

# Harrow Lodge Primary School



## BEREAVEMENT POLICY

<b>REVIEWED:</b>	<b>Summer 2023</b>
<b>APPROVED (L&amp;M):</b>	<b>Autumn 2023</b>
<b>EFFECTIVE PERIOD:</b>	<b>Autumn 2023-Autumn 2026</b>
<b>DUE FOR REVIEW:</b>	<b>Summer 2026</b>
<b>RESPONSIBLE PERSON:</b>	<b>Mrs S Boyes</b>

**SIGNED BY CHAIR OF GOVERNORS**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Boyes', is written over a horizontal line.

Name of School	<b>Harrow Lodge Primary School</b>
Date of Policy	<b>Summer 2023</b>
Member(s) of Staff responsible for Supporting Bereavement	<b>Sarah Boyes</b>
Member(s) of the Governing Body responsible for Supporting Bereavement	<b>Sarah Cole</b>
Date for Review	<b>Summer 2024</b>

**Rationale:**

We understand that bereavement and loss can be faced by members of our school community at any time.

Within a school community there will almost certainly be some pupils who have experienced bereavement-or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil.

However, as we return to school following the disruption caused by the recent pandemic, we are aware that even more members of our school community may have been touched by bereavement and loss; with many losing family members, close friends, fellow pupils or members of school staff during these challenging times.

Every death and the circumstances in which it occurs is different and this policy has been created to guide all members of our school staff on how to deal professionally, sensitively and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances.

Our school is committed to supporting the emotional health and well-being of every member of our school community and this policy outlines the practical measures we will take to create an ethos and environment that supports any individual, or the whole school community, as they cope with the loss of a loved one.

**Aims and Objectives:**

The purpose of the Bereavement Policy is to help everyone involved at a time when there may be shock, upset and confusion, ensuring that there is as little disruption as possible, effective communication takes place and each member of the school community is supported to help them through a very difficult time.

By:

- Giving guidance on how to deal sensitively and compassionately with bereavement.
- Providing appropriate support to any child, parent or staff member before (where applicable), during and after bereavement.
- Encouraging the whole school community to work together, with outside agencies as appropriate, to support each other.
- Providing staff with time and space to work through their own feelings and access support when needed
- Giving children the opportunity to tell their story, express their feelings, share their memories and develop coping strategies through the on-going support of sensitive staff.
- Outlining clear expectations about the way the school will respond to the death, including staff responsibilities and effective communication
- Ensuring a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.

## **Roles and responsibilities:**

### **Lead Staff Member**

The designated person within the school who has overall responsibility for support and liaison in the event of a death or traumatic loss is **Sarah Boyes (SENCO)**

In the event that this person is absent then another member of the Senior Leadership Team will take responsibility.

Responsibilities are:

- Policy development and review, involving pupils, staff, governors, parents/carers and relevant local agencies.
- Implementing the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities.
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies who can provide support.
- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff.

### **Lead Governor**

The nominated Governor with responsibility for bereavement is **Sarah Cole**

Responsibilities are:

- To contribute to generating and updating the policy.
- To support the Head teacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is managed.
- To support the Head teacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is delivered in  
in
- the curriculum.
- To review practice.

## **Section 1 – Responding to the death of a pupil or member of staff**

The response of the school to a bereavement could be thought of in terms of stages over time.

### **Short term considerations:**

- Aim to establish the facts – to avoid the spread of gossip and rumours
- Make contact with the family to express condolences
- Find out, if possible how the family would like the information to be managed by the school
  - Make sure all staff have the same version of event/information
- Decide whether to inform children through assemblies, class groups etc
- The child's/ teacher's class and friendship group are likely to require a more personalised response
- Are there siblings or extended family at school?
- Are there any 'special circumstances' that are significant?
- Are there any cultural/religious dimensions to consider?
- Are there any practical implications for the day to day running of the school?

