

Loss and Bereavement Covid-19 For Primary Schools

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Many thanks to the schools and settings whose contributions form the FAQ structure of the Loss and Bereavement pack.



For more details contact your STLS district team,

SEN EY, KEPS, TEP or Beck Ferrari.

With thanks to all the above for their collaboration on this project.

1. Prior to return

What can your Primary School do to support bereaved pupils?

How can I plan and prepare for any bereaved pupils to return to school?

- Check your Bereavement policy is up to date and reflects COVID-19 if appropriate to do so (see Small Steps document or Child Bereavement UK for sample policies if your school does not yet have one).
- Download the Small Steps document to share with any EY and Key stage 1 staff
- Make a “bereavement box” so you have resources to hand to support a bereaved pupil (See Small Steps and below)
- Collate resources available e.g. information leaflets for staff, parent/carers, books for staff and workbooks or story books for children. (See booklist)
- Ensure you are aware of any children where bereavement has occurred within the family. Gently seek to find out about the circumstances of the death and what your pupil knows about it. Consider any cultural implications to understanding and supporting the family’s grief (eg. background, religion).
- Consider accessing staff training to help build understanding and confidence. (See Training below)
- Provide supervision for staff who may be experiencing their own anxieties, as well as supporting children, at this time.
- Consider setting up a bereavement support group within districts/ collaborations

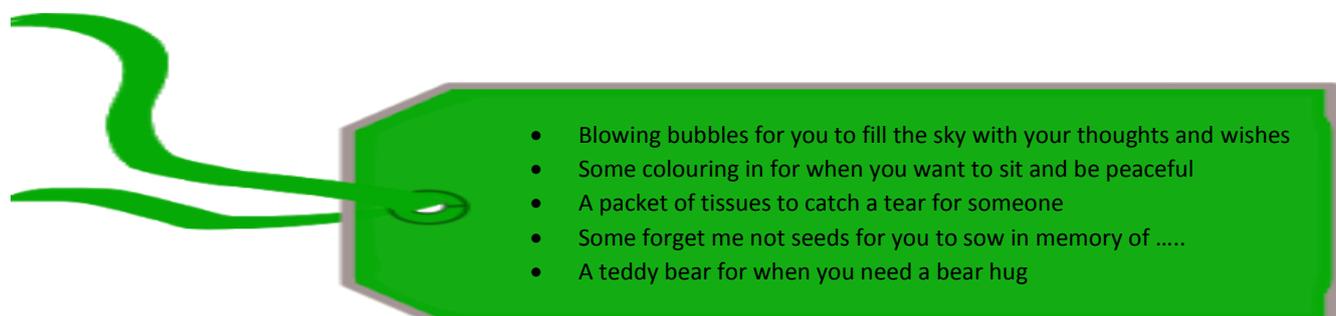
What can I say or do to support one of my pupils who has been grieving through the lockdown period?

Checking in with families by phone can remind them that you are there and help you keep liaison going prior to return. Grieving through the lockdown has the potential to have made things more challenging for bereaved families as they have had to manage without much of their support network and with far less to distract them. (To find out more see Bereaved Family Voices below)

What can I say or do to support a newly bereaved pupil where someone has died during the Coronavirus pandemic?

It can be really helpful for families to know you are thinking of them and can make a big difference to families to know that school genuinely care and are interested in supporting their child. You could send a card and follow up with a telephone call. *“I am so sad to hear about How are you all managing at the moment? Is there anything school can do at this stage to support your child? How are you and your child feeling about returning to school?”*

You might want to send a small ‘comfort package’ with some items to support the child. It might include:



What additional information is available if the person died from COVID-19?

If you find that the family were bereaved by COVID-19 you will be mindful of the difficult circumstances in which such a death occurred as well as the challenges for people in saying goodbye at end of life and in planning funeral services. You may want to signpost families to helplines, specific support from bereavement organisations and to publications to support children in understanding this. See booklist and organisations below.

What plans do I need to make for a bereaved pupil to return to school?

