



HALES VALLEY TRUST

Bereavement Policy May 2020

Background

Priory Primary School is openly inclusive, welcoming all children from the whole community to a caring and happy environment where they can achieve to the very best of their abilities. At Priory, we believe that all children are unique and we encourage them to develop their strengths and creativity as individuals. We emphasise the development of the whole-learner physically, intellectually, emotionally and ethically.

Rationale

Every 22 minutes in the UK, a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 41,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, and, sadly, around 12,000 children die in the UK each year. Within our school community there will almost always be some recently bereaved children who are struggling with their own situation – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil. We would hope to not encounter such circumstances, but the statistical inevitability of such an occurrence implies the necessity of having a Bereavement Policy in place, in order that we might be proactive, rather than reactive, when responding to these sensitive situations. Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children, or staff, require, though referral to more specialist support should be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex. Additional information and resources can be accessed at www.childbereavement.org.uk

Objectives:

The core intentions of the policy are:

- To support pupils and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and community
- To identify key staff within school and Local Authority, and clarify the pathway of support.

The Children Act 1989 aimed to ensure that the welfare of the child was paramount, working in partnership with parents to protect the child from harm. All intentions of this policy endorse that aim as we endeavour to counter any adverse effects of bereavement and maintain pupils' emotional well-being.

Staff Roles and Responsibilities

The role of the governing body:

- To approve policy and ensure its implementation, to be reviewed in three years

The role of the Headteacher:

- To monitor progress and liaise with external agencies
- To respond to media enquiries with support from the Trust
- To be first point of contact for family/child concerned.
- To keep the governing body and Trust fully informed.

The role of the Trust:

- To advise and support staff.
- To support the Headteacher with media enquiries
- Consult on referral pathways and identification of complex grief.

The role of Pastoral Staff:

- To have bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff

Procedures:

Within school we work in partnership with parents. When pupils join the school, we find out as much as possible about every child to tailor the academic, social and emotional teaching in school to match their needs. Parents are encouraged to make teachers aware of any previous changes that might have profoundly affected their child, such as: divorce, bereavement, moving, new babies etc. If there has been bereavement, information on what the child was told should be sought, in order that the school does not say anything that could confuse or upset the child or family, particularly linked to religious cultures and beliefs.

A tragedy or death can affect each individual in the school community. It is important that all teachers, governors, support staff and Hales Valley Trust are informed as soon as practicable and therefore avoid rumours. In consultation with the family, parents and children will also need to be informed about what has happened, as soon as is appropriate.

Family Bereavement:

When school is informed of bereavement or loss, the following action should be considered:

- The family should be contacted for appropriate support. See Appendix C for addresses and relevant telephone helplines
- The family should be asked how much and what the child already knows and how they have been involved
- It should be explained to the family how the school can be involved to support the child and family
- The importance of working together and liaison will be explained – both parties assessing any changes in behaviour. Eating and sleeping patterns may change or behaviour in school may deteriorate or the child becomes withdrawn
- Involve outside agencies as appropriate e.g. the school nurse, Psychological Service, Barnardos
- For a member of staff experiencing close family bereavement, absence will be arranged for attendance at a funeral and appropriate time off in line with the Absence Management Policy. Additional time may be given through sick leave as appropriate.

Death of a child or member of staff :

When the school is informed of the death of a child or member of staff, the following action should be considered:

- Discussion should take place with the family and their wishes taken into account before decisions are taken on how and what to tell the pupils in school
- Counselling should be available, if necessary, e.g. in cases of sudden or violent death, outside agencies should be involved with this e.g. Psychological Service
- The school may be closed, or as many people as possible released to attend a funeral or memorial service, should it be appropriate and they wish to do so
- Staff and pupils should be supported throughout the grieving period; anyone displaying signs of stress should be offered appropriate support
- Pupils and staff may express a wish to attend, or take part in the service, but they should only do so with the prior agreement of the deceased's family, relatives or next of kin, as well as the agreement of their own parents/carers.
- The class most affected might like to write down their thoughts and feelings; these could then be given to the bereaved family to assist in the planning of the service
- After the service, staff and pupils should be encouraged to meet and express their thoughts and feelings, as such services are important in the grieving process.

Terminally Ill Pupils/Staff:

- In the event of a pupil or member of staff becoming terminally ill, their wishes and those of their parents/guardians/next-of-kin should always be respected
- Should the child wish to attend school, the class teacher may need to inform the class of the pupil's condition

- Occasionally, the pupil may wish to talk to their fellow classmates about their predicament themselves. Honesty about death and dying may be the best line of approach. Sometimes there is just no other way.

