

Sudden and Traumatic Death and Bereavement

A Guide for Schools and Educational Settings in Cumberland



Information · Protocol · Guidance · Resources

***“Death neither obeys the school timetable nor appears on it...
It enters the classroom without knocking.”***

Up to 70% of schools have a bereaved pupil on roll at any one time. Many staff members feel anxious about supporting a bereaved pupil in a school or an early years setting, or addressing bereavement and loss in the curriculum.

In addition, there are many more crises which, although they may not result in death can have a traumatic effect on individuals, eg; serious injuries, physical assaults on children, children witnessing violence/attacks/murders, fires in school.

The guidance draws largely upon information from *With Hindsight*. A document sent to schools in Cumbria in 2004. It has been developed by the Cumbria branch of Child Bereavement UK, the North Cumbria Clinical Commissioning Group and the Cumbria County Psychological Service to support and assist schools and educational settings in dealing with a death within the school community and providing ongoing bereavement support.

To assist in the production of this pack, we have consulted with head teachers and senior staff in Cumbrian schools who have experienced a traumatic death (suicide) or unexpected death of a pupil and the difficulties they experienced in dealing with the practicalities of such a tragedy whilst maintaining all other aspects of school life.

The information contained in this guidance is intended to enable schools to manage their own difficulties, drawing on their own resources and accessing additional support, advice or information from other agencies where appropriate, bearing in mind that:

- The guidance offers a framework in which to operate, rather than a 'must do' list. It is not intended to be prescriptive or to attempt to cover all possible events.
- The Local Authority expects to support schools in any significant incident. Schools are not expected to cope alone with incidents involving for example, death or anything that attracts intensive media interest.

Whilst we can never fully prepare for every possible circumstance surrounding a death or traumatic incident, we can prepare to manage them with courage, compassion, and mutual support.

A school that is well prepared to deal with tragedies is like to be well equipped to respond to other issues relating to loss and bereavement (for example, pupils may experience death of a close relative, parental separation or divorce, or the loss of a pet) and thus will also be helping its pupils towards an emotionally literate adult life.

Structure of Document

Staff in schools who have experienced the death of a pupil expressed that they needed to access some guidance as a matter of urgency to help them deal with the immediate aftermath.

For this reason, the document is structured as follows:

Section 1: 'Immediate Actions Guidance and Printable Checklist' to be used in the event of a sudden death of a pupil, staff or member of the school community and will assist schools in the aftermath. The checklist can be completed by schools as required.

Section 2: Information and guidance on the important but less immediate actions required by a school community.

Section 3: A Whole School Approach to Supporting Bereavement, including curriculum resources and online support

Section 4: Appendix

Contents

Sudden and Traumatic Death and Bereavement Guide for Schools and Educational Settings in Cumbria	Page
Introduction	2
Structure of Document	3
Contents	4
Section 1 Immediate Actions Following a Sudden Death or Critical Incident: Guidance and Printable Checklist	5
1.1 Intermediate Actions: Notes & Guidance -	6
Immediate Actions Checklist: Appendix 1:1	
Section 2 Immediate but Less Urgent Actions	7
2.1 Expressing Sympathy and Attending Funerals	8
2.2 Managing Bereaved Pupils Return to School	10
2.3 Maintaining Ongoing Contact with the Family	12
2.4 Remembering the Person who has Died	13
2.5 Dealing with the Personal Records and Effects	14
Section 3 A Whole School Approach to Supporting Bereavement	15
3.1 Children's Understanding of Death at Different Ages	16
3.2 Bereavement in Children and Young People	17
3.3 Talking with Bereaved Children and Young people	18
3.4 Helping Children with Grief	20
3.5 Recognising when a Pupil is Struggling	21
3.6 Talking about Death with Children and Young People with SEND	22
3.7 Welfare of Staff Supporting Bereaved Children and Young People	24
3.8 Building Resilience	25
3.9 Bereavement in the Curriculum: Lesson Plans and Ideas	26
3.10 Framework for Developing a School Bereavement Policy	27
Section 4: Appendices & Resources	28
Part 1: Additional Guidance re. Section 1 Immediate Actions: Notes & Guidance	
Part 2: Additional Resources for Children, Young People and Schools	

SECTION 1

Immediate Actions Following a Sudden Death or Critical Incident: Guidance and **Printable Checklist**

Consultation with school staff has suggested that, in the wake of a tragedy, especially a sudden bereavement, schools often feel unprepared to deal with the immediate aftermath.

The protocol, legal obligations and general management of staff and students is a huge task at such an awful time. The following notes and guidance offers a framework in which to operate, rather than a 'must-do' list.












Schools who have experienced a sudden or traumatic death within the school community have expressed that it is helpful to have a list of actions and considerations to guide them through such a difficult time.

Action 1 provides an editable version of a **checklist** for schools to adapt to their needs and circumstances.

It is not intended to be prescriptive or to attempt to cover all possible events.

Further complications are added when the death was of a traumatic nature. We have included some guidance on dealing with particularly distressing situations linked to how a person may have died. There is also information on dealing with social media,



	Action	Guidance	Additional guidance	The additional guidance is available as appendices at the end of this document
1	Print off or save the Checklist in a central folder	Schools who have experienced a sudden or traumatic death within the school community have expressed that it is helpful to have a list of actions and considerations to guide them through such a difficult time. We have provided an editable version of this checklist for schools to adapt to their needs and circumstances.	 1. Immediate Actions Checklist	
2	Establish a Critical Incident Management Team	A critical incident management team should be in place. A list of designated roles and responsibilities can be found here: <i>including dedicated phone line and script for answering calls.</i>	 2. Designated Roles & Responsibilities	
3	Confirm the information you have been given (from speaking with family, item 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be aware that the news will likely already be on social media Contact Cumbria Safeguarding Childrens Hub on. Check school records for date of birth of the child who has died: beware of children with the same/similar names Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion Be aware of religious and cultural considerations 	 3a. Managing Social Media  3b. Religious & Cultural	
4	Check school records for child who has died and siblings	It is wise to ensure that you have recognised any other relatives attending school (siblings with different surnames, cousins, step-family etc) who will need particular support. Where you know the pupil has siblings in another school it is worth contact that school to ensure they are aware.	No additional guidance	
5	Contact Educational Psychology for support	The County Psychological Service can prioritise your school and contact you to discuss your needs, offer advice, assistance and support.	 5. Role of the EP	
6	Contact the bereaved family	Consider carefully how you will contact the pupil's family. This will depend on how well you know the family and the circumstances at the time. Be led by what the family wants at this difficult time. The attached document contains a sample letter and some additional guidance on religious and cultural considerations .	 6. Contacting a Bereaved Family	
7	Arrange to tell staff, governors, pupils and their families	Announcing the news to the school community can be challenging and it is important that it is handled sensitively and effectively. The following guidance is useful for informing pupils, staff and families. Schools should follow protocol for informing governors. Additional information on children's understanding of death can be found in section 3.1, page 16 .	 7. Informing Staff, Pupils & Parents	
8	Maintain school routine and provide safe space	The school should be aware that the school timetable may need a degree of flexibility to accommodate the needs wellbeing of children affected by the situation. However, minimal disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security and familiarisation.	 8. Maintain School Routine	
9	Prepare to deal with the Media	Our Communications Team david.helliwell@cumberland.gov.uk , 01228 830835 manage all communications with press, media etc so it is important to liaise with them for advice.	 9. Dealing with the Media	
10	Ensure the school is represented at the Child Death Joint Response meeting	The Joint Agency Response Meeting is usually held within 1 working day of the sudden unexpected death of a young person under 18 years old. It is part of the statutory Child Death Overview Process (CDOP).	 10. Joint Response Meeting	
11	Dealing with Specific Circumstances; Suicide/Murder	When a Death Occurs Outside of School: Suicide, Murder A Pupil's Parent or Sibling Dies The Death of a Member of Staff Particular Circumstances Regarding Suicide	 11. Dealing with Specific Situations	

SECTION 2

Immediate but Less Urgent Actions

- 2.1** Expressing Sympathy and Attending Funerals
- 2.2** Managing Bereaved Pupils Return to School
- 2.3** Maintaining Ongoing Contact with the Family
- 2.4** Remembering the Person who has Died
- 2.5** Dealing With the Personal Records: Pupils and Staff



Expressing Sympathy

Arrangements should be made to express sympathy to the families, young people and/or staff directly affected by the incident. In the intense immediate aftermath of a tragic or traumatic event, families may receive much support, but as the days and weeks pass, the reluctance of many to face the *long term effects* of bereavement mean they may experience a lessening of social contact. *Never assume that others are helping bereaved families.*

There is much that schools can do to keep in touch and provide support, such as by:

- Arranging for pupils and staff to send sympathy messages to the family of the deceased
- Visiting pupils/staff in hospital or at home;
- Dealing sympathetically with the personal effects of those that may have been injured or killed. It is appropriate, however, to let the deceased young person's desk and other reminders to be in the classroom until the end of the term/school year;
- Supporting plans the parents/families or staff may have for a memorial;
- Ensuring that brothers and sisters in the affected family are supported during their return to school and afterwards;
- Providing opportunities for pupils to write about, draw or otherwise express their appreciation for a pupil or member of staff who has died, and passing these onto parents or immediate family;
- Consulting parents/immediate family about special assemblies, anniversaries and any memorials the school plan;
- Arranging for the handling of donations that are often sent in large numbers. It is vital that the families of those injured or killed are kept informed of the plans for the donations and that any purchases/memorials/dedications are discussed and agreed sensitively with all concerned.

Attendance at the Funeral

People from different backgrounds and religions have different burial rites. Some, including Parsees, Sikhs and Jews may hold funerals within 24 hours of death. There is not always time therefore to prepare staff and pupils for attendance.

