



A GUIDE TO DEALING WITH BEREAVEMENT IN SCHOOLS

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Introduction

This booklet was initially produced by Rhondda-Cynon-Taf and Merthyr Tydfil Educational Psychology Service and Eye to Eye Youth Counselling Service (in 2015). This update was undertaken with The Exchange Counselling Service in Merthyr Tydfil and Eye to Eye Counselling Service in RCT to provide an accessible, practical and user-friendly guide for head teachers and school staff to use when supporting a family facing, or experiencing bereavement. The guidance is based on what is considered to be good practice, but there is no definitive model for schools to follow. Treating children, young people and families with respect and understanding at a difficult point in their lives is of paramount importance.

The guide makes a clear distinction between the death of an individual, which is a sad, but common event; and a critical incident, which is a tragic and usually unexpected event, often affecting a number of people. Definitions are provided to help schools understand the nature of the issue that they are dealing with.

Providing an overview of the grieving process, the guide highlights how bereavement may affect a child and their learning in school. A child's experience of death, and their reactions to it, may be different to that of an adult. The guide highlights the need to know and understand the child, as support offered must consider and respect the child's individual personality and their home circumstances.

The guide also covers information on how to cope with the news that a child may have a close family member who is terminally ill, or that a close family member has died.

In the case of an unexplained death or suspected suicide, particular care should be taken to ensure sensitive and appropriate support. Specific information on what schools should do is provided.

Also included is a section covering the impact that bereavement may have on members of staff.

Finally, the guide draws attention to the need for a longer-term awareness that a child has been bereaved. The grieving process can affect children in different ways as they mature, and transition between classes and/or schools can be stressful. A quiet awareness of the history of the child may be helpful for staff to understand why a child may be having difficulty coping at different stages of their education.

A comprehensive list of organisations and charities that can offer further support and guidance is provided, together with a list of some of the key books that are available.



1. How common is bereavement?

Bereavement is a common event; According to the Childhood Bereavement Network, most young people in the UK will have been bereaved of someone close to them (a parent, sibling, grandparent, friend or teacher) by the time they are 16, with one in 29 (or one per classroom) having experienced the death of a parent or sibling.

2. Why is it important for schools to understand about the effects of bereavement?

The death of someone close affects many aspects of life, sometimes for a very long time. Grief is often revisited over a life-span and can be experienced and expressed in new ways, particularly at times of further change or loss.

When a child's needs, such as grief, go unrecognised, they can be more vulnerable to poor life outcomes, particularly in socially disadvantaged areas.

Grief is often overlooked as a factor that may be impacting on a child's behaviour.

3. What is the difference between a bereavement, and a critical incident?

A bereavement can be used to describe the death of an individual, for example a child, teacher, parent or someone else close to a child or young person. Such deaths can be expected, such as following a terminal illness, or unexpected, such as through a sudden heart attack. The impact of the death of someone close should never be underestimated but most such deaths, whilst tragic, are within the realm of common human experience.

A critical incident, in contrast to a sad event, usually occurs suddenly and is usually a rarely occurring event that is traumatic and unpredictable. Critical Incidents have the potential to overwhelm usual human and organisational coping responses, even with the provision of sources of support; consequently multi-agency support to effectively manage all aspects is required. In the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region, there is an agreed protocol for management of Critical Incidents (revised September 2020). This protocol defines Critical Incidents as an event, or series of events;

1. That is sudden, unexpected and out of the realms of common human experience; and
2. it has resulted in (or could have caused) death, life threatening injury or sustained serious and permanent impairment of health or development; and
3. an immediate effective response requires multi-agency co-ordination to manage threat, risk, harm and the impact on a group of individuals and/or the wider community.



Examples of a Critical Incident would include:

- The death or serious injury of a child or staff member as a result of an accident or act of deliberate violence, which occurs within the school context: This could occur on or off the school site (e.g. whilst on a school trip).
- The unexplained death or disappearance of a child or young person.
- Damage to the school as a result of natural or man-made disasters.
- The effects of terrorism, war or natural disaster.

It is essential that as far as possible, schools plan and prepare in advance for how they will respond in the event of a critical incident. Your school should have a copy of the document 'Critical Incidents in Schools, Preparation and Planning' that will help with this. The Educational Psychology Service are also able to offer more information and can provide training for school senior leaders in relation to effective planning and establishing a school Critical Incident team.

4. Should schools treat bereavement as a critical incident?

In normal circumstances, bereavement should be considered to be a sad event. In such circumstances, research indicates that children who have experienced a bereavement are initially best supported by familiar, trusted adults, such as family members and school staff. Staff who have had specific training around loss and bereavement, such as Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) may be particularly helpful in offering direct support to the child. Advice can also be sought from the Educational Psychology Service or school counselling service, in relation to how staff and parents can best support bereaved children. However, direct work with the child by these external services, particularly in the initial days and weeks following a death, is usually not required or advised. Involving professionals otherwise unknown to the child, is considered to potentially make a strange and upsetting situation even more difficult. Consequently, direct work is usually only undertaken if a child continues to struggle to cope with the loss in the months after the death, if their reactions are extreme and do not follow the normal grieving process or if the death is as a result of a Critical Incident and consequently involves an experience of significant trauma.



5. How do children and young people understand death?

The following categories are a helpful guide to how children and young people may respond to a death. They should not be thought of as rigid rules, as children and young people mature at different rates.

