

Section 1

Introduction

A death can affect the school community in many different ways. Adults and pupils benefit from being kept informed of a death. Rumour and gossip can be very damaging and can lead to both young and old developing the attitude that the death is not a topic to talk about. Children and young people have a healthy curiosity and if they are not informed of the circumstances or feel they are unable to ask questions, their normal grief process can be obstructed.

Rationale

At Smarden, we believe that bereavement and loss are an inevitable part of living and growing. We provide opportunities within our setting for children to develop their own appropriate range of emotional, spiritual and intellectual responses to manage these experiences. We believe that the ethos of the school based on openness and mutual support, provides a framework in which these experiences can be realised in a supportive manner. Bereavement affects everyone in different ways and for different periods of time. Whatever the level of understanding about bereavement, we have a duty to help support anyone when they could be feeling their most vulnerable, in the way that best meets their needs. By adopting a planned and considered approach the school can support the emotional wellbeing of the child, family and staff.

Aims

- To provide a framework for all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with difficult and upsetting circumstances.
- To meet the needs of all its children and staff and to be a place that both child and family can rely on, and gain much needed support.
- For the whole school community to work together, with outside agencies as appropriate, to support each other.
- For staff to have time and space to work through their own feeling and become aware of the needs of the children.
- For children to have the opportunity to tell their story, express their feelings, share their memories and develop coping strategies through support by sensitive staff.
- To have clear expectations about the way school will respond to the death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.
- The family will feel supported and be given an opportunity to express their feelings of loss.

Section 2

Guidelines

The following guidelines will provide a framework for informing staff, governor and pupils following a death.

Informing staff and governors of a death in the school community

- Where possible discussion should take place with family and their wishes taken into account before decisions are taken on how and what to tell the staff in school.
- All staff should be informed of a bereavement as soon as possible, with factual information including all part time staff and SMSAs. A staff meeting will be arranged as soon as practicable and absent staff will be identified. Arrangements will be made to inform absent staff over the telephone.
- Senior leadership team will be prepared for reactions to this news including visible upset and feeling of anger/guilt. People may connect the incident to their own personal experience of bereavement, so feelings about past bereavements may need to be discussed. This is perfectly natural response.
- Senior Leadership team will be available to talk things through with a member of staff, parent or child if they are finding the situation particularly hard. Advice for families will also be provided of support services available to them.
- Bereavement support or counselling should be available to all as necessary.
- Where possible all staff that have requested to attend the funeral or memorial service will be released from class.

Informing pupils of a death in the school community

Pupils of all ages can experience grief and loss.

- Pupils in the same class should be told, in small groups with adults they know.
- A letter should go to families within school the same day if possible (Appendix 2).
- Staff will be provided with guidelines of how to inform pupils (Appendix 3).
- Time and space will be provided
- Staff will be as honest as possible about their own feelings and experiences and talk about their relationship with the person.
- A bereavement support pack will be available for classes to access.

Ongoing support

- The family and staff will be given an opportunity to celebrate the life of the child with a special assembly held in school at an appropriate time.
- School will provide ongoing support children to explore their feelings and memories through identified activities. Some opportunities may include story telling, remembering activities, and expressing feelings activities.

Supporting pupils of a death outside of the school community

When school is informed of a bereavement that is linked to a school pupil e.g. family member, close family friend, pet:-

- The family should be asked how the school can be involved to support the child and family.
- It should be explained to the family how school can provide resources to support the pupil.
- Both parties will monitor any changes in child's behaviour and share any information.

Section 3

Monitoring

The policy will be monitored and updated every two years.

The guidance and resources will be reviewed at regular intervals to enable any new resources or information to be included.

Links to other policies

- Wellbeing Policy

Appendix 1

Useful online resources and information

- www.winstonswish.org.uk – a useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community.
- www.childbereavement.org.uk -a bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss
- www.bhf.org.uk/smallcreature - British Heart Foundation site to help children come to term with loss using carton creatures.

Books on Bereavement

- Granpa – John Burningham
- When Dinosaurs Die – L & M Brown
- Liplap’s Wish – Jonathan London And Sylvia Long
- The Memory Tree – Britta Teckentrup

Appendix 2

Guide for how to inform pupils

- Be honest
- Use clear language
- Expect questions
- Recognise every death and reaction to it is unique
- Don’t assume
- Allow time
- Acknowledge that some days will be better than others

Suggested script

“I’ve got some really sad news to tell you today that might make you sad. (Name)died yesterday. This means that we won’t see (Name) again. We have lots of memories of (Name) that we can think about and we can celebrate those together”