



## KING EDWARD VI HANDSWORTH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

# Bereavement and Loss Advice and Support Policy

June 2020

### Document Control

<b>Document Ref:</b>		<b>Date Implemented:</b>	November 2019
<b>Version:</b>	2	<b>Date Modified:</b>	June 2020
<b>Revision due date:</b>	<b>September 2021</b>		
<b>Governor Committee and date (where applicable)</b>	Welfare		
<b>Reviewed by:</b>	Jane Glendenning	<b>Sign and Date:</b>	
<b>Authorised by:</b>		<b>Sign and Date:</b>	

### Related Documents/Policies

Reference	Title
	Building a Suicide Safer School Policy (2020) Information provided by Cruse Bereavement.

Jane Glendenning (DSL) is responsible for reviewing and updating this procedure.

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**Aims and values**

This policy will help staff to achieve the safeguarding vision of the School, which is that the Staff and Governors are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all its students. We believe that:

- Young people need to be safe and to feel safe in school;
- Young people need support which matches their individual need;
- All young people have the right to be supported to meet their emotional, and social needs as well as their educational needs – a happy healthy sociable young person will achieve better educationally.

**Statement of Principles**

This policy relates to bereavement experienced by any member of our school community and applies to all at King Edward VI Handsworth School for Girls irrespective of their age. This policy also applies at times when a student or staff member is not in school. The procedures and support guidelines may be adapted as appropriate to meet our School’s emotional health and well-being aims and the individual circumstances of each situation.

**Roles and responsibilities**

**Governors**

As part of their general responsibilities for the strategic direction of the school, Governors have a key role to play in the regular review of King Edward VI Handsworth School for Girls Bereavement Advice and Support Policy.

**Headmistress**

The Headmistress will ensure that staff and parents/carers are informed about this policy, and that the policy is implemented effectively. The Headmistress will also ensure that staff receive training, so that they are able to handle any difficult issues with sensitivity and confidence.

**School staff**

All school staff will use this document to enable them to effectively support students and colleagues affected by bereavement.

**Parents**

Parents will notify the school of any bereavement which is likely to impact on their child and provide the Pastoral Team with necessary details in order for us to offer and provide relevant support in school. Parents will use the information in this document based on material available from the bereavement support charity, Cruse, to aid their understanding of the grieving process; the impact of bereavement on them and their child; and follow the advice recommended to support all affected by the bereavement.

**Students**

Students will have access to this document in order to aid their understanding of bereavement and the grieving process and who to go to for support.

## Introduction

We know that these are unprecedented times but the 'normal' scale of bereavement outside the here and now is that:

- Every 22 minutes a parent of dependent children dies in the UK.
- Up to 70% of schools have a bereaved pupil on their roll at any given time – about 1 in 25 children have experienced the loss of a parent/sibling.
- 92% of young people will experience a significant bereavement before the age of 16 years.

Source: (Child Bereavement UK 2018)

Bereavement and loss are essential to the human experience. For most of us, bereavement will be the most distressing experience we will ever face. Grief is what we feel when somebody we are close to dies. Everyone experiences grief differently and there is no 'normal' or 'right' way to grieve.

At some point in their childhood or adolescence, most children will experience the death of a family member or friend. Oftentimes they will manage this grief with the support of their family and friends, however, the death of a parent or main carer remains the most traumatic and painful loss for a child. Following the loss of a parent, 19 per cent of children continue to experience significant psychological problems, such as trauma or a prolonged grief reaction, one year later, according to research by William Worden (1993). Research from Boingboing has suggested that children reach acceptance sooner if they are well supported by families and the school community in the early stages of grief.

### The developmental perspective

A child's stage of development partially determines their ability to grieve and understand the notion of death.

- Seven- to 11-year-old children begin to grasp the finality of death, but may have difficulty processing that it will or could happen to them.
- In early adolescence, young people begin to accept that they too will die.
- The significance of death is not fully realised until adulthood. Even as adults, we continue to struggle to accept our own mortality (Kalish & Reynolds, 1976).

Children and young people who have experienced significant loss or multiple bereavements may come to understand the inevitability of death far sooner than their peers.

### Children's grief

For many children and young people, the death of a parent, caregiver, sibling or grandparent is an experience they are faced with early in life. Sometimes people think a child or young person who is bereaved at a young age will not be greatly affected, as they are too young to understand the full implications of death. This is untrue and unhelpful. Even babies are able to experience loss. A baby cannot cognitively process the implications of the bereavement but that does not mean that they do not feel the loss.

However, children do not have the emotional resources or cognitive capacity to stay with feelings of grief for a prolonged time (a common adult experience). The Child Bereavement Network likens this to 'puddle jumping', whereas in contrast adults 'may wade through rivers of grief or become stuck in the middle of seas of distress'.

After losing a loved one, children may swing from crying one minute to playing the next. This can be distressing for their parents or carers, who may also be grieving, to observe. This fluctuation in mood does not mean the child isn't sad or they have finished grieving. On the contrary, it can form an

important defence mechanism against becoming overwhelmed by loss. It is also normal for children to feel depressed, guilty, anxious or angry with the person who has died, or another close person to them.

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

Some children may, however, struggle to express their feelings through words, so exploring sensitive children's books about death (such as Michael Rosen's *Sad Book*) or drawing pictures are important alternative ways of expressing feelings.

### **Teenagers' understanding of death**

- A bereaved young person may appear to be grieving like an adult but they are not an adult and should be treated as a young person.
- The bereaved young person shouldn't be burdened with tasks that a responsible adult can undertake.
- Grieving young people may prefer to speak with their friends or people outside of the immediate family about the death. This should be encouraged.
- Due to the developmental and hormonal changes that a young person will be undergoing, the emotions related to the death of someone close may be very intense.
- The young person needs to be encouraged to express how they are feeling and the emotions they are encountering.
- The death of someone important, may make them feel different at the time when, developmentally, they want to be the same as everyone else.
- The reality of death conflicts with teenage 'task' of being invincible.

### **Navigating change and loss**

Whilst this document refers to the death of a person, the impact of the death of an animal or even the 'death' of a marriage for example, can result in the same grieving process. Remember that loss is not just about death. We experience loss in all different parts of our lives:

- Relationship breakdowns;
- Prolonged absence;
- Loss of teacher;
- Disenfranchised grief;
- Moving - house and friends;
- Starting school, college, work;
- Serious illness or disability;
- Redundancy.

**In the context of COVID-19** teenagers will:

- Feel the loss of opportunity to complete exams;
- Experience the loss of opportunity to say goodbye and celebrate an ending, particularly for years 11 and 13;
- Lose the ability to access usual ways of maintaining good well-being e.g. playing outside, meeting friends or going to the gym;
- Lose the regular routine shaped by a school day and support from teachers;
- Lose the usual social interactions which come with being in school.

Anyone who suffers a bereavement during the pandemic crisis may also not have had the opportunity to say goodbye to their loved one; this will compound their feelings of loss.

## **Adults' experience and response to loss**

- Low motivation;
- Difficulty problem solving;
- Fear of being alone;
- Use of substances to medicate;
- Vulnerable immune system;
- Denial;
- Difficulty finding consolation;
- Irritability and mood swings;
- Sleep difficulties;
- Change in eating habits.

## **The grieving process and changes in behaviour**

Grief is individual and the processes of mourning are never the same between two people. However, some of the responses to death and bereavement can be similar depending on the age, level of comprehension, relationship with the person who has died and the emotional resilience of the mourner.

### **1. Shock.**

This is the most common initial reaction. It can manifest in physical pain, numbness, apathy or withdrawal. Many people feel disorientated – as if they have lost their place and purpose in life or are living in a different world. For many young people shock is the first response when learning that someone close has died. The way in which shock is demonstrated by the newly bereaved young person again varies and may not be communicated in the same way as bereaved peers or siblings. Shock is a protective state, it allows the individual time to process bad news in the manner that best suits them and acts as a temporary buffer before reality sinks in.

Shock, like grief, is an individual response and can manifest in many ways. Some young people might express a difficulty in verbally acknowledging what has just been said, others might start to sob uncontrollably, some might laugh upon being told of the death. This response should not be viewed as disrespectful or inappropriate because it is a reflex reaction over which the young person has no conscious control. Laughter originating from shock is indicative that the young person's brain is momentarily protecting them from the reality of the death.

It is not uncommon to hear a young person in this situation ask the person breaking the bad news to them if they are joking. On an intellectual level the young person knows that what is being told them is not a joke but on an emotional level the ability to process this fact is extremely difficult. The laughter will cease when the rational mind has processed that the person has died.

Some young people might immediately start tidying up, putting away toys, returning to homework, clearing away plates, etc. This action can appear quite robotic as if the young person has switched on to auto pilot. The commencing of mundane tasks such as tidying things away is indicative of the young person struggling to process the information and trying to "carry on as normal" in the hope that the news just given to them might not be true.

Try not to be alarmed if the child or young person's response seems inappropriate, shock, as mentioned manifests itself in different ways.

