A Bereavement in your school community

Guidance for schools

‘If we believe that education is about prevention and developing potential, and not just academic success, we need to help children recognise loss and death as an inevitable part of all existence. They can then use these situations as an opportunity for growth’

This guidance has been written to support schools when there is a bereavement in the school community.

The document provides guidance about:

- Being prepared: how to plan for bereavements
- Common responses to death and bereavement
- When to involve professionals from outside the school community
- What schools can do to support adults and children when there is a bereavement in the school community
- Resources available

The guidance was initially planned to be specific to those instances where a child dies, but as the work progressed it was clear that much of the advice was equally applicable to the loss of a staff member or any significant person in a child’s family or life.

This guidance has been written by a small working party consisting of the Bereavement Counsellor for CDOP, the Safeguarding in Education Advisor, a Senior Educational Psychologist and representatives of schools across Wandsworth. The guidance will be kept under review and updated when necessary.

**Introduction**

Death is a subject that we can all find difficult to address within a school setting, however bereavement is a natural process which schools need to be prepared for. It is almost inevitable that at some point all school communities will be affected by a death in some way or another. This might include the death of a pupil, the death of a staff member, the death of a pupils’ family member, or the death of a key member in the school community such as a governor or popular visitor to the school.

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 6,000 children die in the UK each year. Deaths of public figures may also temporarily affect pupils.

Other losses children experience can feel similar to a bereavement, for example Looked After Children may feel they have lost their birth family; refugee and asylum seeking children may have left family behind in dangerous circumstances and be unsure if they will ever see them again.

*Death is one of the greatest taboos. It doesn’t square with our worship of youth. But the truth after all, is that we are all terminally ill. Once we recognise that, we can enjoy the life we have left*

*Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (1982)*
These guidelines are intended to support Wandsworth schools when any bereavement occurs by providing a framework to help schools through the immediate processes required, information about ways to support children and staff through the grief process and what support is available to them both initially and in the longer term.

Some deaths are expected and schools can help in preparing children for what will happen and ensuring they have support in place. Others may be completely unexpected (accidents, sudden illness etc) and support will need to be put in place without warning. Deaths as a result of suicide may also require specialist support being accessed. Some bereavements may be linked to a sudden, traumatic incident (eg violent crime, gang related incidents, terrorist attacks etc) and although the guidance here applies equally to these incidences in respect of support for bereaved pupils and staff, it is also important to acknowledge that additional guidance, advice and support may be needed, both for the school and for those individuals (adults or children) involved. This will be particularly crucial where the incident is linked to the school in some way or where there is an actual or perceived risk to other members of the school community or the family.

Wandsworth Schools and Community Psychology Service has detailed guidance ‘Managing the Response to Critical Incidents’ (link) and EPs are available to provide an immediate response and support for schools when critical incidents (including deaths within the school community) occur.

Having a clear plan of action at such times is an important part of keeping children and staff safeguarded and supported. The guidance covers four key action sections

- Being prepared
- Immediate (initial) action
- Short term action
- Long term action

**Being prepared**

- Identify staff members who are willing to undertake key roles in relation to bereavement support and enable them to access appropriate training
- Ensure you have up to date staff contact details for out of hours situations and these are available to key staff when not on site
- Ensure key staff members have information on how to access parent contact details
- Ensure all staff are aware of the processes to be followed and have an understanding of bereavement issues
- Consider curriculum input. How are your pupils prepared for issues of change, grief and loss through the curriculum?
- Prepare information sheets for parents and ensure school has suitable / appropriate resources available
- Have fact sheets available to assist staff members through the various aspects of bereavement support
If a pupil or staff member is known to have a terminal or life-limiting illness a sense of ‘normality’ may be very important for them and being in school is part of maintaining this continuity. See appendix B – terminally ill children

Checklist for initial action

- Inform key members of staff
- What do you know? Accuracy of information / verification
- Identify which staff members are taking lead roles and agree who is taking each key responsibility (define roles clearly)
- Release leads from other responsibilities where possible
- Decide who is communicating with the family
- If there is media interest who will liaise with them (this will not always be relevant, but it is important to anticipate possible interest and be prepared – further detail is provided later in the guidance and in app B)
- Inform staff as quickly as possible – ideally before pupils. Don’t forget part-time and peripatetic staff and any staff members absent that day
- Decide when / how pupils are to be informed – this is usually best done by someone they know well and in familiar groups
- Inform parents – consider including guidelines for parents on supporting bereaved children
- Inform Governors
- Inform the LA and request available support for the school community
- If necessary issue holding statement while further information / clarification is being sought
- Consider what information may be appropriate to put on website