Discuss with the family about the pupil's return to school letting them know that staff will be made aware of their bereavement. Find out whether they would like their child's peer group to be told in advance. Ask if there is anything that they or their child are concerned about. Outline any support the school may be able to offer- remember to check with the pupil what they would like. Signpost the family to support organisations.

For many children, school is a place of normality and routine but right now there are additional challenges in making school feel normal. Bereaved children would benefit from being with familiar staff and peers, although with social bubbles being proposed as schools reopen, this may be more difficult to achieve.

What support could I set up for a grieving pupil?

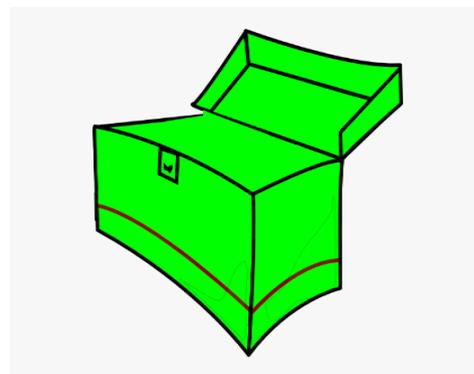
Support can be set up but needs to be adapted to the wishes of the returning pupil. When so much around a child has changed it can be hard if others set out to control what they should do with their grief. You might wish to consider having named staff (not just one) on hand to provide support. Remember that your ideal member of staff for such a role (warm, caring and empathic) may not be the same as the pupil's. Prepare to adapt!

Decide on spaces that could be used if a pupil wishes to have some time out of class- both indoors and outdoors within safety parameters. Agree these with the pupil on return. Would they like anything available in these places to support them?

Bereavement Box

Resources might include:

- A blank photo frame for decorating (card, foam, wood)
- Puppets to encourage conversation
- Water balloons to fill and burst outside to let go of feelings
- Wooden spoons with wool and fabric offcuts to make two sided feelings faces
- Foam hearts for decorating with ribbon to hang
- Beads to thread to make a coping bracelet with each bead representing a key person for support
- Feathers and voile bags with feathers representing memories
- Mindful colouring activities
- Jar, salt, chalk etc for a memory jar



What external support will be available to bereaved pupils and their families?

Most children with good support from their family, friends and school will adjust and manage their grief. Many children, along with their families will benefit from accessing group support within their school and/or from

bereavement organisations (see below). A few may have more difficulties with their grieving journey because of challenges within the home environment, the traumatic nature of the death and factors that make it difficult for the child to make sense of the death. These children may require more specialist therapeutic support on top of that provided by the school. Research suggests that being bereaved from COVID-19 increases the risk of more complicated grief. Pupils bereaved by COVID-19 who require it will have access to counselling sessions funded by KCHFT (details to follow).

Where can I learn more about supporting bereaved pupils?

There are many excellent resources to develop staff understanding about child bereavement and to provide families with helpful information. May have specific help for bereavement by COVID-19 A good place to start is:

Child Bereavement UK	Download their Schools Information pack https://www.childbereavementuk.org/primary-schools-supporting-bereaved-children Additional guidance about COVID-19 and video clips https://www.childbereavementuk.org/coronavirus-supporting-pupils
Winston’s Wish	Guidance about supporting pupils and coronavirus https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus/
Grief Encounter	https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/serviceupdate/
Kent Educational Psychology Service	Resources and support for schools Schools can order the Grief and Loss Resource available on KELSI https://www.theeducationpeople.org/products/partner-providers/grief-loss-and-crisis-support/
Small Steps – Supporting Bereaved Young Children in Early Years settings	Download a free copy of Small Steps from Threads of Success website https://www.threadsofsuccess.co.uk/small-steps-1 Small Steps is a support guide for pre-school settings to help a child with their first steps in their grieving journey
Slide Away	Toolkit for schools http://www.slideaway.org/Portals/0/Documents/Toolkit-factsheets-pt2.pdf
Beck Ferrari	Contact for consultation or training beck.ferrari@gmail.com

What training can staff access in supporting bereaved pupils?