Return to School (see Appendix E):

- For the bereaved pupil or member of staff, returning to school may be traumatic
- Where there has been a close family bereavement, in most cases everyone (teaching, support staff, volunteers if appropriate and pupils) should be made aware of the situation before the pupil returns (providing the parents/guardians of the bereaved pupil agree)
- Staff should show appropriate compassion and allow expression to those suffering grief
- Teachers should try to foster an environment that is compassionate, yet disciplined
- Family life at this traumatic time, can be particularly distressing, routines upset, relationships strained, the future uncertain. For this reason, school routines should be kept as normal as possible in order to provide a respite
- Staff should be aware of anniversaries as this can spark a revival of feelings of bereavement
- Staff might keep an eye on those particularly affected by the death of a close associate.

Talking to the Bereaved Pupil:

- Try to be available to listen and support if possible, arrange a one-to-one session with a Mental Health First Aider as soon as possible after the pupil returns to school
- Be calm and show them that you are listening and understanding by occasionally repeating what they have said and by acknowledging their emotions
- If people feel like crying they should cry – crying is not a sign of weakness, but often a sign of deep feeling
- Beware of using platitudes e.g. “I know how you feel,” (pupils may feel offended that you presume how they feel).

Do

- ✓ Let the pupil know that you genuinely care
- ✓ Make time to be available and listen
- ✓ Accept all that the child is saying
- ✓ Allow them to express their feelings their way
- ✓ Let them know their feelings are normal
- ✓ Let them know that it is OK to cry
- ✓ Talk honestly and share your feelings
- ✓ Be honest
- ✓ Have eye contact
- ✓ Have appropriate physical contact
- ✓ Let them know that it is not their fault
- ✓ Be aware of the home situation

Don't

- X Stop the pupil talking
- X Tell them how they should or should not feel
- X Avoid contact
- X Change the subject
- X Deny your pain and feelings
- X Point out things for which they should be grateful
- X Be frightened of sharing your own feelings

Appendix F sets out the developmental stages relating to children's understanding of death.

Mental Wellbeing in the Curriculum

As part of our PSHE curriculum, physical health and mental wellbeing topics are taught from EYFS to Year 6. Pupils are taught the importance of asking for help and support from a trusted adult when they do not know how to deal with a range of feelings that they might have. As they move through the school, pupils are taught what might affect their mental health and ways to take care of it.

Within the PSHE Programme of Study, pupils in Year 6 look specifically at managing change, loss and bereavement as one of their topics. They learn about changes that may occur in life including death, and how these can cause conflicting feelings. They explore strategies that can help someone cope with the feelings associated with change or loss and are encouraged to talk to someone that they trust should they ever need to.

Books and texts, which deal with bereavement sensitivity, can be shared with the pupil, family, class where appropriate. Guidance from the Senior Leadership Team is important before resources are shared with the children.

Links to other Policies

- Child Protection & Safeguarding Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- SRE Policy
- SEND Policy

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years to ensure that all areas are up to date and in line with current practice and statutory requirements. Should any amendments need to be made; the review will be carried out by the SMSC lead and shared with the Senior Leadership Team prior to them being adopted at whole school level.

Appendices

- Appendix A: Cultural and religious considerations
- Appendix B: Talking about death to children with learning difficulties
- Appendix C: Useful websites for dealing with loss and bereavement in the school community
- Appendix D: Books dealing with death and loss
- Appendix E: Support and further suggestions for teachers
- Appendix F: Developmental stages relating to an understanding of death
- Appendix G: Sample letters

Appendix A: Cultural and religious considerations

Different Cultures and Beliefs

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

General points for Eastern Faiths:

Within a faith there are often many variations and it is wrong to be prescriptive. Beliefs can be moderated by life in a Western Culture. This is especially so for the younger generation, who may find it difficult to fit in with the stricter requirements of older members of a family or community. Families tend to be much more involved in preparing the body and the funeral arrangements than in Christian faiths. Because of belief in an afterlife, it is important that the whole body is retained. Post-mortems therefore, tend to be viewed as unwelcome procedures. The coffin is likely to be kept at home until the funeral and may well be open. All who wish to pay their respects will be very welcome. The following descriptions merely give an overview of the major religions and belief systems that are found in the UK.