### **Medium term considerations:**

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

### **Longer term considerations:**

- Curriculum approaches to consider mortality and bereavement
- Be aware of anniversaries, particularly for siblings or close friends
- Continued support available for all who may need it

### **Guidelines for breaking news about a death to staff and Governors**

- 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.
- Ensure that there is someone responsible for telling people who are unable to attend the staff meeting i.e. part time staff, peripatetic staff, lunchtime supervisors. Consider the best way of imparting the information to those absent e.g. by doing home visit, by telephone, text or e-mail etc.
- Identify individual members of staff who feel able to:
  - support members of staff
  - 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.
- Identify a member of staff who will provide a letter for parents (*See Appendix C- Suggested templates for letters to parents/carers*) which should be sent the same day.
- 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

*(See Appendix A- Sources of further advice and support)*

### **Guidelines for breaking news of the death to the children/young people**

- Inform the children/young people as soon as possible about the death.
- Where possible, the pupils should be informed in small groups i.e. class or tutor 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.
- Allow the children/young people to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.
- Allow the children/young people to verbalise their feelings.
- Allow the children/young people to discuss the situation and share their experiences of death.
- Be honest about your own feelings and talk about your relationship with the person.
- Avoid using euphemisms- give the news stating simple facts, use the words dead/died.

- Those children/young people 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/young people 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.
- Put an appropriate time limit on the discussion. It is preferable to resume normal school activities as soon as possible thus ensuring minimal disruption within the school.
- Conclude the discussion with a prayer/special poem/period of reflection to remember the person who has died and their family.
- Be available for any child/young person who needs additional help and support.  
*(See Appendix A- Sources of further advice and support)*

### **Things to consider in the days following the news of the death**

- It is important to consider any cultural or religious implications and seek advice if necessary.
- Ensure nominated staff with responsibilities for supporting staff and children, are available to do so.
- It may be necessary temporarily to provide staff cover for their normal activities.
- Identify an allocated quiet place where children, young people and staff can go if necessary.
- It is preferable for there to be minimum disruption to the timetable but some flexibility may be required.
- Try to engender an awareness of when people need help and support, particularly those who worked closely with the person who has died and secretaries/ administrative staff who are taking telephone calls, dealing with parents etc.
- Through the nominated staff member who has responsibilities for liaising with the individual's family, ascertain their wishes about the school's involvement in the funeral, if any.

### **Things to consider on the day of the Funeral**

It is essential to liaise with the family and ascertain their wishes. The family may well welcome the involvement of members of the school community but equally, they may wish to keep things private.

Consider practical issues like:-

- Putting an obituary in the paper, sending flowers to the home or to the funeral, making a collection etc.
- Who will attend the funeral, making a collection etc.
- Cover for any staff who may be going to the funeral.
- Transport to and from the funeral.
- Informing the parents of those pupils who will be involved.
- Possible closure of the school. If this is the case remember to tell lunchtime supervisors, caretaker etc in advance.

It is important to note that at the current time there may be restrictions on the number of people who are able to attend the funeral, and in the current circumstances, families may not be able to mourn the death of their loved one by organising a traditional funeral.

This makes other ways of remembering and celebrating the deceased person's life even more important to those grieving and a valuable way to help them cope with their loss.

Schools may consider holding a memorial service at a later date to celebrate the deceased person's life and achievements. It might also be appropriate to plant a tree, create a memorial garden or quiet reflection area as a way to remember the person. *(See Appendix F Child Bereavement UK Schools Resource Pack for more ideas on celebrating someone's life)* or visit: <https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-funerals-alternative-goodbyes/> )

## **On-Going Support**

### **For staff:**

*(See Appendix E- Child Bereavement UK Guidance on supporting staff)*

Being alongside anyone experiencing a loss can be emotionally draining, and supporting a bereaved pupil particularly so. At certain points in time, some members of staff may be more vulnerable due to circumstances in their own lives. Consider how school can support these members of staff and whether there is capacity to utilise other staff members to help share the load.

Following bereavement, it is only to be expected that some members of staff will be emotionally affected and would benefit from the provision of some time for reflection. The following support may be helpful:

- A specific room could be allocated- e.g. the Meeting Room - for the duration of a lunchtime to enable staff to meet and share their thoughts over a coffee or tea. It should be emphasised that anything shared on such occasions should be held as confidential and not for public airing.
- Access to one to one time with a member of staff who is trained in bereavement support.
- Access to external support services who can offer bereavement counselling in school, such as Havering and Brentwood Bereavement Service / The Educational Psychology Team
- Availability of information about accessing bereavement support outside of school *(See Appendix A-Sources of further advice and support)*

### **For the Family:**

Each family will be different, with differing needs. Therefore, the school will need to consider how best they can be there to act as a source of support and information.