The Education People Free Webinar for Early Years: <i>Bereavement and Loss in Covid 19 for Early Years setting</i>	Friday 22 May 2020 https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7760308395783045391
Kent Educational Psychology Service Free Webinars <i>Grief and Loss in Schools</i>	Details to follow via KELSI and LIFT
Beck Ferrari Bespoke bereavement webinar training for schools and settings	Various dates term 6 and term 1 Contact: beck.ferrari@gmail.com

What books could I read to help me understand children’s grief and what my school can do?

For adults:

The Little Book of Bereavement for Schools	Ian Gilbert	A personal account of how schools tried to support one family after the death of their mother, containing ‘must know’ advice and structured into fifteen points for schools to follow.
A Child’s Grief	Winston’s Wish	An accessible guidebook for parents and professionals.

Grief in children: A handbook for adults	Atle Dyregrov	An excellent handbook providing advice and strategies for understanding and supporting a grieving child.
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What books could I share with bereaved pupils?

For children:

Information and Workbooks		
When Someone Dies (Questions and Feelings About)	Dawn Hewitt	A picture book featuring simple language to explain questions about death for children.
What does Dead mean?	Caroline Jay and Jenni Thomas	A simple book with questions and answers for young children. Also ideal to help adults in knowing how to answer the many questions young children may pose.
Grief Encounter	Shelley Gilbert	An excellent workbook with a whole range of activities to encourage conversations about loss between children and adults-
Someone I know has Died	Child Bereavement UK	A workbook for young children who want to remember someone who has died (Key Stage 1) Available from: www.childbereavementuk.org
Remembering	Dianne Leutner and Daniel Postgate	An awarding winning book prompting children to explore and record their memories of a special person after they have died.
Saying Goodbye	Dr Susie Willis	Written specifically to support children bereaved by Covid 19 PDF: https://adobe.ly/3aphMF7 Animation : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SnIYObmeAZE
Story books about Grief		
Always & Forever	Alan Durrant	A story about grieving animal friends and their memories.
A Place in my Heart	Annette Aubrey	A helpful story about a little boy trying to understand his feelings after his Grandad has died.
The Memory Box	Joanna Rowland	With beautiful illustrations this story follows a young girl making a memory box to help her explore two key questions about grief; will I forget my loved one? What do I do with my feelings?
Sad Book	Michael Rosen	A fantastic book exploring the feelings of sadness when someone is bereaved.
Always & Forever	Alan Durrant	A story about grieving animal friends and their memories.

Where can I signpost families to for bereavement support?

CRUSE Bereavement Care	Support, advice and information for bereaved adults and children including free access to trained listeners
The Good Grief Trust	COVID-19 Bereavement Helpline and website with advice for families
Child Bereavement UK	Website and Helpline to support families and young people.
The Compassionate Friends	A peer support group formed by and for parents whose children have died, irrespective of the child's age at death and the cause of death.
Holding On, Letting Go	A bereavement support charity holding weekends for children and young people with support for parents and carers across Kent.
Slide Away	A bereavement support charity holding workshops for school aged children in West Kent.

For details on further books and organisations that offer bereavement support contact Beck Ferrari

What has it been like for bereaved families through lockdown?

Bereaved family voices:

Lockdown has been hard because I can't go to school anymore and school was helping me a lot. Primary aged girl

I don't like being at home all the time. I miss my friend. He understands how I feel. Primary aged boy

Well, being trapped inside is obviously making us all lonely, but when you've lost someone who means a lot to you, you already feel lonely. So the added isolation just repeats in your head; how wrong things are and pushes in how different life is without them, especially when you lived with them. It makes you feel independent, but the wrong type of independent, when you have to face all your fears alone because you know they weren't meant to leave and they didn't want to, but they did so you fear everyone else will too. Teenage girl

Lockdown has just made it hard, really tough, really tough. It's just me and my mind with nothing to take my mind off it, nothing to keep me busy. Teenage boy

His grandad died of COVID-19. I have told my son he died but not how. I don't want to say about the virus yet because I think that will make him more scared of getting it too. Parent

There have been negatives and positives with lockdown. The negative; that it's hit quicker, you're isolated just being on your own. It's the realisation that it's just us now. The positive is that we have all spent time together and have had to just get on with it. It feels like more of a rollercoaster ride. Parent

This situation has made it all so, so hard. I have felt so alone just trying to look after my son. And all can do is ring people if I'm struggling, it's not the same. My grief is with me all day and then all night. Nothing to break it up. Parent

For more details contact your STLS district team, KEPS or Beck Ferrari.

