



Children's



Endeavour



Trust

# Bereavement Policy

The Children's Endeavour Trust comprises:

Abbot's Hall Community Primary School

Bosmere Community Primary School

Broke Hall Community Primary School

Chilton Community Primary School

Combs Ford Primary School

Freeman Community Primary School

Springfield Junior School

Whitehouse Community Primary School

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## **1. Rationale**

Bereavement is an experience which will be faced by everyone at some point. Within a school community there will almost always be some children who are struggling with bereavement – or sometimes the entire school may be impacted by the death of a child, member of staff or someone who is an intrinsic part of the community. The term 'bereavement' refers to the process of grieving and mourning and is associated with a deep sense of loss and sadness. Empathetic understanding within the familiar and secure surroundings of school can be of benefit in providing support in difficult and upsetting circumstances.

Most grieving children do not need a 'bereavement expert.' They need people who care. Schools, just by carrying on with their usual day-to-day activities while being aware of the bereavement, can do a huge amount to support a grieving child. The purpose of this policy is to give all staff a confidence in recognising and adopting a particular procedure. It should be noted that a universally accepted procedure outline will, in itself, not enable everyone to feel comfortable in dealing with the practicalities of death and bereavement. To this end, the school will maintain an awareness of staff who have indicated a willingness to offer support in this way.

## **2. Aims**

The core aims of the policy are:

- To give a framework and guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with a bereavement.
- To support children and members of staff before (where applicable), during and after bereavement.
- To enhance effective communication and clarify a pathway of support between members of staff, children, families and the community.
- To identify key staff within the school who can offer support with a bereavement.
- To offer staff training on how to manage bereavement situations.
- To have clear expectations about the way the school will respond to a death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.

In acknowledging these aims the Trust schools recognise:

- That grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real.
- That differing religions and cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment (see Appendix 5).
- That the death of a child has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching and care team of that child and every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far-reaching contacts.

One of the main concerns must inevitably be the immediate family of the deceased and the Trust and schools state its commitment to any such family as may need practical, emotional and ongoing support.

## **3. Procedures**

When someone dies in the school community, whether the death is one that affects an individual child or of someone known to the whole school community, the school's response will be remembered by everyone affected, child or adult. It will depend on individual circumstances and the needs of children, staff and the wider school community.

## **4. Family Bereavement**

When the school is informed of a family bereavement or loss the following actions should be considered:

- The Headteacher (or a senior member of staff nominated by the Headteacher) should contact the family to offer appropriate support.

- They will ask the family how much and what the child already knows and how they have been involved and explain how the school can be involved to support the child and the family. A child's true understanding of death is fairly dependent on their age (see Appendix 2) and this should be acknowledged when considering guidance.
- When the death affects an individual child, they should be asked how they would like the news to be shared. Do they want everyone, no one or just their close friends to know?
- Other members of staff may need to be involved, for example the Deputy Headteacher, Pastoral Staff.
- A selection of resources available in school can be of benefit, for example stories to gently introduce young children to the concept of death.
- Members of staff, in particular a child's class teacher should maintain close contact. This gives opportunities to discuss concerns but also remember that successes are equally important and can provide reassurance. Grieving children and young people can display altered behaviours in different situations. Good communication with home will help school be aware of this and provide a more realistic picture of how the child is coping.

For members of staff experiencing close family bereavement, compassionate leave and ongoing support will be arranged in line with the Trust Leave of Absence Policy.

## **5. The Death of a Child or Member of Staff**

In the event of a child or member of staff dying it is important that all people who are close to the deceased are told in a sensitive and supportive manner rather than risk them hearing it 'on the grapevine'. In both cases, discussions should take place with the family and their wishes considered as to what information they wish to share with the school. A simple confirmation of death may be required until more details are available. The school can help to prevent speculation and rumours, as well as be a source of support for the family and school community.

### **Initial Response**

If the school is open, the Headteacher will inform the Senior Leadership Team and administrative staff as they need to help in the next part of the process.