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support. Send a letter of condolence from the school.  
*(See Appendix C-Suggested templates for letters to parents / carers)*
- Give parents and family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died.
- Send a representative to the funeral-If possible and permitted by the family.
- Hold a collection /flowers to be sent as appropriate.
- Invite parents/family to any commemorative events held by the school, both at the time and in subsequent years.
- If memorial work has been completed, for example a remembrance wall or book, then this should be returned to the parents at an appropriate time, and pupils informed where it has gone.
- If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed.
- It will then be for the parents to decide if they wish to maintain on going links with the school.

## **Section 2 – Ongoing Support for a bereaved pupil**

### **Returning to school following a bereavement**

For the bereaved child or member of staff, returning to school may be traumatic.

- Where there has been a close family bereavement, in most cases everyone (teaching, support staff, volunteers if appropriate and pupils) should be made aware of the situation before the pupil returns (providing the parents/guardians of the bereaved pupil agree)
- Staff should show appropriate compassion and allow expression to those suffering grief.
- Teachers should try to foster an environment that is compassionate, yet disciplined
- Family life at this traumatic time, can be particularly distressing, routines upset, relationships strained, the future uncertain. For this reason, school routines should be kept as normal as possible in order to provide a respite.
- Staff should be aware of anniversaries as this can spark a revival of feelings of bereavement.
- Try to be available to listen and support if possible, arrange a one-to-one session with the School Counsellor / Learning Mentor / Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) / SENCO as soon as possible after the pupil returns to school.
- Be calm and show them that you are listening and understanding by occasionally repeating what they have said and by acknowledging their emotions.
- If people feel like crying they should cry – crying is not a sign of weakness, but often a sign of deep feeling.
- Beware of using platitudes eg “I know how you feel”, (young people may feel offended that you presume how they feel).

#### **Do:**

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

#### **Don't:**

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

Whether a pupil is returning to school quickly or after a period of absence, staff should ensure that there are systems in place to support them.

For example:

- Time out cards – special cards giving the young person permission to leave the class when feeling overwhelmed and/or emotional.
  - Access to a quiet space for time out and reflection if required.
  - Regular opportunities to talk to staff- using appropriate books / resources as a prompt for these discussions  
*(See Appendix B- Useful books covering the themes of Bereavement and Loss)*
  - Making more intensive support from the school counsellor or specialist external services available to them if needed. *(See Appendix A-Sources of further advice and support)*
- Grief is a very personal experience, every child and young person will experience it differently, give them the time and space to deal with their feelings in their own way.  
*(See Appendix D- CRUSE Guidance on supporting bereaved pupils)*

For useful advice for practical ways in which bereaved children and young people can be supported in school visit the following links:

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/primary-schools-supporting-bereaved-children>

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/secondary-schools-supporting-bereaved-children>

## **Transitions**

There are many transitions that take place in a pupil's journey through school. It is important that there are clear protocols in place to ensure that relevant details of a pupil's circumstances are passed on so they do not need to repeat their story at each transition point.

Transitions could include:

- Changing school
- Moving from Infant to Junior School (from KS1 to KS2) /Moving from Primary to Secondary School (from KS2 to KS3) / Moving from Secondary to Sixth Form / College (from KS4 to KS5)
- Moving class
- Teacher changes

## **Children's Understanding of Death**

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 below are guidelines only:

### **2-5 Years**

Young children may be beginning to understand the concept of death, but do not appreciate its finality. Some may not appreciate the permanence of death: 'Shall we dig granny up now?' They think in literal and concrete terms and so will be confused by euphemisms for death such as 'gone away' or 'gone to sleep'. Children of this age may well require repeated explanations of what has happened. As their thinking is very much centred on themselves, they may consider that something they did or said caused the death. They are prone to fantasise at this age and if not told what is happening may dream up something scarier than reality.



### **5-8 Years**

At about five years of age most children are beginning to realise that dead people are different from those who are alive, that they do not feel, they cannot hear, see, smell or speak and they do not need to eat or drink. At around seven years of age the majority of children accept that death is permanent and that it can happen to anyone. This can result in separation anxiety. They are better-able to express their thoughts and feelings but may conceal them and outwardly appear unaffected. They need to be given an opportunity to ask questions and to be given as much information as possible to allow them to adjust. They are likely to be very interested in the rituals surrounding death.

