



Bereavement Policy

Rationale

We believe that bereavement and loss are an inevitable part of living and growing. Early Years practitioners will provide opportunities within their settings 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 pre-school, which is based on openness and mutual support, provides a framework in which these experiences can be realised in an enriching manner.

Process

In the event of a death the pre-school will act in a planned and agreed manner, so that all staff know what is expected and can contribute their part in a way that is consistent with the values that have been adopted.

The response of the pre-school to a bereavement will follow stages over time.

Short term –

- Aim to establish the facts – to avoid the ‘rumour mill’ - filling any information gap
- Find out, if possible, how the family would like the information to be managed by the school
- Make sure all staff have the same version of event/information
- Decide whether to inform children through assemblies, class groups etc
- The child’s class and friendship group are likely to require a more personalised response
- Are there siblings or extended family at school – what is their understanding of the situation?
- Are there any ‘special circumstances’ that are significant?
- Cultural/religious dimensions
- Are there any practical implications for the day to day running of the school?

Medium term –

- How are the emotional needs of staff and children to be monitored? – including behaviour change –
- What support – discussion, listening, answering questions – is available, and how is it ‘signposted’?
- Do all staff have a consistent set of responses that are in line with the policy of the school?
- How do children/staff/school want to celebrate the child’s life? Is this consistent with the family’s wishes?

Longer term –

- Curriculum approaches to consider mortality and bereavement –
- Be aware of anniversaries, particularly for siblings or close friends

In dealing with children’s responses to bereavement will need to recognise the emotional and physical signs as well as take account of their cognitive development. See Appendix 1.

We also need to have regard to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. See Appendix 2

- The pre-school will have identified, through access to appropriate training, a lead worker in bereavement support for their setting. This person will be aware of the needs of bereaved children and will have collated resources in order to support them. Our lead worker is Sandra Burgess.
- The pre-school bereavement lead worker, in partnership with the practitioners will co-ordinate the pre-school’s response and be fundamental in liaising with bereaved family.
- As far as possible, all staff should be told together by the named person. By creating a list of people to be told, the pre-school can be sure that no one close to the situation will find out by chance.
- All the parents/carers will be told in writing at the same time and as promptly as circumstances will allow.
- Following this the children in pre-school will be told at a time previously notified to the parents.

- Staff will be consistent in their use of terminology to ensure clear understanding of the concept of death.
- Absentees from pre-school will also need to be informed at the earliest opportunity. The preschool will have procedures to track who is informed, when and by whom, to ensure that no one is missed.
- The pre-school will have a range of strategies that it may adopt in the days and weeks that follow any significant loss. Decisions about which to undertake will be determined following discussions with the family concerned and will take into account the cultural/religious beliefs of the family.
- The child's key person or other named member of staff will be identified to keep in touch with the family so contact from the family's perspectives is manageable. This person will co-ordinate the sending of a card.
- Attendance at the funeral and other forms of remembering will be agreed by the staff team. If you decide to close the setting in term time, this will need to be with the prior agreement of KCC due to funding regulations and please remember to inform Ofsted that this is your intention.
- Staff will have ongoing opportunities for peer support in order to maintain their well-being.
- The pre-school bereavement lead worker will take responsibility for recording details of a bereavement on the child's Record of Transfer and ensuring this information is passed to the next setting, with parent's permission.
- The pre-school will provide ongoing support and will ensure that the anniversary of the death is remembered.

Curriculum

In the event of bereavement or significant loss the pre-school has identified activities that will support the child/children to explore their feelings and memories. Some opportunities may include:

Telling the Story

- Use puppets
- Use photographs
- Use the home corner or small world toys e.g. Lego or Playmobil
- Use stories
- Use playdough
- Use sand tray

Expressing feelings

- Feelings biscuits
- Mad and sad box
- Water balloons
- Wooden spoon feelings faces or feelings pebbles

Remembering

- Memory box
- Memory jar
- Playdough model memories
- Photo albums

Coping strategies

- Worry dolls
- Handprints
- Special dates
- Friendship Bands
- Feather comforts

Parents/carers

In acknowledging the role of the pre-school in supporting children with bereavement and loss, the pre-school will work alongside the parents/carers in this process.

The parents/carers remain the most significant support to young children in understanding death. The pre-school can support parents/carers in this by:

- Sharing with parents/carers the intentions of the pre-school to act in a particular way in the event of a death.
- Offering guidance to parents/carers on how they might support their child.
- Sharing information with families about other sources of support e.g. Winston's Wish Helpline, or support from a bereavement specialist where appropriate.
- Keeping parents/carers fully informed about the actions of the pre-school throughout the immediate period of grieving.