If the information comes outside working hours the person who receives the news will inform the Headteacher who will then tell the Senior Leadership Team and any others who need to know initially, bearing in mind the impact of hearing such news not in person. Members of staff should generally be told before the children, in particular teachers who had a particularly close relationship with the deceased. They should then be given time to process the news and start to grieve in an appropriate private space. Children may be told in small groups, or as a larger gathering depending on the circumstances. See Appendix 3. After the news has been made known, it may be appropriate to have a break in the timetable to allow the community to process the news and take some time out.

It is also appropriate to let parents know in order that they can support or comfort their children.

### **The First Few Days**

In the first few days after a death of a child or member of staff, our schools will aim to provide stability and normality as far as possible, although some flexibility may be necessary.

- Where possible a safe space will be allocated to allow anyone to take time out to grieve and manage overwhelming feelings.
- Nominated staff with responsibilities for supporting staff and children will have their normal activities covered if necessary.

- The needs of administrative staff who are taking telephone calls and dealing with parents will also be considered.

It may be helpful to hold a special assembly to bring the school together to acknowledge what has happened, to reflect on and remember the life of the person who has died and to normalise and share grief. It can also give the message that it is okay to be sad but equally alright to not be affected and to inform children and staff of any support that is available.

- Anyone who wishes to attend should be able to be there: teaching and non-teaching staff, children and any family who may wish to attend. Many families find comfort in other people organising something special and appreciate being there. Others may not wish to participate but should be given the opportunity to do so.
- A special assembly should have a clear beginning, middle and end, explaining the purpose and length of the assembly. There should be a brief reminder of the circumstances surrounding the death and when it happened. Children may like to participate to feel involved and have a sense of doing something positive.

A temporary tribute or book of condolence may be set up, in a safe accessible area where children can be supervised. The family should be offered the opportunity to visit the school if they wish to, or the school can take photographs to share with them later. Staff and children should be consulted before removing any temporary tribute, giving notice to prepare them beforehand.

Support for children may be provided by school staff, external agencies or local services. The school will advise teachers to be alert to any children who are struggling with their grief and keep in close contact with their families to work together to support and comfort them.

Supporting bereaved children can be very stressful for staff who may themselves be struggling with their own reactions and emotions. At certain points in time, some members of staff may be more vulnerable due to circumstances in their own lives and they should be encouraged to speak up if they are finding the situation unmanageable in order that they can themselves be supported.

## **Funeral**

Staff and children may wish to attend the funeral; this may depend on who has died and their relationship with the family. The school should communicate with the family to find out whether they welcome members of the school community before confirming any arrangements. If the family consent, the Headteacher should ensure that all staff are asked if they wish to attend the funeral. It may be that not all members of staff are able to attend due to staffing ratios, if the school remains open, but should this be the case, decisions will be made according to the nature of relationships between people and the person who has died.

Children may express a wish to attend or take part in the funeral service, but they should only do so with the prior agreement of the deceased's family, relatives or next of kin, as well as the agreement of their own families. Consideration will need to be given as to their supervision and decisions made as to whether they attend with their families or as part of a school group.

## **After a Bereavement**

For a bereaved child or member of staff, returning to school can be traumatic. It is an indication that life is "normal" yet their lives feel anything but.

- It may be helpful to meet with the child and family to discuss their return to school. The purpose of this meeting should:
  - Acknowledge the death.
  - Find out how the child would like to share the news.

- Ask if the child would like to choose a member of staff with whom they feel they have a close attachment to be their point of contact within the school.
- Organise a safe space for the child to go if they feel overwhelmed by their grief and need 'time out'.
- Set guidelines for communication – with the child, with members of staff and between home and school.
- Consider providing support for peers when they have a bereaved friend
- Where there has been a close family bereavement, or following a meeting as suggested above, everyone (teachers, support staff, volunteers if appropriate and children) should be made aware of the situation before the child returns (provided the family agree).
- Teachers should try to foster an environment that is compassionate, yet disciplined. Family life at this time may be distressing with routines upset and the future uncertain. As such school routines should be kept as normal as possible.
- It should be noted that grief may impact a child's progress. Some children may work really hard and put themselves under extra pressure to succeed, while others may find it difficult to focus in class. There may be changes in behaviour that need to be managed.
- Staff should be aware of anniversaries and significant days such as Mothering Sunday or Fathers' Day as this can spark a revival of feelings of bereavement. There will also be other, more personal, dates such as a birthday or anniversary of death that it would be helpful to note, so that additional support can be given at these times.
- Over time it is helpful to share information about a child's circumstances so that they do not need to repeat their story at each transition point. Transitions can include, changing class, year or teacher or moving to a new school.
- It should be remembered that even when deeply sad, children still need to be children. Loss and grief are very grown up experiences. School offers the chance to play, laugh, sing and generally just be a child without feeling guilty.