### **2. Denial.**

This is another response that you might observe in bereaved young people. Denial as a response to bereavement is useful to the young person as it gives them time to pursue quests to relocate the person who has died and puts off the inevitability of accepting that their loved one will not be coming back. Some young people may behave as though the deceased person is still living and may talk about future plans with them. Denial as a response to bereavement can be witnessed when a young person does not want to leave a certain place like home for fear of leaving the person who

has died behind; do not want to attend school; or go to bed for fear of missing the person who has died returning.

Some newly bereaved young people do not present any behaviours associated with grieving, or deny their grief altogether. This is most often witnessed when the bereaved young person appears to act and behave as if the death has not occurred. School staff might observe the bereaved young person exhibiting compensatory behaviours such as all-consuming academic pursuits or an overly keen engagement in sporting activities. This is not because the bereaved young person does not intellectually comprehend the death of their loved one but rather that they are trying to throw themselves in to tasks that will serve to facilitate their denial of the death. Denial in such instances can serve as a protective mechanism allowing the bereaved young person time to process the death and its consequences.

It is not uncommon for some bereaved young people to delay their grief for months or sometimes years. Other life changing incidents such as moving home, acquiring a step parent or experiencing a further bereavement can serve to release the bereaved young person's delayed or unresolved grief. Unfortunately, there is no way to divert grief, regardless of how long the young person has managed to deny their grief, they will have to go through the grieving process eventually.

### **3. Yearning and searching.**

Young people may find that they can't stop thinking about the events leading up to the death. "Seeing" the person who has died and hearing their voice can happen because the brain is trying to process the death and acknowledge the finality of it.

Searching can be another form which denial can take. For example, some bereaved young people might actively search for the deceased person as part of their belief that the person is not really dead. Searching varies depending on the age of the child or young person who has been bereaved. Therefore, a child might be seen looking under beds and emptying toy boxes to check if the deceased person isn't hiding there. Older children and young people might search local areas or places of work where the deceased frequented in a similar desire to find the person alive and well. They may attempt to phone them, report having seen them or mistake other people for them.

### **4. Depression.**

Many bereaved people experience feelings of depression following the death of someone close. Life can feel like it no longer holds any meaning and some people say they too want to die.

This could also manifest itself in profound sadness and hopelessness; low energy; disturbed sleep; change in appetite; difficulty concentrating; retreat from friendships and previously loved activities.

### **5. Anger.**

This is a profound and often underestimated part of the grief. Death can seem cruel and unfair especially when someone feels that the person has died before their time or when they had plans for the future together. This type of behaviour is most commonly directed at the caregiver or the person they feel most comfortable with. The anger may also be directed at themselves for things they had done or didn't do or say to the person before their death. Defiance, angry outbursts, challenging behaviour and school refusal is the result of the young person struggling to process and articulate their emotions.

Older children and adolescents may exhibit mood swings that are frequent and unpredictable. This may be how the adolescent behaved prior to the bereavement due to hormonal changes and puberty; however, the mood swings which occur through grieving are more heightened in their intensity.

### **6. Anxiety.**

Angry outbursts may be followed by intense feelings of remorse and guilt, the fear of retribution. Young people may fear dying of the same illness, or experiencing a similar accident.

### **7. Guilt and bargaining.**

Guilt is another common reaction. People who have been bereaved of someone close often say they feel directly or indirectly to blame for the person's death. They may also feel guilty if they had a

difficult or confusing relationship with the person who has died, or if they feel they didn't do enough to help them when they were alive. Severe feelings of guilt may trigger profound feelings of worthlessness and, for a small minority of young people, suicidal thoughts. Parents should request a CAMHS assessment if there is concern that a young person is struggling to keep themselves safe.

#### **8. Acceptance that the person is no longer living.**

Children will remember through looking regularly at photographs, gifts and belongings associated with that person. This process can be painful for grieving adults to observe and support, as it can activate their own grief.

#### **Other people's reactions**

One of the hardest things to face when we are bereaved is the way other people react to us. They often do not know what to say or how to respond to our loss. Because they don't know what to say or are worried about saying the wrong thing, people can avoid those who have lost someone. This is hard for us because we may well want to talk about the person who has died. It can become especially hard as time goes on and other people's memories of the person who has died fade. Young people are also significantly affected by the grief processes of those around them. Parents, carers and involved friends should seek help for their own distress in order to both support and protect grieving children.

#### **Coping and adapting**

When someone close to us dies we have to cope and adjust to living in a world which is irreversibly changed. We may have to let go of some dreams built up and shared with the person who has died. The length of time it will take a person to accept the death of someone close and move forward is varied and will be unique to the mourner. How we react will be influenced by many different things, including:

- age;
- personality;
- cultural background;
- religious beliefs;
- previous experiences of bereavement;
- personal circumstances.

No one can tell us how or when the intensity of grief will lessen; only we will know when this happens. It is not unusual for bereaved people to think they are finally moving towards acceptance only to experience the same strong emotions they experienced shortly after the death.

Life will never be the same again after a bereavement, but the grief and pain should lessen. There should come a time when we are able to adapt and adjust and cope with life without the person who has died. The pain of bereavement has been compared to that of losing a limb. We may adapt to life without the limb but we continue to feel its absence. When a person we are close to dies we can find meaning in life again, but without forgetting their meaning for us. Many people worry that they will forget the person who has died; how they looked, their voice, or the good times they had together. There are, however, many ways we can keep their memory alive (see appendix A).

#### **Advice for all adults supporting bereaved children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities**

- Make sure the young person has a photo of the person who has died to keep in their bag, so they can get it out when they want to talk about the person, or need to look at it for reassurance if they are having a difficult time.
- Let them keep something that belonged to the person in their bag, such as an item of clothing or a piece of non-valuable jewellery, that they can take out when they want tactile comfort.



- Involve the young person in activities that bring back happy memories. For example, if their mother has died and they used to love baking cakes together, arrange for them to join you or a group of children to do some baking. It may make it easier for them to talk about their mother and how her death is impacting on them.

### **Information and advice for School Staff supporting students (please also see Appendix H whilst working remotely)**

Some young people who have been bereaved usually want to return to school fairly soon after the death as this offers some sort of normality and routine. In some circumstances, a teacher is the person a bereaved young person is most likely to turn to when they need to talk about their bereavement. This can prove particularly daunting if you haven't had any experience of supporting a bereaved person previously. That is why teaching staff need to be suitably prepared to recognise the impact the bereavement will have had upon the young person and be equipped to support them.

Discussing death and bereavement can also prove a difficult subject for pupils too, therefore questions and debates that arise pertaining to this topic should be encouraged, as and when they occur. A school staff member able to recognise some of the potential behaviours that a bereaved young person may exhibit, is in a better position to support the student as they grieve. As the nature of grief is individual it is essential to remember that no two people will grieve in the same way and exhibit the same behaviours.

Bereaved young people require time, patience and compassion from school staff. The familiarity of school and existing rapport with staff can be a useful vehicle to encourage communication and to allow the young person to convey their feelings.

If a bereaved student is in school, they may display mood swings behaviours that appear polar to the behaviours of the student prior to their bereavement. The loss that the bereaved pupil has suffered has thrown them in to a place populated by doubt, fear and insecurity. The regression towards behaviours exhibited in their formative years enables the pupil to try and emanate a time prior to the death when they felt safer and their world was intact.

Whether the student is in school or working remotely, teachers may also notice a bereaved young person's academic skills deteriorate; their spelling may become poor or they might not be able to understand certain mathematical equations that they were adept at prior to the bereavement. As the bereaved young person moves towards acceptance of the death such behaviour should disappear.

It is not uncommon for some bereaved young people to feel like they are going mad as the process of grieving takes its toll. It is essential for school staff to reassure the bereaved young person that they are not going mad and that the feelings they are experiencing are a very normal and natural reaction to the death of someone close.

Grieving is an exhausting process for adults and young people alike, therefore school staff may become aware of how tired and listless the bereaved young person may be. Bereavement can dramatically affect the sleeping patterns of a young person and if they are experiencing nightmares or engaging in hyper vigilance then they will most likely be lethargic and lacking energy. Exhaustion will also have a direct effect on the bereaved young person's ability to concentrate on their work and it is not uncommon to find a bereaved young person falling asleep at different times of the day.

A bereaved young person may present as being angry, frustrated and aggressive. The maelstrom of emotions experienced by many young people as they enter adulthood can be difficult enough and the death of someone close can serve to heighten and potentially complicate these feelings further. A good natured and amiable pupil may become aggressive following the death of someone close and their frustration can become apparent. If a bereaved young person displays physically or verbally threatening behaviour when in school it is important that appropriate boundaries are put in place and universally adhered to by all members of staff. The Form Tutor who knows the bereaved pupil well should speak with them if such behaviour manifest. The Form Tutor will need to reassure the bereaved pupil that anger and frustration are acceptable responses to grief but will equally reinforce that harming others either verbally or physically is not acceptable. Challenging the bereaved pupil will not make the bereavement experienced by them any worse. By challenging the aggressive behaviour of a bereaved student, staff are showing that they care about the student's well-being. The reinforcement of school rules promotes the familiarity and certainty of normal school life.