If such a case arises, a member of staff should swiftly make enquiries about the burial customs (e.g. if flowers are in order and whether women and men and representatives from the school – including pupils – would be welcome). **Some bereaved families may want a very private funeral; others may very much value the attendance of staff and some pupils.**

Many adults fear that a funeral will upset surviving young people further. There are no hard and fast rules about whether or not young people should attend funerals of staff or pupils to whom they were close. Every young person is different and age and circumstances need to be taken into account, as do the wishes of the pupils concerned. However, current professional consensus is that funerals provide a helpful outlet for shared grief, and attendance is therefore likely, in most instances, to be beneficial to affected adults and young people alike. If pupils or friends/classmates wish to attend, the permission of their parents/guardians need to be obtained. It is recommended that pupils in primary schools are collected by, and attend the funeral with, their parents, taking the children home afterwards if necessary.

There may be other worries about lack of familiarity with religious beliefs or funeral rites and customs where they are different from those of staff and pupils. In the latter case, where good relationships have been made or can be made between school and the religious leaders in the community served, such issues can be discussed and worries overcome. **It is advisable to confirm what clothing to wear; whether it is cultural, traditional, religious or symbolic.**

For other pupils and staff in the school it may be desirable to hold special assemblies and memorial services.

If, however, pupils are going to attend a funeral, they will need to be told what to expect.

Some bereaved pupils may not be attending school after an incident and will need assistance and extra support for re-entry. Some may have been injured or distressed and will need significant support to reintegrate back into school life.

The school could consider such arrangements as:

- **Negotiating** a date for return with parents/carers.
- **Arranging with parents for a visit** by the (form) teacher or other appropriate staff to a young person's home or hospital.
- **Maintaining contact** between the home and the school and deciding who is the most appropriate person to do this. (See: 2.3 *Maintaining Contact with Family*)
- Checking whether any books or equipment were lost in the incident and making a decision about replacements.
- Checking what worries the pupils and the parents have about re-entry and making appropriate arrangements e.g. visit to classroom; to the scene of the incident in which death occurred.
- **Briefing peers** who may be able to help in the process of resettling. This is likely to be those in the same year/class group.
- Arranging for **part-time attendance** at first if this is considered helpful.
- **Making adjustments** to the curriculum.
- **Making adaptations to the building** or availability or aids if the young person is temporarily or permanently disabled.
- Checking on **worries** about meeting other young people and discussing reactions to **questions** and **comments**.
- **Arranging for a 'sanctuary'** that a young person could go to if upset during the school day and a means of them **leaving the classroom discreetly**.
- Making sure that all staff who teach the young person are aware of the need for sensitivity in relation to **missed work** and the possible need to **reschedule projects**.
- Remember to brief temporary or supply staff;
- Checking whether special arrangements with **Examination Boards** will be needed.
- Ensuring that there is not a 'support vacuum' during periods when the school is not open (the school holidays for example).

Clearly, there are also individual differences in adjustment. Pupils and staff will respond to a crisis in different ways and at different paces. Teachers and other staff will need to be sensitive to such individual differences otherwise more harm than good may be done.

If the pupil is having difficulty returning to school, you may be able to consider an individual reintegration package; short visits, working alone, attending favourite lessons, reduced timetable.

Also;

- Offer a named member of staff / quiet place for the pupil to go to if distressed or needing time out.
- Consult other staff about any outstanding work and organize ways to enable the pupil to catch up. If the pupil thinks it would be helpful and friends agree, establish a peer support network – ensuring that those helping are given appropriate support themselves.
- Be alert to changes in behaviour – reactions may present themselves months or years after the event, and it may be difficult for staff and other pupils to relate behaviours to bereavement. Talk over possible reasons for changed behaviour with the pupil and work out ways together to improve the situation.
- Notify examination boards of the impact of the bereavement if public exams are due.
- Follow up absences – absence could indicate bereavement-associated problems at home or school. Keep familiar routines, boundaries and structures in place – they promote a sense of security.

“A child can live through anything as long as he or she is told the truth and is allowed to share with loved ones the natural feelings they have when they are suffering.”

It may feel intrusive to maintain regular contact with the bereaved family at such a difficult time, but it is an important part of supporting them through what is considered the most difficult period.

Once a funeral has taken place and the immediate aftermath has subsided, families can be very grateful of ongoing contact and support from the school.

Where divorce/separation has occurred within a family, try to involve both parents (if appropriate). Arrange separate meetings where necessary to update on progress in school.

- Talking with the pupil and family helps inform you about how they are coping, what their concerns are and what would be most helpful for the pupil on return to school.
- It helps schools to gauge insight into how the family as a whole is coping with their grief, and how this may impact upon the pupil. Don't underestimate the importance of the school's role in supporting the whole family, as indirectly as this may seem.
- Keeping in contact with the family is helpful in arranging for memorials, remembrance, awards etc
- Making special contact with the family around an anniversary or birthday is important. It is a key time in the grieving family's lives and schools should ensure these times are planned for and handled with sensitivity and support.

Saying goodbye and remembering the person who has died is an important part of the grieving process. It can also help to restore a sense of normality after a very unsettling time.

There are a number of different ways you may wish to say goodbye and honor the person. Here are some suggestions:

- **Special Assembly** – This can provide an opportunity to reflect and remember the life of a person who has died. It could include:
 - Lighting a special remembrance candle.
 - The favourite song or poem of the person who has died.
 - Pupils or staff taking it in turns to tell their favourite stories and share memories of the person who has died.
 - A candle-light vigil.
 - A choir service
- **Website message** - You may wish to put up a remembrance message on the school website. This is a simple way for the school to publicly remember the person who has died. The wording of the message should be checked with the family prior to posting on the website, as well as the length of time it will be available for viewing.
- **Time to share** - Classroom activities can be another helpful way of saying goodbye to someone who's died. Writing cards or a memory book can give pupils the chance to share feelings and discuss the situation.
- **Creating a special area** with a photo and a specially made plaque/sign which can be displayed as a permanent fixture in the school.
- **Naming a special award** after the person who has died, e.g., a sports day trophy, music/singing award, specific subject award.

Assemblies and memorial services can be very daunting for staff who are leading them. Many emotions are at play, including nerves. You may wish to seek advice from the local church or place of worship where the funeral took place, as they may offer to lead the service in the school or provide some words/readings that could be appropriate for the occasion. It may be appropriate to invite the family of the person who has died.

Be aware that there may be certain times of the year or events in the school calendar that a grieving pupil may find particularly difficult to manage. Possible triggers include; anniversaries, Mother's Day/Father's Day, world events such as the Manchester bombing, the Grenfell fire and their anniversaries, parents' evening, the school prom, or particular curriculum topics that bring up death or tragedy.

In the experience of staff it is often an unexpectedly distressing task to remove the records of a child or member of staff who has died. It can feel very 'final' and almost disrespectful. Please bear in mind that there are certain guidelines under the General Data Protection Act (2018).

- Schools should amend the status of a pupil as 'deceased' in their electronic system/register as soon as the death is confirmed.
Schools should also ensure that the child's name be removed from any other general school distribution lists.
- If a member of staff has died, personnel records must be kept for a minimum of seven years from the date of death. Following this period of time, records must be confidentially destroyed.
- In the case of a pupil. Personal files must also be kept for a minimum of seven years from the date of death and again, must be confidentially destroyed.

If the school holds any child protection information, these cannot currently be destroyed as they are on a disposal hold nationally due to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) enquiry. This should be noted for any schools which currently hold information on a deceased child.

Any queries regarding this issue can be directed to the Local Authority's Records Centre:

[Click here to Area Contact Details for the Records Management Service](#)

SECTION 3

A Whole School Approach to Supporting Bereavement

- 3.1 Children's Understanding of Death at Different Ages
- 3.2 Bereavement in Children and Young People
- 3.3 Talking with Bereaved Children and Young People
- 3.4 Helping Children with Grief
- 3.5 Recognising When a Pupil is Struggling
- 3.6 Talking about Death with Children with SEND
- 3.7 Welfare of Staff Supporting Bereaved Children and Young People
- 3.8 Building Resilience
- 3.9 Bereavement in the Curriculum: Lesson Plans and Ideas
- 3.10 Framework for Developing a School Bereavement Policy





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.

Age	Children's conceptual understanding	What to expect and how we can support them
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.	It is not unusual for children of this age to revert to behaviour patterns they had when they were younger. These are likely to disappear again once family life resumes. Reading books on death and loss, playing, drawing and having opportunities to talk about worries and feeling will help them deal with loss.
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 and be in charge of their feelings. Unexpressed feelings can lead to physical symptoms. They need important people in their lives to show them that it's OK to express your feelings. They are likely to be very interested in the rituals surrounding death. It is important that routines are maintained.
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.	Death can make them feel different at the very time they want to feel the same and can cause difficulties with peers and mood swings. They will benefit from your willingness to listen and reassurance that their feelings are normal.
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.	If you notice a teenager who is withdrawing, acting very matter of fact or detached, or angry and protesting, then remain available for them but don't push. Your job is to remind them that you are there and if they prefer to speak to someone else, you will help them find peers or other trusted adults to support them. They need to be reassured of your love and support and to know that the limits you set are still enforced.

Adapted from <https://childbereavementuk.org/for-schools/resource-managing-death-school/> © Liverpool Clinical Commissioning Group & School Improvement Liverpool 2016

Young people experience the effects of bereavement just as intensely as adults and that the experience can have long term negative consequences from them. However, there is a difference between the way adults and young people mourn. The mourning period can be lengthy in young adults, lasting two years or more with the second year sometimes experienced as more difficult by the child than the first. Sometimes adults may notice a sudden change in behaviour but, because time has passed since the bereavement, they may not make the connection.

What we might expect...