## 6. Talking About Bereavement

People are often at a loss as to what to say or do to help a child who has been bereaved by the death of someone important to them. Every situation is different, and children will be affected to a greater or lesser degree, dependent on the circumstances of the death and the nature of the relationship they had with the person who has died. For a child who wishes to, school staff can provide an opportunity to talk about what has happened with a familiar and trusted adult in relative peace and calm. When a parent or sibling has died, children can try to spare their surviving parent by hiding their own grief and appearing to be OK. School is often seen as somewhere safe to express this grief. The following guidance may be useful:

- **Do not avoid the subject** – it can make matters worse. It is better to explain what has happened in a sensitive way to avoid rumours and whispers. Use the correct words 'death' and 'dead' rather than euphemisms such as 'lost', 'passed' or 'gone to sleep'.
- **Try not to judge** – grief is a very personal experience. Every child and young person will grieve differently, even those from the same family. Teenagers in particular resent assumptions being made as to how they should be feeling and what they should be doing.
- **Check out the facts** – staff should familiarise themselves with the circumstances surrounding the death. Communicate with the family and make sure that what is said will not conflict with the family's wishes. Different information from home and school will confuse a child and complicate their grief.
- **Acknowledge what has happened.** Do not be afraid to use the word 'death', 'I was very sorry to hear of the death of your ...'. A card to a bereaved child from his/her class is often appreciated and helps to keep up contact with school if they are not attending.

- **Responses will vary** – adults should not assume that a lack of reaction means that they do not care. Initially, the full reality may not have sunk in. Young people can feel that they have to be seen to be coping as a sign of maturity. They should be allowed to express emotion and feelings and staff should not be afraid to share their own feelings of sadness.
- **Children and young people need honesty**. Although sometimes difficult, it is better to answer questions truthfully. If a child asks a difficult question, rather than answering straight away, ask the child what they think.
- **Be prepared to listen** – schools are busy places and time may be limited, but an offer to spend a bit of quiet time with a child who clearly wants to talk will be greatly appreciated. Some will welcome the opportunity to just sit with a teacher and say nothing; for others it is enough to know that someone is keeping a look out for them. If teachers are discussing something in class that will refer to the person who has died, they should not be afraid to do so. Avoiding references to the person who died might be perceived as a denial they ever existed. If not sure, teachers should check with the bereaved child first, letting them know their intention.

See Appendix 6 for guidance on talking about death to children with learning difficulties.

## 7. Remembering

It may be appropriate and/or desired by the family to have a more lasting memorial in school. The Headteacher or nominated person may wish to discuss suggestions for how to remember the deceased, for example a tree, special garden, piece of artwork or a bench. Children may also wish to be involved with plans. There will need to be an awareness of sensitivities of any future requirement for removal, relocation or replacement. See Appendix 7 for memorialisation ideas.

## 8. Terminally Ill Child or Member of Staff

Anticipated death can be as hard to deal with as sudden and unanticipated loss. Children and adults who are not expected to live may benefit enormously from normal routines such as attending school whilst they are still able to do so. This can present challenges for the school community. Sensitive but honest communication between the family and professionals involved will help overcome most of these challenges. In the event of a child or member of staff becoming terminally ill, their wishes and those of their parents/guardians/next-of-kin should always be respected. However, the following guidance is useful:

- Children and adults who are constantly in and out of hospital should be welcome to attend school as far as their illness allows, to give an opportunity to have some normality in their lives. Continuing to take part in school routines as much as possible can give a feeling of achievement, with the emphasis on living rather than dying. It can also give back a sense of identity as a person rather than a patient.
- For children, the school and family, including the sick child, should decide together how to share the news that a child is terminally ill. It is not easy, but an open and honest approach is usually the best way.
- Classmates who have had the situation explained to them may be supported by being involved, such as giving them by giving them jobs such as wheelchair pushing. These tasks should be shared and not become the responsibility of just one child.
- If the child is receiving treatment from a local hospice or hospital, it may be possible to call on a nurse or social worker whose job includes visiting schools to explain to children about a friend's illness and treatments involved. This should help alleviate any worries that fellow children may have. It is helpful for the school to at least identify the key professional responsible for the ill child and how to contact the professional for advice and support.
- Young people deal with difficult situations much better when truthful explanations are given regarding absences, changing appearance, lack of energy, treatments and exclusion from activities

such as sport. Being naturally curious, classmates will ask questions, and these should be answered sensitively but factually.

- On occasions the child may wish to talk to their fellow classmates about their illness themselves. Honesty about death and dying may be the best line of approach. However, the class teacher should be prepared to answer questions and reassure children.
- Teachers should aim to further maintain a sense of normality by continuing to expect usual standards of behaviour within the child's limitations.
- The school will offer information to parents and carers on what to say to children when someone is dying. They may have concerns surrounding their own children being upset or made anxious by a classmate who is seriously ill. It can help to give reassurance that children and young people will have fewer anxieties if presented with the truth, rather than having to make up what is happening. With consent from the family of the sick child, information on the illness and treatments will help other parents and carers to understand and feel informed. The realisation that their children are contributing to an increased quality of life for the sick child may create a more positive approach.
- Teachers should try to support children by taking a lead in helping the class decide how to deal with an anticipated death. For example, the question of what should be done with the child's desk and the child's school work needs to be considered as well as how to ensure that the child's memory is preserved.

## **9. Other Circumstances**

Every death is hugely personal and unique to those affected by it, however it occurs and for whatever reason. Further information on how to support death due to different circumstances can be found at [www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org). A list of other resources can be found in Appendix 4.



## Appendix 1: Suggested Template for Letter to Parents

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Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a child, 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

### Sample Letter on the Death of a Child

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the death of (name) a child in (year group)

(Name) died from an illness called cancer. As you may be aware, many children who have cancer get better but sadly (name) had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday.

He/She was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her. When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try to answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we would be more than willing 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)

Headteacher

### Sample Letter on Death of a Staff Member

Dear Parents

I am sorry to have to tell you that a much-loved member of our staff (name) has died.

The children were told today and many will have been quite distressed at the news. No-one wants to see children sad, but we are very aware that factual information and emotional support are the best means of helping children deal with bereavement. I am sure there will be many parents who are also saddened by the news.

Children respond in different ways so may dip in and out of sadness, and questions, whilst alternately playing or participating in their usual activities. This is normal and healthy. You may find your child has questions to ask which we will answer in school in a way appropriate to their level of understanding, but if you feel you would like more support and advice yourself, please do not hesitate to contact the school office. You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk). We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Children who wish to attend will be welcome to do so, though it will not be compulsory. It is likely that school will be closed on the morning or afternoon of the funeral as staff will, of course, wish to pay their respects to a very popular colleague.

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

Yours sincerely

(Name)

Headteacher

### **Sample Letter to Bereaved Family**

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear of (name'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/her very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to his/her friends and classmates. He/She was a much-loved member of our school family. If we can do anything to help as you plan (name's) funeral service or other memorial opportunities, please let us know. In time, we will also ensure that anything of (name'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,

(Name)

Headteacher

## **Appendix 2: Children's Understanding of Death (from Child Bereavement UK)**

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Children and young people mature at different rates and their understanding and responses to bereavement are likely to be based as much on their experience of life as on their chronological age. The age categories given are guidelines only.

### **2-5 years**

Young children are interested in the idea of death in birds and animals. They can begin to use the word 'dead' and develop an awareness that this is different to being alive. Children of this age do not understand abstract concepts like 'forever' and cannot grasp that death is permanent. Their limited understanding may lead to an apparent lack of reaction when told about a death, and they may ask many questions about where the person who has died is and when that person will come back.