Informing staff / parents / pupils

- Prepare what you are going to say
- Don’t be afraid to show emotion
- Start by acknowledging you have some sad news to give
- Be honest – give the news stating simple facts, use the words dead / died
- If known give brief details of where / how / when the death occurred
- Talk briefly about the person
- Provide any details of arrangements already in place
- Acknowledge different people will have different reactions and this is OK
- Be prepared for obvious upset / feelings of anger / guilt etc.
- Explain any arrangements for support and how this can be accessed

Children’s reactions and age appropriate understanding

A range of reactions is normal – individuals will react differently to the same situation and it is not possible to predict reactions. There are many reasons for this relating to previous experiences, individual resilience, levels of understanding, fear, guilt etc.

Children’s reaction to crisis or loss may include shock, followed by
- Fear
- Distress
- Separation anxiety
- Lack of concentration
- Nightmares / sleep problems
- Regressive behaviours
- Needing reassurance
- Constant questions
- Aggression, fighting and arguing

Children’s reactions will also vary dependent on age, development and any learning needs the child may have. Further information about age related / developmental reactions is provided in app A.

Regressive behaviours are quite common and may go on for 6 to 12 weeks or longer. Some children do not seem to be affected by a bereavement, traumatic incident or loss and may not show much reaction. This may be because they felt an emotional distance from it; were not mature enough to deal with the concepts or they may have adopted other coping mechanisms. Others may show a delayed reaction and begin to act differently weeks or months later. This can make it difficult for parents / carers and school staff to recognise that the behaviours stem from the loss / trauma experienced. In addition reactions to particularly traumatic incidents are likely to be more complex and can require ongoing or specialist support.

The phases of mourning are often talked about, but it is important to remember that there is no formula for grieving. Although phases in mourning can be identified there is a dynamic between them, which can involve movement forwards and backwards in terms of resolution over time. Equally there are no time scales for grief. It takes it own time. The commonly described phases of mourning are given in App A.

**Vulnerable and at risk pupils**

Schools also need to identify those pupils who are particularly vulnerable and more at risk of having difficulty coping. This may include those who:

- Are related to, or were particularly close friends with the deceased
- Witnessed the incident (if applicable) or were involved in some way with what happened – these children are highly likely to require specialist support or monitoring (see SCPS guidance and seek advice)
- Have been recently affected by a bereavement or other loss / traumatic event
- Are refugees from countries in conflict
- Have a history of depression / low mood
- Have special educational need, including those with learning and communication difficulties who may be at a different developmental level to their peers, which may affect their understanding of trauma and death
- Those with SEND who may themselves have life-limiting conditions or anxieties related to their own conditions
Strategies will need to be put in place with the staff team and parents to support these pupils and kept under review. It may be appropriate to involve external agencies. It is also important to recognise that there may be children who are vulnerable who have not been previously identified and staff will need to be vigilant to identify signs that other pupils need support.

Appendix A gives some more detailed information about age related understanding of bereavement and loss and things that may help the child.

**Practical matters**

Schools will need to consider issues such as the personal possessions of the deceased; where the child sat in class and how any changes will be managed sensitively; special responsibilities the child or staff member had and how these will be re-allocated; dynamics of the group; staff changes etc.

**Contact with bereaved family**

It is important for the family to be consulted in relation to what information can be shared, what views they have about ways in which they would like their child’s life to be remembered and how involved they wish to be with any memorial events the school plan to hold. Different cultural and religious traditions will be a contributing factor and it is important to be sensitive to and respectful of these differences.

Most schools will have children from many religious groups, as well as children with no particular religious background. It should not be presumed that someone is a practising member of a religious group on grounds of their ethnicity alone. At times of loss some people may turn to a religion, whether a practising member or not. Others may turn away from long held beliefs.

Rituals and customs around the death, as well as what happens to the spirit or soul after death, are important components of all religions. It is therefore important to understand the role religion plays for a bereaved child or family.

Respect the child or family’s beliefs whatever they are. It is OK to ask to help you understand. Do not impose your own beliefs, however much strength they may give you.

Involving faith leaders from your local community where appropriate to give guidance and support.

Relatives of the pupil / staff member who has died may want to visit the school at some point. This needs to be managed sensitively and in discussion with the family concerned.

If a pupil dies and siblings are also pupils at the school it is particularly important that their wishes and feelings are also explored and taken into account.