How young people respond to upset, loss or trauma depends on their understanding, beliefs and fears about their own situation, their level of cognitive maturity, and the amount of support they receive. Normal reactions might include:

- An initial response of shock, disbelief, numbness and confusion;
- Denial pretending things are still the same;
- Anger;
- Guilt that they could have done something to prevent it;
- Anxiety and even panic that there will be further loss or that they themselves might die;
- Distress and despair;
- Intense loneliness.

Teachers are in strong position to offer support to pupils. They have a relationship that predates the bereavement and are uniquely placed to look out for changes in behaviour.

Children and young people may show any of the following:

- Anxiety, irritability, sadness;
- Nightmares and disrupted sleeping patterns;
- Tiredness and listlessness;
- Bed wetting;
- Headaches and stomach aches;
- Reduced appetite;
- Fears and separation difficulties.

The following changes in behaviour may be observed:

- Reluctance to go to school;
- Unwillingness to go out and play;
- Becoming upset by seeming minor events;
- Problems with schoolwork;
- Changes in patterns of social relationships e.g. becoming withdrawn or starting to bully others;
- Behaviour which is out of character hyperactivity, temper, fighting or regressive behaviour'
- A loss of interest and motivation, and concentration/difficulties in class.

Don't assume anything. Ask the pupil how they feel, rather than projecting feelings that you might expect them to have. Also, expect that other children in a class might be affected by a death in an immediate family other than their own.

Allow time and space for pupils to digest the news, find out the facts and discover exactly how they feel. For some, this may be their first experience of someone they know dying, for others it may trigger a previous loss or trauma.

Moving on - expect children (especially younger ones) to 'move on' fairly quickly. As adults we tend to remain in a feeling or thought for a lot longer than children. If we are sad and reflective, we may be so for many hours. Children may be distraught one moment and then the next, need to ask what is for lunch, or express annoyance that it is raining outside. Although this sometimes shocks us, this is completely normal, so try not to punish it.

Act early to prevent rumours from spreading, or gossip being spread around the school. Our response to death is often something that we mask when in public. Some people mask it with humour. Among children this humour can be less tempered by social graces and so can be very hurtful, as can rumours about a death or an individual. Try to prevent these at all times, but remember that nasty words are sometimes born out of fear. This does not, and should not excuse them, but may help us deal better with the pupils concerned.

Try to normalise the feelings that a bereaved young person shares with you. They are probably very worried that they are the only person who has ever felt this way. Assure them that feelings of anger, fatigue, fear, worry, stress, sadness, exhaustion, guilt, anxiety, frustration, loneliness, lack of focus etc are all a normal reaction to grief.

Acknowledge that some days will be better than others. A bereaved pupil may arrive for registration one morning and seem totally fine. The next day, for an obvious reason, or for no apparent reason at all, they may seem completely different.

"My mum died and my life changed forever. It was the biggest thing that ever happened to me. My teacher never mentioned it."



Teenagers and Grief

In today's world, death can be found everywhere, making up more of a teenager's normal life experiences than we realise. It is contained in the music they listen to, the technology they use, and the media they engage with. This 'death at a distance' has little impact on their daily lives, but when they are affected personally, a teenager's world can be significantly disrupted.

The death of a friend, or even someone a young person barely knew, can have a huge impact and this is sometimes unrecognised. Bereavement combined with the upheaval of youth has been described as a **"double jeopardy."**

When we consider grief alongside the workings of a teenager's part-adult, part-child world, we begin to get a feel for why teenage grief is a particularly complex, daunting process – for both the young person and the adults around them.



Without listening we cannot know how the individual makes sense of their world. Their emotions are constructed on their beliefs. Their anxiety may be real or irrational (to us). Tuning in enables us to understand and perhaps offer an alternative construction on their fears. It offers them a chance to share feelings that they may never have voiced. This in itself is therapeutic.

The following information is adapted from Liverpool Clinical Commissioning Group & School Improvement Team's 2016 document: **A Whole School Approach to Supporting Loss, Separation and Bereavement.**

"Don't think it's the same for everyone"

All young people are individuals and each will grieve in their own way. **"I acted completely different from my brother because I was much angrier whereas he was quieter."** Emily age 17.

Family members may be grieving for the same person but each will have had their own, unique relationship with that person and therefore the meaning of the death will be different for each one.

Complex family relationships can leave a young person confused about just who it is they are grieving for, or they may result in ambivalent feelings towards the person who died.

"I wondered what the point of going back to school was"

For a teenager whose world has just fallen apart, life can lose its purpose and meaning. They may become apathetic, depressed, withdrawn and develop a **"What's the point"** attitude to school or even life.

"I felt like nothing mattered any more, like everything seemed really trivial and all my work just didn't really matter."

Others may become very hard working to compensate for feelings of guilt.

- [Child Bereavement UK](#) provides further in-depth information on supporting grieving children
- [Young Minds](#)

People often find it difficult to know what to say or do to help a child or young person who has been bereaved. Most grieving pupils do not need a **'bereavement expert'** but simply need the support of people who care. Teachers can make a real difference to bereaved pupils by offering opportunities for them to talk about their experiences if they want to and by listening and responding to the spoken and unspoken messages they send.

The following are brief guidelines based on what children and young people have said that they want from school.

Acknowledge what has happened- Do not be afraid to use the word death, when expressing your sorrow to them about the death of their...

Check out the facts: make sure you are fully appraised of the circumstances surrounding the death. Communicate with the family to ensure that you are giving the information they want so the child is not confused by different information/vocabulary which will complicate their grief process.

Try not judge – grief is a very personal experience and every child/young person will present differently and teenagers will often resent adults assuming that they will be feeling a certain way.

Cards and well-wishes from teachers/classmates are usually appreciated and maintain contact with school if they are absent.

Responses will vary- Do not assume that a lack of reaction means they do not care (see above try not to judge). The full reality can take time to sink in, and often young people will try to appear as though they are coping believing this to be mature behaviour. Allow them time and space to express their emotions and do not be afraid to share your feelings of sadness with them.

Be prepared to listen- Offer them time and space to talk or to sit quietly with you, this support will be greatly appreciated even if they don't take you up on it.

Children and young people need honesty- It may feel difficult but it's better to answer their questions honestly, if it feels too difficult then delay your response by asking them what they think?

Give bereaved pupils time- It may take months before they can fully cope with the pressures of school work, please remember that they will be grieving for life and their loss will always be with them.

Grief can become an all-consuming issue for young people. Occasionally, children may need more focussed intervention to help them cope with what has happened to them. It is important to recognise when to seek more specialist help.

You may notice some changes in behaviour that concern you, and may indicate that a child or young person needs further help.

When a child shows differences in behaviour it is important to have systems in place e.g. a profile which indicates that there is a concern. This can be a simple pro-forma that can be shared with the management team in the school, the psychology services and the parent/carer.

By keeping open lines of oral and written communication between home and school, any further intervention for assessment and support purposes comes from a shared understanding of the problem and there is agreement from the parent that further assessment from an educational psychologist or mental health professional is necessary.

Throughout the school there should be a consistent approach to staged 'intervention'. In the case of some children there may be a need to develop an individual education program with greater emphasis on aspects such as personal and social development.

When whole school approaches are required, it is helpful if there is a team approach to support for learning.

Team around the Child/Family meetings involving the parents and the network of professionals should ensure that there is quality monitoring of what planned and implemented. A pupil support team could be established in the school. The team could consist of the headteacher or other senior staff, Educational Psychologist, SENCo, Learning Support Assistant/Classroom Assistant, specialists to introduce music, drama or art as therapy.

The pupil support team will develop a plan that addresses:

- The need for individual or group work with the most affected children.
- Staff developing issues to meet individuals/group/whole school needs.
- Teambuilding.
- Co-operative teaching.
- Assessment: continuous assessment, whole school or group screening.
- Monitoring of teacher plans, classroom learning and teaching activities and evidence of progress from assessment activities.
- Seeking the views of children.
- Seeking the views of parents.
- Seeking the views of staff.

Charities such as Child Bereavement UK, Cruse and the Samaritans may also be able to offer helpful guidance on dealing with death and mourning. Details of these and other organisations are given in **Section 4, Appendix Part 2.**

Children do not need protection from the feelings and emotions associated with grief but do need support to express them and reassurance that these sometimes powerful and overwhelming emotions are normal and necessary.

Communicating the truth

Children with learning difficulties are sometimes assumed to need protection from death and dying more than most, or not to have the capacity to understand. Whilst to a certain extent this is true, we often underestimate their abilities to cope with tough things in life. The challenge is finding creative ways to communicate when words are sometimes not appropriate.

- If using words, use the real ones e.g. dead and dying, not euphemisms like 'lost'.
- Use as many real life examples if you can, e.g. pictures of funerals and coffins to aid understanding.
- Acknowledge any death. To ignore what has happened implies that this is an unimportant event and denies the existence of the person who has died.
- Pre-grief work is especially important to help prepare for an expected death.

Understanding the Concept of Death

All children struggle with the concept of death and its permanence. Children with learning difficulties may find this particularly difficult to grasp, especially the permanence, and may benefit from simple, practical examples to illustrate the difference between dead and living things. Very visual explanations are particularly important for children on the autistic spectrum. Some of these ideas may seem a bit macabre but it is what many SEND children need.

- Buy a bunch of flowers, put them in a vase and observe them wilt, wither and die. Compare to a fresh bunch of the same type. If kept, the dead flowers will illustrate that death is permanent, the flowers do not return to life.
- Purchase a dead fish from the supermarket and compare it to a live one. Even when put into a bowl of water the dead one will not move, breathe or swim.
- Give the dead fish a burial that replicates as far as possible a real one. Explain a cremation by burning leaves and mixing the resulting ashes with some earth.
- Take photos of this to act as a visual reminder for when re-explanation is needed.



Expressing their grief

Children do not need protection from the feelings and emotions associated with grief but do need support to express them and reassurance that these sometimes powerful and overwhelming emotions are normal and necessary. This is even more the case for children with learning difficulties.