Children at this age expect the person to return. Young children tend to interpret what they are told in a literal and concrete way; therefore, it is important to avoid offering explanations of death such as 'lost', 'gone away' or 'gone to sleep' that may cause misunderstandings and confusion. Provide honest answers to their questions but do not feel you have to tell them everything in detail or all at once. Information can be built on over time.

Children may have disrupted sleep, altered appetite, less interest in play and may become more anxious about separation even when being left with familiar adults. There may be regression in skills such as language or toilet training.

### **Children of Primary School Age**

Between the ages of 5 and 7 years, children gradually begin to develop an understanding that death is permanent and irreversible and that the person who has died will not return. Children who have been bereaved when they were younger will have to re-process what has happened as they develop awareness of the finality of death.

Children's imagination and 'magical thinking' at this age can mean that some children may believe that their thoughts or actions caused the death, and they can feel guilty. Not being given sufficient information in age-appropriate language can lead them to make up and fill in the gaps in their knowledge.

Children increasingly become aware that death is an inevitable part of life that happens to all living things. As a result, they can become anxious about their own, and others', health and safety.

Children at this age need honest answers to their questions that can be built on over time, and opportunities to express their feelings. They can need reassurance that nothing they said or thought caused the death.

### **Teenagers**

Adolescence is a time of great change and grief impacts on the developmental task of moving from dependence to independence. Young people are moving from familial ties to increased involvement with peers. It can be difficult to ask for support while trying to demonstrate independence. Young people do not like to feel different from their peers in any way and being a bereaved young person can be extremely isolating. The support of peers with similar experiences can be very powerful.

Teenagers will have an adult understanding of the concept of death but often have their own beliefs and strongly held views, and may challenge the beliefs and explanations offered by others.

Some young people may respond to a death by becoming more withdrawn, some may 'act out' their distress while others cope with the awareness of their own mortality through risk-taking behaviour in an attempt to get back some control where life feels out of control for them. Others may take on adult responsibilities and become 'the carer' for those around them. Keeping to the usual boundaries of acceptable behaviour can be reassuring for bereaved young people.

Young people who have been bereaved at an earlier age may need to re-process their grief as they think about and plan for their future and fully understand the impact of life without the person who died.

### **Appendix 3: Guidance on Imparting News About a Bereavement**

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#### **Guidelines for Breaking News About a Death to Staff**

- Arrange a staff meeting which should take place as soon as possible.
- Impart factual information. Never make assumptions or repeat what has been said by rumour. Give news sensitively and empathetically, being aware that people may react in different ways.
- Be aware of the relationships staff may have had with the person who has died.
- Other members of the school community should also be informed, such as:
  - Part time staff not in school that day;
  - Other departments, for example cleaning, catering;
  - Previous school staff who worked closely with the child or teacher;
  - Any other professionals who may have been involved, for example Educational Psychologist.
- Consider the best way of imparting the information to those absent for example by doing home visit, by telephone, text or e-mail etc.
- Identify individual members of staff who feel able to: a) support members of staff b) support groups of children. The most appropriate person to support the children should be well known to them and trusted.
- Identify a member of staff who will liaise with the individual's family, to deal with staff condolences and any funeral arrangements (if necessary).
- Identify an appropriate member of staff who will take phone calls and/or direct them as appropriate. Try to establish a "protected" telephone line to ensure free flow of accurate information. Telephone line providers may provide an additional line if the situation requires one.
- Arrange a staff meeting at the end of the day to ensure staff are coping with the situation.
- Identify any unresolved problems or ongoing issues.
- Ensure that those staff who live alone have contact numbers of friends in case of need.
- Identify sources of advice and support to access for help in coming to terms with the bereavement.

#### **Guidelines for Breaking News of the Death to the Children**

- Inform the children as soon as possible about the death.
- Where possible, the children should be informed in small groups i.e. class groups.
- Identify those children who had a long term and/or close relationship with the person who has died so they can be told separately. If appropriate, a special assembly could be held at a later time in the day to remember the person who has died.
- Start by acknowledging that you have some sad news to give.
- Be honest. Give the news stating simple facts, using the words 'dead/died', not euphemisms
- If known, and with the permission of the family, explain briefly where and when the death occurred.
- If facts are not known, say so, and that you will endeavour to find out. If rumours are rife, say which of these are not correct, if known. Where appropriate, remind children of their responsibilities and the impact of posting on social media.
- Allow the children to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.
- Allow the children to verbalise their feelings.