In some circumstances a bereaved young person may demonstrate high-risk behaviours in response to their grief. Such types of high-risk behaviours can include excessive alcohol consumption, substance misuse and self-harm. Some bereaved young people may use such vehicles as coping mechanisms endeavouring to anaesthetise the emotional pain they are experiencing. If staff members are concerned that a bereaved pupil is using any of the aforementioned as a coping mechanism this should be addressed swiftly by reporting it to the Pastoral Leader.

School staff are attuned to noticing angry, distraught students who rail against authority out of despair, but there may be equally distressed young people who take great care to conceal their pain and experience a range of bodily symptoms, such as stomach pains or headaches. Experience shows that withdrawn students can be harder to identify, so it is important to regularly check up on any bereaved students.

Although empathy and compassion are important for school staff when supporting a bereaved young person, forming a strong emotional attachment with the bereaved young person can prove damaging to the student in the future and can emotionally drain the staff member. Professional agencies such as Cruse Bereavement Care exist to provide support to bereaved young people, and this is worth remembering in order to safeguard both the young person and staff members.

**Do:**

- Reassure the student that feeling sad is an important part of our feelings when someone dies. Sharing how we feel is important, helps look after ourselves and develops appropriate coping mechanisms.
- Be emotionally present and able to offer compassionate responses.
- Acknowledge the loss. Young people will remember and greatly appreciate this. For example, 'I heard your dad died last week; I'm so sorry.'
- Stay with routines and keep the young person's life as normal as possible. Being able to have fun and keep learning are all important aspects of building resilience.
- If the bereaved pupil appears to be throwing themselves in to their studies take some time to talk with them and reassure them that grieving is normal and that they will need time to grieve.
- If necessary, when students are in school, inform supply staff on cover work sheets if there are any special measures that have been put in place to support the young person. For example; agreed time out periods from lessons.
- Help the bereaved young person to understand that they won't always feel different or act differently to how they were pre-bereavement. Although their lives have been changed forever their grief will lessen over time.

- **Do not** avoid conversations with parents about how they are feeling. Remember, if a parent is struggling to cope, there is a risk that their children are supporting them, rather than processing their own feelings.

### **Information and advice for the Pastoral Team supporting students and their family/friends**

There is no set time prescribed for when a bereaved young person should return to school following the death of someone close. The length of absence will depend on the wishes and cultural beliefs of the family and the young person's preparedness to return to school when school is open. If a bereaved young person has been absent from school for a long period of time this can increase their anxieties and cause difficulties readjusting to school life.

- Communication with the bereaved young person's family whilst supporting them is essential. The family or caregiver of the bereaved young person will have their own belief systems and thoughts on how the bereavement should be dealt with; their wishes must be respected.

When school is open to students:

- Before the bereaved young person returns on site, the Pastoral Leader or Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will ensure that they are clear about what the young person wants other pupils to know and how they would prefer to be received. For example, a bereaved student might state that they do not want their class mates to treat them any differently than prior to the bereavement, whereas another bereaved young person might request that certain information relating to the death is given to their form and/or teaching group so that they do not feel under pressure and won't need to repeat what has happened if continuously asked.
- Some bereaved young people may be anxious about returning to school for fear of having to face their friends, peers and staff. The Pastoral Leader will coordinate the bereaved young person's return to school to ensure that the needs of the young person have been discussed prior to their return to school.
- A meeting with the bereaved young person and their family should be held in advance of the child's anticipated return so that the staff and other pupils are informed about how to react to the bereaved young person in accordance with the child's wishes.
- The DSL/Pastoral Leader/Form Tutor could consider attending the funeral if the member of staff has formed a relationship with the family.
- Separation anxiety can sometimes manifest when the bereaved young person returns to school. This is a very natural reaction following a death. The bereaved young person might appear anxious about the welfare of their other relatives upon returning to school following the death of a parent. Reassure children they will be loved and cared for, and that school is also supporting their family.
- The Pastoral Leader will inform the student of the type of support they can expect when they do return to school. For instance, the bereaved young person will need to be reassured that an inability to concentrate during lessons is understandable and if work is not completed on time then dispensation will be made.
- The Pastoral Leader will provide the student with a time out card to allow the student to share grief and gather themselves when situations at school become overwhelming. If this is agreed then all of the teaching staff should be notified so that if the bereaved young person needs to leave the lesson they are not reprimanded or asked why they are leaving.
- The Pastoral Leader/Form Tutor may involve the bereaved young person's closest friends when devising a plan of support. Fostering the re-engagement of friendships between the bereaved young person and their friends will further enable the young person to feel more "normal" and will encourage them to talk about how they are feeling in a safe environment. The Pastoral Leader will ensure that the bereaved young person's friends will have access to support too should they require it.

- The Pastoral Leader will inform school staff of the young person's bereavement and will provide them with the support plan if they will be involved in supporting the bereaved young person.
- The Form Tutor and Pastoral Leader will encourage the bereaved young person to share their feelings and let them know that they will be available to support them whilst they are at school.
- When a Form Tutor or Pastoral Leader is meeting a bereaved young person, the meeting will be held in the Pastoral Hub or Blue Room to ensure interruption is minimal. The meeting will allow the bereaved young person to set the pace of any conversations pertaining to the death and ensure that the time set aside is adequate to facilitate such discussions and that the member of staff will not be called away whilst the young person is sharing.
- If a young person is unusually upset and unable to cope with their grief, (becoming depressed, unable to function/learn, angry, disruptive, potentially self-harming) advice will be sought from CAMHS.
- Pastoral Leaders should liaise with the bereaved young person's family if they have concerns that the student's grief is delayed or that they are denying their grief altogether. This must be explained to the family using Appendix D.
- Any Pastoral Staff working with a bereaved student needs to look after their own well-being. The DSL will be available to support them.

### **Information and advice for parents supporting a child through bereavement**

If you share the bereavement, ensure that you not only encourage your child to talk about their feelings but that you talk to them about how you are feeling too. Don't try to put on a brave face if this is not how you feel because your child may try and emulate this and neither of you will be able to progress if you are not being honest with each other about your emotions and how you are coping and this can be problematic later on.

If you suspect that your child is deliberately hiding their feelings in order to protect you, explain to them that they do not need to do this and encourage them to talk about how they truly feel rather than bottling things up to spare your feelings. The death of someone close can plunge a family in to chaos and confusion and normal daily life can be turned on its head. This said try to keep your child's routines as regular as they were prior to the death, the structure of meal times, bedtime and the like are extremely important as they not only safeguard the physical well-being of the young person but afford stability and security.

If your child states that they want to return to school let them. Don't be tempted to keep them at home; returning to the normality of school will help the young person to progress through the journey of their grief.

If your child has started to become violent against themselves or others do not be afraid to reinforce boundaries. Explain to the child that whilst you understand their frustration and anger it is not acceptable to hurt themselves or others.

If your child states that they do not want to attend the funeral do not force them to. Likewise, if your bereaved child does want to attend the funeral let them, young people have a need to say goodbye as much as adults and if they wish to attend the funeral to do this or they wish to remain at home and say their goodbyes privately you should respect their wishes.

### **Appetite and eating**

Bereaved children and young people can sometimes experience difficulties with their appetite and eating following the loss of a loved one. A bereaved young person may have a distinct lack of appetite and state that they "Can't face food/eating". Even favourite foods or treats can prove

unappealing to the grieving young person but encourage them where possible to eat little and often. Similarly, a grieving young person can turn to food to self soothe and give temporary respite from their grief. Bereaved young people can become fussy over food and about what they eat. If the bereaved young person appears to be eating much more than they would normally, try not to restrict their diet or chastise them.

Difficulties concerning appetite and eating can be further compounded by changes in routine and altered meal times as a result of the bereavement. For instance, if the person who has died was the primary provider of meals to the young person, difficulties can occur when someone else takes over this task. If the bereaved young person is eating at different times and in different places following the death, this too can prove problematic.

If you suspect that there are drastic and sustained changes in the bereaved young person's eating habits, particularly if they are losing weight dramatically through refusing to eat, a discussion with their GP might be needed. Remember to gently encourage the bereaved young person to eat and try to keep meal times as structured as possible.

### **Sleep and sleep patterns**

It is essential that the bereaved young person receives plenty of rest. Sleep is crucial for the mental, emotional and physical well-being of the young person. In the aftermath of the death of someone close, the sleep patterns of a bereaved young person can change significantly. A bereaved young person, irrespective of how tired they are, might not be able to fall asleep easily or may wake throughout the night and have difficulty falling asleep again. Nightmares and bad dreams are not uncommon in bereaved young people and time must be given for young people to discuss these.

Sometimes a bereaved young person may be afraid to fall asleep stating that they are scared they won't wake up again. Sometimes a bereaved young person may insist that the light is left on and they may display hyper vigilance which means they purposely stay awake in the hope of ensuring no one else dies or anything bad happens during the night.

Some young people will find it easier to sleep if you talk with them whilst they are in bed and preparing to go to sleep. Books to help the bereaved young person better understand their feelings can be useful too. A list of books for bereaved young people of different ages can be found here in Appendix G.

Blankets can also be used by children and young people alike. Some bereaved children and young people feel more secure at night time if they can wrap themselves in a particular blanket that is special to them. The use of certain calming oils such as lavender can be used to aid sleep and promote restfulness. A few droplets on to the pillow can be used, but do not place straight on to the skin.