### **8-12 Years**

At this age children's understanding of death almost matches that of an adult, although they find it difficult to grasp abstract concepts. An important factor is their deepening realisation of the inevitability of death and an increasing awareness of their own mortality. This can result in fear and insecurity.

Their need to know details continues, and they will seek answers to very specific questions.

### **Adolescence**

The struggle for independence at this age may cause bereaved teenagers to challenge the beliefs and expectations of others as to how they should be feeling or behaving. Death increases anxieties about the future, and they may question the meaning of life and experience depression.

Teenagers may find it easier to discuss their feelings with a sympathetic friend or adult than with a close family member. They may be having difficulty coming to terms with their own mortality and that of those close to them. They may cope with this by refusing to contemplate the possibility of death by taking part in risk-taking behaviour. Anger makes up a large part of their grief, often compounded by a sense of injustice.

### **Common Signs of Grief:**

It is important to understand that grief is a very personal experience, every child and young person will experience it differently. It is important to give them the time and space to deal with their feelings in their own way.

You may notice some of the following changes in behaviour, which are all normal as long as they do not continue for too long:

- Change in behaviour, perhaps becoming unnaturally quiet and withdrawn or unusually aggressive.
- Anger is a common response at all ages and may be directed at people or events which have no connection to the death.
- Disturbed sleep and bad dreams.
- Anxiety demonstrated by clingy behaviour and a reluctance to be separated from parents or carers.
- Being easily upset by events that would normally be trivial to them.
- Difficulty concentrating, being forgetful and generally 'not with it.' This makes school work particularly difficult and academic performance may suffer. Older children may feel that there is no point in working hard at school and they might lose a general sense of purpose in their lives.
- Physical complaints, such as headaches, stomach aches and a general tendency to be run down and prone to minor illness.
- Older pupils may engage in risk-taking behaviours and openly challenge authority.

### **Local Sources for Further Advice and Support:**

It may be that some individuals need more specialist support and counselling over a longer period of time to come to terms with their grief. (See

[Appendix A- Sources of further advice and support](#))

### **Teaching about Loss and Bereavement in the Curriculum**

Alison Penny, Co-ordinator of the Child Bereavement Network, states *that “As well as helping prepare pupils for their own future experiences of loss, education can help dispel myths and taboos, and help children to know how to support their peers. This could reduce the bullying and isolation which bereaved children can experience, and encourage children to seek help for themselves or for friends if they are experiencing a bereavement. A school which teaches these topics is also likely to be better prepared if there is a death in the school community (e.g. a pupil, parent or staff member). Schools which have experienced a death in the school community often wish they had been better prepared.”*

We deliver lessons on Bereavement and Loss as part of our PSHE curriculum. We use a spiral curriculum approach to deliver these topics, ensuring that the following themes are taught and revisited each year; developing each theme in more detail in line with the pupils’ age and maturity.

Our curriculum covers the following topics:

**Differences and changes in families:** The death of a family member is only one of the differences in family make-up which children will be aware of. Acquiring an understanding of diversity and change in families is important in helping children contextualise loss, death and bereavement. It is important that pupils appreciate that during our lives will all experience loss; from losing a favourite toy, the death of a family pet, the loss of a best friend, loss incurred through family break-ups to bereavement.

**Life cycles and understanding death:** Understanding death is complex and involves considering questions such as “What does dead mean? Why do people die? What happens when someone dies? Where do they go? Will I see them again?” However, pupils also need to consider the religious and cultural implications of death, alongside a purely biological concept of death. It is important for them to consider ways in which relationships are maintained with someone even after they have died.

**Understanding/managing feelings and seeking help:** Coping with loss, death and bereavement includes dealing with a range of feelings which might include sadness, anger, fear, relief. Being able to recognise and describe feelings is an important first step to being able to manage them, and to empathise with others. Children may also learn about how feelings are linked to physical symptoms and behaviours, and about what to do when feelings are difficult or unmanageable.

Meeting the needs of all learners on a topic such as bereavement goes beyond the content of the programme of study. Curriculum development must be part of a whole-school approach, involving proactive and flexible pastoral support, a system for managing and communicating important information about bereavements, staff training and support, and policy development.

