



Bereavement Policy Evesham Nursery School

1. Introduction

The main aim of this policy is to provide a framework for all staff, both teaching and nonteaching, to give guidance on how to deal sensitively and compassionately in difficult and upsetting circumstances. We acknowledge that death, while being the inevitable end of life, is often unexpected and traumatic. Its unpredictability can cause severe distress and can shock and disturb the whole school community.

2. Our aim

At Evesham Nursery School we aim to meet the needs of all children and staff within a caring, compassionate, empathetic community. When home circumstances are changed because of a death in the family and all around is 'different', our school aims to be a place that both child and family can rely on, and gain some much-needed support. If the death is of a child or member of staff, the whole school community will work together; with outside agencies as appropriate, to support each other.

3. Procedures

Within school we work in partnership with parents. When children join the school, we find out as much as possible about every child to tailor the academic, social and emotional teaching in school to match their needs. Parents are encouraged to make staff aware of any previous changes that might have profoundly affected their child (divorce, bereavement, moving, new babies etc). If there has been bereavement, information on what the child was told (in terms of religious beliefs etc.) should be sought, in order that the school does not say anything that could confuse or upset the child or family. We understand that the communication of any death within our community must be planned and handled with great sensitivity. While recognising the need to act speedily, we will ensure that the immediate family of the deceased have been consulted prior to any wider communication through the school website, text, telephone, email, or social media sites.

We will establish a *School Bereavement Team* to be chaired if and when necessary by a *Bereavement Team Leader* who will be the most senior appropriate member of staff in school. Members of the Team will be *SLT, Chairman of Governors; Keyworker; School Office Administrator; local Minister or relevant religious representative (where appropriate)*. We acknowledge our responsibility to all those who grieve as a result of a life changing significant loss in their lives. We will provide opportunities for children to share their feelings in the school environment supported by trained staff. Appropriate support will also be offered to staff.

A. In the event of a death within the School Community

B. We will ensure that school office staff are prepared to receive the news of a death within the community and respond in an appropriate manner. Should we receive the news of a death, in **ALL** cases the person receiving the news will:

- Confirm the information, check it, record it and check it again. (It is essential to have the facts confirmed)
- Share the news as soon as possible with an appropriate senior member of staff and a member of the Bereavement Team.

The senior member of staff and the members of the Bereavement Team will:

- Consider the action required, follow the agreed procedures, take notice of the guidance and examples and be aware of the impact of shock on each other and on the wider community.

B. The sudden death of a parent or close relative

We acknowledge that in the case of the death of a child's parent or close relative, it is best that a family member breaks the news with the support of an appropriate member of staff. If this is not possible the Bereavement Team Leader will decide on action to be taken.

The news of the death will be given to all relevant staff as soon as possible.

- The family should be contacted with appropriate support (See Appendix 1 for helpline numbers & websites)
- The family should be asked how much and what the child already knows/understands about what has happened.
- It should be explained to the family how the school can be involved in the support of the child and the family.
- The importance of working together with the parents/carers to assess any changes in behaviour; eating and sleeping patterns may change and behaviour in school may deteriorate or the child may become withdrawn.
- Involve outside agencies as appropriate; school nurse, psychological services.

For a member of staff experiencing close family bereavement, absence will be arranged for attendance at the funeral and appropriate time off in line with the Absence Management Policy. Additional time may be given through sick leave as appropriate.

C. The death of an Evesham Nursery School child

When the school is informed of the death of a child the following action should be considered;

- Discussion should take place with the family and their wishes taken into account before decisions are taken on how and what to tell the children in school.
- Encourage staff to voice any concerns they have about telling the rest of the children /school.
- Consider the most appropriate way to communicating the news within school; be that a full school assembly, Year groups or a smaller, bespoke groups.

- Inform parents the same day in the most appropriate way depending on the circumstances; via text, email, website, telephone.
- Give children opportunities to express their feelings at the time they are informed and over the following days and weeks.
- Avoid rumours, exaggerations and embellishment of the event, by agreeing the facts which will be stated openly and honestly without assumptions or judgements.
- Remember that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotions and feelings. Some may deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some may show feelings of anger. There may well be tears and distress. Planned support will be available.
- Staff and children should be supported throughout the grieving period; anyone displaying signs of stress should be offered appropriate support. Counselling should be available if necessary.
- Ensure time to incorporate grieving amongst the staff and enable them to share how they feel about what has happened.
- Books to help on hand to support (See Appendix 2 for a list of books/authors)

D. The death of a member of staff

We acknowledge that if such a death occurs it is doubly traumatic for the staff; supporting the children but also grieving on a personal level for a colleague.

Should we receive the news of the death of a member of staff; the appropriate senior member of staff will call together colleagues from the Bereavement Team.

We will use the guidance notes below:

- Gather together the staff and inform them of the news.
- Allow time for grieving amongst the staff and allow them to share how they feel about what has happened.
- Inform the staff that they may need to address what has happened in their classes.
- Impress on the staff what facts are to be announced to the children. To avoid rumours, exaggerations and development of the event, the agreed facts should be stated simply.
- Communicate to the staff how the announcement will be made. Should it be a full school assembly, year groups etc.
- It must be remembered that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotional feelings, some will deny or disbelieve the announcement, others may feel panic or anger. There may be tears and distress; everyone will react in their own way.
- Under such circumstances some staff may have difficulty coping with the loss themselves. Colleagues will need to be aware of those staff who seem particularly affected by the death.

E. Terminally ill child/member of staff/close family member

We acknowledge that the anticipated death of a member of our school community, whilst very difficult to manage, enables us to establish appropriate communication with the family to support those likely to be most affected before and after the death. Our responsibility is

to support adults, children and young people who have to face the painful reality that a parent or someone close to them is terminally ill.