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Loss and Bereavement in Primary Schools

2. The First Few Weeks

Acknowledging loss in the school community

What can we do to support children's feeling of loss?

As a staff group, have a discussion (virtually) where you consider the losses that have been experienced by children, families and the staff team. Explore the losses that you are aware of from the communication you have had with families and staff as well as other potential losses not yet shared. During the pandemic we have all experienced some loss of stability and certainty, but many will have experienced much more. Building awareness of losses will help us to be mindful of both child and staff emotional states.

How can I help the community acknowledge the losses that have been experienced?

Use assemblies, circle times, and other smaller group work to explore feelings of loss. It can be helpful to draw on the depth of the emotions (*How big is that feeling?*) as well as the range of emotions (*What feelings have you felt?*) See the Universal strand for lesson plans and activities to support emotional wellbeing.

How do we share news of/talk about the death of a member of staff/school community?

See guidance in "Managing Bereavement: A guide for schools by Child Bereavement UK" page 7 section 3 – Breaking Sad News – a death in the school community. This resource provides template letters in the appendices too.

How can the school community acknowledge the death of a member of staff or pupil?

Where possible, hold assemblies for public remembrance of the death and to help recognise significance of the loss. If this is difficult to achieve for some time due to social distancing protocols, then explore ways in which class groups can join together virtually using technology.

Plan activities that everyone in the school community can contribute to whether or not they are currently in school. (Child Bereavement UK – Remembering Collaborative Projects for the School community) <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=7c952b41-2a99-443c-827d-25a739301a25>), for example a memory book; pages could be emailed in by children/families and collated at the end as a keepsake for the whole community.

For bereaved pupils

How can I understand what grief has been like for bereaved pupils?

It is unwise to measure children's grief against a perceived value of the relationship and thus create a scale of loss. It can however be helpful to consider the particular challenges children face for different bereavements. In Kent there are an estimated 5750 school pupils who are parentally bereaved. Such a loss is likely to change their lives fundamentally and trigger a lifelong grieving journey. When a child experiences the death of a sibling, they not only face their own very painful grief but can be heavily impacted by the grief of their parents.

Although death from COVID-19 is very sadly possible at any age, the statistics show us that for those in their older years the death rate is significantly higher. It is more likely that your pupils will have been bereaved of an older family member, in particular, a grandparent or great grandparent. Recognising the significance of this is vital. Their grandparent may have been their childcare, their routine and stability. The relationship one of warmth and security, where young people had found unconditional love without the complications and tensions of parenting.

Of course, not all children and young people experience the positive benefit of a grandparent in their life. It is however quite likely that this might be the first death of a family member they have experienced. Helping them understand and learn to grieve is therefore important. As well as trying to manage their own feelings, a child or young person may have to face the very real emotions of their parent. The legacy of that most tangible grief may well last for weeks, months and years and the impact on family life be felt deeply.

The death of a pet can also trigger real pain and loss. For a child, their pet may have been their close companion who provided unconditional comfort. Children whose pet died during lockdown may not have had the opportunity to go to the vet with their animal and take part in goodbye.

What should I look out for in terms of children's grief?