**Terminally ill children at school**

Children who are in and out of hospital, or have a terminal illness, life threatening or life limiting condition often welcome attending school as an opportunity to have some normality in their lives. Continuing to take part in school routines can give a feeling of achievement with the emphasis on living rather than dying.
The school and family (including the child) need to decide together what information is to be shared with other pupils and how this will be done. Classmates are usually very supportive, and can take on some appropriate tasks (e.g., pushing a wheelchair, helping with equipment etc.).

Generally children deal better with difficult situations when truthful explanations are given. They will notice changes (e.g., absence from school, changes in appearance, lack of energy, exclusion from PE etc.). Other children (especially younger ones) are naturally curious and may ask questions which should be answered sensitively but factually. Seriously ill children are often very knowledgeable about their illness and may be happy to provide the answers themselves.

If a child is receiving treatment from a local hospital or hospice there may be a nurse or social worker whose role includes providing information to the school and/or pupils about the illness and any treatment being provided. In any case it is important for key school staff to know the key health professionals involved with the child and how to contact them for advice or support.

Other parents and carers may have concerns about their children being upset or anxious and this will need to be sensitively managed by staff.

Families and the community where a bereavement is expected may experience anticipatory grief (see app A)

**High Profile cases and dealing with media or other enquiries**

It may be helpful to prepare a brief written statement which staff can use when responding to enquiries to ensure consistency.

Staff should be cautioned about talking to the media or making any comment on social media.

All media contacts should be directed to, or dealt with, in line with advice from the Wandsworth Council Press Office. This is particularly important where

- The death involves possible criminal elements
- The death is high profile due to press/media interest
- Abuse or neglect is suspected
- Cases of suicide / suspected suicide

It may be necessary to organise additional staff to deal with enquiries and designate separate areas for those managing this. Calls made and received should be logged.

Strategies may need to be put in place to ensure pupils and staff are not subjected to unwarranted press intrusion (e.g., reporters hanging around outside school attempting to 'interview' pupils or staff.

Be aware that you may not have full control over information that is given to those connected with the school community, as social media networks can mean that information about events and speculations may be circulating amongst pupils and parents before you even hear about it.
Support for staff members
Staff may need to meet regularly during the first few days, and be given opportunities to talk if they need to.

Staff should be monitored for any signs of undue stress and be given information about how to access additional support if they are not coping.

A range of reactions is normal, and like the pupils this will vary and some may cope at first and have a delayed reaction later.

Senior staff and key leads need to ensure they look after themselves as well as others and build in time for their own needs. All staff working with grieving children need to be provided with support.

Effective team work is crucial to good outcomes and recovery from trauma and loss. It is important that each person recognises their own skills and their limitations and support structures are in place.

Wandsworth Council provides an Employee Assistance programme, which schools can buy into, which provides 24 hour telephone help to staff.

Paula Steele, Bereavement Counsellor - Child Death Overview Panel is also available to provide staff debrief / support if a child has died. This can be either in a group or individual session. Paula can be contacted on 020 8725 3711 (direct line) or paula.steele@stgeorges.nhs.uk

Funerals / memorials etc
Ascertain the family’s wishes in respect of attendance / involvement of the school in funerals. The family may welcome members of the school community, or wish to keep things private.

If appropriate identify who may wish to attend and the practicalities.

Ascertain the family’s wishes in respect of flowers / donations/ other messages of condolence.

Most schools feel that holding some sort of special assembly or remembrance service is helpful. Family members may or may not wish to attend / be involved in the planning, but should be invited and kept informed. The event should be open to any members of the school community who wish to attend. Some pupils have contributed very movingly to such events and this also gives them a sense of doing something positive at a difficult time.

Ensure support is available for pupils and staff after the event if needed.

Schools may also want to think about medium and longer term ways to remember the person who has died, perhaps linked to anniversaries or a significant time for the individual involved.

Some ideas for holding memorial events are detailed in App B.
Appendix A

Supporting bereaved children

Responding to children’s reactions - general

- Existing attachments and relationships may need re-building
- Love and care within the family groups is a primary need
- Children may need to be reassured that someone will take care of them
- Physical closeness is usually appropriate
- It is important to listen to pupils and talk to them about what has happened. For example encourage expression (eg crying, laughter), listen for confused thinking, answer questions honestly, do not be afraid to say ‘I do not know’, ensure the child is not blaming themselves
- Opportunities should be provided for the child to express themselves in various ways (eg painting, drawing, writing, using puppets or other play materials)
- Tolerate regressive behaviours and accept aggression and anger, especially in the early stages, while ensuring the child and others are kept safe
- Reaffirming the future and talking in hopeful terms about future events can help a child rebuild, trust and have faith in his/her own future
- Issues of death should be handled with regard to the child’s age and level of understanding. There are some responses that tend to be typical of various age groups