- Parents/carers will be invited to be involved in any pre-school response that occurs after the death, e.g. a remembering time. The format of this will take into account the beliefs and wishes of the bereaved family.

Outcomes

By adopting a planned and considered approach the pre-school can with some degree of confidence support the emotional well-being of the child. As a result:

Staff will:

- Feel equally valued.
- Have an opportunity to prepare themselves for the supportive role they adopt.
- Be given time and space to work through their own feelings.
- Become aware of the needs of bereaved children, and be offered training, to develop strategies to support them.

Children will:

- Be offered support by sensitive, trained staff working together.
- Have the opportunity to tell their story, express their feelings, share their memories and develop coping strategies.

The pre-school will:

- Have clear expectations about the way that it will respond to the death, not simply react.
- Provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment where there are no expectations in their responses to the children's grief.

The family will:

- Feel supported.
- Be given an opportunity to express their feelings of loss.
- Have opportunities to understand and communicate with their child about their loss as a result of the activities provided by the pre-school.

The parents/carers will:

- Be given guidance on how to support their child/children.
- Be aware of the support offered and understand the processes that will follow bereavement.

Publications:

Small steps: Supporting bereaved young children in pre-school settings. Provides strategies of how to talk to young children about death and template letters to send out to parents.

Useful websites:

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

<https://www.winstonswish.org/>

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/>

Reviewed 06/08/26

To be reviewed annually

Appendix 1 (Taken from website www.cruse.org.uk July 2022)

What children understand about death

Birth to six months

Responding to loss

Although babies are often too young to understand what death is, they still respond to loss and experience grief.

A baby up to six months old can experience feelings of separation and abandonment. They can become aware that someone is missing, which can make them feel anxious and fretful.

This experience can be heightened if the baby's primary caregiver has died. A baby is able to identify who feeds them, changes and cuddles them. They'll recognise that they're no longer being looked after by the person who has died, and this can cause distress.

Similarly, if the baby's primary caregiver is grieving, the baby can pick up on their feelings and experience this grief too.

Six months to two years

Recognising loss

Although they might not fully recognise that someone has died, babies will recognise that they're absent. This can be very upsetting – they may react with loud crying and angry tears.

It is also common for babies this age to become withdrawn and lose interest in their toys and feeding. They will likely lose interest in interacting with others too.

At the older end of this developmental stage, bereaved toddlers actively look for the person who has died. If Granddad spent a lot of his time in his shed, a toddler might keep looking in the shed, hoping that they'll find him there.

Two years to five years

Limited cognitive ability

Between two to five, children don't fully understand what 'dead' actually means, and that death is irreversible.

A four year old child may be worried that, although Nanny is dead, she should have come home by now. It's very common for young children to be told that their loved one has died, but expect to see them alive and well in the near future.

Children this age may 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?”

Children at this development stage have limited cognitive perception. Because of this, they may show less of a reaction to the news of a death, especially when compared to an older child. In fact, they might go out to play after hearing such news.

Understanding abstract concepts

Children this age might also have difficulty with abstract concepts surrounding death. They might be confused by:

- How one person can be in a grave and also be in heaven at the same time.
- If they are told that the person who has died is simply sleeping. This could make them afraid of falling asleep, or seeing anyone else asleep. They might also wait for them to wake up.
- If they are told that the person who has died has gone on a long journey. This could make them insist on waiting for them to return.

Magical thinking

Bereaved children in this age group can believe in omnipotence or magical thinking. They think that their actions, inaction, words, behaviours or thoughts are directly responsible for their loved one’s death.

It is **very important** that you explain to the bereaved child that the death was not in any way their fault or responsibility. A grieving child needs to be reassured that nothing they said, didn’t say, did or didn’t do caused the death.

This form of thinking isn’t just experienced by children this age. Many bereaved children and young people of older ages can believe in magical thinking.

Five years to ten years

Children at this developmental stage have a wider understanding of death and what it means.

They begin to realise that death is the end of a person’s life, and that the person who has died won’t return. By the age of seven, the average child accepts that all people, including themselves, will eventually die.

This wider understanding can increase a child’s anxieties about deaths of people who they are close too.

Sharing the facts

Children this age attend school. This means where they get information, and misinformation, from is much broader. Sources can include friends, classmates and others in their peer group. This includes information, and misinformation, around death.