- Use a simple workbook such as 'When Someone Very Special Dies' by Marge Heegard. This can easily be adapted for various ability levels.
- Looking at photographs or watching videos of the person who has died can facilitate expressions of sadness or anger.
- Act as a role model, shed tears if genuinely felt, use symbols to communicate how you are feeling but also reassure that you are OK and your response is natural.
- Carrying a comfort object such as a small piece of warm furry blanket can be an aid for getting through difficult moments.
- Reassure that being angry is OK. Offer opportunities for safe ways to express frustration and anger which for all children can play a big part in their grief. Use a pillow as a focus for their anger.

Remembering the person who has died

- A piece of fabric from an item of clothing carried in a pocket or made into a cushion can be comforting.
- Placing their favourite perfume or after shave on a hanky.
- Putting together a memory box of tangible reminders chosen by the child. This can help give some insight into factors and events that are key to the relationship with the person who has died.
- Listening to audio tapes of the voice or favourite music of the person who has died may help the visually impaired.
- Use a time line to spark off memories of significant events and pictures to build the deceased's life story.

Other useful sources of information/resources

- [Downs Syndrome](#)
- [Scope](#)
- [Autism: The National Autistic Society](#)

Further information and sources of support can be found in the resource list in the Appendix

If we expect staff to provide support to children and young people it is equally important to look after ourselves. The Welfare of staff supporting bereaved young people should be supported by both senior staff and each other. Additionally, staff should be kept informed through regular briefings, even when there is no 'new' information to share.

It is important to acknowledge **your** feelings too. You may also be caught up emotionally, or have echoes of recent or distant crises which make it difficult for you to respond to this situation as you might wish.

Take care of yourself. Don't be afraid to admit that the task is too difficult for you and be prepared to call on another member of staff, to support you or to talk to your pupils. Young people will benefit from this.

If, for personal reasons, it feels very difficult for a member of staff to offer a young person the support they needed, schools should arrange for other members of staff to take over this role.

Any school involved in a tragedy should consider devising guidelines for new and supply staff, who may be required to plan learning experiences and respond to the needs for vulnerable young people who have been involved in the crisis.

These guidelines may also be helpful to staff in school who may be teaching affected pupils in the future.

[More information.....](#)

Does the School Have a Supportive and Caring Ethos?

Building resilience is about helping children to recognise, accept and deal with their feelings. Schools should be places where young people can express their views, opinions and feelings. It is sometimes difficult for young people who have been affected by crisis, grief and or loss, to express their feelings to other children, young people and the adults in their lives.

Some children will not express their feelings to adults at home or in school for fear of causing the adults to be upset, or because they do not feel confident in discussing whatever personal crisis they are experiencing.

Although schools are very good at celebrating happy events some may find it difficult to respond effectively to grief, sadness and loss.

Many adults also have difficulty discussing grief or loss.

School clearly need to consider staff training and training for parents to create the caring and supportive ethos that allows for expression of pain, grief and loss by pupils, parents and staff.

Having special, quiet places with comfortable seating is helpful if young people want to leave the classroom activity to sit, think, cry etc

Teaching & Learning

There is some evidence that involvement in critical incidents can have an effect on a child's attainment. The learning experiences should be planned in such a way, that they take account of reduced concentration, restlessness and behaviours which can be disruptive.

Effective learning and teaching will ensure that there is:

- Planning by the teacher for individuals, groups and whole class approaches.
- Differentiated content, context, pace and methodology.
- Effective assessment of the whole child and their performance across the whole curriculum.
- The commitment to the personal and social development of the child/ren as a major priority.
- A rich and varied curriculum which is balanced with equal weight given to progression and continuity.
- An emphasis on reinforcement and consolidation.
- An emphasis on praise and encouragement.
- Self-evaluation by children.

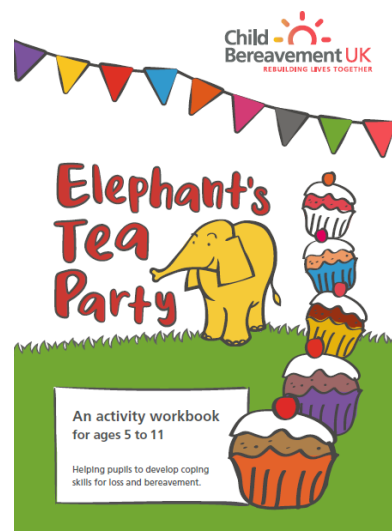
The resources to support the curriculum may require to be screened in the early days in order that staff avoid material which may upset young people or parents. Over time, however, people come to realise that there will be a lot of material that can cause upset. Careful consideration will be given to the way in which this material is presented and addressed with children. It will not always be possible to avoid upset, but recognising that the material may upset or has caused upset is essential.

"The strongest oak of the forest is not the one that is protected from the storm and hidden from the sun. It's the one that stands in the open where it is compelled to struggle for its existence against the winds and rains and the scorching sun." Napoleon Hill (1883-1970)

There are a number of resources available to schools that can help schools to address death and bereavement indirectly.

For younger children:

The Elephant's Tea Party is free programme of fun resources, lesson plans and activities for primary and lower secondary schools, to help equip pupils to develop coping skills for loss and bereavement, now and in later life.



The following ideas are taken from Child Bereavement UK's curriculum support pack:

English literature

Reading and discussing poems such as **'Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night' by Dylan Thomas**.

Try watching the clip of the reading of **'Funeral Blues' by W H Auden** from the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. **'Vicky Angel' by Jacqueline Wilson** tackles a death and the **Harry Potter** series covers death and being orphaned. For older pupils, **John Diamond wrote 'Snake Oil'** charting his battle with, and eventual death from, throat cancer.

History

When studying the Victorians, investigate their influence on present day funerals and other rituals associated with death and dying. Investigate how they were responsible for the development of out of town cemeteries filled with beautiful trees and planting.

Compare dying in Victorian times with now. Back then it happened at home and the body would be kept at home until the funeral. Today, very few people die at home. How would we feel if required to wear mourning clothes in the style of Queen Victoria, dressed head to toe in black. Explore what women were expected to wear and for how long.

Music

Listen to and compare various types of music played at funerals from classical to the popular. Examples could include **Faure's Requiem**, and **Always Look on the Bright Side of Life from Life of Brian**.

Discuss why the latter has become so popular (injects some humour, gives a positive message). **Tears in Heaven by Eric Clapton** written for his son who died age four is another often used. Research the top ten tunes used at funerals - great fun. Use the internet or ask a friendly funeral director. **My Way sung by Frank Sinatra is usually number 1**.

Puff Daddy wrote a rap called I'll Be Missing You, based on the song by the Police Every Breath You Take. This was in tribute to his friend Notorious B.I.G. Ask pupils to identify emotions/feelings that these pieces create. Similarly, **Wiz Khalifa's song See You Again** could be transcribed for pupils to highlight words/phrases that pertain to death and mourning.

It is good practice for schools to consider death and bereavement before they are faced with such a tragedy. The guidance below provides a framework to work within.

Introduction

Include a comment about why it is important to devise a bereavement policy, the school ethos and how this policy fits into the overall approach adopted by school towards the care of its staff and pupils. It should include the date when the policy came into operation, the review date and by whom it will be reviewed.

Who is involved and the roles adopted

This should include the name (or designation) and specific role of each member of the team.

- Key co-ordinator (usually the Headteacher) responsible for liaising with all parties.
- Member of staff (Pastoral team member) to coordinate support to pupils.
- Media spokesperson.
- School Nurse (if available) to offer support to staff and students.
- Member of Governing Body to ensure staff are supported.
- Business Manager who has access to contact details, and can provide admin support.

Aims of policy

This should identify who should benefit and by what means. All staff and pupils faced with bereavement will be provided with appropriate support.

This will be by way of:

- Offering opportunities to express feelings in a safe and supportive environment.
- The development of an action plan to support staff and pupils.
- Gaining access to specialist help if necessary (a note should be kept of local and national organisations which could help and any resources and information on grief, and trauma).

Procedure

This should include steps to be taken and by whom from the moment staff are informed of a death.

- Contact with family – to express sympathy, confirm details of what has happened and agree what information can be shared.
- Informing staff and pupils (how and by whom).
- Allocation of lead responsibility for ensuring pupil/staff welfare.
- Contact with media (if necessary).
- Contact with external agencies as needed.
- Arrangements for funeral/memorial services.
- Responsibility for reviewing the situation.
- Responsibility for record keeping.

With thanks to © Liverpool Clinical Commissioning Group & School Improvement Liverpool 2016

For more guidance and examples of bereavement policies, visit:

[Broadgreen Primary School Bereavement Policy \[PDF 1,071KB\]](#)

SECTION 4


Appendix & Resources

PART 1		
1.1	Immediate Actions Checklist for Completion by Lead Staff	29
1.2	Designated Roles & Responsibilities	30
1.3	Managing Social Media	31
1.4	Religious and Cultural Considerations	32
1.5	The Role of Educational Psychology Service	34
1.6a	Contacting the Bereaved Family	35
1.6b	Template Letter to Bereaved Parents	36
1.7a	Informing Staff and Pupils	37
1.7b	Informing Parents	40
1.8	Maintaining School Routine and Providing a Safe Place	42
1.9	Dealing with the Media	43
1.10	Joint Agency Response Meeting	45
1.11	Dealing with Specific Circumstances (eg: Suicide/Murder)	46
PART 2		
2.1	Supporting Resources from Child Bereavement UK	50
2.2	Reading List for Children & Young People	51
2.3	Web Resources for Young People and Those Supporting Them	52

Appendix 1.1 Immediate Actions CHECKLIST for Completion by Lead Staff

	Action	Completed (time & date)	By whom	Comments/notes
1	Establish a Critical Incident Management Team			
2	Confirm any information you have been given			
3	Check school records for deceased child and any siblings & relatives			
4	Contact Educational Psychology			
5	Contact the bereaved family			
6	Informing staff, governors and pupils and hold daily staff meetings to keep staff up-to-date/raise concerns			
7	Maintain school routine and provide a 'safe space'			
8	Contact the Local Authority Communications Team david.helliwell@cumberland.gov.uk 01228 830835			
9	Ensure the school is represented at the Joint Agency Response Meeting			

The following guidance is to help schools to manage the practical considerations listed in the Immediate Actions Checklist. We have also provided a sample script for those responsible for taking phone calls. This list can also be used in the event of a critical incident that doesn't involve the death of a child/staff member.