## **Appendix A- Sources of further advice and support:**

HBBS are a local non-profit making registered charity, who offer professional and confidential counselling to adults and children who are struggling to come to terms with bereavement or loss. They are able to offer support to individuals and to the wider school community in Havering. Contact Details: Contact Name Havering & Brentwood Bereavement Service Telephone 01708 476912/01277 283199 E-mail enquiries@hbbs.counselling.org Website <https://www.hbbscounselling.org/>

Child Bereavement UK help children and young people (up to age 25), parents, and families, to rebuild their lives when a child grieves or when a child dies. They also provide training to professionals, equipping them to provide the best possible care to bereaved families.

Contact Details: Contact Name Child Bereavement UK Telephone Call our Helpline 0800 02 888 40 Website <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Pages/Category/child-bereavement-uk-supportservices>

List of Online Resources and Information <http://bereavement.lgfl.org.uk/>  
Useful on-line resources “Managing a sudden death in the school community” produced by Child Bereavement UK in partnership with London Grid for Learning

[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk) A useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community.

[www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk) A bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss.

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-parents> An organisation offering local bereavement support to both adults and children.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/children-and-bereavement/> NHS Website offering practical advice on how to support grieving children and young people.

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief> Cruse Information on dealing with grief and bereavement as a result of Coronavirus.

<https://www.thegoodgrieftrust.org/need-know-info/coronavirus-bereavement-advice/> The Good Grief Trust-Advice on support available to those who have lost loved ones as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.

<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-funerals-alternative-goodbyes/> Suggestions for ‘Alternative Goodbyes’ when Funerals are not possible

## **Appendix B- Useful books covering the theme of bereavement / loss:**

### **Books and resources - early years**

The suggestions below are suitable to use with very young children to introduce the life cycle including the end of life, or to use when someone they know has died. Children under five may not fully understand the concept of death but will be very aware that something important has happened. They need simple and honest explanations, possibly repeated many times. The books below will help with this.

**I Miss My Sister Sarah Courtauld** Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop. A young girl's sister has died and the impact on her and her family is sensitively illustrated with minimum text. Designed to be shared with an adult, it will help to start conversations, answer questions and allay any fears.

**Missing Mummy Rebecca Cobb** Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop. Beautifully illustrated and with moments of wonderful warmth, this is a touching, honest and helpful book about the death of a parent. With minimum text, it touches on some of the worries and fears that a young child may have after a death, offering reassurance and hope.

**I Miss You: a First Look at Death Pat Thomas** This 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. It briefly covers a range of issues such as why people die, how you may feel when someone dies and what happens afterwards. A good one to use to introduce the subject.

**Goodbye Mousie Robie H Harris** The story of a young boy dealing with the death of his pet mouse is handled with the sure touch of an author familiar with children's tender emotions. Simply told by the boy, in a matter-of-fact tone with a dash of humour, he recounts his reactions to the death of his pet mouse.

**When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death Laurence Krasny Brown and Marc Brown** The authors explain in simple language the feelings people may have regarding the death of a loved one and the ways to honour the memory of someone who has died.

**Granpa John Burningham** This award-winning book is a beautifully written tale about the close and imaginative relationship between a little girl and her Granpa. The last page is an illustration of Granpa's empty chair with the little girl beside it looking very thoughtful. No explanation is offered but his death is implied. This nondirective approach enables the book to be used for a variety of situations.

### **Books and Resources - Key Stage 1 (5-7yrs)**

The suggestions below are suitable to use with young children to introduce the life cycle including the end of life, or to use when someone they know has died. Books can help children experiencing loss make some sense of confusing and sad emotions. They can also help children to feel less alone. Different books can be selected, and are appropriate for individual circumstances. The books marked \* are particularly suitable for reading during circle time. Always be prepared for children who may become upset. It is a good idea to let parents/carers know that you are introducing the subject of loss and bereavement.

\* **Badger's Parting Gifts** Susan Varley (also available in Urdu and Arabic) When old badger dies, his friends think they will be sad forever. Gradually they are able to remember Badger with joy and to treasure the gifts he left behind. Sensitively written, this book will help children identify and begin to understand feelings associated with the death of someone they love.

\***The Lonely Tree** Nicholas Halliday A story based on the life cycle in the natural world. The young tree is sad when his old friend the Oak dies but Spring brings joy to the little tree.