When supporting a bereaved child, it is therefore important that the following are explained appropriately:

- The cause of loved one’s death
- The funeral and burial process
- What happens to the body of someone who has died

Children will ask many questions. They may want to know intricate details about the death and decomposition of the body. Although this might feel uncomfortable to talk about, **it is very important** that children have these details explained to them clearly. This will help them understand what has happened.

Talking about feelings

At this developmental stage, children can empathise with and show compassion for people who have been bereaved.

Children in this age group often copy the coping mechanisms they see in bereaved adults. They may try to disguise their emotions in an attempt to protect them. A bereaved child may feel they need permission to show their emotions and talk about their feelings.

It is **very important** to let them talk about their feelings.

Avoid saying things like “Come on be a big brave girl for mummy” or “Big boys don’t cry”. However well meant these may be, they can make children feel they need to hide their feelings. They may think what they are feeling is wrong. This can cause further complications as the bereaved child develops.

Signs of grief in a child

Children and young people may react in a number of ways after the death of someone close.

Understanding the signs of grief in a child means we can give them the help they need. These can include both emotional and physical responses.

Here’s our guide to how bereaved children, young people and [teenagers](#) might behave, and how adults can support them.

Emotional signs of grief in children

- Shock
- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Guilt
- Depression
- Acceptance

Physical signs of grief in children

- Behaviour and Mood
- Appetite and eating
- Sleep and Sleep Patterns
- Regression or Reverting Back
- Illness: Real or Psychosomatic

Appendix 2 (Taken from website www.cruse.org.uk July 2021)

Coronavirus: children and young people

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Children, teenagers and young people will be hugely affected by what is going on around them at this difficult time. Their lives are changing and they will have picked up worries and fears about the virus and the possibility that they or someone they love and depend on may get ill. They may be particularly worried that grandparents, older relatives and family members with health conditions or disabilities might die. They will also pick up on other worries parents and carers may have about the situation. For children who have already been bereaved, anxiety may be worse.

Under lockdown restrictions activities which help children and young people switch off, relax and cope with stress are not available. It is normal for tempers to fray when families are thrown together for long periods, sometimes in close quarters.

How you can help

Talk honestly with your children about both facts and emotions. Ask what they know – they may be getting information which is incorrect or distorted from friends or social media. Don't overload children and consider their age and understanding. With a younger child you may need to give information in small chunks. Talking about the situation and about the possibility of death and dying is an ongoing conversation.

Ask what they know, and be reassuring. Explain that the illness is often mild and most people recover. But be honest about the fact that, very sadly some people will die. It's OK to let them know if you don't know the answers to some of their questions.

Don't make promises ('Grandma will be fine') but reassure them that they are loved and supported. Let them know about any plans for what might happen if one of the family gets ill. Focus on what you're doing to stay safe. An important way to reassure children and young people is to emphasise the safety precautions that you are taking. Children feel empowered when they know what to do to keep safe so explain about the importance of washing their hands.

It can help to keep to a routine, especially if other parts of life have been disrupted. Structured days with regular mealtimes, school work, breaks, playtime and bedtime can help younger children happy and healthy. Help them get some exercise and keep in contact with friends and relatives, over the phone or internet if restrictions make this necessary.

At the same time don't be hard on yourself or set unrealistic goals about what you can do under exceptional circumstances. Try to make sure you all get some time apart, and time to relax. Where possible, let children and young people make some choices about what they are doing, as this may help give them some sense of control over their lives.

If someone dies, we have more information about how children may react and how you can help them.

How Cruse can help

- Our National Freephone Helpline offers emotional help and signposting – call 0808 808 1677. [Opening hours](#).
- There is a lot of information about helping children and young people [elsewhere on our website](#).
- We also have a website for young people www.hopeagain.org.uk.
- Some of our Local Services can offer support to children and young people. [Find the details of your Local Service](#).

Further information

Cruse information

[Children's understanding of death](#)

[Teenager's understanding of death](#)

[Hope Again - Cruse's website for young people](#)

Other charities and organisations

[Childhood Bereavement Network - Covid-19 resources and links](#)

[Winston's Wish - Coronavirus information](#)

[Child Bereavement UK - Video on supporting bereaved children during the virus](#)

[Nelson's Journey - Guidance for families around funerals](#)

[Anna Freud Centre - Covid-19 and mental health support for young people, carers and schools](#)

[Young Minds - Supporting your child during the coronavirus pandemic](#)