It is worth remembering that although there are common emotions, child grief may look very different from adult grief. Some children will externalise, being open and honest about their grief and some will internalise masking their grief, with changes being very subtle - this does not mean they are not grieving. Their responses can happen at different times, in different stages. There is often a delay. We might however see:

- difficulty regulating emotions and thoughts → anxiety (clingy behaviour), sadness and longing, anger/acting out, guilt/shame.
- restless, agitated, searching behaviour that is seemingly purposeless → trouble concentrating, hopelessness/despair
- disrupted physiological processes, e.g. immune system, hormonal system, cardiovascular functioning, sleep regulation → sleep difficulties, physical complaints, change in appetite
- cognitive challenges to work out and make sense of someone's death. Whilst it is not the job of a school to inform a child about how or why someone died, staff maybe an important part of helping a child make sense of the information given to them. With the current Coronavirus circumstances schools will want to seek guidance in how to explain COVID-19 to children (see below).
- a struggle to engage in learning, concentrating and socialising.
- some children may be in denial or 'grab the limelight' – allow/accept this behaviour in the short term. There can be regression to more infantile behaviour.

Children's understanding of death by age. (Remember that not all children develop in line with their chronological age).

Age 0-2	Aware of the absence of person they were attached to. Seek presence of person who has died. No understanding that death is permanent.
Age 2-4	Concrete thinking. Idea that death exists but no understanding of finality. 'Magical thinking' – may think they caused the death or that they can bring the dead person back to life.
Age 5-9	Understand that death is irreversible. More awareness of mortality. May think of death as something scary or spooky. Curious about death and may appear insensitive as they try to make sense of the death. May present physical symptoms of loss and stress (somatic symptoms) – e.g. tummy ache and sleeping difficulties
Age 9-12	Understand finality of death and own mortality. More able to understand death as both concrete and abstract. May make them feel different from peers at time when they want to be 'normal.'
Adolescents	Grieve in similar way to adults, but less able to process powerful emotions. Question meaning of life and bereavement.

What should I say to a bereaved pupil as they return to school?

Saying something is better than saying nothing. Acknowledging the death directly with the child is key; when we say, *I'm so sad to hear that Daddy died*, we open the door of communication to the child and remove the responsibility from them to have to bring the subject up. We don't have to use 'clever' or wise words, just acknowledge that it is very difficult. *I'm going to check in with you each day and you can tell me if you want to talk to me.* Children will usually let you know by their response if they wish to continue the conversation. After initiating conversation, we do well by

simply listening and thanking the child for telling us rather than feeling that we need to say the 'right' thing.

What language should we use to communicate about death?

A lot of language around death is ambiguous and metaphorical so for children this leaves the potential for misunderstanding. The only word that means dead is dead. It can feel uncomfortable as an adult to use such direct language with children, but our tone and expression will convey sensitivity. Children need language that is clear and unambiguous and in line with their cognitive development to help them understand what death is: *When we die our hearts stop beating and our bodies don't work anymore.* They may need further help differentiating death from sleep. *Death isn't the same as sleep because when you're sleeping you are still breathing and your heart is still beating so you will wake up again.* A further step is understanding that death is permanent and irreversible *When someone has died their body can't come back to life anymore.*

Where the death has been from COVID 19, it is important to check in with the family to understand what the child has been told. The family may welcome some support in explaining what this means to their child: *It was very sad Grandad caught the virus/COVID-19. The doctors tried very, very hard to make Grandad better, but the virus was too strong and it stopped Grandad's heart from working so he died.*

Should I talk about heaven?

Finding out from the family about their beliefs is important, as our role is to support them and not introduce new ideas. Where the idea of heaven has been introduced to a child, we can then follow this up. Children may ask about what heaven is like- it is okay to say that we don't know as we haven't been there. *Some people believe that heaven is what do you think?*

How can I support a bereaved child who appears upset and tearful at school?