Name	Designation	Role	Responsibilities	
Click here to enter text.	e.g. Head teacher/Deputy	Crisis Manager	Overall direction and coordination, as necessary; liaison with the emergency services, the LEA, media, staff and parents; control and records of spending; allocation of roles to others depending on level of crisis.	
Click here to enter text.	e.g. Chair of Governors/Vice Chair	Media Liaison	To inform LA; to brief Media on facts and how the school is responding; keep LA, students, parents, staff and community informed. Contact School Improvement Service	
Click here to enter text.	e.g. Key members of the senior team	Pastoral Care Coordinator	Pastoral care for students and staff; operational issues as directed; parent/visitor liaison; timetable issues etc, liaise with Psychological Service, Education Welfare Officer, Social Services etc.	
Click here to enter text.	e.g. Senior Management/Bursar	Administrative Coordinator	Manage incoming calls; identify 'safe' areas in school for parents/pupils; liaise with contractors, utilities, and repairs/accommodation issues; transport communications; catering arrangements.	
Click here to enter text.	e.g. Senior Admin Staff	Administrative Support	General enquiries, reception, parent/visitor liaison; record keeping and other duties as required.	 Guidance for Taking Telephone Calls
Click here to enter text.	e.g. Other staff/governors	Incident Record coordinator	Incident record keeping; collation of message sheets; chasing outstanding 'actions'; maintenance of master record log/checklist	

The internet is rapidly becoming the first place where bereaved people will seek help. It is a place where young people can express their sorrow in their own words using icons, pictures or memes that express these feelings. 89% of young people access internet daily. 83% young people use internet to search for information on personal issues. It provides a safe, anonymous place and a supportive environment where people can connect with others. It provides the opportunity for communication with other mourners who knew the deceased.

Considerations for Schools From CBUK:

- It needs to be remembered that a school cannot 'contain' information that is being shared within the community; it will 'leak out'. Bearing this in mind, consideration needs to be taken with regards to the use of social media and having to deal with some of the repercussions it can have.
- The use of social media is instantaneous and if the correct information is not communicated there may be another source spreading the news or an incorrect version of events around the community. Inform the school and the school community as soon as possible (with the family's consent) with honest information, in a language appropriate for the audience. This will help to reduce anxieties and hopefully prevent the spread of rumours amongst the school community.
- Social media also can be used by the school community and family as a source of information and bereavement support. Again this should be done in consultation with and with the consent of the family/families concerned. Consult your school social media policy which will provide additional guidance.

"When someone is lost, the most natural place to look for them is the place where they were last seen."

What to be aware of

- Some mourners e.g. family members may become disenfranchised and not understand why consolation is being sought online. Death notifications via Facebook will increasingly be the rule rather than the exception. Because of this immediate family may feel excluded.
- There needs to be awareness that tension can manifest itself online. Often they may be a struggle for the "*chief mourner*" position.
- Be aware of how mourners may feel if a profile is removed and that status updates may continue to appear in news feed on non – memorialized profiles, which for some people may be difficult.

As a multi-cultural society, in which various beliefs, religious and non-religious, need to be taken into account, respect for the differing needs, rituals and practices are essential when acknowledging a death. This diversity enriches our lives. 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. The following descriptions merely give an overview of the major religions and belief systems that are found in the UK; Islam, Buddhist, Humanist, Hindu, Sikh and Christianity.

Islam	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
Buddhist	<p>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 family members.</p>
Humanist	<p>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. This is done by friends and family who are supported by an Officiate. The ceremony, usually a cremation, will be tailored to meet the family's wishes rather than following a set pattern.</p>
Hindu	<p>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.</p>

	<p>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.</p>
Sikh	<p>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 (place of worship) 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).</p>
Christian	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>

Adapted from: Liverpool Clinical Commissioning Group & School Improvement Liverpool 2016

The County Psychological Service has a protocol for supporting schools who have experienced a critical incident or the death of a pupil or member of staff. We do not offer a “counselling” service but can be available to support staff in dealing with trauma and bereavement. Educational Psychologists (EPs) are trained in helping schools to manage the psychological effects of a critical incident. An EP will be able to negotiate how best to support you and assist you in following the protocols involved in a serious incident. These might include;

- Providing links to relevant documents, guidance and literature
- Illustrating procedures and protocols which schools need to follow
- Providing emotional support to staff
- Helping schools and their staff to understand how trauma and bereavement can affect children and young people (terminology, range of emotions, behaviour)
- Helping schools assess the level of children’s reactions and needs
- Assisting schools in building resilience within the school community
- Signposting to other outside agencies who can offer ongoing support to children, young people and adults and identifying referral pathways for individuals who require specialist support from professionals

As a service, we value the importance of established and ongoing relationships which EPs have with schools. In the best case, your named EP will be available to contact the school, but in some cases e.g. illness, leave (especially in school holidays), another experienced EP will be available to provide the immediate assistance outlined above.

It is no doubt that you will be in an emotional state; sympathy, sadness, your own grief and loss. Nerves and uncertainty will also be in play. There is no 'right' way to speak with a grieving family but your support and sharing in their loss is bound to be in some way, a small comfort. It is important that you gather your thoughts and work through your own reaction to the death prior to making contact with the family, and consider some important points and possibilities before you do so;

- *How* you will make contact: a telephone call or a home visit (your relationship with the child's family/the child will aid this decision).
- Consider having a colleague to accompany you – you can support one another.
- *Whom* you may speak to first (a family member, a neighbour, police liaison officer). It is possible that parents may not wish to or be incapable of speaking with anyone at the time and may have asked someone to communicate with others on their behalf.
- Consider family dynamics, particularly for separated parents, step-parents.
- Whomever you speak with, offering condolences to the family on behalf of the school community is the most important step.
- Think about what you need to ask/agree with the family:
 - When/what to tell pupils (level of detail considering circumstances, what information the family wishes to be shared)
 - How to inform the wider school community (pupils' parents/carers etc)
 - Give your contact details/direct email/telephone number, and agree when you will make contact again. ***There will be follow-up conversations about funerals/memorials.***

Once you have made contact with the bereaved family, you could follow this up with a letter (see sample template below). The letter may update the family on when the rest of the school were informed, and any other practical issue ie; the child's belongings/books/photos that will be sent to the parents when they feel ready.

Considering Specific Religious and Cultural Practices

It is important to bear in mind the cultural and religious aspects of death. In some religions funerals take place very soon after a person has died.

A template letter to bereaved families is in appendix 6b

Dear <name>

We are so very sorry to hear of <name> 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 <name> very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to his friends and classmates. He was a much loved member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help as you plan <name> funeral service or other memorial opportunities, please let us know. In time, we will also ensure that anything of <name> 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 deepest sympathy

<Headteacher >

Informing Staff

The initial briefing should:

- give a brief statement of factual information;
- outline the school's response and proposed plan of action;
- allow staff to ask questions and to get a response;
- outline staff responsibility for monitoring pupil and staff welfare;
- identify vulnerable staff and pupils who may be at risk;
- clarify specific responsibilities for staff;
- advise staff on procedure for dealing with media enquiries;
- advise staff on agreed procedure for informing pupils and parents;
- inform staff of the support services that are available;
- reassure staff and pupils that they will be supported; and
- advise staff of time/place of next briefing and debriefing session.

Speed and chaos may be a major factor on a day when a Critical Incident has happened - meaning that constantly referring to plans and lists is not always possible. But remember that keeping people informed is helpful and valued.

Whether it is a death or a critical incident, a whole school is involved in a tragedy even though some may be more affected than others. It is fundamental to consider the following;

- The burden of coping with the crisis should not be allowed to fall upon only one or two staff, however willing and dedicated. All staff, both teaching and support, will need an opportunity to express their emotional reactions to the crisis.
- If a member of staff has been fatally or seriously injured, school colleagues will be under increased emotional stress and additional outside assistance, possibly from a neighbouring school or with the use of known supply staff, will almost certainly be required in the short term.
- Staff closely associated with the pupils involved, especially those responsible for them at the time of the incident, should be offered opportunities for debriefing. Many staff however, may require some support, and Local Authority services will be made available to those requiring specialist help.
- If possible, support should be organised from within the school. Colleagues can be of immense support to each other in times of crisis. Generally they know each other well and will be able to identify colleagues who are not coping as well as others.
- Senior staff need to protect their colleagues whilst recognising that they too need support. It is important that though is given to the relief of senior staff after a period of time. Tired and upset staff at whatever level will not be able to make sensible decisions if the crisis persists over many hours. Again LA support staff are available to assist.
- These needs of Headteachers, senior staff and governors have not always been fully acknowledged. The strain of leading a school through a critical incident can obscure personal feelings. Headteachers and others need to be aware of their own welfare and needs.

Informing Pupils

It is a common misconception that children do not grieve; even very young children will want to know what happened, how it happened, why it happened and perhaps most importantly of all, what happens next? The following guidelines will help you and your team to inform children of the death of a member of staff or pupil.

When to tell pupils

It is best if everyone can be informed as soon after the death as possible to avoid misinformation and rumour, but only once facts have been established and staff have been informed, briefed and feel equipped to respond to questions and concerns.