Possible reactions to grief and strategies according to child’s age

2-5 years

- Death viewed as temporary
- May ask when deceased person is coming back
- May be matter-of-fact or appear unconcerned when told of the death
- Take explanations literally
- Need simple factual explanations that cannot be misconstrued
- May believe they have caused the death by bad behaviour or bad thoughts
- May believe the deceased person will return if they are very, very good
- May show separation anxiety
- Can feel helpless, powerless and unable to protect themselves. Separation anxiety may emerge
- May become very fearful
- May recreate elements of trauma / loss through play. If children are engaged in such play, show an interest and be curious – try not to shut down the play, instead use it as an opportunity to explore issues such as right and wrong and the child’s feelings / responses

Things that may help

- Answer questions honestly and simply
- Encourage expression
• Listen for confused thinking
• Reduce ideas of self-blame
• Be approachable
• Give appropriate comfort cuddles
• Encourage dramatic play

6-8 years

• Begin to understand reality and finality of death
• Knowledge of death may be a mixture of fact and fantasy
• May visualise death as a skeleton or ghost
• May believe they can cause death by wishing it
• May be interested in the biological aspects of death
• Questions may be upsetting for adults
• Will need simple and honest answers
• Denial is a common reaction
• Focus on their own feelings
• Little awareness of the impact of death on others
• May grieve in short, intermittent bursts
• May become reoccupied with details and want to talk about it continually
• May show signs of guilt, feelings of failure and anger
• Complain of feeling unwell (somatic complaints)

Things that may help

• Provide a secure, caring environment
• Listen, reassure and comfort
• Answer questions as simply and honestly as possible
• Allow expressions of feeling
• Listen for confused thinking
• Provide opportunities for creative activities (painting, drawing, colouring, building, sand / water play etc)

9-12 years

• May understand the permanence and irreversibility of death
• Will have more understanding of the extent of the loss
• May realise that they will die one day
• Can understand what the loss may mean to others
• May try to behave like adults
• May assume role of deceased parent
• May postpone grief to support other family members
• Friends may be important for support and consolation
• May experience difficulties in interactions with peers – they may feel different from others
• May repeatedly go over details
• May become anxious, insecure, fearful
Things that may help

- Opportunities to be heard, acknowledged and accepted
- Acknowledge feelings, allow expression of emotions
- Help them understand their reactions
- Be patient
- Provide reassurance and comfort
- Answer questions openly and honestly

Adolescents

- Friends and peers are very important
- They will have ‘adult’ understanding without necessarily having the emotional development to manage adult responsibilities
- May struggle to make longer term plans
- May keep so busy they do not ‘have time’ to reflect / grieve
- May be worried about losing control of their emotions or find it difficult to manage other stressful situations
- May increase risk-taking behaviours
- May feel angry, or feel sense of injustice, futility or senselessness
- May feel isolated or lonely or just sad
- May be confused / disorganised and have difficulty coping with day to day issues
- May experience heightened anxiety

Things that may help

- Listen
- Encourage them to talk about their feelings
- An expression of sadness, a hug or a touch may be all that is needed
- Encourage them to remember the deceased person and talk about them if they want to
- Encourage them to find ways forward and avoid telling them how they should feel or act
- Keep to normal routines as much as possible – they help
- Allow time and space
- Provide access to support / counselling – can help to talk to others who have had similar experiences

Phases of mourning

These are commonly described as follows:

*Early grief; the protest phase*

This stage is characterised by shock, disbelief and denial. The death can produce feelings and thoughts around life having lost it’s meaning. Shock can take the form of physical pain or numbness, but more often consists of complete apathy and withdrawal or abnormal calm, in some cases even anger. Numbness can act as a defence that enables coping with immediate jobs and needs.
Some form of denial generally occurs and can last minutes, hours or weeks. In this stage the bereaved person acts as if the dead person is still there and no loss is acknowledged.