Sometimes sitting with the bereaved child or young person (particularly those engaging in hyper vigilance) until they fall asleep can help them feel safer. If your bereaved child tells you that they are experiencing nightmares, encourage them to share them and help them to talk about any fears or worries they might have.

### **Regression or reverting back**

The death of someone close robs the bereaved young person of their sense of security and protection, particularly if the person who has died was the young person's primary caregiver. When this feeling of security has been impaired the bereaved young person may be observed to regress or revert back to behaviours and speech that were first exhibited in previous developmental stages.

- Try not to become alarmed if your child appears to be unable to perform tasks that they were easily able to do prior to the person dying.
- If you have concerns that your child appears to be regressing academically, let School know.
- Try not to show frustration with your child if they have become absent minded or forgetful, these are common responses experienced by grieving people and should disappear in time.
- If you are worried that your child is displaying regressive behaviours over a long period of time contact your GP, Cruse Bereavement Care or any support agency you feel may help.

### **Illness – Real and Psychosomatic**

When a young person is bereaved it can sometimes be observed that they complain of illnesses or physical ailments in response to the emotional trauma they are experiencing. Sometimes these illnesses can be real manifestations brought on by eating too little/too much or from not getting enough proper sleep.

Commonly some bereaved young people experience psychosomatic illnesses in response to the death of a loved one. This does not mean that the ailment or discomfort that the young person complains of is “all in the mind” but rather that the discomfort parallels the emotional pain they are feeling. For example, a bereaved child might complain of a headache or upset stomach when actually they are trying to convey their emotional pain in physical terms. Sometimes a bereaved young person can become anxious and fretful over the idea that they or someone close to them might fall ill and subsequently die. This is a natural response to the perceived lack of security felt by the young person following the bereavement. If your bereaved child is complaining of a particular ailment encourage them to discuss how and where it hurts as they might be trying to explain the emotional pain they feel in physical terms.

A number of bereaved young people might start to complain of symptoms similar to those experienced by the person who has died prior to death. If you are finding it difficult to reassure a bereaved young person that they do not have a brain tumour or terminal illness it might be worth taking the young person to see their doctor who can explain to them that they don't have such illnesses.

Providing a healthy balanced diet and ensuring the bereaved young person gets quality sleep can help to prevent infections and colds that can occur whilst they grieve. The young person's immune system can be weakened as a result of too little food or too little sleep so nutritious food is important where possible.

If the bereaved young person is becoming obsessive about a particular illness and it is dramatically affecting their daily lives discuss with your GP.

### **Information and advice for all adults supporting young people**

#### **Don't:**

- Don't volunteer too much information. You should respond to child-led questions.
- Don't feel that you have to help a child stop crying – it is key that young people feel adults can stay with their sadness.
- Young people's understanding is literal, so avoid statements like they have 'passed on'. Be explicit with explanations, 'they have died'. More distress is caused by this not being made clear for young people. To develop healthy coping mechanisms, young people need a clear understanding of what actually happened, however traumatic.
- Don't ignore your own grief – seek timely support for yourself. Remember young people will follow the grieving patterns of adults around them.

- Where possible, avoid becoming uncontrollably distressed when around young people. If young people are witness to adults struggling with their grief, it can be more difficult for them to process their own losses.
- Remember that unresolved grief is deeply distressing and potentially life changing for young people. Support access to specialist psychological help when needed.

### **When to contact a specialist**

#### **The child or young person should get specialist help if they are experiencing any of the following:**

- Extended period of disrupted relationships with family and friends.
- Inability of parent to meet child's needs (due to parental grief).
- Prolonged lack of interest in activities they used to be involved in.
- Prolonged refusal to attend school or poor academic performance.
- Continuing problems with sleeping.
- Persistent low confidence, shame or guilt.
- Prolonged fear of being alone.
- Signs of chronic depression.
- Risk-taking behaviour, for example, drug or alcohol abuse, sexual experimentation, fighting, reckless driving.
- Repeated desires to join the dead person, copying symptoms/behaviour of the deceased or repeatedly dreaming of their own death.
- They are convinced they have caused harm/death.
- The death of their parent or sibling was by suicide.
- They were directly/indirectly responsible for the death.

#### **As time passes:**

- Grief pops up normally at the most inconvenient times. Be prepared to listen, again and again and again.
- Give time – it may be a good while before they can fully cope with pressures of school work.
- Be aware of important dates, often the day itself can pass quite easily but the days after can be hard.

### **Advice for young people from young people**

You do not know how your friend feels, and even if you did, it is not what they need to hear. No two people are the same. No two losses are the same. It is useless comparing grief; at this moment they cannot imagine anyone knows how they feel.

Though many people find comfort in the belief their loved one is in a better place, immediately following a loss is not always the right time to say it. The list below is not about things that aren't true; it is about things that aren't helpful to say. Realistically, things probably will get easier. But when someone is in the unimaginably deep, dark hole of grief, they just want you to acknowledge the pain. What's worse is that for many people this initial pain is deeply connected to the person who died and starting to heal will feel like they are forgetting or 'moving on'.

Living a good, long life does not diminish the pain of the loss. Regardless of the deceased's age, the hurt and pain may be unbearable. Share memories, reminisce about their life, but do not imply that it should make this loss easier.

Though many take comfort in a greater plan, a death can cause many people to question God, their understanding of God's omni-benevolence, and their faith in general. This can be the case even for

people who have extremely deep faith. For those who don't, it can feel distant and alienating. So, better safe than sorry – steer clear.

We all grieve in our own way – some people will cry. A lot. Some people won't. There is no right or wrong way, and however someone is grieving they should feel supported to cry as much as they want to, and not feel they are being judged for it. You do not need to exacerbate it with the pressure of containing their emotions.

**Things that are unhelpful to say:**

- *"I know how you feel"*
- *"He/she is in a better place now"*
- *"At least she/he lived a long life"*
- *"Everything happens for a reason"*
- *"Don't cry" or "You need to be strong now"*
- *"It could be worse. I know this person who . . ."*

These suggestions for coping with bereavement have been put forward by young people who have been bereaved. Some of the ideas were volunteered by bereaved children and young people who used the Cruse website, Hope Again to share coping strategies with bereaved peers.

- Get creative. Write a poem or letter to your loved one who has died. Keep a diary of how you are feeling so that you can pour your feelings on to the page.
- Make a memory box. Gather together letters, badges, photographs, and keepsakes you have from your loved one and put them in to a special memory box that you can reopen and reminisce over when you need to.
- Try to focus on some of the good times you and your loved one shared together.
- Talk to people; don't let your hurt grow until you break down.
- Just take one day at a time.
- Visit the grave if you are ready and able to. It might make you feel closer to your loved one.
- It is OK to feel sad, angry and scared and to cry. It is also OK to feel happy and enjoy things.
- It is OK if the loved one you have lost is not in your thoughts all the time.
- Hug those loved ones who are still here.
- Remember that you are not alone and that help is out there if you need it.
- Bereavement can seem to last forever, but it does get easier with time.

**Information and advice for adults on how to support themselves following a bereavement**

One of the most helpful things is to talk about the person who has died and your relationship with them. Who you talk to will depend on you. It may be your family, friends, a faith/spiritual adviser, your GP or a support organisation.

**Do:**

- Talk to other people about the person who has died, about your memories and your feelings.
- Look after yourself. Eat properly and try to get enough rest (even if you can't sleep).
- Give yourself time and permission to grieve.
- Seek help and support if you feel you need it.
- Tell people what you need.

**Don't:**

- Isolate yourself.
- Keep your emotions bottled up.
- Think you are weak for needing help.
- Feel guilty if you are struggling to cope.



- Rely on drugs or alcohol – the relief will only be temporary.

### **Information and advice for adults supporting adults following a bereavement**

People who have been bereaved may want to talk about the person who has died. One of the most helpful things you can do is simply listen, and give them time and space to grieve. Offering specific practical help, not vague general offers, can also be very helpful.

#### **Do:**

- Be there for the person who is grieving - pick up the phone, write a letter or an email, call by or arrange to visit.
- Accept that everyone grieves in their own way, there is no 'normal' way.
- Encourage the person to talk.
- Listen to the person.
- Create an environment in which the bereaved person can be themselves and show their feelings, rather than having to put on a front.
- Be aware that grief can take a long time.
- Contact the person at difficult times such as special anniversaries and birthdays.
- Mention useful support agencies such as Cruse Bereavement Care.
- Offer useful practical help.

#### **Don't:**

- Avoid someone who has been bereaved.
- Use clichés such as 'I understand how you feel'; 'You'll get over it'; 'Time heals'.
- Tell them it's time to move on, they should be over it - how long a person needs to grieve is entirely individual.
- Be alarmed if the bereaved person doesn't want to talk or demonstrates anger.
- Underestimate how emotionally draining it can be when supporting a grieving person. Make sure you take care of yourself too.
- Feel that you have failed if you need to seek professional help for the bereaved young person. You are doing the right thing.