- Allow the children to discuss the situation and share their experiences of death.
- Be honest about your own feelings and talk about your relationship with the person without eulogising them.
- Those children who have had more involvement with the person should be given the opportunity to share their feelings and experiences either within the group or on a one-to-one situation.
- Ensure the children understand that the death is nothing to do with anything they have said or done. It is in no way their fault.
- Reassure them that not all people who are ill or have had an accident will die and that many people get better.
- Acknowledge that not everyone will be feeling sad and that is okay
- Put an appropriate time limit on the discussion.
- Conclude the discussion with a prayer or special poem to remember the person who has died and their family.
- Allow a break in the timetable for children to process the news and take a little time out.
- If appropriate give children something practical and positive to do such as making cards, contributing to a book of condolence, writing or drawing messages, creating a piece of artwork
- Be available for any child who needs additional help and support.

## Appendix 4: Useful Resources and Links for Responding to Bereavement

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### Child Bereavement UK

Website: [www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)

Email: email: [helpline@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:helpline@childbereavementuk.org)

Helpline: 08000 288 840 (9am-5pm, Monday to Friday)

Live Chat: via website (9am-5pm, Monday to Friday)

### Winston's Wish

Website: [www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)

Helpline: 08088 020 021 (8am-8pm, Monday to Friday)

### Cruse Bereavement Care

Website: [www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk)

Helpline: 08088 081 677

### UK Trauma Council

<https://uktraumacouncil.org/resources/traumatic-bereavement>

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## Books Dealing with Death and Loss

### Under 5 Years

*Missing Mummy* by Rebecca Cobb – Beautifully illustrated and with moments of wonderful warmth, this is a touching, honest and helpful book about the death of a parent. With minimal text, it covers some of the worries and fears that a young child may have after a death, offering reassurance and hope.

*I miss you* by Pat Thomas – This book helps children understand that death is a natural complement to life, and that grief and a sense of loss are normal feelings for them to have.

*When Dinosaurs Die – A guide to understanding death* by Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown – A comprehensive, sensitive guide for families dealing with the loss of loved ones.

*What Does Dead Mean?* by Caroline Jay and Jenni Thomas – A book for young children to help explain death and dying, based on the many questions that children ask. This book looks at questions such as why 'Why can't doctors and nurses make people better?', and offers practical help for children, as well as guidance for parents and carers when a child is bereaved.

*Is Daddy Coming Back in a Minute?* by Elke Barber & Alex Barber – Alex is only three when his father has a heart attack. All on his own, Alex manages to get help but his beloved Daddy dies at the scene. Explains sudden death to pre-school children using words and illustrations they will understand.

*Suzie Goes to a Funeral* by Charlotte Olson – Join Suzie as she goes to Grandma's funeral and says goodbye. Suzie can help explain to a child who may be anxious about going to a funeral for the first time.

### 5 – 11 Years

*Waterbugs and Dragonflies: Explaining Death to Young Children* by Doris Stickney – Written from a Christian perspective, this acclaimed book can be used to help explain the concept of death to young children. The story illustrates that death is inevitable, irreversible but natural.

*Badger's Parting Gifts* by Susan Varley – After Badger dies his friends gradually come to terms with their grief by remembering all the practical things Badger taught them, and so Badger lives on in his friends' memories of him.

*Ben's Flying Flowers* by Inger Maier – When Emily loses her brother after a long illness, she feels alone, angry, and very, very sad. With the understanding and support of her parents, Emily learns what helps her

sadness and also learns that remembering Ben and their happy life together builds healthy and helpful images that soothes her sad feelings and provide much comfort to her and her family.

*Michael Rosen's Sad Book by Michael Rosen* – A very personal story that speaks to adults as well as children. The author describes feeling sad after the death of his son and what he does to try to cope with it.

*Goodbye Mog by Judith Kerr* – The final book about Mog the forgetful cat. It tells how her family grieve her loss and then begin to move forward in their lives, while always remembering their beloved pet.