This should be agreed with the family of the deceased beforehand.

What to tell

Obtaining factual information should be made a priority. Think through how this might be done, remembering that making contact with those directly involved may be difficult. State in your policy the importance of not making assumptions or repeating what has been heard through rumour.

- Factual information should only be shared with the family's consent, and in a sensitive way. Staff should be informed before pupils.

NB: If the death is by suicide Samaritans provide step-by step programme to support schools in explaining this to pupils. They can be contacted on: 0808 168 2528.

[Samaritans Step by Step Guide](#)

Who to tell and How to tell

Identify how best to cascade the information.

Experience has shown that ***it is more beneficial if all pupils are informed***. Where possible, pupils should be informed in the smallest groups possible, so it is also important that all staff are properly briefed and prepared.

- Identify those children who had a long-term and/or close relationship with the deceased to be told together as a separate group.
- In secondary schools, informing pupils in year groups, key stages or whole-school assemblies will depend on who has died, who is most impacted and the circumstances of the death. **Identify who is best placed to share the information.**

It is always a shock when a death occurs in a school even if it may have been anticipated. In the eyes of the pupils, teachers are part of the fittings and fixtures in school and are not expected to die. Children expect to live forever, and so a fellow pupil dying whilst still young enough to attend school will also feel quite shocking.

Ensure everyone imparting the news is well prepared to give the same, accurate information and uses language appropriate to the understanding of the pupils. You can begin with statements such as ***"I am afraid I have to tell you something very sad"***. Then explain how, where and when the death occurred using simple, accurate words such as ***"dead"*** or ***"died"***. Euphemisms can lead to confusion and anxiety, so when using phrases like 'passed away', be sure to explain that this means death.

Some examples of how to inform children

"I've got some really sad news to tell you today that might upset you. I know most of you will have heard of cancer, and know that sometimes people with cancer get better, but other times people die from it. Mrs Smith, the Geography teacher and Year 11 tutor, has been ill with cancer for a long time. I have to tell you that Mrs Smith died yesterday in hospital."

"Sometimes people have accidents at work, at home, at school or on the road. People may be hurt or injured in the accident and they may have to go to hospital for treatment. Sadly, there are some accidents that cause people to die. I have some really sad news to tell you that might upset you. Yesterday Stephen, who is in Year 4, was in an accident and he was so badly injured that he died."

Reactions to Expect and How to Deal with Them

Pupils understanding and reaction to the news will depend on their age, life experience, emotional maturity, and cultural and familial beliefs.

- Be prepared for children to demonstrate their upset through tears or anger. But also, be prepared for some children to show little outward reaction. We are all different and there is no one right way to respond. Reassure them that however they feel is okay. Set aside some time to listen to what pupils may want to say or ask. Some may have lots of questions. Try to answer their questions as honestly and simply as you can, but don't be afraid to say you don't know if you haven't the information and let them know you will tell them more as you find out.
- Be prepared for children to say or do the unexpected, experience has shown some responses or apparent lack of response may be upsetting for adults; no apparent response does not mean that a child does not care.
- Acknowledge that not everyone will be feeling sad, and that is ok.

Further information on children's understanding of death can be found in section 2.

What Next?

- End discussion on a positive note - not all people who are ill or have accidents die - many get better.
- Consider a prayer or reflection to remember the deceased and their family.
- Perhaps coordinate an assembly to end discussion.
- Give pupils something practical and positive to do, such as making cards or writing something.
- Do pupils want to arrange for representatives to attend the funeral? How will this be managed?
- Try to identify any key answers that you may need to prepare, e.g. the facts about an illness, or dates which may be relevant to the death such as end of school year and changing class or schools.

Explaining Funerals, Burials and Cremations to Children

Useful guidance is provided by [Child Bereavement UK](#)

It is likely that a high percentage of parents will have heard the sad news. It is very difficult to find the words to put into a letter, and also to ensure that you are giving the right amount of factual information without causing confusion or misunderstanding. *In the event of a suicide, this is particularly difficult, and the views of the family should always be sought in formulating a statement about the suicide.*

A letter (sample A) should go to families the same day if possible. Consider including guidelines for parents on supporting bereaved children with the letter. See fact sheet Guidance for parents and carers (sample B).

Sample A: Letter to parents

Date:

Dear Parent

It is with great sadness that I have to tell you of the sudden death of _____ use caution if naming a pupil (a pupil in Year ____/a Year ____ Teacher). The pupils were told this morning by their Principal/class/form teacher.

_____ died of (an asthma attack, meningitis etc) and the pupils have been reassured this is something that does not happen very often. Your child may or may not want to talk about it but it is likely that he/she will need extra love and support from you in the days ahead. This does not mean that anything is wrong with him/her. It only means that this traumatic event has been too powerful for him/her to deal with on his/her own. He/she may be feeling anxious. Take time to listen to your child and try to provide a predictable routine for him/her at home. Avoid too many absences to start with.

We have enclosed an information leaflet for you which may be useful at this time.

We are seeking support from (Educational Psychology/police/Child Bereavement UK) who are helping to support us through this difficult time. It is sometimes necessary for a member of the team to speak to a class or to individual pupils who may be distressed. He/she will be guided by the Principal/class teacher in this. If you do not wish your child to receive such support from the team please contact us immediately.

We are deeply saddened by this great loss but are trying, for the pupils' sake, to keep the school environment as normal as possible. Our thoughts are with _____'s family at this tragic time and the school community sends them sincerest sympathy and support.

_____ 's funeral is on _____ at _____ am/pm at _____. We are in touch with the family regarding their wishes for the school's representation at the Service.

If you require further clarification or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

HEADTEACHER

- Consider including guidelines for parents on supporting bereaved children with the letter. See fact sheet Guidance for parents and carers (Sample B)

SAMPLE B: UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD'S REACTIONS AND HOW YOU CAN HELP INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

When a child or young person experiences a traumatic incident, it can be very upsetting for them and for you. Even though the event is over your child may still be experiencing reactions to it. It is normal for children and young people to be upset after such a happening. It is unlikely that they have experienced such an event before and so their reaction may be challenging for you. Their reaction may last a few days, a few weeks or longer. Reassurance, understanding and support from you, along with their teachers and their friends can help them to cope.

Here are some common reactions to a traumatic incident. You might have noticed some of these.

THINKING	FEELINGS
Confused Nightmares/bad dreams Poor concentration Restless Not interested in what is going on Spending a lot of time thinking about what happened Thinking that they cannot cope	Worried Guilty Anxious Fearful Easily upset Cross Panicky Overwhelmed
BEHAVIOURS	PHYSICAL COMPLAINTS
Loss of appetite Being very quiet Nervous Being quarrelsome/arguing	Feeling tired all the time Unable to rest or settle Feeling sick/knot in tummy Cold and shivery
REMEMBER	
1. These are normal reactions. 2. The reactions should lessen in time normally over the next few weeks. 3. If you continue to have concerns some more specialist help may be needed. Talk to your doctor about this.	

HELPING YOUR CHILD	
<i>It is important that you are prepared to bear whatever your child wants to talk about and to answer their questions.</i>	
DO	DO NOT

<p>Take time to listen and answer questions.</p> <p>Be honest in your explanations and in showing your own sadness or grief.</p> <p>Let them know their feelings are important.</p> <p>Give plenty of reassurance and affection.</p> <p>Let them know you love them and will be there for them.</p> <p>Keep to routines and patterns as much as possible.</p> <p>Be aware that changes such as clinging or aggressive behaviour or physical problems may be an expression of grief.</p> <p>Take things one day at a time.</p>	<p><i>Try to hide your own sadness or grief but try not to overwhelm them with such.</i></p> <p><i>Tell your child not to worry or be sad.</i></p> <p><i>They cannot control their feelings.</i></p> <p><i>Feel like you have to have all the answers or get it right all the time.</i></p> <p><i>Be surprised at your child's ability to set grief aside and alternate between sadness and happiness.</i></p> <p><i>Time with friends and playmates enables them to release anxiety about incidents over which they have no control.</i></p>
---	---

Schools are, in general - a very important safe space for children and young people, and in the wake of a tragedy the safety, security and normality schools can offer pupils (and staff) is more important than ever.

Research tells us that;

“engendering feelings of safety, calmness, sense of self and community efficacy, connectedness and hope” (Canadian Medical Association Journal, 2010).

is key to supporting children in coping with trauma and bereavement.

It is important to continue or quickly re-establish ‘normal’ routines within the school:

- Every attempt should be made to provide as much continuity as possible for young people, whilst accepting that opportunities for pupils to take ‘time out’, and the availability of extra support may continue to be needed.
- Maintain the normal school day so that pupils are unsettled as little as possible.
- Review the school calendar for the next few months and cancel or rearrange any events that might appear inappropriate.
- Parents can be invaluable (e.g. classroom helpers) in enabling the school day to run smoothly

Schools may wish to create or designate a special area where pupils can go to talk to an adult about how they are feeling. Although this is not essential, children should feel able to approach their teachers and other school staff in talking about their feelings and concerns.

*A perceptive teacher is not intrusive, and knows when to talk and when to listen. **Listening time is never a waste of time.** Experience has shown that young people will not talk about their innermost feelings to parents and teachers unless they are given strong signals that it is safe to do so.*

One of the tasks of the senior school staff must be to protect young people, parents and staff from the glare of publicity, particularly at the onset of the incident. While the media can help inform the public responsibly, it can also be harmful intrusive at times of stress and personal grief. As a broad rule, the media will tend to focus on what they term 'human interest stories' i.e. death, serious injury or random assaults on pupils. This interest may continue for a considerable period and involve the perceived harassment of those associated with the school. Destruction of property may have long term implications for the school itself, but will only generate short term press concern. It is essential that their potential presence be taken into account in any Crisis Management Plan.