One of the toughest parts of supporting a bereaved child can be for staff to learn to tolerate children's sadness and not to be scared of their grief. It is their grief that has made them upset, not us. It can be helpful to:

- share our sadness and tears with children.
- support crying, join in yearning.
- it is natural to want to hold, cuddle, touch children but with social distancing measures in place this can be difficult. Using duplicate teddy bears that the child and adult each hug to share the hug through the bear or providing the child time with the school dog can be helpful.
- review pleasant and difficult memories of the dead person.
- together make a memory book of photos captioned by the child. Collect home movies, videotapes, and tape recordings for the memory file.
- encourage the child to carrying a comfort object such as a small piece of warm furry blanket can be an aid for getting through difficult moments.
- use resources in the Bereavement Box (See Prior to Return section for ideas)
- for details of other activities see TISS crib sheet attachment

Most school staff are not trained counsellors. What will they do if their support opens up a 'can of worms'? Who can they ask?

Grief is a normal response to the loss of someone significant and not a 'can of worms.' Yes, there may be times when a child becomes outwardly emotional or distressed. This is a normal part of them processing their pain. We don't need to be a trained counsellor to be a safe person for a child to express their feelings. Being a caring human being is enough. When our responses are empathetic, they will help contain the child from feeling overwhelmed e.g. *I can see that it's really hard for you right now. That's okay if your tears come. Shall we sit here quietly? Do you want to tell me about your tears?*

If our responses are from a place of fear or discomfort with the child's emotions e.g. *Don't get upset? Go outside and calm yourself down*, then they may give the child message that we cannot cope with their grief.

If we are worried about a child's level of distress or other grieving behaviours, then we should share this with other staff involved and check in with the family. We need a fuller picture to help us understand how the child is. If the shared information leaves us with concerns then we can access guidance from bereavement organisations, STLS and KEPS or Beck Ferrari.

How can I support a bereaved child who is very private and withdrawn about their grief?

Respect their privacy, they may want the normality and security of school away from a home of grieving adults. However, we can still let them know we've noticed them and remember what they are going through. A simple, *It's good to see you* or *Thank you for working hard /helping me* can help children not feel invisible even when they want to remain more private. Validate all feelings as legitimate and painful. Use books and stories to show how others coped with death and encourage them to share their feelings indirectly through the characters. Reading fairy tales where a child conquers adversity is a way to help restore meaning and hope. And remember that *Silence is Golden*. Sometimes there are no words that bring enough comfort to take away the pain. Your presence can sometimes say what words cannot.

How can I support a bereaved child who is presenting with challenging behaviour at school?

Accept anger, understanding that it is misplaced grief. Reassure that being angry is OK. It will help children to have boundaries in place, but empathy comes first. Reassure that hurting is part of grieving and eventually will subside. Find safe physical outlets for children's anger, for example they can punch a pillow as a focus for their anger. Put aside adult activities when possible to emphasise the value of conversations about guilty or angry feelings. Encourage drawing, writing, and playing out feelings. Where possible meet periodically with the siblings as a group to explore feelings of guilt and anger and work out solutions to common problems with their new living situation. Help children keep at their studies but do not allow it to impinge on their playtime. It may be helpful to agree with pupil strategies that will enable them to cope in the classroom e.g. able to leave lessons without fuss – "exit card" system. Reassure the pupil that a lack of motivation and concentration is normal and will pass. If possible, give interim strategies, e.g offer shorter tasks, opportunities for movement, celebrate small successes, minimise failures.

How to support children whose parents have died of COVID-19? What external/specialist support is available?

Research has highlighted the additional difficulties in being bereaved during the Coronavirus pandemic in particular death in ICU, limits on access to saying goodbye at the end of life and restrictions on funeral arrangements.

Bereavement organisations offer support so that the young person can meet with others who are grieving. Young people whose parents have died from COVID-19 can have access to KCFHT funded counselling should they need this specialist support. Prior to Return section for signposting.

What happens if a child refuses to return to school in fear they or a family member might die?

Fear of separation and fear of death are common and understandable responses for bereaved children. In the Coronavirus pandemic, levels of anxiety are likely to be heightened again with increased attention on death in the media as well as risks of contagion.

- Have open dialogue with parent/carers to acknowledge and validate such fears.
- Understand how parents themselves feel about this as their own anxieties might contribute to their child's concerns.
- Be open and honest about how school are putting into practice all safety requirements.