**Acute grief: the disorganisation phase**

Many people feel at this stage that they are abnormal because they have never before experienced the waves of savage feelings that surge through them and over which they temporarily have no control, eg tears, anger, guilt, sadness and loneliness. Some or all of the following emotions may be experienced:

- There may be overwhelming grief, yearning and pining, plus an urge to go over the death, trying to find a reason for it and re-visiting where and how it happened.
- There may be anger against the person who caused the death in the case of an accident, with God for letting it happen, or with the deceased for leaving them. They may be angry with other family members and even against themselves.
- The bereaved person begins to feel the despair, the emptiness, the pain of the loss and with this may come depression. Such feelings are often accompanied by a sense of redundancy, of a lack of self worth and a lack of a point of anything. If a person can cry it usually helps to relieve the stress.
- Guilt is a common emotion that can be felt for the real or imagined negligence or harm inflicted on the person who has died. People often say ‘if only I had called the doctor / not gone out’ etc there is a tendency to idolise the person who has died and feel they could have loved them better. The bereaved can also feel guilty about their own feelings and inability to enjoy life.
- There is often anxiety. In extreme cases anxiety can even become panic as the full realisation of the loss begins to come through. There is anxiety about the changes and new responsibilities that are taking place and the loneliness ahead. There may even be thoughts of suicide.

**Subsiding grief – the re-organisation phase**

This generally occurs in the second year after the death. Acceptance and a calmer emotional state gradually take over. The person is ready to move on, although feelings of sadness and loss may remain for some degree for a lifetime.

**Anticipatory grief**

This is the normal mourning that takes place when a family or community expect a death. It involves thoughts, feelings and physical sensations which can be similar to the grief following a death. Children may be worrying (what will happen to me? How can I stop this?) and be feeling very fearful. Their households may be disrupted, parents spending time at hospitals or hospices, their basic needs may be overlooked. The dying person may be angry, sad, depressed and sometimes withdrawn from their family and friends which children may find confusing and upsetting. During this time children may feel safe while in school, though their grief thoughts and feelings may intrude into the school day. A common reaction to anticipated death is to bargain: for children this may be thinking “if I am really good / if my work improves/ if I follow a particular ritual Daddy will not die”. They can feel it is their fault if the loved one does not get better.
Cultural and religious traditions
Below is some brief guidance about some different traditions. Consult each individual family to ensure you understand their individual cultural or religious traditions.

Muslim

When someone dies or you hear about someone’s death it is usual to say “from God you come and to God you return”. The person who has died is usually buried within 24 hours. Mourners sit and read the Quran while the body is waiting for burial. The body is then carried to the place of burial where it is washed and wrapped in a white cloth. Close relatives will see the body one more time before it is carried by the pall bearers for the funeral prayer. This is said standing up. After the prayer the body is carried to the grave and a close relative receives it. Women do not go to the graveyard. On the third day after the death a prayer meeting is held, the same takes place on the tenth and twentieth days amongst strict Muslims. After forty days the final prayer of closing the mourning period takes place. A yearly prayer will take place on the anniversary of the death. It is not usual practice to erect elaborate tombstones or put flowers.

Hindu

Hindus believe in reincarnation and view death as the soul moving from one body to the next on it’s path to reach Nirvana. Death is a sad occasion but Hindu priests emphasise the route ahead for the departed soul and a funeral is as much a celebration as a remembrance service. Hindus cremate their dead, believing that the burning of a dead body signifies the release of the spirit and that the flames represent Brahma, the creator. Family members will pray around the body as soon as possible after the death. The body will be bathed and dressed in white, traditional clothes. A funeral procession may pass places of significance for the deceased. Prayers are said here and at the entrance of the crematorium. The body is decorated with sandalwood, flowers and garlands. Scriptures are read from the Vedas or Bhagavad Gita. The chief mourner will light some kindling and circle the body, praying for the wellbeing of the departing soul. After the cremation the family may have a meal and offer prayers in their home. Mourners wash and change completely before entering the house after the funeral. This is the beginning of a thirteen day mourning period when friends will visit and offer their condolences.

Jewish

Burials take place as soon as possible – within 24 hours. The body is washed and dressed in white. The service need not be done by a Rabbi but should be read by someone who can read Hebrew. At the cemetery everyone may be asked to put some dirt into the grave. There should be no flowers but people may be asked to donate to charity. After the funeral the close family sit ‘shiva’ – tradition is that this lasts 7 days but some will only sit for 3 days. During this time friends and family come to pay their respects. Many people will bring sweets because it is a symbolic way of wishing mourners a sweet life in the future. Most families will have some refreshments prepared for guests. Often mirrors are covered and immediate family wear slippers to show they are not leaving the house for the shiva period.
Christian

When some one dies there will be mourning, but often also a celebration of the person’s life. There is no fixed period of mourning. It is usual to send an ‘in sympathy’ card. A funeral will take place during which words will be said about the person’s life and their qualities extolled, as well as prayers said. There will usually be hymns or other music. After the funeral is it usual to have awake and food and drink will be served. This gives further opportunities to talk about the person who has died and share reminiscences. Some Christians have a burial, others will choose cremation. Christians believe that the soul lives on and that the earthly body is not required in the afterlife. If there is a burial there is usually a marked gravestone, flowers may be placed here also. If there is a cremation the ashes are scattered in a garden of remembrance or other suitable place of choice. It is usual to have flowers or for mourners to be asked to contribute to a charity donation if they wish to do so.

