



# Dealing with bereavement & loss

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**Review Term: Spring 2025**

The subject of bereavement and loss is one that can be difficult, especially when it involves bereavement or loss through the death of a loved one. For a child whose life has been affected by a bereavement or loss, school with its familiar environment and routines, can be a place of comfort, security and continuity. School is often seen as somewhere safe and neutral for a child to express their grief with a familiar and trusted adult.

This policy aims to establish procedures for dealing sensitively with the death of a member of the school community, death of a pet and the loss experienced when a child's parents divorce or separate. The policy is applicable to, and takes into consideration current times.

## **Death of a parent/carer or other significant person:**

### **Short term**

1. The head teacher or deputy head teacher (or in their absence an AHT) will make contact with the family straight away to establish facts.
2. Communication protocols will be discussed on initial contact with family, regarding information the family would like to be shared and how this will be done.
3. Death in the school community will be acknowledged by Bromcom email, to the family. If the deceased was a parent of a pupil on roll we will also acknowledge the child(ren)s loss by card.
4. Attendance at the funeral can be organised, as per family wishes. If the child is to attend the funeral then where possible, arrangements will be made for the class teacher or a familiar and trusted adult to attend, if the family wishes and agrees.

### **Medium term - Transition planning, pupil returning to school**

5. The class teacher or a familiar and trusted adult will become the link with the family.
6. The class teacher may discuss the death with the class before pupil returns to school, as per family wishes.
7. Parents of the children in the class will be informed of any discussion by email, if applicable.
8. If other issues arise as a result of this discussion, support will be available for classes through circle time and families through use of the parent/child sharing library.
9. Bereavement counselling will be explored – in discussion with the family, if required. Access to Learning Mentor if needed.
10. The pupil's loss will be acknowledged by relevant members of staff, as per family wishes – 'I'm sorry to hear about...', 'I've heard about ... how you are feeling?'
11. The child will be able to nominate a member of staff to talk to. This could be a teacher, Learning Mentor or a member of support staff.
12. The child will be invited to create a memory book/box.

13. A “time out” system to have some space, if a child feels overwhelmed by powerful emotions; this could include a non-verbal signal.

### **Long term**

14. The progress and wellbeing of the pupil (learning, changes in behaviour) will be monitored by staff.
15. Knowledge will be shared at transition times, significant dates such as mothers/fathers day/anniversaries/birthdays etc - memories book.
16. If needed external support will be considered, and/or parents signposted.
17. If needed a staff mentor will be assigned.

### **Procedures for dealing with a death in the School Community**

- The head teacher will inform the Chair of Governing Board immediately.
- Briefing for all staff as soon as possible
- Where possible there will be a gap between telling staff and pupils.

The following will be confirmed during staff briefing:

- Who will tell the class? (Class teacher).
- How? (Class groups).
- Where? (Safe surroundings - classroom).
- How will parents be told (email/Bromcom)
- Access to bereavement support if needed (under “further support”)
- Memorial/tribute consideration?

It is important to acknowledge that not everyone will be affected by the death and/or be feeling sad, and that is ok. Grief is personal and can be processed differently. It may also be experienced at a later stage.

Use of social media – ensuring appropriate sharing of information at the right time, respecting family privacy and views. Reporting of any concerns.

### **Dealing with the death of a pet**

It is important not to make assumptions about how a child might react to the loss of their pet. Some children are not deeply involved with their pets and, once they have died, they may be secretly relieved that they don't have to care for them anymore. However, most children are very fond of their pets and their pet has been really important and special in their lives. The death of a pet may be particularly painful if:

- The pet was very special, such as a first pet .
- There have been other losses in the child's life, for example the death of a grandparent, loss of friends by changing schools, or the break-up of parents or other family members. For these children, the death of their pet may be marked by a period of grief.

### **How staff can offer support:**

- Acknowledge their feelings. Encourage the child to talk about their pet and express their emotions; writing a story or poem about their pet or drawing a picture of their pet can be helpful for them.
- Try to understand the importance of the animal and what the child has lost; don't trivialise or minimise their grief.

- Use language that the child will understand - straightforward words such as “dead” or “died” are more appropriate than “put to sleep”, which may cause some confusion and anxiety for younger children who don’t fully understand the concept of death.
- Be prepared to talk about how the animal died, but don’t include distressing details.
- Don’t be afraid to share your own feelings of sadness.
- If children are having other difficulties in their lives, a pet’s death may be the last straw and particular care must be taken to understand their problem.