**Am I Like My Daddy?** Marcy Blesy This beautifully illustrated and poignant book will help children bereaved when very young who struggle to remember the parent who died. Grace is in the process of learning about who her father was. Through the eyes of others, she learns about who she is today. This book is American, but relevant to all.

**Heaven** Nicholas Allan While he is waiting for the angels to collect him, Dill the dog explains to Lily what he thinks heaven is like: hundreds of lampposts to pee against, lots of whiffy things to smell and bones everywhere. Lily completely disagrees. Luckily, they agree to disagree just in time for a poignant, last goodbye.

\* **Waterbugs and Dragonflies** D Stickney Written from a Christian perspective, this book can be used to help explain the concept of death to young children. The story illustrates that death is inevitable, irreversible but natural. It is presented as something sometimes difficult to understand but a happy experience for the deceased.

**Josh – coming to terms with the death of a friend** Stephanie Jeffs and Jacqui Thomas Josh's friend Max has died. The book explains with simple clarity not only what happens to the body of a dead person but also the Christian belief that we will be safe in heaven.

\* **Lifetimes** Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen A beautifully illustrated book which aims to help parents/ teachers explore the subjects of life and death.

\* **Dogger** Shirley Hughes A sensitively written story, with which adults and children will identify. It is about a little boy who loses his favourite toy 'Dogger' and describes his feelings and responses as a result. Useful as a gentle introduction to the subject of loss.

**When Uncle Bob Died** Althea A helpful book which in a simple way explains the facts surrounding death. It is honest but reassuring. A good book to read to a young child to prepare them for the death of someone close. Realistic illustrations.

**What does dead mean?** Caroline Jay and Jenni Thomas A beautifully illustrated book that guides children gently through 17 of the 'big' questions they often ask about death and dying. Suitable for children aged 4+, this is an ideal book for parents and carers to read with their children, as well as teachers, therapists and counsellors working with young children.

## **Books and resources - Key Stage 2 (7-11yrs)**

The suggestions below are suitable to use with older primary-aged children to introduce the life cycle including the end of life, or to use when someone they know has died

When your mum or dad has cancer Ann Couldrick Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop. This is a useful booklet for younger children (7+) to teenage children. It has an introduction for parents but then explains cancer in a simple way children can relate to. It also covers many questions children ask such as whether the person will die and what exactly happens, but tackles the answers with insight and honesty.

The secret C by Straight Talking About Cancer Julie Stokes and Vicky Fullick This illustrated guide for children provides a sensitive introduction for a child when a parent, sibling or a person close to them is diagnosed with cancer. It is aimed at children aged 7 to 10 years and will work best when an adult is present to expand on the simple messages in the text.

Always and Forever Alan Durant When Fox dies the rest of his 'family' are absolutely distraught. How will Mole, Otter and Hare go on without their beloved friend? But, months later, Squirrel reminds them all of how funny Fox used to be and they realise that Fox is still there in their hearts and memories.

The Tenth Good Thing about Barney Judith Viorst A short story that by dealing with the death of a pet, takes a child through the rituals associated with any death, addressing the feelings children have when faced with loss. This book does not have religious overtones, so it can be used by pupils with different sets of beliefs.

Remembering Mum Ginny Perkins A simple photo journey of a real family whose Mum died. It shows how that family coped with the anniversary of Mum's death, and how they are living without her but still including her in their daily lives. Very real and one with which children will identify.

Sad Book Michael Rosen Michael Rosen talks of his sadness after the death of his son. A personal story that speaks to adults and children. Minimal text with moving illustrations.

What On Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies? Trevor Romain Child-friendly, accessible text, this short book deals with the many questions that bereaved children of this age have when someone dies.

Us Minus Mum Heather Butler The boys think Mum is invincible. But they're wrong. Because Mum is ill. Really ill. It's up to George and Theo to keep Mum (and everyone else) smiling – which will almost probably definitely involve willies, shepherd's pie and Goffo's victory at the pet talent show. This book is both funny and sad.

The Huge Bag of Worries Virginia Ironside Bereaved children and those in families where someone is expected to die often have worries they feel unable to share. This reassuring story will encourage them to voice their fears and concerns.

The Copper Tree Hilary Robinson and Mandy Stanley When Olivia's teacher dies, the children at her school are encouraged to think of everything that reminds them of her. Sprinkled with light-hearted moments, The Copper Tree approaches grief with sensitivity and sound judgement. A delightful and touching short story.