The press treatment of an incident will generally follow an established pattern:

- They will **initially seek as much factual information** as possible, including any photos of the actual incident/pupils involved.
- This will be **followed by a need for background information**, which they will obtain by trawling records and databases for anything that has even a remote bearing. This is traditionally where 'experts' are brought forth to comment. **Schools may wish to anticipate this by including with the Crisis Management Plan a brief handout (which can be photocopied) that provides details of the school, a photograph, safety arrangements in place/safety record and details of senior staff etc.**
- **The final phase, perhaps the most unpleasant, is the search for somebody to blame** for what has occurred. This is where earlier ad-hoc comments and speculation can cause considerable difficulties.

The key to successful media management is the right balance of mutual co-operation. The benefits to be gained from this are:

- Sensitive and sympathetic treatment of the victims and their relatives;
- Positive coverage of those involved in handling the incident;
- The opportunity to address rumours and ill-founded information;
- A swift and effective way of distributing public information.

Schools are urged to seek advice from the County Councils Media Team on handling the incident and particularly before agreeing to be interviewed or releasing the names of the pupils and staff.

School communities will still face the need to deal with the attentions of the media. Press, radio or TV reporters may approach pupils, parents, governors, teaching and support staff individually in the earliest stages of an incident. In an out of school incident, the media might learn of it before the school and may have information at odds with that of the school.

Almost without exception it is inadvisable to permit press and television on to the school premises or to give them access to staff or pupils. In the most difficult circumstances, the police will usually provide some protection against media intrusion.

In some cases, the police will be the leads communications and this will be agreed at the Joint Agency Response Meeting.

Guidance Points

- Prepare (with the assistance of the Country Media Team if possible) an agreed text for release to the media and/or as a script from which anyone confronted by the media can speak.
- If you have any concerns about issues of legal liability or the possibility of police action, clear any statements with the LA or Diocesan legal advisers first, as well as the County Media Team.
- Try to establish the line of questioning that is likely to be adopted by the press. They are often helpful in providing this information because generally, they would rather that you were responsive and eloquent rather than tongue tied and struggling for an answer.
- Identify a designated spokesperson (usually a senior person on the staff or governing body) appropriately briefed and prepared to make a direct response for the school. Members of staff dealing directly with families involved in the crisis should not be asked to take on the task of dealing with the press as well.
- All enquiries should be directed to and through the designated spokesperson who can arrange to have a briefing session with the press if necessary. The briefing session could take place away from the school site. If the press are aware of these arrangements, they may be less inclined to crowd the school gates or try to interview individual pupils, staff or parents.
- While factual information may be given to the press, the privacy of staff, young people and their families must be maintained at all times.

Facing the Press

How you Present and Respond is as Crucial as what you Say

- Remember reporters move on to the next catastrophe; a survivor may live for years with a foolish quote in an unguarded moment.
- Effective direct communication within the school community can limit the impact of sensational media coverage.
- Pupils, teaching and non-teaching staff, governors and parents need appropriate, accurate, up to date release of information and encouragement so as to reduce speculation and rumour.

Do

- Respond to 'what' and 'when' questions if the facts are available;
- Give your information quickly, accurately and get your key message(s) across;
- Consider, when possible, the needs of your audience;
- Choose your own time when to report to the media;
- Prepare and rehearse;
- Be aware of what has been said by others. It is important to speak with the same voice;
- Use the opportunity to quash ill-founded rumour or inaccuracies.

Don't

- Reply to 'how' and 'why' questions unless you are clear about the facts of your answers;
- Speculate;
- Bluff or lie;
- Make 'off the record' comments;
- Make promises you cannot keep;
- Make excuses or blame others;
- Respond to 'blind quotes' (e.g. 'one of your staff tells me that...Do you agree?')
- Say 'no comment' – explain why you cannot comment;
- Allow words to be put into your mouth (e.g. 'would you agree with that...').

In the event of any death of a pupil, the school will be notified by the Child Death Review team (if not already by parents and pupils) and will be invited to the Rapid Response Meeting. This is usually held within 1 working day of the sudden unexpected death of a young person under 18 years old. It is part of the statutory Child Death Overview Process (CDOP) which has the aim both to try and prevent deaths in childhood and also to ensure that the family and community receive the support that they need.

The Joint Agency Response meeting will involve most of the professionals who have been involved with the young person. This is to build up a picture of the context in which they lived as well as to try and understand how or why they died.

The meeting can be challenging and distressing. Attendees from schools may be the only ones to have actually known the young person before they died. Discussing the events around the time of death can be upsetting for non-medical people. **Experience tells us that it is helpful to send 2 members of staff** to offer support to one another. Most schools send head or deputy head teachers, heads of year or pastoral support staff. Schools attended by siblings of the child who has died unexpectedly will also be invited, to ensure that the siblings can be appropriately supported.

Further information on the Child Death Review Process can be accessed by ctrl and clicking on the following links;

[Describing the Child Death Review Process: A Guide for Parents, Families and Carers Whose Child has Died Unexpectedly](#)

[Information to Support Schools and Community Groups Following a Child Death](#)

Alternatively, visit Cumbria Safeguarding Children's Partnership's website.

Appendix 1.11 Dealing with Specific Circumstances (eg: Suicide/Murder)

1. A Pupil's Parent or Sibling Dies

This is an event where the whole crisis contingency plan does not have to be set in motion. However, the following actions should be instigated. How much of the following is required will depend on the age and understanding of the young person concerned, as sensitive judgments will need to be made before making any decision on how best to handle the situation.

In the case of a death in the young person's closest family, the headteacher or the class teacher should be informed. If the death happens while the young person is in school, a representative for the family, preferably a parent should be asked to come to the school to inform them. If the teacher has to give the death notification, the guidelines in the 'Immediate Actions Checklist' should be followed.

Before notifying fellow pupils, the class teacher should speak to the bereaved young person to determine what information should be given to his/her classmates and in what form. Some young people prefer to be absent while this information is given, some want to participate. It is helpful if classmates are informed about whether their bereaved classmate wants them to talk about what has happened (i.e. speak openly and take the initiative, or let the bereaved young person decide when he or she wants to talk). Use the opportunity to talk about grief and grief reactions, but be sure to prepare the affected young person for this.

It is a symbolic gesture to the bereaved young person and the family if a representative of the school, preferably the class teacher, is present at the funeral. The teacher can also (with parental consent) encourage the bereaved young person's closest friends to participate in the funeral.

Following the death of a parent, the teacher must accept a longer period with a possibly reduced capacity for school work. Because of this, the bereaved young person might need extra help at a later time, when working capacity becomes more normal again.

Let the young person decide how much he or she wants to talk about what happened, but let them know that you are willing to listen if he or she comes to you.

Keep the home informed about the young person's progress at school.

2. The Death of a Member of Staff

If a member of staff dies suddenly, the guidelines presented above are, to a large extent, applicable to this situation. It is, however, especially important to include the following measures:

- If the death happens suddenly and unexpectedly, arrange for a meeting (debriefing) as soon as practically possible, where colleagues can talk through what has happened. The effects on staff and close colleagues will need to be carefully and continuously monitored.
- Use a classroom meeting to help the most affected classes; use rituals to help students express their feelings.
- Try to establish continuity in the classroom as soon as possible. If possible, use an existing member of staff to take the class. Where supply staff are used, try to use a supply teacher who is known to the pupils. They should be informed properly on how students and other staff are affected and which ones are most distressed. Remember this member of staff will also require support. The headteacher or the previous year's class teacher may be appropriate to hold the classroom meeting (perhaps through circle time).
- In order to prevent rejection, use time with the class to talk sensitively about the replacement of the teacher or member of staff who has died.
- In the case of the class teacher, let children participate (with parental agreement) in the funeral, accompanied by parents or other trusted adults.

3. Particular Circumstances Regarding Suicide

The someone should choose to end his or her life creates within us a deep sense of unease in that it serves to challenge some of our most deeply held thoughts and beliefs. It defies an established view that all human life is sacred. It questions the value of life itself. It confronts us with longstanding taboos against the taking of life and, for some, it prompts complex religious considerations. The act of suicide forces us to question the value and meaning not only of life in general but also of our own individual lives.

Staff and pupils may have feelings of extreme guilt for not knowing how distressed and distraught an individual must have been prior to taking his or her own life.

The school community may encounter suicide in a variety of ways. A teacher, member of ancillary staff, or a young person may use suicide or, alternatively, someone in their extended family may die through suicide. The suicide of a celebrity may have far reaching implications for a minority of vulnerable students. In the event of a suicide of any member of the school community, the school's Crisis Management Plan should be implemented.

It is important to remember that suicide is a major cause of death among young people in their teenager years, and it is occurring increasingly with younger people.

Staff should pay close attention to the following indicators and should give consideration to any developing patterns e.g. are there clusters of indicators in relation to one individual?

- Previous history of a suicide attempt.
- Verbal threats of suicide.
- Changes in behaviour such as withdrawal.

- Indicators of depression.
- Signs of self-harm.
- Themes of death and self-harm in written or art work.
- Emergence of problems in school such as a drop in academic performance, emotional outbursts etc.

There are no strict criteria to be adhered to in organising responses to death by suicide. Individual circumstances require individual responses that take into account the uniqueness of each situation.