When supporting children and young people who are experiencing anticipatory grief, we will:

- Respect the feelings and wishes of the parents/guardians/next-of-kin at all times.
- Confirm the facts concerning the illness with members of staff.
- Should the child wish to attend school, the staff may need to inform the class of the child's illness/condition.
- Allow the child to speak freely about the sick person in an appropriate setting. Allow them to talk about their feelings/how they are feeling. Never give false hope to the child.
- Occasionally, the child /member of staff, may wish to talk to their fellow classmates/colleagues about their predicament themselves. Honesty about death and dying may be the best line of approach. Sometimes there is no other way.

F. Funeral and Memorial services.

Following the death of a child/member of staff/person from the school community we will need to consider our involvement in any funeral and/or memorial services. We will need to plan/organise the following;

- The school may be closed, or as many people as possible, released to attend a funeral or memorial service should it be appropriate and they wish to do so.
- Children and staff may express a wish to attend, or take part in the service; this should only be done once we have had the prior agreement from the deceased's family, as well as the agreement of their own parents/carers.
- The class most affected might like to write down their thoughts and feelings; these could be given to the bereaved family to assist in the planning of the service.
- After the service, staff and children should be encouraged to meet and express their thoughts and feelings as such services are important in the grieving process.

G. Returning to school.

We acknowledge our responsibility to 'keep a special watch' on children who have been bereaved, especially on their return to school and for at least a two-year period and at times of transition. We further acknowledge our responsibility to prepare staff and children appropriately before a bereaved member of our community returns. Members of our Bereavement Team will advise an appropriate response, depending on the individual's circumstances.

- 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 children) should be made aware of the situation before the child returns (providing the parents/carers of the bereaved child agree).
- Staff should show appropriate compassion and allow expression to those suffering grief.

- Staff 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.
- Staff might keep an eye on those particularly affected by the death of a close associate.

H. Support with/talking to the bereaved.

- Try to be available to listen and support if possible, arrange a one-to-one session with the Home School Link as soon as possible after the child returns to school (See Appendix 3 for 'Support and further suggestions for staff')
- 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 in their own 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
- Point out things for which they should be grateful
- Be frightened of sharing your own feelings

Extra support if needed

- Appendix 1 Useful Websites and helpline numbers for dealing with loss and bereavement for parents, staff and children.
- Appendix 2 List of books to help parents, children and staff during times of loss and illness
- Appendix 3 Support and further suggestions for staff

Appendix 1

Useful Websites and helpline numbers for dealing with loss and bereavement for parents, children and staff

www.childbereavement.org.uk Child Bereavement Network – 0800 02 88840 – a network of child bereavement services

www.cruse.org.uk CRUSE Bereavement Care - 0808 808 1677

www.winstonswish.org.uk Winston's Wish Family Line – 08088 020 021 – national helpline offering guidance, information and support to anyone caring for a bereaved child, including professionals and family members

www.mind.org.uk Mental Health information and support -0300 123 3393

Appendix 2

Books dealing with death and loss

Beyond the Rough Rock - Supporting a Child who has been bereaved through Suicide - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley

As Big As It Gets - Supporting a Child when someone in their Family is Seriously Ill - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley

The Secret C - Straight Talking about Cancer - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley

I Miss You - First Look at Death - Pat Thomson

Storybooks available in school

Grandpa- John Burningham

Always and Forever – Alan Durant

The Huge Bag of Worries – Virginia Ironside

What on Earth Do you Do When Someone Dies? – Trevor Romain

Badger's Parting Gifts- Susan Varley

Saying Goodbye to Daddy – Judith Vigna

Waterbugs and Dragonflies – Explaining Death to Young Children

Appendix 3

Support and Further Suggestions for Staff

Parents and carers often feel that staff are experts on their children. They may turn to the school for advice and information, especially on matters of bereavement. It is important to remember that the family, friends and the immediate community often best support those suffering from bereavement, as is the case with other stressful life events. Staff need not be experts on the subject but they do need to use sensitivity and their skills in understanding children's development and emotional needs. The following are some points that may be helpful to bear in mind when talking to parents and carers:

- A death will disrupt the family for many months; in fact, the family will never be the same again. Family members are grieving, relationships alter, and members may take on new roles. Sometimes there is a change of carer, house or school, all of which add to the disruption and distress experienced by the child. To support the child, it is helpful to minimise, if possible, changes and disruptions in their normal daily routine and life in school.
- Bereaved family members may emotionally and physically withdraw from the child, to protect themselves from more distress. Some adults will deny the bereaved child is grieving, as it will be too distressing for them to acknowledge the child's pain. This may cause distress and confusion, causing grief reactions of anger, withdrawal or psychosomatic behaviours such as headaches, stomach-ache or sickness.
- The bereaved child may regress in behaviour, becoming clingy, difficult or withdrawn. His/her schoolwork may suffer. These changes will be partly due to grief but also to the disruption and changes within the family, causing the child to feel confused and unsafe.
- The child may feel resentment, jealousy or guilt towards the dead person or child. The expression of this verbally can cause the remaining family members distress and shock. Parents and carers need to know this is normal and will decrease as the child and the family become more stable and settled.
- Parents and carers need to be informed of the benefits that a child gains in being involved in the ceremonies and rituals that follow death. An explanation as to how mourning practices help children to express their feelings and come to terms with and accept the reality of their loss can be very beneficial.
- Staff should remember that parents and carers will often use them as role models, counsellors or extended family; looking to them for support for themselves as well as finding appropriate ways of supporting and talking with their children.
- Staff may require their own support structures. Supporting bereaved families, whilst rewarding, can also be emotionally draining.