Will we be able to go on holiday?", "Who'll give me my pocket money and help me with my homework?" An older adolescent may be worried that s/he will be unable to go to college or will have to stay at home to look after younger siblings. During this stage it is usual to experience feelings of despair, emptiness and the pain of the loss.

Acceptance: readjustment: The loss is no longer felt as sharply. The adult/child is more able to talk about the loss, can settle into new circumstances and regains a greater interest in life.

Complicating Factors in Bereavement at this time

Unpredictability – it is not just very old, very frail people who die. The person they know may have been perfectly well last time they saw them.

Suddenness: Children have little time to adjust to the changing future

Separation: Children are physically distant from those who might support them – wider family, friends, teachers

Support structures: The current disruption of normal routine may mean children have fewer places in which to switch off and focus on something else, for example, school, sports club etc

Anxiety: While children and young people will worry about other family members dying after any death, in the present situation, such anxiety is sharper and less easy to soothe

Lack of 'specialness': The death of a child's important person won't receive as much attention as before the crisis

Absence of rituals: with heavy restrictions on funerals, children will have less chance to 'say goodbye' in a formal sense

Some of these factors can make it more complicated to talk about. It may also feel harder to assure children that other people they know won't die yet.

Talking to children about the death of someone close

It is likely that children will come to you specifically for comfort or enlightenment and it will help to have given some thought as to how you will respond.

When talking to a child about the death of someone close, the language used, and the child's need for information and understanding, will vary according to their age and developmental stage, and the specific cause of death. However, the child's basic needs will always remain the same:

- Use simple, direct language appropriate to their level of understanding
- Use the terms 'died', 'dead', 'death' - avoid euphemisms such as 'lost'
- Keep children informed about what has happened / what will happen
- Answer questions openly. It's OK to say if you don't know. If you feel an answer is too difficult for them to hear, explain that honestly
- Repeat explanations more than once
- Reassure them that they are not to blame
- Allow and encourage the safe sharing of feelings and thoughts
- Listen to their feelings, worries and memories

Supporting children through their bereavement

Keep in touch – maintaining some contact with class teachers and support staff can be hugely helpful to children who have experienced the death of a loved one e.g. Use the class email at regular times throughout the week.

Keep a routine: Try and bring an element of 'normality' to their days and provide some structure to their days

Listen and reassure: Acknowledge how strange and difficult this situation is, rather than trying to make it better. Listen to their worries and fears: these are real and we can't take them away, but it will help children if someone they know and trust hears them. Reassure them when you are able to do so honestly.

Further support

Child Bereavement Network: <http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/>

Child Bereavement Trust: <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

Winston's Wish: <https://www.winstonswish.org/>

Helpline number for Winston's Wish – 08088 020 021

Simon Says: <https://www.simonsays.org.uk/>

Hope again: <https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/>

Compassionate Friends: www.tcf.org.uk

Helping a child remember someone who has died

There are many things you can do to help a child remember someone who has died:

You could create a book of memories filled with photos, stories, cards and letters; you could suggest they make a memory box and talk with them about what they might include; you could hold a small candlelight ceremony with them; help them create a calendar of important dates and ways in which they could mark them; plant some bulbs in a pot which will become flowers dedicated to the memory of the person who has died. You could also talk about a First Aid Kit, a collection of things that make them feel better on bad days.

Remember

- Reassure the child that it is OK to play and have fun sometimes, as well as feeling sad
- Listen to the child when they want to talk, even if they ask the same questions over and over again.
- Share a book – this is always a good way to start / prompt a conversation with young children

Books to share:

The Invisible string by Patrice Karst

The Goodbye Book by Todd Parr

I'll always love you by Hans Wilhelm

I miss you by Pat Thomas

Badger's Parting Gift by Susan Varley

When you lose a friend by Helena Fletcher-Hill (You will find this story on our website)

<https://primarysite-prod-sorted.s3.amazonaws.com/farnborough-road-infant-school/UploadedDocument/6d4fdd4d7e5647239f3f1e33bad1e264/when-you-lose-a-friend-final.pdf>

Appendix 2

Reference documents

2wish and Child Bereavement UK – Offer training for staff and programmes of support for parents and siblings – referrals can be made from their websites

Schools Information Pack, Childhood Bereavement Charity

Winston's Wish online support materials

'Dignity and Respect, Cultural Awareness: Religion and Belief' NHS

'Childhood Bereavement' National Children's Bureau 2004

Macmillan Nurses –offer a pack for children and come into school

Useful Websites:

www.griefencounter.org.uk

www.winstonswish.org.uk

www.childbereavement.org.uk

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

www.thelauracentre.org.uk

www.rd4u.org.uk

www.rip.rap.org.uk

www.penthaligonsfriends.org.uk