- Prepare to adapt usual expectations about attendance as children might benefit from shorter periods of attendance and increased support as they learn to manage their fear.
- Refer to child development stages and their understanding of death.
- Refer to the **Anxiety** strand of the working group for more information on managing emotionally-based school refusal.



*For more details contact your STLS district team, KEPS or Beck Ferrari.
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Loss and Bereavement in Primary Schools

3. In the Long term

How can we respond in the long term to loss in our school community?

Showing we remember losses in our community for the long term sends a clear message that each member of the community is valued; and that they would be valued if something happened to them. Initial responses to loss in COVID-19 have had to be constructed within the guidelines about keeping people safe. Sometime in the future we hope that our responses will not have to consider social distancing.

naming a room
memorial award
each planting a daffodil
tree
wildlife garden
mosaic mural
garden
memorial area
naming a building
memorial service

Discuss ideas with the bereaved family, they may wish to take a role in planning or in attending something. Some families may be more private and would rather be sent a photo of what you made/did. Offer pupils and staff the opportunity to get involved too, this may be both empowering and healing for their grief.

Consider setting up a bereavement group within school to offer ongoing support for any bereaved families; we know the impact of grief can remain significant for many years for some individuals. See Child Bereavement UK for advice. Set up a one off or biannual day for bereaved children e.g. Beck Ferrari Child Bereavement Specialist facilitating a Treasured Memories Day within your school. Look back at the First section of the Loss and Bereavement pack (Prior to the Return) for contact details for other organisations.

How long we can expect each stage of grieving to last for?

The idea of there being linear, one-way stages of grief has largely been dismissed. Each grieving journey is individual, and people may travel through different 'stages' (or 'tasks') in a bidirectional manner, revisiting feelings and darker periods of grief. It can be more helpful to think of tasks of grief and look to children managing and adjusting to a life without the significant person. For example, adjusting to changes in simple things, such as who locks the door at night. This can involve reinventing roles which can evoke feelings of helplessness and be difficult to manage. Children will revisit their grief as they reach different stages of development and different milestones. It is still important and significant, even when many years have passed.

How can we let bereaved children know we haven't forgotten their grief?

Keeping the communication going will allow us to check in with a child and show them we are keeping them in mind. This might be particularly helpful when changes, transitions, anniversaries are ahead. Be mindful of triggers; Coronavirus has been the main focus of life for society, when this begins to dissipate the child may be glad that the attention has shifted, they may also be worried that their loss will be forgotten.

Other causes of death, particularly cancer appear in charity or fundraising appeals as well as TV programmes and each mention may be a trigger a wave of grief for a bereaved child.

How can we support transition to other classes or schools?

Transition within school:

Information about a child's bereavement would be kept within their school file and this might include important dates/anniversaries. It can be helpful for schools to think about manageable ways to share this with key staff e.g. each new class teacher as the child transitions from year to year. Dates could be held by a member of the pastoral team and then reminders sent to class teachers as dates are nearing (each half term). Ongoing communication with the family can be valuable as you can ask the families to inform you (and give you reminders!) of any difficult dates.

Transition between schools:

Ensure bereavement is noted on transition documents when children are transferring to new schools. Find an opportunity to liaise directly with the new school to make them aware. It can be hard for a new school to open the door of communication so facilitate this to happen if possible.

Also encourage the parent/carers to inform the new school in person.

In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to send a card (e.g. to the child's home address) on a key date that has been extremely difficult, the year they transition. The aim of this would be to reassure the child that they have not been forgotten, whilst they settle into their new setting. It will be important to communicate that a lack of cards in future years does not mean the child is forgotten.

How should school support times in the school day, timetable or curriculum areas that are difficult for grieving children?

Children struggling with anxiety might find leaving parents or carers at the beginning of the school day difficult but there may also be other times which are tricky. This will depend on the individual child. For some playtime is a welcome respite, for others getting engrossed in their learning offers a distraction.