Islam

Muslims believe in life after death when, on the Last Day, the dead will come back to life to be judged by Allah. The good will reside in Paradise, the damned in Hell. Muhammad teaches that all men and women are to serve Allah and that they should try to live perfectly, following the Qur`an. Devout Muslims believe that death is a part of Allah's plan and open expressions of grief may be viewed as disrespectful to this belief. As cremation is forbidden; Muslims are always buried, ideally within 24 hours of the death. Ritual washing is usually performed by the family or close friends at the undertakers or mortuary. They will wrap the body in a clean cloth or shroud. The coffin is often very plain as traditionally one would not be used. The grave is aligned to enable the head of the deceased to be placed facing the holy city of Mecca. Muslim graves are unmarked but to meet UK requirements, a simple headstone is used as a compromise. There is an official mourning period of three days when the family will remain at home and be brought food by friends and relatives. For forty days after the funeral, relatives may wish to make regular visits to the grave on Fridays.

Hindu

Hindus believe in reincarnation and a cycle of rebirths. When a person dies, the soul is reborn in a new body, returning to earth in either a better or worse form. What a person does in this life will influence what happens to them in the next; the law of Karma. Those that have performed good deeds in this life will be reborn into higher order families, those whose behaviour has been bad will be born again as outcasts. A Hindu funeral is as much a celebration as a remembrance service. Hindus cremate their dead as it is the soul that has importance, not the body which is no longer needed. White is the traditional colour and mourners usually wear traditional Indian garments. If attending, it may be worth asking what will be appropriate dress. During the service, offerings such as flowers or sweetmeats may be passed around and bells rung so noise is a part of the ritual. The chief mourner, usually the eldest son, and other male members of the family, may shave their heads as a mark of respect. In India, the chief mourner would light the funeral pyre. Here, he will press the button to make the coffin disappear and, in some instances, may be permitted to ignite the cremator. Ashes may be taken back to India to be scattered on the River Ganges. In the UK, some areas of water have been designated as acceptable substitutes. The mourning period lasts between two and five weeks.

Sikhs

Sikhs believe the soul goes through a cycle of rebirths, with the ultimate objective being to reach perfection, to be reunited with God and, as a result, break the cycle. Thus death holds no fear and mourning is done discretely. The present life is influenced by what happened in previous ones and the current life will set the scene for the next. The deceased is cremated as soon as possible after death. The coffin is taken to the family home where it is left open for friends and family to pay their respects. It is then taken to the Gurdwara where hymns and prayers are sung. A short service follows at a crematorium, during which the eldest son presses the button for the coffin to move behind the curtain. In India, the eldest son would light the funeral pyre and no coffin would be used. After the funeral, a meal may be held at the Gurdwara. The ashes may be taken back to India to be scattered. Here they may be sprinkled in the sea or river. The family remain in mourning for several days after the funeral and may listen to readings from the Guru Granth Sahib (Holy Book).

Buddhist

Buddhists believe that nothing that exists is permanent and everything will ultimately cease to be. There is a belief in rebirth but not of a soul passing from one body to another. The rebirth is more a state of constantly changing being rather than a clear-cut reincarnation. The ultimate objective is to achieve a state of perfect peace and freedom. Buddhists try to approach death with great calmness, and an open-minded attitude of acceptance. There are few formal traditions relating to funerals and they tend to be seen as nonreligious events. Cremation is the generally accepted practice and the service is kept very simple. It may be conducted by a Buddhist monk or sometimes family members.

Christianity

Christians believe that there is just one God and that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. They believe that Jesus died on the cross (The Crucifixion), and that three days later, God raised him from the dead (The Resurrection). Christians believe in an afterlife and also the idea of resurrection but the details around what actually happens at the time of death and afterwards, varies within the different denominations. For some, as soon as a person dies,

he or she is judged by God and will immediately go to Heaven or Hell, dependent on how good or bad a life they led. For Roman Catholics, there is a half-way place called Purgatory, where an impure soul can stay until fit to enter Heaven. Others believe in the Day of Judgement, when the world will end and the dead will return to life to be judged by God.

Within the different Christian denominations, there are many variations on what happens at a funeral. When someone dies, the body is taken to an undertaker who will carry out the necessary preparations for the body to be laid out. This is to enable those who wish to view it before it is placed in a coffin. The funeral, organised by an undertaker, is about one week after the death. This usually takes place in a church, but sometimes a crematorium, or a combination of the two. The coffin will remain closed. Wreaths or bunches of flowers may be placed on the coffin. It is traditional to wear black but this custom varies. If held in a church, the funeral service may include a Holy Communion, Eucharist or Mass. The body will either be buried or cremated, dependent on the wishes of the deceased and the family. A churchyard grave is often marked by a headstone but for a cremation, the family may choose a more informal way to mark where the ashes are buried or have been scattered.