The following points, however, merit consideration:

- When a young person has died by suicide, the risk of others doing likewise will not increase as a result of focused and informed discussion in class. Knowledge is rapidly circulated within the school community and silence from the school senior staff may result in rumour and innuendo.
- The views of the family should be sought in formulating a management statement about the suicide.
- In general terms, knowledge of suicide attempts should remain strictly confidential wherever possible, and should not be shared with other students.
- In the case of a suicide, careful consideration should be given to identifying the closest peer group and to asserting if some, within this peer group, are at particular risk. The process is important in preventing contagion or so called 'cluster suicides'.
- With regard to school based memorial services, plaques, statues and other memorials, there is a debate between those who would see these as fitting tributes and those who fear the glorification of suicide and attendant risk of contagion.
- For those students who wish to attend a funeral service, numbers should be limited and should be at the discretion of the family.
- Religious considerations may be of key importance.
- There should be mutual understanding of roles amongst those who comprise that professional network which offers support to the family.
- Whilst it is essential to ensure any necessary specialist input for the family and closely affected members of the school community, it is important, too, for normal routines and functioning to be re-established as soon as possible.

Early information regarding time and place of death, method and other circumstances should be made available from a source of authority to confront rumours. However, it is important to avoid romanticising death. Suicide creates much pain and new problems. Suicide should be presented as a permanent 'response' to temporary problems that could have been solved in a better way. The task of the school will be able to help friends accept the pain created, without choosing an 'easy' solution to what has happened. Teachers can help the young people find various coping strategies and ways of expressing themselves. This can be of help when they face any crises they might meet later in life.

Further information and guidance about suicide can be below:

[Papyrus \(Prevention of Young Suicide\)](#)

[Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide \(SOBS\)](#)

[Building Suicide-Safer Schools and Colleges – A Guide for Teachers and Staff](#)

When A Death Occurs Outside of School

In cases such as this, quite often, staff and students will learn of the incident via the media and will only be able to speculate as to the circumstances surrounding the incident. The day following the incident is likely to be difficult if the only information available is that which was given in the press and/or social media.

It is vital, therefore, that precise details are sought, and early contact with the family may be the only way of ascertaining precisely what has happened and how the incident should be dealt with. The headteacher or other senior teachers should make contact, even if this is over the weekend or holiday period.

For a death that occurs on a school outing/trip or bus journey to/from school, the school's Critical Incident Management Plan should be implemented and schools will work alongside the police and the LA Health & Safety team in managing the immediate action plan.

An immediate action plan will include:

- The development of routines that ensure that the headteacher is informed by parents or other authorities (police, hospital etc);
- The headteacher (or in their absence, Deputy) verifies information about the death before informing teachers and classmates. They gather as many facts as possible about the event from parents and others (police, fire brigade, hospital etc).

Information should be gathered about:

- When, where and how it happened?
- Were other pupils present?

The headteacher takes responsibility for informing:

- Teachers/ancillary staff;
- Class and other pupils (assisted by teachers) for death notification.
- Planning for the rest of the day is activated to include support in the classroom.
- If press approach, they should be referred to the Council's Communications Team.
- Affected family, classmates and staff should be shielded. Only if confident to do so and in consultation with the deceased family should a statement from the school be given to the media.
- A meeting should be held to discuss plans for the following day. All teachers in classes affected by the death should attend as should any ancillary staff who would be expected to deal with affected pupils e.g. lunch time supervisors.

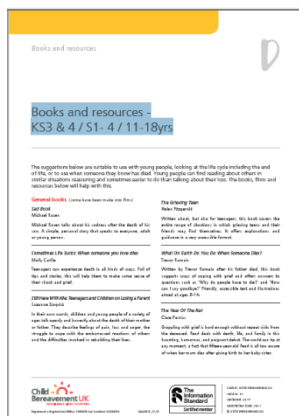
Schools' Information Pack



A series of A4 fact sheets, offering guidance, support and information when a death occurs in the school community or when a school is facing an expected death.

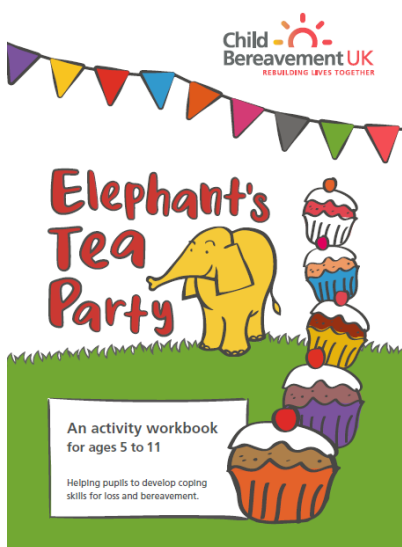
> [Download the Schools' Information Pack](#)

Books and resources - KS3 & 4 / S1- 4 / 11-18yrs



The suggestions are suitable to use with young people, looking at the life cycle including the end of life, or to use when someone they know has died. Young people can find reading about others in similar situations reassuring and sometimes easier to do than talking about their loss. [The books, films and resources will help with this.](#)

Elephant's Tea Party



By talking about death and dying as a normal and natural subject, it can help enable bereaved children to have better coping skills. Giving children support from familiar, trusted adults will mean that most will not need professional help. Schools are well placed to provide this support.

[The Elephant's Tea Party](#) is a free initiative for schools that raises the topics of death and grief in a sensitive and age-appropriate way. It helps teachers give children the emotional literacy and life skills needed to equip them for bereavement, now and in later life.

Reading List

Using stories and activities can be a really good way to explore issues with a child who has been bereaved.

CHYPBAG have created a suggested reading list, which we found helpful when working with bereaved children and young people. There are also textbooks and reference sources for people working in the area of child bereavement.

The books are arranged in the following categories:

- Books for Younger Children
- Sudden Death
- Illness
- Death of a Sibling
- Books for Adolescents
- Books for Professionals Working with Families

Most of these publications are available from Amazon.co.uk, whilst others are only available via the Child Bereavement UK site: <https://childbereavementuk.org>
ISBN and publishing details are provided to assist sourcing.

Books for Younger Children	 Books for Younger Children.pdf
Books for Adolescents	 Books for Adolescents.pdf
Books for Professionals	 Books for professionals.pdf
Books Dealing with Illness	 Illness.pdf
Books about Death of a Sibling	 Death of Siblings.pdf
Books for SEND	 Special Educational Needs.pdf
Books dealing with Sudden Death	 Sudden Deaths.pdf

Appendix 2.3 Web Resources for Young People and Those Supporting Them

The logo of each organisation contains a hyperlink. Hold control and click at the same time to be directed to the website.

<p>Child Bereavement UK Child Bereavement UK supports families and educates professionals when a baby or child of any age dies or is dying, or when a child is facing bereavement. 0800 02 888 40</p>	
<p>Brake Brake works to stop road deaths and injuries by campaigning for safer roads; supports people bereaved or injured in road crashes; and raises public awareness for sustainable transport.</p>	
<p>Samaritans Every six seconds, somebody contacts us. Ten times a minute, we can help someone turn their life around. That's a privilege, and a huge responsibility.</p>	
<p>Papyrus PAPYRUS is the national charity dedicated to the prevention of young suicide.</p>	
<p>SOBS We exist to meet the needs and overcome the isolation experienced by people over 18 who have been bereaved by suicide.</p>	
<p>Sudden Sudden is a charitable initiative sharing best practice, research and resources among professionals across the world working with people who are suddenly bereaved.</p>	
<p>Young Minds We're leading the fight for a future where all young minds are supported and empowered, whatever the challenges.</p>	
<p>Winston's Wish A charity which supports children and young people following the death of close family.</p>	
<p>Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership Cumbria Local Safeguarding Board provides practical advice and support for schools on the safety and wellbeing of pupils</p>	

<p>Childline ChildLine is a counselling service for children and young people up to their 19th birthday</p>	
<p>Compassionate Friends We offer support after the death of a child of any age and from any cause.</p>	
<p>National Autistic Society Every autistic person, and their level of understanding, is different. The NAS provides information and resources on explaining and discussing death and bereavement</p>	
<p>Kooth Is an online counselling and emotional well-being platform for children and young people, accessible through mobile, tablet and desktop</p>	
<p>Boing-Boing Boingboing provides opportunities to learn about resilience. We run regular Resilience Forums, develop Resilience Frameworks, books and other materials, and offer training and talks on resilient approaches to life's challenges.</p>	
<p>Cruse Offers support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies</p>	
<p>Hope Again Young people coping with bereavement and living after loss. A website from Cruse Bereavement.</p>	
<p>Child Death Helpline A freephone service for all those affected by the death of a child 0800 282 986 0808 800 6019</p>	
<p>CALM The Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) is leading a movement against male suicide, the single biggest killer of men under 45 in the UK</p>	
<p>Grief Encounter Supporting bereaved children and their families to help alleviate the pain caused by the death of someone close.</p>	

<p>Breaking Bad News</p> <p>This website provides information about how to support someone with intellectual difficulties in bad news situations</p>	
<p>Suicide Bereavement Support Cumbria</p> <p>Are a self-help organisation working in Cumbria and surrounding area to provide support to people who have been affected by the tragedy of loss by suicide. They offer support in a range of ways which are described on our website.</p>	
<p>The Growing in Grief Awareness Programme (CBN)</p> <p>is a whole- school framework, free to primary and secondary, special and mainstream schools across the UK. They provide downloadable tool to audit current practice in promoting well-being among bereaved students and developing the curriculum to prepare children to deal with bereavement. The Programme aims to help schools plan to support pupils facing or following the death of someone important in their lives prepare pupils to manage loss and bereavement in their lives.</p>	
<p>Dealing with a Bereavement</p> <p>Mencap provide some useful information on dealing with a loss, including resources about how to discuss death with a person with a learning disability.</p>	

Authors:

Sudden and Traumatic Death and Bereavement: A Guide for Schools and Educational Settings in Cumbria has been compiled by a number of professionals interested in developing and embedding bereavement support across Cumbria.

Thanks go to:

Dr Deb Lee	Designated Paediatrician for Child Deaths
Carol Green	Child Bereavement UK, Bereavement Services Team Lead Cumbria
Carly Dennison	Assistant Educational Psychologist
Sue Sanderson	Senior Educational Psychologist
Charlotte Thompson	Public Health Nurse Practitioner