## **Appendix A: Anniversaries and reminders when you are bereaved**

There are many events that will evoke memories of the death of someone close. Some are personal and obvious, such as a wedding anniversary or birthday, and others are more unpredictable, like a piece of music, a smell or a particular TV programme. Anniversaries and reminders can evoke powerful memories and feelings which are distinctly personal. These days or events, which mean so much to one person, may be ordinary to others who may not understand what is happening.

Just as each relationship and each bereavement is unique, so too are the feelings evoked by reminders. For some people, anniversaries can evoke fond and happy memories, while for others they can create feelings of sadness, grief, fear, regret and anger. Another disturbing feeling that can be evoked by a reminder is guilt - guilt at what has been said or done, guilt concerning what was left unsaid, and even guilt at having forgotten or not thought about the dead person for a period of time.

### **What can help?**

- It helps to accept that, when grieving, there are some occasions which will be very difficult and then to work out how best to manage them. Spend some time trying to work out, well in advance, which arrangements will best suit your needs and the needs of others who share your loss.
- Some people try to avoid the pain of certain events by making sure they are away from the people and places which bring sad thoughts and memories. But you may feel it is important to mark the day in a way that is special for you and for the person who has died and whose loss you mourn. What is important is that what you do will have some special private meaning for you and those close to you.
- Some people find it comforting to take part in religious and cultural practices which help individuals and groups remember the dead and celebrate their lives and work.
- Others find they prefer something more personal, and others do nothing at all other than maintain routine and normal life.
- The uncertainty and anxiety surrounding death may lead to fixed ideas and thinking, but it is important to remember that people remember and forget the dead in their own ways and what bereaved people need is acceptance from others.
- As time passes, anniversaries and reminders can help us to begin to focus on happy memories of good times shared in the past.

### **Coping at Christmas/other religious celebrations**

Christmas and other significant events in the calendar can be a painful time whether it's your first year without someone who has died, or you were bereaved long ago. We know that facing a celebration alone, or whilst grieving, can be a daunting prospect. Spend some time trying to work out, well in advance, which arrangements will best suit your needs and the needs of others who share your loss.

### **Whether to celebrate**

Some bereaved people find that they do not wish to celebrate at all, whilst some find that simply maintaining their routine and celebrating as normal is the best tribute they can pay their loved one. It may feel important to make a special effort to remember the person who has died. This can be as simple as 'speaking' to the person, silently or out loud, or it may involve visiting their grave, or a place that was special to them. These can be things that we do alone, or with friends or family. You may have photos or particular memories which you treasure; sharing these with others may be something that brings you together.

**Different ways of mourning**

We know that people remember and mourn in different ways. Conflict within a family can sometimes arise when we have expectations of how others should grieve, so try to be sensitive to others' needs, and to talk openly about what will be best for you.

**Routine and self-care**

The celebratory period may mean that your normal routine is disrupted, and this can make it easier to forget to look after yourself. Trying to keep to regular patterns of sleeping and eating are small things that can make a difference.

**Grieving on Mother's/Father's Day**

These can be an incredibly challenging days for anyone whose parent or child has died. It can evoke powerful memories and feelings which are very personal.

Cruse Freephone National Helpline is open from 09:30 to 17:00 on Mother's Day and Father's Day for anyone who wants to talk to one of their trained bereavement supporters. The number is 0808 808 1677.

## **Appendix B: The death of a pupil**

The death of a student can be traumatic for both school staff and pupils. A student's death can unnerve other pupils and challenge any feelings of security they might have felt prior to the death. It is likely that many students will have questions and will want to know details relating to the death. School staff should endeavour to answer all questions in an open and honest manner, using language that is appropriate to the students' age and level of understanding.

You may notice that lessons become disrupted as students may be observed becoming restless and unable to concentrate. There may also be an increase in behavioural difficulties and academic grades may deteriorate. If the death occurred on the school premises some pupils may not want to return to school for fear of dying in a similar way or in the same place where their classmate died.

If any of the young people witnessed the death, irrespective of whether the student died on school premises or not, they may need to be referred for specialist help. Any specialist help school staff believe would benefit the young person will need to be discussed with their family before any referral is made.

### **Pastoral Team and Senior Leadership Team responsibilities:**

- The Headmistress will inform staff in a briefing prior to informing the students.
- Prior to informing a class/year group/whole of the student body about the death, the Headmistress (or Deputy Head(s) in her absence) will ensure that the School has the permission of the family of the student who has died first and will only explain the details/circumstances that they have consented to making public. The facts will be delivered in a sensitive and truthful way and pupils will be encouraged to ask questions as this will help to dispel any current or potential rumours or misinformation from circulating within the school.
- Staff should be aware that some of the students may laugh or make inappropriate comments; this is how shock can sometimes manifest. Likewise, some young people may burst in to tears. We will ensure that all pupils who are upset or feel uneasy are supported to talk (in private) about how they are feeling.
- Members of the Senior Leadership and Pastoral Team will be present when the news is broken to students so that they can take distressed students in to a quieter room and can look out for any students who look particularly anxious or unsettled. We will allow a class discussion when appropriate whereby all students can communicate their feelings and be reassured. Ground rules such as, "No interrupting someone when they are speaking" will be used to encourage students to speak without fear of recrimination.
- If there are pupils who wish to attend the funeral of the student who has died we will encourage them and ensure that their family and the family of the person who has died agree. If their family consents, the DSL will explain to the pupil(s) what the funeral will likely consist of and what to expect.
- The Senior Leadership Team will talk with students and other school staff about holding a memorial service for the pupil who has died and decide on an appropriate way to commemorate them. The School will involve students who have expressed an interest in participating.
- The School may open a book of remembrance dedicated to the student who has died where students and school staff can write about the student and include pictures and poetry before giving the completed book to the family. This can prove cathartic to many bereaved people.

## Appendix C: Death of a staff member

- If you are the first school staff member to be informed that a colleague has died ensure that you inform the Headmistress immediately. A staff meeting may need to be called irrespective of the time of day when you are informed, with a skeletal staff supervising lessons/break times, etc. This may need to be done via a remote staff meeting if not all school staff are on site.
- The Senior Leadership Team will arrange for the school staff to meet again at the end of the day or at the most convenient time to allow them to share their emotions and discuss ways to best support each other and the students.
- As soon as all of the school staff have been informed a school assembly with all form groups present will be called, if possible. If students are in school, the Headmistress (or Deputy Head(s)) will explain to the students what has happened and allow pupils to ask questions (in form groups if appropriate). Questions must be answered honestly, being mindful to only give out the details that the family of the person who has died has consented to. If pupils are not in school, information will be communicated to parents who will be asked to share the information with their child(ren) in an appropriate way.
- If there are pupils who wish to say something about the person who has died or want to pay tribute, they will be encouraged to talk about their feelings and share memories with their friends, their parents, Form Tutors or members of the Pastoral Team.
- Some staff members may be grieving too so the School will provide support and time off to mourn.
- If the member of staff who has died taught a particular class, the Headmistress or another teacher familiar to the students, will attend the class with the new class teacher when they have been appointed.
- Staff and students will hold a memorial service or open a book of remembrance when this is possible and all staff and students wishing to participate will be encouraged to do so. School staff will also be given the chance to meet to share their feelings, thoughts and memories pertaining to the member of staff who has died.
- Consideration will be given regarding how best to support those staff members and students who have been particularly affected by the death and support will be provided for the teacher appointed to take over from the person who has died.
- Students may wish to access Cruse Bereavement Care's specialist website, Hope Again <https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/> designed to support bereaved children and young people. Form groups or groups of students who have been most affected by the death can log on to Hope Again if they feel they would benefit from this.

## **Appendix D: Complicated bereavement in children**

The process of grief can move quickly or can proceed slowly but no change at all can be worrying. Complicated Bereavement (also known as complicated mourning, complicated bereavement, prolonged grief) is the concept used when a bereaved person appears to be “stuck” in their grief process or their grief has become a way of life. Anyone can be at risk of complicated grief.

As the nature of grief is so individual it can be difficult to identify possible complicated grief. The British Medical Journal has described complicated grief as, “...the persistent and disruptive yearning, pining and longing for the deceased.” The following are what the BMJ stated as being symptomatic of complicated grief:

- Frequent trouble accepting the death.
- Inability to trust others since the death.
- Excessive bitterness related to the death.
- Uneasiness about moving on with life.
- Detachment from other people to whom the bereaved person was previously close.
- The prolonged feeling that life is meaningless
- The view that the future will never hold any prospect of fulfilment.
- Excessive and prolonged agitation since the death.

Grief is a natural response to bereavement but grief that is complicated can be unhelpful and potential damaging to the mourner. Complicated grief often requires support therefore if you think that a bereaved young person is exhibiting signs of this, contact Cruse.

Both anticipated bereavement (when a person is expected to die as a result of a terminal illness) and unexpected bereavement can be further complicated for children and young people by a number of factors, including:

- Relationship factors;
- Circumstantial factors;
- Multiple losses;
- Personality factors;
- Social factors.

### **Relationship factors**

The relationship that the young person had with the person who has died is extremely important. For example, complicated grief is more likely to occur if the person who has died was the child’s parent, sibling or best friend. If the young person was dependent upon the person who has died or has been diagnosed with mental health problems then the risk of complicated grief increases.