Humanist

Humanists are non-religious. They follow the principle that this life is the only one we have and therefore when you are dead there is no moving on to another one. The focus of a Humanist funeral is on celebrating the life of the deceased. The person people knew is talked about, stories shared, and memories recalled. Their favourite music may be played, whatever it is. This is done by friends and family who are supported by an Officiant. The ceremony, usually a cremation, will be tailored to meet the family's wishes rather than following a set pattern.

Appendix B: Talking about death to children with learning difficulties

When talking about death and bereavement with a child with learning difficulties it might be helpful to consider:

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

All children benefit from being given simple, honest “bite size” pieces of information about difficult issues - often repeated many times over. For some children with special needs, it might be more appropriate for symbols to be used to convey ideas rather than language.

Appendix C: Useful Websites for dealing with loss and bereavement in the school community:

Dudley Counselling Service

www.dudley.gov.uk/resident/learning-school/parentalsupport/dudley-counselling-service

Cruse Bereavement

(0870) 167 1677

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Winston’s Wish

01242 515157

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Mary Stevens Hospice

01384 443010

www.marystevenshospice.co.uk

Child Bereavement Online

www.childbereavement.org.uk

Dudley Family Information Service

01384 814398

Appendix D: Books dealing with death and loss

- Beyond the Rough Rock - Supporting a Child who has been Bereaved through Suicide - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley
- As Big As It Gets - Supporting a Child when Someone in their Family is Seriously Ill - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley
- The Secret C - Straight Talking about Cancer - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley
- I Miss You - First Look at Death - Pat Thomson
- Grandpa- John Burningham Always and Forever – Alan Durant
- The Huge Bag of Worries – Virginia Ironside
- What on Earth Do you Do When Someone Dies? – Trevor Romain
- Badger’s Parting Gifts- Susan Varley Saying
- Goodbye to Daddy – Judith Vigna
- Waterbugs and Dragonflies – Explaining Death to Young Children

Appendix E: Support and further suggestions for teachers

Parents and carers often feel that teachers are experts on their children. They may turn to the school for advice and information, especially on matters of bereavement.

It is important to remember that the family, friends and the immediate community often best support those suffering from bereavement, as is the case with other stressful life events. Teachers need not be experts on the subject, but they do need to use sensitivity and their skills in understanding children's development and emotional needs.

The following are some points that may be helpful to bear in mind when talking to parents and carers:

- A death will disrupt the family for many months; in fact the family will never be the same again. Family members are grieving, relationships alter, and members may take on new roles. Sometimes there is a change of carer, house or school, all of which add to the disruption and distress experienced by the child. To support the child it is helpful to minimise, if possible, changes and disruptions in their normal daily routine and life in school.
- Bereaved family members may emotionally and physically withdraw from the child, to protect themselves from more distress. Some adults will deny the bereaved child is grieving, as it will be too distressing for them to acknowledge the child's pain. This may cause distress and confusion, causing grief reactions of anger, withdrawal or psychosomatic behaviours such as headaches, stomach-ache or sickness.
- The bereaved child may regress in behaviour, becoming clingy, difficult or withdrawn. His/her schoolwork may suffer. These changes will be partly due to grief but also to the disruption and changes within the family, causing the child to feel confused and unsafe.
- The child may feel resentment, jealousy or guilt towards the dead person or child. The expression of this verbally can cause the remaining family members distress and shock. Parents and carers need to know this is normal and will decrease as the child and the family become more stable and settled.
- Parents and carers need to be informed of the benefits that a child gains in being involved in the ceremonies and rituals that follow death. An explanation as to how

mourning practices help children to express their feelings and come to terms with and accept the reality of their loss can be very beneficial.

- Teachers should remember that parents and carers will often use them as role models, counsellors or extended family; looking to them for support for themselves as well as finding appropriate ways of supporting and talking with their children.
- Teachers may require their own support structures. Supporting bereaved families, whilst rewarding, can also be emotionally draining.