## **Dealing with divorce or separation**

We also recognise that children experience a loss when parents divorce or separate. They will have two main concerns:

- being separated from one of their parents.
- grief because the original family does not exist anymore.

The children will feel lost. Their own natural place in the family is not the same anymore.

Most children have a 'secret mission' to reunite their parents. If they are asked, they will usually prefer the parents to stay together instead of getting a divorce or separating. This is still the case when the marriage has been very difficult. Children are extremely loyal to their parents. They will often deny and hide their own feelings.

Many children feel guilty when their parents divorce or separate. They think that if they had just behaved better or done better in school, it would not have happened. It is important to explain to a child that they did not cause the divorce or separation. A child needs to know that the divorce is a result of the parents not being able to work things out.

Children often experience a conflict of loyalty. When they are with one parent, they feel guilty about not being with the other, and vice versa.

## **How will children react?**

Children will always react to a divorce or separation. The question is how and how strongly. A child who does not show any feelings or reactions may need help to express what is going on inside. Otherwise, they are very likely to suffer depression later.

- Nursery, Reception and Year 1 children may show regressive behaviour. This means that the child may return to an earlier stage of development and, for example, start to wet themselves again. A pre-school child may become confused, irritable or worried.
- Children In Years 2- 4 are very vulnerable. At this age a child is still not mature enough to understand what is going on, but is old enough to understand that something very unpleasant is taking place. They still depend very much on the parents and will have a hard time talking about their emotions. They may react with anger, or it may affect their focus, progress and/or friendships at school.
- Children in Years 5 and 6 may have started having important relationships with other people besides their parents and family. When the parents divorce/separate, it will often be good for a child to talk to someone outside the family about their problems and feelings. They may react to the divorce/separation with anger, grief or depression. A good starting point would be by accessing support from the school Learning Mentor.

Children’s wellbeing and progress will be monitored and reviewed, external support such as Counselling or Family Therapy can be considered if it is required.

Trusted good friends can be involved in supporting the children.

### How teachers can make divorce less traumatic for children:

- Talk to the children. Be open; listen to how they feel. They may be angry, frightened or worried. Use of Zones of Regulation to articulate feelings.
- Children can express themselves in other ways than with words. Play is very important. Play with the child; let them act out their feelings. Children may need to work off tension through energetic games.
- Drawing may help a child. Children often draw things that are important to them. Ask about the drawings; this can be a good way to start the child talking about what's going on inside.

### Death in the curriculum

Death is also dealt with in the curriculum in the following ways:

- Remembrance month - November
- Formal curriculum – RE/RSHE/Science/History/English
- Informal – Sharing, child led e.g. death of a pet, TV, personal experience etc.

### Further Support/Guidance

For school staff:

[“Managing a sudden death in the school community”](#) guidance and resources for teachers from LGFL

[Managing bereavement](#) – A guide for schools from Child Bereavement UK

Elephant’s Tea Party – An activity workbook for ages 5-11, helping pupils to develop coping skills for loss and bereavement (see Learning Mentor for this resource)

### Useful websites for extra information:

[www.childbereavement.org.uk/](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk/)

<https://www.winstonswish.org/>

[Short guidance films from](#) Child Bereavement UK

### Copies of the following books are available in school:

Title	Topic	Age Range
We Love them	Death of a pet	KS1
I Miss You	A first look at death	Early years
Since Dad Left	Separation	Y3 & 4
When Someone Very Special Dies	Activity book, dealing with grief	All ages
Always and Forever	Explaining Death	KS1/Y3 & 4
What Do you know about Divorce and Separation?	Separation	Year 3/4
Dogger	Dealing with loss/death of a pet	KS1
Badgers Parting Gifts	Dealing with loss	All ages
The simple guide to child trauma	Child trauma	Adults
Michael Rosen’s Sad Book	Death and sadness	ages4-11
I don’t want to talk about it	Divorce	ages 4-8
Helping children cope with divorce	Divorce	Adults
Two homes	Separation and divorce	KS1
When someone has a very serious illness	Coping with loss and	KS2

	change	
Missing mummy	Bereavement	KS1
What happens when someone dies?	Death and funerals	KS1/2
When dinosaurs die	Understanding death	KS1/Year 3&4
Lifetimes	Explaining death	All ages
A place in my heart	Understanding bereavement	KS1
Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine	Activity book	All ages
Someone I know has died	Activity book	KS1