Curriculum areas, difficult dates, school events, even charity fundraising can present challenges for grieving children and families. When we prepare children for something potentially difficult, we show them that we have them in mind and can work out together how best to manage the situation. We also give them the opportunity to contribute to something that is very relevant to them. There are many ideas for supporting children at school e.g. Mothers' Day or on anniversaries. See Child Bereavement UK <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/news/learn-how-to-makeformum-this-mothers-day>

How can our school foster children's resilience to help them cope with the adverse effects of COVID-19?

Resiliency can be defined as the ability to spring back from major difficulties and negative experiences. Research indicates that resiliency is not a single quality or trait and that the concept can best be understood from a multi-level perspective - child, family and community. A complex interaction between factors contribute to an individual's resiliency level: e.g. temperament, relationships with other, school ethos and standard of living.

School are well placed to support resilience, such as by providing opportunities for positive relationships with both peers and adults, offering space for containment and processing of emotions (*see emotion coaching phrases below*), instilling clear consistent boundaries, and a sense of belonging through participation in events. It may be helpful for children to listen to other children's experiences of grief linked to Covid-19 and to benefit by learning how they are feeling and coping.

Emotion coaching aims to recognise, empathise and validate feelings. For example:

- *I can see that you're frowning and kicking the wall. I wonder if that's telling us you feel a bit angry. I would feel like that too. It's ok to feel angry.*

- *I've noticed you looking around at the other children who are doing their work. I wonder if you might be feeling worried about something. Have I got that right?*
- *It's normal to feel off task/upset/angry when you've experienced a loss. Feeling those emotions can feel hard sometimes.*

These statements can support children to recognise and accept their emotions and support them to believe in their ability to navigate through painful and overwhelming feelings.

Should a bereaved child be added to the SEN register?

Being bereaved is not a special need and grief is a normal response to the death of someone significant. Most children adjust and with support learn to manage their grief. For some bereaved children, the death may impact more significantly on their social, emotional or mental health. Where the child then needs to access additional support for this in line with the schools SEN policy they may be placed on the SEN register for their SEMH needs.

What should I do if I'm still worried?

We will often feel worried about grieving children. It can be upsetting to be around a grieving child, or to even imagine what they have been through. Most children with good support from their family and school will learn to manage. They will adjust and, although they will periodically revisit their feelings, will be able to grow around their grief. For some, when the death was traumatic (in the child's eyes), the support structure around the child is fragile or the child has particular needs which make processing and adjustment hard, there is risk of poorer bereavement outcomes. There may also be concerns that the child is experiencing ongoing guilt or blame cognitions which are interfering with their ability to function in day to day tasks many years after the experienced loss. Sharing our concerns with both family members and school staff can help us get the fuller picture. We may then wish to raise concerns with STLS, KEPS or other bereavement organisations.

Grief is not a mental health problem itself, but where a child struggles to adjust it can trigger mental health difficulties. These concerns can be discussed with your NELFT CYPMHS team to consider referral for psychological support.

I am worried about a staff member's ability to cope. How do we support staff who are bereaved?

It can be difficult to support a bereaved child as it can weigh heavy on our emotions. If you are also managing your own grief this may feel additionally hard. For more details on self-care and support see the working group pack on supporting staff, and also page 20, Section 10: "Looking after yourself (staff)" in "Managing Bereavement: A guide for schools by Child Bereavement UK".

A final thought...

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

There's an elephant in the room.
It is large and squatting, so it is hard to get
around it.

Yet we squeeze by with, "How are you" and "I'm fine"
And a thousand other forms of trivial chatter.

We talk about the weather.
We talk about work.
We talk about everything— except the elephant in the room.

There's an elephant in the room.
We all know it is there.
We are thinking about the elephant as we talk together.

It is constantly on our minds.
For you see, it is a very big elephant.

It has hurt us all.
But we do not talk about the elephant in the room.

Terry Kettering

Although not always easy, ongoing **communication** is essential.

Many thanks to the schools and settings whose contributions form the FAQ structure of the Loss and Bereavement pack.



***For more details contact your STLS district team, KEPS or Beck Ferrari.
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