Appendix F: Developmental Stages relating to an understanding of death

Birth to six months

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

Six months to two years

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

Two years to five years

During their development, between the age of two to five, children do not understand that death is irreversible. For instance, a four year old child may be concerned that although nanny was dead she should have come home by now. This example illustrates how children at this stage do not understand the finality of death and nor do they understand what the term "dead" actually means. It is common for a young child to be told that their aunt has died and still expect to see them alive and well in the immediate future. Children do not understand that life functions have been terminated and will ask questions such as:

"Won't Uncle Bob be lonely in the ground by himself?"

"Do you think we should put some sandwiches in Grandpa's coffin in case he gets hungry?"

"What if Nan can't breathe under all that earth?"

"Will Daddy be hurt if they burn him?"

As the cognitive understanding of children in this age range is limited, they can sometimes demonstrate less of a reaction to the news of the death than might be observed by an older child and might promptly go out to play on hearing the news of the death.

Children aged between two and five years old have difficulty with the abstract concepts surrounding death. For instance, they might be confused as to how one person can be in a grave and also be in heaven at the same time. They will become further confused if they are told that the deceased person is simply sleeping and this in turn could make them fearful of falling asleep or seeing anyone else asleep. They might insist on waiting for the person who has died to wake up or similarly if they have been told that the person who has died has gone on a long journey, they may await their return.

At this age bereaved children can become involved in omnipotence or magical thinking. This refers to the concept that bereaved children believe that their actions, inaction, words, behaviours or thoughts are directly responsible for their loved one's death. This form of thinking is not exclusive to this particular age group and can be experienced by many bereaved children and young people of older ages. It is essential that you explain to the bereaved child that the death was not in any way their fault or responsibility. The need to reassure the grieving child that nothing they said / didn't say, did or didn't do caused the death is paramount.

Five years to ten years

Children at this developmental stage have acquired a wider understanding of death and what it entails. They begin to realise that death is the end of a person's life, that the person who has died won't return and that life functions have been terminated. By the age of seven the average child accepts that death is an inevitability and that all people including themselves will eventually die.

This understanding can also increase a child's anxieties regarding the imminent deaths of other people who they are close to. Children of this age are broadening their social networks by attending school and are therefore open to receive both information and misinformation from their peers and social circles.

With this in mind it is important that the cause of death, the funeral and burial process and what happens to the deceased person's body are explained in a factual and age appropriate manner to the bereaved child. Children will ask many questions and may want to know intricate details pertaining to the death and decomposition of the body. Again, it is vital that children have such details explained to them clearly so that they understand.

At this developmental stage, children can empathise with and show compassion for peers that have been bereaved. Children aged between five and ten often copy the coping mechanisms that they observe in bereaved adults and they may try to disguise their emotions in an attempt to protect the bereaved adult. The bereaved child can sometimes feel that they need permission to show their emotions and talk about their feelings.

The important thing is to let them do this. Avoid remarks such as, "Come on, be a big brave girl for mummy" or "Big boys don't cry," such comments, however well-meant can make

children feel they need to hide their feelings or that what they are feeling is wrong. This can cause complications as the bereaved child develops.

Appendix G: Letter Templates

Sample letter on death of a pupil:

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher/form tutor/had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>. <Name> died from an illness called <Cancer>. As you may be aware, many children who have <Cancer> get better but sadly <Name> had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday. He/She was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try to answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we would be more than happy to help you.

We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating <Name's> life.

Yours sincerely
<Name> Head Teacher

Sample letter on death of a staff member:

Dear Parents

I am sorry to have to tell you that a much-loved member of our staff [name] has died. The children were told today and many will have been quite distressed at the news. No-one wants to see children sad, but we are very aware that factual information and emotional support are the best means of helping children deal with bereavement. I am sure there will be many parents who are also saddened by the news. Children respond in different ways so may dip in and out of sadness, and questions, whilst alternately playing or participating in their usual activities. This is normal and healthy.

You may find your child has questions to ask which we will answer in an age-appropriate way in school, but if you feel you would like more support and advice yourself, please do not hesitate to contact the school office. You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at www.childbereavement.org.uk or <http://www.winstonswish.org.uk/>

We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Children who wish to attend will be welcome to do so, though it will not be compulsory. It is likely that school will be closed on the morning or afternoon of the funeral as staff will, of course, wish to pay their respects to a very popular colleague.

I am sorry to be the bearer of sad news, but I appreciate an occurrence like this impacts the whole school community. I am so grateful for the thriving partnership we have with parents and trust that we, together, will be able to guide and support the children through what may be, for many, a very new experience in their lives.

Yours