Buddhist

Death marks the transition from this life to the next for the deceased. Among Buddhists, death is regarded as an occasion of major religious significance, both for the deceased and for the survivors. For the deceased, it marks the moment when the transition begins to a new mode of existence within the round of rebirths. When death occurs, all the karmic forces that the dead person accumulated during the course of his or her lifetime become activated and determine the next rebirth. For the living, death is a powerful reminder of the Buddha’s teaching on impermanence; it also provides an opportunity to assist the deceased person as he or she fares on to the new existence.
Assemblies / memorials / remembrance events

Have a clear structure

Begin by explaining the reason for the assembly / event and a brief factual statement about the circumstances surrounding the death

You could then include any of the ideas below

- Lighting a special remembrance candle (or candles)
- Favourite songs or poems of the person who has died
- Pupils and / or staff who wish to do so recounting stories or memories
- Photos of person who has died
- Placing objects associated with the person in a special memory box, which can then be given to the family
- Creating a memory tree or collage (drawings, pieces of writing, photos etc.)
- Releasing balloons (can have messages attached)
- Planting something (eg bulbs or a shrub or tree) in an outdoor memory area / garden
- Farewell message book or box
- Think about appropriate music to play during the event

Longer term memorial ideas

- Plaque or wall display (some schools have established an area like this which can be added to if future need arises)
- Were they sporty? Can you establish a cup or award named after them?
- Did they like singing or acting? Hold an event in their honour?
- Raise funds to support a relevant charity
- Think about particular dates which may have special significance (e.g. birthdays / anniversaries of the death / a particular event the person would have been involved in) and acknowledge these may be difficult for some people. You may wish to mark the first anniversary in some way.

Memory stones

The concept of memory stones is simple, yet is a really helpful tool to enable pupils to speak about their feelings.

First – hold a jagged pebble – describe it (‘rough’, ‘has sharp bits’ etc). You can also ask pupils to describe it. Ask a pupil (or pupils) to hold and squeeze it – how does it feel? Use the descriptions you get to talk about hard or difficult feelings they may have about the person who died, what happened etc.
Second – hold a normal smooth pebble – again describe it or ask pupils to do so. You are looking to find words like ‘normal’, ‘smooth’, ‘ordinary’. This stone represents the ordinary, everyday memories they have of the person.

Finally display a sparkling gemstone and follow the same process. This stone is sparkly and precious and represents great memories of person who died – use it to explain this. All three stones are important and the feelings and memories are all true and relevant. The stones can all be held in one hand and the memories can be held in our minds all together.

Some children may be helped by having their own set of stones to keep.

After any remembrance events or discussions both pupils and adults may need time and space to reflect before carrying on with the day or may be upset – bear these issues in mind when planning any special events.
Appendix C

Points to note with media interviews:
During an incident, the media will be at the scene very quickly and in large numbers. It is important to co-operate for two reasons:

• The media can provide a useful conduit for the dissemination of public information
• It is important that what is reported is factually correct; if they don’t get information from you, then they will approach others for comment which may lead to inaccurate reporting

The school’s key objectives are:

• To show that it is controlling the incident and doing all it can to minimize the consequences
• To set minds at rest as far as possible and counter dangerous rumours
• To establish itself as caring, responsible and competent

The expertise of Wandsworth Council’s Press Officer lies in dealing with the media. Talk to him and listen to his advice.

Do not allow the press on to the school premises or give them access to children unless there is a special reason for this and consent has been given.