### **Circumstantial factors**

If the death was sudden and unexpected or as a result of suicide the young person is at greater risk of experiencing complicated grief. The bereaved young person may feel responsible for not being able to prevent the death and in the case of suicide may be acutely aware of social stigma.

### **Multiple losses**

This means that a young person who has experienced other deaths previously or has experienced a number of people close to them die in one instance (for example a road traffic accident with one or more people close to the young person involved) are more vulnerable to complicated grief. Also, if before or after the death a young person has suffered other losses such as a change in school or the divorce of parents, this too can make complicated grief more likely.

**Personality factors**

How emotionally resourceful or resilient a young person is may determine if that young person will experience complicated grief. If a young person has poor coping skills, is culturally isolated or financially deprived this can increase the likelihood of complicated grief.

**Social factors**

If a bereaved young person is exposed to poor housing, substance misuse, domestic violence and poverty they can be at risk of complicated grief. The probability of complicated grief is increased if the bereaved young person does not have access to social networks and appropriate support systems.

**How can I help?**

- Encourage your child to talk about their feelings and what they are thinking. Talking can help the bereaved young person process their grief and feel supported.
- If your child has mentioned taking their own life speak with your GP immediately.
- Don't be embarrassed to ask for help, you are doing the right thing for your child.

## **Appendix E: Traumatic bereavement**

A traumatic loss is one that is sudden and unexpected, and often results from horrific or frightening circumstances. A traumatic loss can be caused by natural disaster, terrorist attack, suicide and other traumatic losses.

### **Supporting pupils following violent deaths**

The loss of someone close through death entails grief irrespective of the cause and everybody will grieve in their own personal way and for as long as it takes them to reach acceptance. The death of someone close as a result of violent crimes like manslaughter and murder can further heighten the pain and distress caused by the loss.

A young person who has been bereaved through manslaughter or murder may find it doubly difficult to understand and process the death. Grief often forces the mourner to ask themselves if they could have prevented the death or if they were a contributing factor. It causes doubt, anger and insecurity as there are often no answers to the questions bereaved friends and families need answering. It is difficult enough for an adult bereaved through murder or manslaughter to try and process what has happened and to understand their feelings but for young people it can be extremely bewildering.

Deaths caused by manslaughter or murder often attract media attention. For a bereaved young person having to grieve in the public arena can prove extremely traumatic. When the bereaved young person returns to school following the death it is most probable that rumour and conjecture surrounding the death of the person will be rife amongst the student population. A special assembly or form meeting prior to the bereaved pupil's return will be organised to allow the students a platform to ask questions and discuss any concerns they might have. Such discussions will also focus on dispelling rumours and requesting the understanding and compassion of the students when the bereaved pupil returns to school.

Students and their families are asked to inform the Headmistress (or Deputy Head(s)) if they have been approached by the media. The School would discourage them from making statements to the press concerning the death or the person who has died as this could prove damaging to the bereaved pupil and their family. Guidelines on media intrusion that are enforced by the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) can be found here: <https://www.ipso.co.uk>.

In instances where the person has died through manslaughter or murder consideration will be made for the process of police investigations, trials, court attendance, post mortems and inquests that the bereaved young person may be requested to participate in. School will ensure that the bereaved pupil has a trusted member of staff that they can talk to and share their feelings with.

If there is considerable media interest surrounding the death, the bereaved young person might feel that they no longer have "ownership" of the person who has died and that the latter has now become public property. If the media has represented the person who has died in an unfavourable manner the bereaved young person may feel they have to continuously defend them.

If the person was murdered and the perpetrator has yet to be found, this can cause great fear and panic within the bereaved young person. Other students may also feel anxious fearing they or their relatives too might die. Any students who are worried would be encouraged to share their feelings with a member of the Pastoral or Senior Leadership Team.



In instances where a perpetrator is known and has been apprehended by the police the bereaved young person may still feel that they and their family are at risk. Feelings of vengeance towards the known/unknown perpetrator are not uncommon in young people who have been bereaved through manslaughter or murder. Such anger can be enormous and the bereaved young person will probably find such an emotion overwhelming.

The Pastoral Team will ensure the bereaved pupil has an outlet to talk about their anger and thoughts of revenge. Such emotions will be received in a non-judgemental and empathic manner; left unchecked such powerful emotions can potentially hinder the bereaved young person's social and emotional development.

### **How can I help?**

- Liaison with the bereaved young person's family is important, particularly when the person who has died, died as a result of murder or manslaughter. School staff will need to know the facts about what has happened and exactly how much/how little the bereaved pupil and their family wish to disclose to the student body.
- If the circumstances are such that the bereaved young person is required to change schools, the DSL will speak with the family and offer to talk with staff at the pupil's new school in order to give them a picture of how the bereaved young person was prior to their bereavement. This can help new staff who do not know the bereaved young person to become aware of behaviours that are out of character.
- If the perpetrator has not been caught, the bereaved young person may be extremely anxious and fearful that they are at risk. School staff will be made aware of this and ensure that every reasonable effort is made to make the young person feel safe whilst they are at school. Other students too may have concerns that the perpetrator has not been apprehended by the police, particularly in the case of murder. Therefore, school staff will help to promote a sense of security for all pupils who are worried or scared.
- If there is media interest surrounding the death, the Senior Leadership Team and relevant Pastoral Leaders will meet and agree on how best to tackle media intrusion. The school will devise an action plan detailing how media interest on school premises should be dealt with and ensure that all staff and students alike understand how to deal with journalists, TV news crews, etc, wishing to speak with them.
- It is probable that students will have many questions and want to know details regarding the murder or manslaughter. School will not avoid such questions, but will answer truthfully, in an age appropriate manner, and give out details that the bereaved young person and their family have given you permission to.

### **Ways of dealing with the impact of traumatic bereavement**

There are four main types of problems which may arise after someone close to you dies in a traumatic circumstance:

- Problems of trauma;
- Problems of grieving;
- Problems of anger and self-reproach;
- Problems of change.

### **Problems of Trauma**

#### **'I can't believe it's true'**

Losses for which we are unprepared, particularly if we can't be present or to hold or touch those we have lost, are difficult to make real.

### **What helps?**

It takes a long time to take in what has happened. Spend time talking it through with others and don't worry that you are being a burden to them, that's what friends are for. Many people might find it helpful to:

- visit the place where the disaster took place;
- talk with others involved;
- place a wreath in a significant place;
- attend memorial services or other rituals of remembrance.

In the end, there may be aspects of the loss that will never be explained. Be prepared to live with the uncertainty of not knowing; we cannot explain or control everything.

### **'I can't get it out of my head'**

Many people are haunted by pictures in their minds of the traumatic event. While this is most likely to become a problem for eye-witnesses, television or other pictures can also 'bring home' the awfulness of the way a person might have died. Such images may occur spontaneously or, in a distorted form, as recurrent nightmares. They may be triggered by any reminder of the loss, e.g. loud noises, cries or shouts.

Some people go to great lengths to avoid any such reminders because the images are so painful. They may shut themselves up at home, avoid talking about the loss, and distract themselves with hectic activity. This kind of reaction is not uncommon and will usually improve with time. However in severe form it may become so disabling that it becomes known as 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder' (PTSD).

### **What helps?**

Haunting images can sometimes be eased by talking to others, going over the events again and again until you get used to them. The images will not disappear but they will become less painful and easier to live with. If the images are stopping you from grieving or getting on with your life, then you should consult a psychiatrist or psychologist. Very effective treatments for PTSD have been developed in recent years. They do not necessarily require prescription medication, although this may help.

### **'I feel numb'**

Numbness is our mind's way of protecting itself from mental pain that threatens to overwhelm us. Sometimes we may be unable to think clearly, or become confused and lose our bearings. At other times we may be unable to express feelings of any kind. In an emergency it is such 'dissociation' that enables us to keep going, searching for a lost person or engaging in the rescue of others. It is only if it continues after the disaster is over that it becomes a problem. Usually this reflects a fear that, if we do not keep our feelings firmly under control, they will take control of us.

### **What helps?**

Grief is the natural response to the loss of a loved person. It is more likely to give rise to problems if it is bottled up than if it is expressed. At times of loss it is normal and appropriate to express grief in any way that feels natural. Some people need to cry, others will rage and others just talk endlessly about what has happened. Try to find someone you can trust who will be a good listener and don't worry if, for a while, you look or feel helpless, that will pass. In grieving we do not forget the people we love, we gradually find new ways to remember them. Memories of the past are sometimes painful but they are our treasure, it is best not to bury them for too long. Paradoxically, if we allow ourselves to lose control of our feelings, for a while, we shall find ourselves better able to live with and to control them.

### **'I can't stop crying'**

Grief can continue much longer than most people expect. We need to recognise that fact and not expect too much of ourselves. This said, there are some types of grief which become “stuck”. Sometimes this reflects our need to punish ourselves – 'Why should I be happy now that he or she is dead?' This is most likely to arise if it is a child who has died, or if we blame ourselves for their death or for not being there for them when needed. At other times it reflects long-standing feelings of depression or helplessness.