*The Tenth Good Thing about Barney by Judith Viorst* – A book looking about death from the perspective of a child. Though dealing with the death of a pet, it helps children deal with the reality of any death, including why we have funerals. This book does not have religious overtones, so it can be used by families with all different sets of beliefs.

*Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine: Your Activity Book to Help When Someone Has Died by Winston's Wish* – Offering practical and sensitive support for bereaved children, this book suggests a helpful series of activities and exercises and aims to help children make sense of their experience by reflecting on different aspects of their grief.

*Mum's Jumper by Jayde Perkin* – If Mum has gone, how do you carry on? Missing her feels like a dark cloud that follows you around or like swimming to a shore that never comes any nearer. But memories are like a jumper that you can cuddle and wear. And Mum's jumper might be a way to keep her close.

*The Memory Tree by Britta Teckentrup* – After fox dies his friends begin to gather in the clearing. As they share their memories, a tree begins to grow, becoming bigger and stronger, sheltering and protecting all the animals in the forest, just as Fox did when he was alive. This gentle and comforting tale celebrates life and the memories that are left behind when a loved one dies.

*I Miss My Sister by Sarah Courtauld* – The beautiful and expressive colour illustrations help to guide the child through the different emotions they may encounter following the death of a sibling, as well as the different categories of grief over a period of time.

### **When a Grandparent Has Died**

*Granpa by John Burningham* – Winner of the Kate Maschler Award, this poignant tale of friendship and loss is one children will long remember.

*Grandad's Ashes by Walter Smith* – This beautifully illustrated picture book for children aged four to eight tells the story of four children who embark on an adventure to find their Grandad's favourite place.

*Grandad's Bench by Addy Farmer* – This is a beautiful, sensitively told story of love and loss and of a special relationship between grandfather and grandson.

## **Appendix 5: Cultural and Religious Considerations**

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### **Different Cultures and Beliefs**

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

### **General points for Eastern Faiths**

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

The following descriptions seek to give an overview of the major religions and belief systems that are found in the UK.

### **Islam**

Muslims believe in life after death when, on the Last Day, the dead will come back to life to be judged by Allah. The good will reside in Paradise, the damned in Hell. Muhammad teaches that all men and women are to serve Allah and that they should try to live perfectly, following the Qur`an. Devout Muslims believe that death is a part of Allah's plan and open expressions of grief may be viewed as disrespectful to this belief.

As cremation is forbidden, Muslims are always buried, ideally within 24 hours of the death. Ritual washing is usually performed by the family or close friends at the undertakers or mortuary. They will wrap the body in a clean cloth or shroud. The coffin is often very plain as traditionally one would not be used. The grave is aligned to enable the head of the deceased to be placed facing the holy city of Mecca. Muslim graves are unmarked but to meet UK requirements, a simple headstone is used as a compromise.

There is an official mourning period of three days when the family will remain at home and be brought food by friends and relatives. For forty days after the funeral relatives may wish to make regular visits to the grave on Fridays.

### **Hinduism**

Hindus believe in reincarnation and a cycle of rebirths. When a person dies, the soul is reborn in a new body, returning to earth in either a better or worse form. What a person does in this life will influence what happens to them in the next – the law of Karma. Those that have performed good deeds in this life will be reborn into higher order families, those whose behaviour has been bad will be born again as outcasts.

A Hindu funeral is as much a celebration as a remembrance service. Hindus cremate their dead as it is the soul that has importance, not the body which is no longer needed. White is the traditional colour and mourners usually wear traditional Indian garments. If attending, it may be worth asking what will be appropriate dress. During the service, offerings such as flowers or sweetmeats may be passed around and bells rung so noise is a part of the ritual. The chief mourner, usually the eldest son, and other male members of the family, may shave their heads as a mark of respect. In India, the chief mourner would light



the funeral pyre. Here, he will press the button to make the coffin disappear and, in some instances, may be permitted to ignite the cremator. Ashes may be taken back to India to be scattered on the River Ganges. In the UK, some areas of water have been designated as acceptable substitutes.

The mourning period lasts between two and five weeks.

### **Sikhism**

Sikhs believe the soul goes through a cycle of rebirths, with the ultimate objective being to reach perfection, to be reunited with God and, as a result, break the cycle. Thus, death holds no fear and mourning is done discretely. The present life is influenced by what happened in previous ones and the current life will set the scene for the next.