## Appendix C- Suggested templates for letters to Parents / Carers

### Template 1-Template of a letter to the parents/carers of the deceased child

<Address>  
<Date>

Dear <Name>

We are so very sorry to hear the sad news of <Name's> death.

There are no words to express our sadness and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through.

As a school community, we will miss <Name> very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to <his/her> friends, classmates and teachers.

<Name> was a <valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly> member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help as you plan <Name's> funeral, please let us know.

We will continue to keep in touch and will support you in any way we can.

With sympathy,

<Name> Head Teacher

## Template 2-Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a pupil

*Before sending a letter home to all parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the deceased child's parents/carers.*

*The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the deceased child's parents and the school.*

<Address>  
<Date>

Dear Parents/Carers,

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>.

(<Name> died suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness yesterday/last week/over the weekend/during half term.)

(<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 <valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly> member of the school community 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, such as sadness, anger and confusion. Some pupils may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

We have tried to answer pupils' questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Child Bereavement UK website ([www.childbereavementuk.org.uk](http://www.childbereavementuk.org.uk))

Our thoughts are with <Name's> family and friends at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember <Name's> life.

Yours sincerely,

<Name> Head Teacher



### Template 3- Template of a letter informing parents/carers of the death of a member of staff

*Before sending a letter home to all parents about the death of a member of staff, permission must be gained from the deceased person's family / loved ones.*

*The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the deceased person's family/ loved ones and the school.*

<Address>  
<Date>

Dear Parents/Carers,

I am sorry to inform you that a <well-respected/long-standing/well-loved/popular/well-known> member of our staff, <Name>, died <suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness>.

The pupils were told today of <Name's death> by their <class teacher/tutor/head of year/in assembly> and many will be reacting to this very sad news.

When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings, such as sadness, anger and confusion. Some pupils may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

We have tried to answer pupils' questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Child Bereavement UK website ([www.childbereavementuk.org.uk](http://www.childbereavementuk.org.uk))

Our thoughts are with <Name's> family and friends at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember <Name's> life.

Yours sincerely,

<Name> Head Teacher

## **Appendix D - Supporting Pupils**

**The following guidelines are taken from the CRUSE bereavement care website. They are general principles, and consideration needs to be given to the specific needs of individuals.**

**Loss from a child's perspective** For many children and young people the death of a parent, caregiver, sibling or grandparent is an experience they are faced with early in life. It is sometimes incorrectly assumed that a child or young person who is bereaved by the death of someone close at a young age will not be greatly affected as they are too young to understand the full implications of death. This is untrue and unhelpful. Even babies are able to experience loss. A baby cannot cognitively process the implications of the bereavement but that does not mean that they do not feel the loss.

**Accepting the child's experience** Children and young people need to be given the opportunity to grieve as any adult would. Trying to ignore or avert the child's grief is not protective, in fact it can prove to be extremely damaging as the child enters adulthood. Children and young people regardless of their age need to be encouraged to talk about how they are feeling and supported to understand their emotions. It is also important to remember that children and young people grieve in different ways. Grief is unique and therefore it is not wise to assume that all children and young people will experience the same emotions, enact the same behaviour or respond similarly to other grieving children and young people. A child or young person's grief differs from that of an adult's grief because it alters as they develop.

**Time to grieve** Children and young people often revisit the death and review their emotions and feelings about their bereavement as they move through their stages of development. Children and young people do not have the emotional capacity to focus on their grief for long periods of time and therefore it is not uncommon for grieving children and young people to become distracted by play. This is a protective mechanism which allows the child or young person to be temporarily diverted from the bereavement. Bereaved children and young people need time to grieve and in order for them to address the bereavement they need to be given the facts regarding the death in language appropriate to their age or level of comprehension. Avoid using metaphors for death such as, "Daddy has gone to sleep", this will make the child or young person believe that Daddy will come back to them and may constantly ask when he is going to wake up. Similarly the child or young person might encounter problems with bedtime and not wanting to sleep for fear of not waking up.

**Talking to children** It is understandable that many caregivers are reluctant to talk to the child or young person about the death as they do not want to cause distress or fear. Children and young people who are bereaved need to know that their loved one has died, how they died and where they are now. Failure to be honest with the grieving child or young person means that their grief is not being acknowledged and this can cause problems later on. If the bereaved child or young person wants to ask questions about death and what dying means, answer them truthfully and if you do not know the answer to a specific question don't be tempted to make the answer up. Assure the child or young person that although you do not know the answer to their question you will find out for them.