### **What helps?**

Grief is not like the measles, we do not go back to being the person we were before our loss. We learn to live with it, and, little by little, the pain will diminish. Grief is not a duty to the dead, those we love would not want us to suffer. Again, talking it through with a friend or bereavement volunteer from Cruse will usually help. If that is not enough or you feel continually depressed or suicidal, you should not hesitate to seek specialist help. Several treatments including Cognitive Therapies, Psycho-therapies and anti-depressant medications will be of help and it is worth discussing with your GP which of these alternatives are available and appropriate to you. Don't give up.

### **'I feel so angry'**

Anger is a very natural reaction to loss, particularly if it was caused by terrorism or other human hands. It may be directed against the perpetrators of the trauma, or against all authorities or the people nearest to hand. Some people may find themselves hitting out wildly at the people they love the best. Occasionally ill-directed anger may even feed into or bring about a cycle of violence.

### **What helps?**

Remember that anger can be a force for good if it is controlled and directed where it can do well rather than harm. Try to hold back from impulsive outbursts and, if you have said or done things that have hurt others, don't be too proud to apologise. They will understand.

### **'I blame myself, I feel so guilty'**

None of us is perfect and it is easy to seize on something that we did or didn't do in our attempt to find someone to blame. Often, people end up blaming themselves. At the back of our minds we may even cling to the idea that, if we punish ourselves we will make things right again and get back the person we have lost. Sadly, this magical thinking is doomed to fail.

### **What helps?**

Sooner or later we have to accept that what has happened is irrevocable and that punishing ourselves won't change anything. Friends will often say 'You shouldn't blame yourself', and maybe they are right. But you do not choose the way you feel. Guilt and anger are not feelings that can be switched on and off at will. Rather we should try to find a creative use for our grief, to bring something good out of the bad thing that has happened.

### **'I feel so frightened'**

We all know that disasters happen, but most of the time we go through life with confidence that we are safe, protected from harm and immune from significant trauma. Then disaster strikes, all in a moment the world has become a dangerous place, we can take nothing for granted, we are waiting for the next disaster. Fear causes bodily symptoms including tense muscles, racing heart, sweating, breathlessness and sleeplessness - all symptoms which, in the environment in which we evolved would have helped us to stay alive in situations of danger. But in today's world they do no such thing and are more likely to be misinterpreted as symptoms of illness.

### **What helps?**

The first and most important thing is to recognise that the symptoms of fear are a sign of normality, at such times a racing heart is a normal heart, headaches, back aches, indigestion, even feelings of panic, are natural reactions that will decline as time passes, they are not symptoms that will lead to something worse. In addition, you are not as helpless as you feel. Relaxation exercises, meditation techniques, aromatherapy or whatever helps to relax you will put you back in control.

This said, you should not expect to go back to being the secure, confident person that you were before the disaster struck. You have learned the hard way that life is never - and never was - completely safe. You have lost the illusion of invulnerability and will never quite regain it. You are older and sadder as a result. But you are also more mature. You have learned that life has its dark side, but that does not mean that you need live your life in perpetual fear. The world today is no more dangerous than it was before the disaster. Previously you had an illusion of safety, the feeling of danger is equally illusory, and it will grow less. Human beings evolved to cope with a much more dangerous world than the one in which we live today. You, and those with you, will survive.

### **'Life has lost its meaning'**

Each person's sense of purpose and direction in life arises from a hundred and one habits of thought and assumptions about the world that we take for granted. Then, all of a sudden, we can take nothing for granted any more. Perhaps the person who died is the one we would have turned to at times of trouble and now, when we face the biggest trouble in our lives, they are not there, or, if they are, they are so overwhelmed by their own grief that we cannot burden them with ours.

### **What helps?**

Those who have a religious faith may find it helpful to seek pastoral support; others may find spiritual help outside of formal religious frameworks. When faced with a disaster of this magnitude it takes time and hard work to adjust. It is rather like learning to cope with the loss of a limb. For a while we will feel crippled, mutilated, as if a part of ourselves is missing.

We feel as if we had lost every good thing that relied on the presence of the person we love for its meaning. But take heart, all is not lost. Now is the time to take stock, and ask yourself what really matters? When we do that we may be surprised to find that many of the things that made sense of our lives when the lost person was with us continue to make sense of our lives now that they are away. Indeed, they may make more sense because they are away. When people say 'He (or she) lives on in my memory', this is literally true.

## Appendix F: Dealing with crisis at school

Occasionally an accident or crisis can occur either on the school premises or on a school trip. A rapid response from school staff will be needed in such situations to ensure relevant information is communicated, the safeguarding of students and staff is adhered to and to prevent further disaster occurring.

- If an accident or crisis occurs staff need to try to establish what has happened, what needs to be done to safeguard students and other staff and what the consequences are likely to be. Once you have clear and accurate information you will need to contact the Headmistress or Emergency Contact on rota in school. The Senior Leadership Team will inform parents, families and other school staff as soon as possible that there has been an accident.
- The Headmistress will organise a specific telephone line within school to be designated for dialling out only. As soon as news of the accident or crisis spreads many of the usual reception lines are likely to become engaged with people phoning in to find out what has happened.
- Where possible staff members, parents and families will be asked to come to the school so that the latest information can be received immediately as it is relayed to the Headmistress or designated member of staff. We will ensure that those people answering communications have the latest up to date and accurate information and if there is an occasion where a pupil or staff member dies as a result of the accident or crisis, the communications handlers are aware that they don't inadvertently tell the parents/family of the death.
- If there is tragic news the Headmistress will ensure that the parents/families involved are told in private what has happened. The Senior Leadership Team will help families/parents in need of transport, hospital contact numbers and emotional support.
- Site Services will prevent the media from entering the school premises or bothering distressed pupils and families. A member of the Senior Leadership Team will deal with any press or television crews.
- The Headmistress or designated member of the Senior Leadership Team will explain to the student body in their class/form groups what has happened and allow them time and space to grieve and ask questions. All questions will be answered truthfully and appropriately to the class' age and level of comprehension.
- School staff will be alert to any students who are exhibiting signs of distress or are struggling to cope. School will resume normal routine as soon as it is appropriate to do so as this will help to promote feelings of security and normality amongst the students.

### Senior Leadership Team will:

- Organise a debriefing session with all school staff members following the accident or crisis;
- Ensure that all students and staff are supported as they grieve;
- Seek advice from Birmingham Education Psychology Service on responding to critical incidents;
- Call an assembly when it is appropriate to do so, to express the school's sense of loss, sympathy for the families involved and to decide on a form of memorial;
- Ensure media interest is kept away from the school grounds and appoint a member of staff to liaise with any journalists or reporters that arrive at the school;
- Keep the parents and families of the students affected by the event aware of what is happening in the school, and of the need to watch out for signs of distress in their children or young people in the months to come;
- Designated members of the Pastoral Team will provide support to bereaved young people in the event of a death. The team appointed to provide support to bereaved students are trained in supporting with bereavement and loss and are supported by the DSL when offering such support.
- The School will respond when appropriate to the following guidance:  
[www.workingtogetheronline.co.uk/chapters/chapter\\_five.html](http://www.workingtogetheronline.co.uk/chapters/chapter_five.html) (Child death reviews.)

## Appendix G: Resources

[www.elsa-support.co.uk/bereavement-resources-for-parents-and-school-staff/](http://www.elsa-support.co.uk/bereavement-resources-for-parents-and-school-staff/) for staff supporting young people: ELSA Bereavement Support Pack. Includes: Activity cards; Grief information; Worksheets and templates; Information about the Grief Pack.

[www.kooth.com/](http://www.kooth.com/) Kooth is a safe, confidential and anonymous way for young people to access emotional wellbeing and mental health support.

[www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/52283247](http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/52283247) advice from Newsround on Coronavirus: What to do if someone you love has died

[www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/help-around-a-death/covid-19.aspx](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/help-around-a-death/covid-19.aspx) COVID-19: Supporting young people and children during the outbreak

[www.nurtureuk.org/what-we-do/news/news/bereavement-support-children-and-young-people](http://www.nurtureuk.org/what-we-do/news/news/bereavement-support-children-and-young-people) Nurtureuk has produced a specially edited version of their Bereavement Box that helps anyone supporting bereaved young people understand what they may be experiencing during COVID-19 with helpful suggestions on approaches and exercises to help children cope better with their grief. [www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/parent-leaflet-child-death-review-v2.pdf](http://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/parent-leaflet-child-death-review-v2.pdf) This

guide has been put together by a group of bereaved parents, support organisations and professionals; it is for parents and carers of a child under 18 which will help parents/carers understand some of the things that will happen and the support that is available.

**Winston's Wish** – [www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk) Winston's Wish was the UK's first childhood bereavement charity and continues to lead the way in providing specialist child bereavement support services across the UK, including in-depth therapeutic help.

[www.hopeagain.org.uk/](http://www.hopeagain.org.uk/) **Hope Again** is the youth website of [Cruse Bereavement Care](#). It is a safe place where you can learn from other young people, how to cope with grief, and feel less alone. Here you will find information about our services, a listening ear from other young people and advice for any young person dealing with the loss of a loved one. Hope Again provides somewhere to turn to when someone dies.