The deceased is cremated as soon as possible after death. The coffin is taken to the family home where it is left open for friends and family to pay their respects. It is then taken to the Gurdwara where hymns and prayers are sung. A short service follows at a crematorium, during which the eldest son presses the button for the coffin to move behind the curtain. In India, the eldest son would light the funeral pyre and no coffin would be used. After the funeral, a meal may be held at the Gurdwara. The ashes may be taken back to India to be scattered. Here they may be sprinkled in the sea or river.

The family remain in mourning for several days after the funeral and may listen to readings from the Guru Granth Sahib (Holy Book).

### **Buddhism**

Buddhists believe that nothing that exists is permanent and everything will ultimately cease to be. There is a belief in rebirth but not of a soul passing from one body to another. The rebirth is more a state of constantly changing being rather than a clear-cut reincarnation. The ultimate objective is to achieve a state of perfect peace and freedom. Buddhists try to approach death with great calmness, and an open-minded attitude of acceptance.

There are few formal traditions relating to funerals and they tend to be seen as non-religious events. Cremation is the generally accepted practice and the service is kept very simple. It may be conducted by a Buddhist monk or sometimes family members.

### **Christianity**

Christians believe that there is just one God and that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. They believe that Jesus died on the cross (The Crucifixion), and that three days later, God raised him from the dead (The Resurrection).

Christians believe in an afterlife and also the idea of resurrection but the details around what actually happens at the time of death and afterwards, varies within the different denominations. For some, as soon as a person dies, he or she is judged by God and will immediately go to Heaven or Hell, dependent on how good or bad a life they led. For Roman Catholics, there is a half-way place called Purgatory, where an impure soul can stay until fit to enter Heaven. Others believe in the Day of Judgement, when the world will end and the dead will return to life to be judged by God.

Within the different Christian denominations, there are many variations on what happens at a funeral. When someone dies, the body is taken to an undertaker who will carry out the necessary preparations for the body to be laid out. This is to enable those who wish to view it before it is placed in a coffin. The funeral,

organised by an undertaker, is about one week after the death. This usually takes place in a church, but sometimes a crematorium, or a combination of the two. The coffin will remain closed. Wreaths or bunches of flowers may be placed on the coffin. It is traditional to wear black but this custom varies. If held in a church, the funeral service may include a Holy Communion, Eucharist or Mass. The body will either be buried or cremated, dependent on the wishes of the deceased and the family. A churchyard grave is often marked by a headstone but for a cremation, the family may choose a more informal way to mark where the ashes are buried or have been scattered.

## **Humanism**

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

## **Resources**

*Death and Bereavement Across Cultures by Murray, Laungani, Pittu and Young*

This book covers rites, rituals and mourning traditions for adults and children from the major religious and secular belief systems. Published by Routledge.

*Supporting Young People Coping with Grief, Loss and Death by Weymont and Rae*

A programme designed to be delivered to groups or whole classes of secondary school students which includes a section on Beliefs and Customs. The session encourages students to explore how the concept of death varies according to different religions and cultures. Information is given on the main world religions and belief systems. Photocopiable work sheets and handouts are included.

## Appendix 6: Talking About Death to Children with Learning Difficulties

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

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

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

## Appendix 7: Memorialisation Ideas

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- Be aware of significant dates – Christmas, Mothers' Day etc. – but also anniversaries, birthdays.
- Memory boxes can be constructed to contain mementoes and items of significance.
- Family trees and Life Story work can help to reiterate and reinforce the child's experiences.
- Art and craft work – memory mobiles; salt jars; decorating photo-frames; creating a collage; 'comfort cushions' made from a favourite item of clothing.... many ideas to express feelings and assist understanding.
- Releasing balloons; celebrating special days; lighting candles; visiting a memorial site.
- Collate group responses to a loss to help in understanding of shared grief.
- Plant flowers; create a memory garden.

In an environment where further deaths may be experienced (schools with children with life-limiting conditions) it would be wise to consider a realistic approach to memorialisation for example, names on stones to be added to a water feature – rather than naming rooms after a specific person.