• Person giving interview should be, Headteacher, Nominee, Chair of Governing Board or LA Press Officer
• Demonstrate concern, not panic – share pity for victim and family loss, give praise to the emergency services
• Have another person with you, if possible, to monitor the interview
• Give facts only – do not speculate – do not apportion blame. At the earliest stages use, “We are dealing with an incident and will release information as soon as the details have been confirmed”. Use the phrase, “at the moment those facts are unknown” rather than respond with unverified facts or ‘no comment’. If possible, agree an interview format i.e. establish what the interviewer wants to ask
• Be prepared to think on your feet, but try to decide beforehand what you want to say. Do not read it out, unless you have been requested, or the Headteacher decides to deliver a statement. The press may ask for copies of the statement, be prepared to hand this out
• Remember you could be quoted on anything you say to a journalist, even if it is not part of the formal interview.
• Don’t over-elaborate your answers. Answer only the questions asked
• Refuse requests for photos or schoolwork of children/staff involved
• Try to keep a grip on your emotions during interviews-especially if it is TV
• Most journalists are responsible, but check where interview/camera team go, when interview is over

Only give out information regarding deaths of persons once the next of kin have been informed. Never before.
Useful contacts

Child bereavement UK
01494 568900
www.childbereavementuk.org

The Compassionate Friends
0845 1232304
www.tcf.org.uk

CRUSE bereavement care
087 1671677
www.crusebereavement.org.uk

Child Death helpline
0800 282986 / 0808 8006019
www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk

Wandsworth Bereavement Service for children and young people
192 Lavender Hill, SW11 5TQ
020 7223 3178
children@wandsworthbereavement.org.uk
www.wandsworthbereavement.org.uk

St Christopher’s Education
Deliver bereavement training for school staff
020 8768 4656
education@stchristophers.org.uk
www.stchristophers.org.uk/education

jigsaw4u
40 Mill Green Road, Mitcham, Surrey, CR4 4HY
info@jigsaw4u.org.uk
Tel: 020 8687 1384

Wandsworth Schools and Community Psychology Service
020 8871 8744

Paula Steele (CDOP bereavement counsellor)
020 8725 3711
Paula.steele@stgeorges.nhs.uk
## Books and other resources

*There are many useful resources – this is a selection of some that may be helpful*

### For adults

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Living with Grief in school</td>
<td>Ann Chadwick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wise Before the Event</td>
<td>William Yule and Anne Gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss, Change and Grief: an educational perspective</td>
<td>E Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words to Comfort. Words to Heal</td>
<td>J Mabey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Bereavement and Loss</td>
<td>EPS Stockport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools information Pack (series of 22 fact sheets)</td>
<td>download from CBUK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood Bereavement – developing the curriculum and Pastoral support</td>
<td>Job &amp; Francis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A resource bank on loss and Grief ‘it hurts’</td>
<td>M Harvey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Grief –exploring feelings with under 11s</td>
<td>B Ward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting young people coping with Grief, Loss and Death</td>
<td>Weymont and Rae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then, Now and Always</td>
<td>J Stokes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Teacher’s Handbook of Death</td>
<td>Jackson and Colwell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grief Encounter</td>
<td>S Gilbert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Forgotten Mourners:</td>
<td>Susan C Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidelines for working with bereaved children</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grief in School Communities: Effective Support strategies</td>
<td>Louise Rowling</td>
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### For children

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sad Book</td>
<td>Michael Rosen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Someone Very Special Dies</td>
<td>Marge Eaton Heegard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding a Way through When Someone Close has Died</td>
<td>Mood and Whittaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembering</td>
<td>Dianne Leutner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Copper Tree</td>
<td>Hilary Robinson and Mandy Stanley</td>
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<tr>
<td>Badger’s Parting Gifts</td>
<td>Susan Varley</td>
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<tr>
<td>Always and Forever</td>
<td>Aland Durant and Debi Gliori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sunshine Cat</td>
<td>Miriam Moss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death: I miss you</td>
<td>Pat Thomas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentle Willow</td>
<td>Joyce C Mills and Cary Pilo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up in Heaven</td>
<td>Emma Chichester Clark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone has Died suddenly</td>
<td>Mary Williams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Tenth Good Thing about Barney</td>
<td>Judith Viorst</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goodbye Mousie</td>
<td>Robie H Harris</td>
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### For those with Learning Difficulties

Organisation called Beyond Words, empowering people through pictures, has resources aimed at those with LD. They have four books (When Somebody Dies; Am I Going to Die?, when Mum died; When Dad Died). Access via website: [http://booksbeyondwords.co.uk](http://booksbeyondwords.co.uk)
Suggested template letters

1. **Letter to parents:**
   Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the child’s parents.
   The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the parents and school.