<http://www.cruse.org.uk/Children/loss-from-childs-perspective>

**Appendix E- Child Bereavement UK Guidance on supporting staff (Taken from Child Bereavement UK Schools Resource Pack) Looking after yourself (staff) Being alongside anyone experiencing a loss can be emotionally draining, but supporting a bereaved child, particularly so. The need for support for yourself is not a sign of an inability to cope or of professional incompetence, but a recognition that everyone needs help to carry out this demanding role. Below are some ideas for ways to look after yourself.**

**Share feelings** Use friends and colleagues to talk about how you are feeling and to share experiences. Just knowing that others are affected can help you to feel less alone and better able to cope. Informal peer support in the staffroom can be a welcome opportunity to talk through issues and concerns and reduce feelings of inadequacy by jointly talking through strategies to help.

**Anticipate that you may experience an emotional reaction** It is perfectly normal and OK to be emotionally affected. However, recognise that in order to help others, you need to feel reasonably strong yourself. You may become aware of previous losses in your own life that have resurfaced. If it all feels too close to home, do not be afraid to say so. This is not a sign of weakness but merely a recognition that we all have our limits.

**Professional boundaries** When working in a school environment, it is very easy to let the carer in us take over and forget our professional boundaries. Getting over-involved is not helpful to either yourself or to the bereaved child or adult. Remember that you cannot carry their grief for them, but you can share their journey by being there for them and being aware.

**Have information on resources and organisations** Sharing contact details of bereavement organisations will enable you to do something practical to support a grieving family. You will be helping by putting them in touch with people who are qualified and experienced in offering the support they might need. (See Appendix A- Sources of Further Advice and Support)

**Help others** If you become aware that a colleague is stressed or affected by a death in your school community, or know that they have experienced a bereavement themselves, try to find the time to ask how they are.

**Spoil yourself** Make time to do something just for you, or give yourself a treat. Physical exercise can be a great stress buster.

**Factors that can contribute to overload** Supporting bereaved children is emotionally demanding. In a study by Brown (1993), teachers from five schools cited the following factors as contributing to their stress:

- Witnessing pain and distress experienced by the families.
- Feeling unskilled in dealing with emotional responses.
- Physical exhaustion as a result of emotional trauma.
- Poor communication between themselves and families or other carers.

Brown also comments on the tensions that can arise in a school setting between a member of staff's personal needs and their professional role. Being over-involved could lead to attachments that are inappropriate or impossible to sustain.

A study by Lane, Rowland and Beinart (2014) showed that teachers often feel uncertain how to respond to bereaved adolescents, particularly in relation to talking about the bereavement, yet feel an obligation to stay strong, to address the bereavement and to provide support even if distressed themselves. They found that teachers best managed their own emotions through setting boundaries in their professional role, creating emotional distance, seeking support from

colleagues or using their own social networks or social agencies. They also identified the benefit of drawing on teachers' own experience of bereavement and the usefulness of bereavement training.

It does not help to offer something that you cannot deliver. No matter how well-meant or strong the desire to take the pain away, always try to be realistic with the amount of support that you can give. It is much better to offer something small but constant rather than a grand gesture that is going to be difficult to deliver. Providing a listening ear once a week and sticking to it is more meaningful than the offer of help anytime when inevitably that cannot be achieved within a busy school environment.

You do not need to be an expert to provide effective help. Many people feel inadequate and out of their depth when faced with adults or children experiencing deep sadness or trauma. Being alongside children who are hurting can remind us of our own vulnerability and immortality. Most teachers and school staff are caring individuals who naturally have the characteristics required to support bereaved children. It is more about being there for them whilst in school and building a relationship with them in your classroom, than being a bereavement professional.

Try to recognise when you are running on empty. Working in the education profession is very much about giving in terms of time and energy; supporting a bereaved pupil may compound this, resulting in depleted resources. It can be difficult to ask for help when we most need it as to do so requires energy and strength. Some of the signs to look out for include feeling physically exhausted and overworked, an inability to delegate and generally not feeling on top of things.

If staff members want further support, ring helpline on 0800 02 888 40 or email [support@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:support@childbereavementuk.org)