**What On Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies – Trevor Romain.** Trevor Romain knows, because it happened to him when his father died. This book can help you through a painful time. Trevor answers questions you might wonder about 'Why do people have to die?' 'Is the death my fault?' 'What happens to the person's body?' 'How can I say goodbye?' In simple, honest words.

**When Something Terrible Happens: Children Can Learn to Cope With Grief – Marqe Heegaard.** Terrible things happen to children. Traumatic events in the lives of their families, their friends or in the world leave children feeling confused, insecure and frightened. Some things happen in nature like floods and earthquakes. People, also cause violence and trauma. This book is designed to help children understand and cope with overwhelming feelings from loss and change. Creating art provides a method for expressing feelings children are unable to understand or express verbally. Drawing a fearful event puts the drawer in charge and presents an opportunity to overcome feelings of helplessness and fear.

**Help Me Say Goodbye – Janis Silverman.** An art therapy and activity book to help children cope with the death of a special person. Includes exercises to address the questions and fears children may have.

**Ethan's Butterflies – Christine Jonas-Simpson.** Ethan's Butterflies provides a way for parents and professionals to connect with young children who experience the loss of a sibling.

**The Secret C: Straight Talking about Cancer – Julie a.Stokes Obe.** It is always difficult to talk about cancer. This book approaches this difficult subject very simply but with clarity and sympathy. It is written to be read with children in mind but it is very powerful for adults. It is a good aid to help people start talking and understanding.

**Samaritans** - <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/support-and-information/if-youre-having-difficult-time/other-sources-help/>

**Child Bereavement UK (UK)** supports families when a baby or child of any age dies or is dying, or when a child is facing bereavement. Includes information on when a grandparent dies. Tel: 0800 028 8840. Email: [support@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:support@childbereavementuk.org) Support available 9am–5pm Mon–Fri.

**Cruse** - Offers support for bereaved people. E: [helpline@cruse.org.uk](mailto:helpline@cruse.org.uk) or [birmingham@cruse.org.uk](mailto:birmingham@cruse.org.uk)  
Website [www.crusebirmingham.co.uk](http://www.crusebirmingham.co.uk) [www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/local-services/west-midlands/birmingham](http://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/local-services/west-midlands/birmingham) [www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/traumatic-bereavement/coping-with-a-crisis](http://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/traumatic-bereavement/coping-with-a-crisis)  
0121 687 8010 (helpline) - Use if you are seeking support. 0121 687 8011 (admin line) - Use for training and enquiries. As the helpline is entirely staffed by volunteers, you may get an answerphone when you call. Please leave a message and they will try to call you back within 48 hours. If you do not hear back from them, so please phone again.

[www.coop.co.uk/funeralcare/what-to-do-when-someone-dies/bereavement-support-for-children](http://www.coop.co.uk/funeralcare/what-to-do-when-someone-dies/bereavement-support-for-children)

Child Bereavement, Trauma and Emotional Wellbeing Service (CHUMS) and Coop Funeral Care have created a series of short animated films to support bereaved families. The films are aimed at helping bereaved children aged 7- 16 cope with the loss of a loved one and provide additional resource to relatives, teachers and other organisations who all play a role in supporting a child through their loss. They also provide specific advice during COVID-19.

**Malachi** [www.malachi.org.uk](http://www.malachi.org.uk) Billesley Ark, 725 Yardley Wood Road, Billesley, Birmingham B13 0PT  
0121 441 4556. Services include: Therapeutic Family Support for pupils and parents and parenting programme.

[www.birminghamhospice.org.uk/](http://www.birminghamhospice.org.uk/) 176 Raddlebarn Rd, Birmingham B29 7DA.

Children’s Counsellors at **Birmingham St Mary’s Hospice** support children and young people whose loved one has been/is being cared for by the Hospice – both during the person’s illness and after they have died. Children’s Service team work with children between the ages of 3 and 18 using a variety of techniques to engage with young people as they go through the journey of bereavement.  
0121 472 1191

<https://edwardstrust.org.uk/> 3 Vicarage Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 3ES Office Opening Times: Mon & Tues 8am–8pm; Weds-Fri 8am–6pm. Bank Holidays: Closed. Bereavement Tel: 0121 454 1705. Supporting children and families facing loss and surviving bereavement across the West Midlands.

**Beyond the horizon: Bereavement Counselling and Widening Horizons Project** Holy Cross Community Centre, 29 Beauchamp Road, Billesley, Birmingham. B13 0NS Support for children, young people and families who have been bereaved by death or feeling unhappy after the divorce or separation of their parents through counselling and other activities for children and young people living in Birmingham. Helpline 0121 430 7529

**Bramble’s Trust** PO Box 1372, Bewdley, Worcestershire. DY12 2GT A bereavement support programme for children and young people who have experienced the death of a close relative. Working across North Worcestershire, South Shropshire and some parts of the West Midlands. Tel 01299 402322

**Solihull Bereavement Counselling Service** Ullswater House, Solihull Hospital, Lode Lane, Solihull. B91 2JL Covering Borough of Solihull. Helpline 0121 424 5103. [www.solihullbereavement.org](http://www.solihullbereavement.org) A Team of highly qualified counsellors provides one to one support for both adults and children in the Solihull Borough, either at home or in rooms at Solihull Hospital.

**Walsall Bereavement Support Service** offers free support to bereaved children, young people and their families who live in the Walsall borough. Bereaved children & young people Helpline: 01922 645035. Adult bereavement support service Helpline: 01922 724841. Adults bereaved by suicide Helpline: 01922 724841



## Appendix H: Advice for staff supporting students remotely and information specifically during COVID-19

In normal circumstances schools would come together physically to support anyone in the community who was bereaved, and in particular when a member of the school community dies. This is clearly impossible while schools are only open to a few, and whilst social distancing needs to be observed.

We may not be able to put our normal school bereavement strategy into action right now, but there's still plenty we can do to support grieving children. It's very similar to what we'd do under normal circumstances, but in a virtual space.

- If you are notified of a bereavement, please add to CPOMS. Form Tutors and DSLs will automatically be alerted.
- Pastoral Leaders will decide whether the Form Tutor or Pastoral Leader will stay in regular contact with the bereaved child; this will depend on the needs of the student.
- The member of staff should schedule regular points of contact with the student. Pastoral Leaders can telephone home; Form Tutors can email if this is what the student would prefer. The frequency depends on the needs of the child. If it's a vulnerable young person, the Pastoral Leader will also schedule regular contact with parents or carers.
- Whatever method you choose to provide bereavement support remotely, be sure to follow our Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy COVID-19 Addendum.

Aside from the resources in Appendix G, Cruse Bereavement has an excellent section on coronavirus and the additional challenges it is bringing to the bereaved and an extensive section on supporting young people who are grieving.

Please also find below the most up to date service information from Birmingham and Solihull Clinical Commissioning Group.



The poster features a woman sitting on a bench by a window, looking out. The text is overlaid on a dark blue background. The NHS logo is in the top right corner.

**Bereavement support services during COVID-19**

**Call: 0121 687 8010**

**Opening times:**

**Mon, Wed, Fri: 9.00am - 5.00pm**  
**Tues, Thurs: 9.00am - 8.00pm**  
**Sat & Sun: 12.00pm - 5.00pm (From 1st June)**

**NHS**  
Birmingham and Solihull  
Clinical Commissioning Group

Once schools are reopened we will take time to reflect on losses and grieve together.



## Information on areas of responsibility

<b>Whole School</b>	
Lead on loss and bereavement across the school	Jane Glendenning
Press liaison if appropriate	Amy Whittall
<b>Staff</b>	
Lead on staff/adult loss and bereavement across the school	Jane Glendenning
Organisation of staff training on loss and bereavement if staff would like training	Tracy Goodyear
Monitoring of staff wellbeing and supporting staff who are struggling	Jane Glendenning and Amy Whittall
Who will record and share, where appropriate, information on staff bereavements?	Sam Harvey
<b>Students</b>	
Lead on pupil loss and bereavement in school	Jane Glendenning
Monitoring student wellbeing and providing support to students who need it	Pastoral Leaders
Overseeing a safe space for students to access and support available	Pastoral Leaders will be available on a rota in the Learning Hub once school reopens
Pastoral Leader's role	To liaise with families and support students, including signposting them to resources and external agencies.
Form Tutor's role	To support and monitor students on a regular basis (if in school, daily; if remotely, every week). Liaise with subject teachers if students are struggling.
Recording and sharing, where appropriate, information on student bereavements	Pastoral Leaders: staff will be alerted via CPOMS and v notes added to SIMS if relevant.
<b>Wider school community, including Parents/Carers</b>	
Contacting bereaved families	Pastoral Leaders or DSL dependent on relationship with family
Sharing the news within the school community, if appropriate	Amy Whittall

Communicating with parents/carers to inform and update them	Amy Whittall
<b>Curriculum Support</b>	
Continued work on loss and bereavement within the curriculum	Jane Glendenning and Alice Pettit

If staff want to talk to someone in school, staff who have received bereavement and loss training are:

- Sarah Shepherd;
- Helen Felton

External support is available from Employee Assistance 24/7 0800 328 1437 or online [employeeassistance.org.uk](http://employeeassistance.org.uk)