   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 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. 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

2. **Sample letter to bereaved parents:**
   Dear
   We are so very sorry to hear of Toby’s death. There are no words to express the sadness of losing a child and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through.
   Clearly, as a school community, we will miss him very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to his friends and classmates. He was a much loved member of our school family.
   If we can do anything to help as you plan Toby’s funeral service or other memorial opportunities, please let us know. In time, we will also ensure that anything of Toby’s that remains in school is returned to you, including photographs we may have on the school system.
   Be assured that you are in our thoughts at this very sad time and do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of support in any way.
   With sympathy,
   Headteacher

3. **Follow up letters after period of time**
   a) 3 month letter
   To all Year ....... Parents and Carers
   Date
   Dear All
It’s been almost 3 months since we received the shocking news of ……….’s death. We have had some contact with ……….’s mother but have not yet discussed what form of a memorial we might set up for …………. I am wondering how your child is managing their loss and if you have any concerns with regard to their wellbeing. You may remember that I sent out a letter describing details about the possible reactions exhibited by bereaved children of particular age groups which I hope you found helpful. If you have mislaid this and would like a second copy please let me know.

**Typical ways in which a child or young person may express their grief:**

- Unusual or atypical behaviours
- Becoming withdrawn
- Becoming angry
- Loss of appetite
- Tummy upsets
- Clinginess and finding any separation difficult
- School refusal - become easily anxious
- Becoming tired or depressed
- Scared of the dark

In school we are finding that a significant group of children are not managing their behaviour well, typically quick to anger and lashing out with undue force in their “play”. Their attention in class and thus their progress in their learning has also been adversely affected.

We are investing a lot of time in supporting this group especially during play and lunch times and we are also seeking external advice from specialists in bereavement and behaviour support.

If you are concerned about any changes in your child’s behaviour at home, you may be interested to know of a service provided by the **Wandsworth Bereavement Service**. They offer 12 one to one sessions for children and these take place out of school hours. Their contact details are as follows:

Address: 192 Lavender Hill, London SW11 5TQ  
Phone: 020 7223 3178  
E-mail: enquiries@wandsworthbereavement.org.uk  
E-mail: children@wandsworthbereavement.org.uk

If you would simply like to come and talk about your concerns then please do not hesitate to get in touch either with myself, ………... or ………....

The loss of ………... has had wide and differing impact on children and adults across the school. Such a loss is a rare experience for us and we are feeling our way gently as well as taking advice from experts in the field.

Yours sincerely  
headteacher

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**b) 6 month letter**

To all Parents and Carers in Year ...  
Date
Dear All

It’s been 6 months since we received the shocking news of ….’s death. We have had some contact with …..’s mother but she is not ready yet to discuss what form of a memorial we might set up for ……….. – we will obviously be led by her wishes.

We are mindful of the fact that you and your child will still be on the grieving journey and we are keen to offer additional support with the summer holidays fast approaching.

As you know from my letter of ............., the Wandsworth Bereavement Service can offer support in this area and we have arranged for them to come in for a meeting on .............at 9.15am until 10.30am. The meeting will consist of a short presentation and will then give you the chance to talk to the members of the bereavement service as well as a chance to talk to the other year ..........parents in an informal way – tea/biscuits will be provided.

If you cannot make this meeting, this services full details are shown below.

**Wandsworth Bereavement Service.** They can offer 12 one to one (free) sessions for children and these take place out of school hours. Their contact details are as follows:

Address: 192 Lavender Hill, London SW11 5TQ
Phone: 020 7223 3178
E-mail: enquiries@wandsworthbereavement.org.uk
E-mail: children@wandsworthbereavement.org.uk

The tragic loss of ............... has had wide and differing impact on children and adults across the school. Such a loss is a rare experience for us and if you feel we could be doing anymore at this stage, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely
Headteacher
Checklist for planning and responding to bereavements

- check the schools policy and procedures / adopt this guidance
- create opportunities within the curriculum for death and grief to be considered / discussed
- identify staff members willing to undertake key roles in relation to bereavement and enable them to access appropriate training
- ensure all staff are aware of loss and bereavement issues
- create a resource base
- ensure you have up-to-date staff contact details for out-of-hours situations, available to key staff when not on site
- ensure key staff have information on how to access parent contact details
- prepare information sheets for parents and staff
- be aware of the different cultural and religious traditions in your school community

Checklist for responding to bereavements

- Inform key staff members
- Identify who is taking lead roles (define clearly), including who will be key point of contact for the family
- Consider issue of media interest and take appropriate action if necessary
- Prepare what you are going to say
- Inform all staff and governors as soon as possible
- Inform the Local Authority and request support if needed
- Inform parents and pupils – pupils are best informed in small groups wherever possible, using age-appropriate language and concepts
- if necessary issue a holding statement while further information / clarification is being sought and consider what information may be appropriate to be put on website
- Ask for help where it is needed
- Look after yourself as well as your colleagues