Children aged between two and five

Younger children do not understand the finality or permanence of death. They may ask questions which reflect their concern for the physical well-being of the dead person e.g. "who looks after them?" "Are they warm?" Children's understanding of language at this age is very literal. Care must be taken that explanations do not cause further confusion or distress. Avoid euphemisms such as 'gone to sleep', 'gone away', 'lost'; use terms such as dead and death. It may feel uncomfortable using these terms but it is less confusing for the child.

Children aged between five and ten

Children around this age gradually begin to realise that death is final and that the person will not be coming back. They are, however, still resistant to thinking about death as a possibility for themselves. As with younger children, they may have a range of practical questions or seek to understand where the person has gone. They will benefit from having their questions answered honestly and openly. Where children of this age have questions that may be more difficult to answer, for example in relation to religious beliefs, or if they are particularly fixated on the answer to a difficult question, it is often helpful to discuss the nature of the conversation with the child's parent/carer so they can continue the conversation and provide reassurance as required.

Adolescents

An adolescent's understanding of death is likely to be similar to that of an adult. Adolescents who are already emotionally vulnerable (e.g. children who are looked after or who have experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences – ACES) may find the experience of bereavement particularly difficult to cope with. There may be an increase in the risk of self-harm, suicidal thoughts, sense of isolation and educational difficulties. The death of a parent may also involve the teenager in extra responsibilities, which bring additional concerns as well as the need to cope with grief and loss. They may feel that they need to be strong for the rest of the family and may be unable to grieve until they feel others are stronger.



6. What factors influence the grieving process?

The relationship between the child and deceased

A young person's response to the death of someone close will vary according to the nature of their relationship. It is important to recognise that losing someone who has played an important role in their life will have more impact on a child than losing someone who has had little to do with them. For example, a child may grieve more for the next door neighbour who has looked after them every day after school than for a grandparent who lives in Australia who they have never met.

The type of death

No cause of death is better or worse than another for a grieving child, although there are different issues to consider depending on the circumstances.

If the death is expected, the family may have had time to prepare and the family may have received help from support services such as Macmillan Nurses. However, it is also important to recognise that this period would have been a stressful time for the young person, where the focus may have been on the person who has died.

If the death is sudden or particularly traumatic, there is no opportunity for goodbyes and no time to prepare for the death. Families experiencing a bereavement through an unexplained death may find the death particularly hard to cope with, see point 11 for more information on this.

The reaction of family members

Children and young people learn to grieve by watching others. If parents attempt to keep their emotions under control, children may feel it is inappropriate to show their own. Equally, it is difficult for children and young people to share their feelings with a parent who is overwhelmed by their own grief. In this situation, the child or young person may try to suppress their emotions so they don't distress their parent further. Children and young people may take on the responsibility of being a carer within the family, and their own needs may be neglected.

Cultural issues

When working with children and young people from different ethnic backgrounds, it is important to be aware of the cultural context. Families who do not communicate well in English may need an interpreter. It is not appropriate to use children or young people as interpreters in this situation.

It is helpful to find out what the bereaved families' choices and wishes are with regards death and process for marking death (funerals etc.)



Gender differences

Males and females often react to death in different ways and therefore have different needs in times of grief. Staff need to be aware of the less obvious signs and symptoms of grief, such as anger and withdrawal.

Children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

Children with additional learning needs may have little sense of the permanence of death; in some cases they may never come to a complete understanding. Depending on the extent and nature of their ALN, they may experience difficulties in understanding what has happened, their responses may be as that of a much younger child or, for children experiencing Autistic Spectrum conditions, their understanding and questions may be very literal. It is particularly important when supporting children with ALN, that their unique needs are understood and taken into consideration.

Resilience

Resilience can be defined as the ability to successfully adapt to and overcome adversity. Given appropriate support, children are usually very good at coping and can be more resilient than adults experiencing the loss. Research in relation to ACEs has found that resilience can be positively impacted by the child having access to a key trusted adult, in who they can confide, ask questions or seek support and reassurance as required. This is particularly pertinent to consider if the death is that of a parent or carer, whom the child would usually turn for support.

Vulnerable families

Most children and their families will be able to cope with the death of a close family member, especially if families can talk about what is happening, about their thoughts and feelings, and about the person who has died. For different reasons not all children will have this experience within their family. For example:

- Children who are looked after (CLA)
- Children from families with a limited support network
- Children whose parent/s experience mental health and/or physical difficulties
- Children who have or continue to experience ACEs

In such circumstances school may be a particularly valuable source of support to the bereaved child.



7. What can we expect to see from a child or young person who has been bereaved?

Children and young people can experience a huge range of reactions after the death of someone close. These can be emotional, physical or behavioural reactions. Some people think that grief follows a pattern of responses from disbelief through to acceptance. Grief is nowhere near as organised or straightforward as this. Grief feels chaotic and follows no rules.

The following list begins to describe some common responses to the death of someone important. However, not every child or young person will experience these emotions, or show the emotions they are experiencing. This is not an exhaustive list; there may be more that have not been mentioned.

Emotional reactions of the child or young person

- Sadness
- Guilt
- Anger (towards others and/or the person who has died)
- Disbelief
- Fear
- Rage
- Anxiety
- Despair
- Feeling numb
- Jealousy (of others who have not experienced a bereavement)
- Shock and denial
- Loneliness

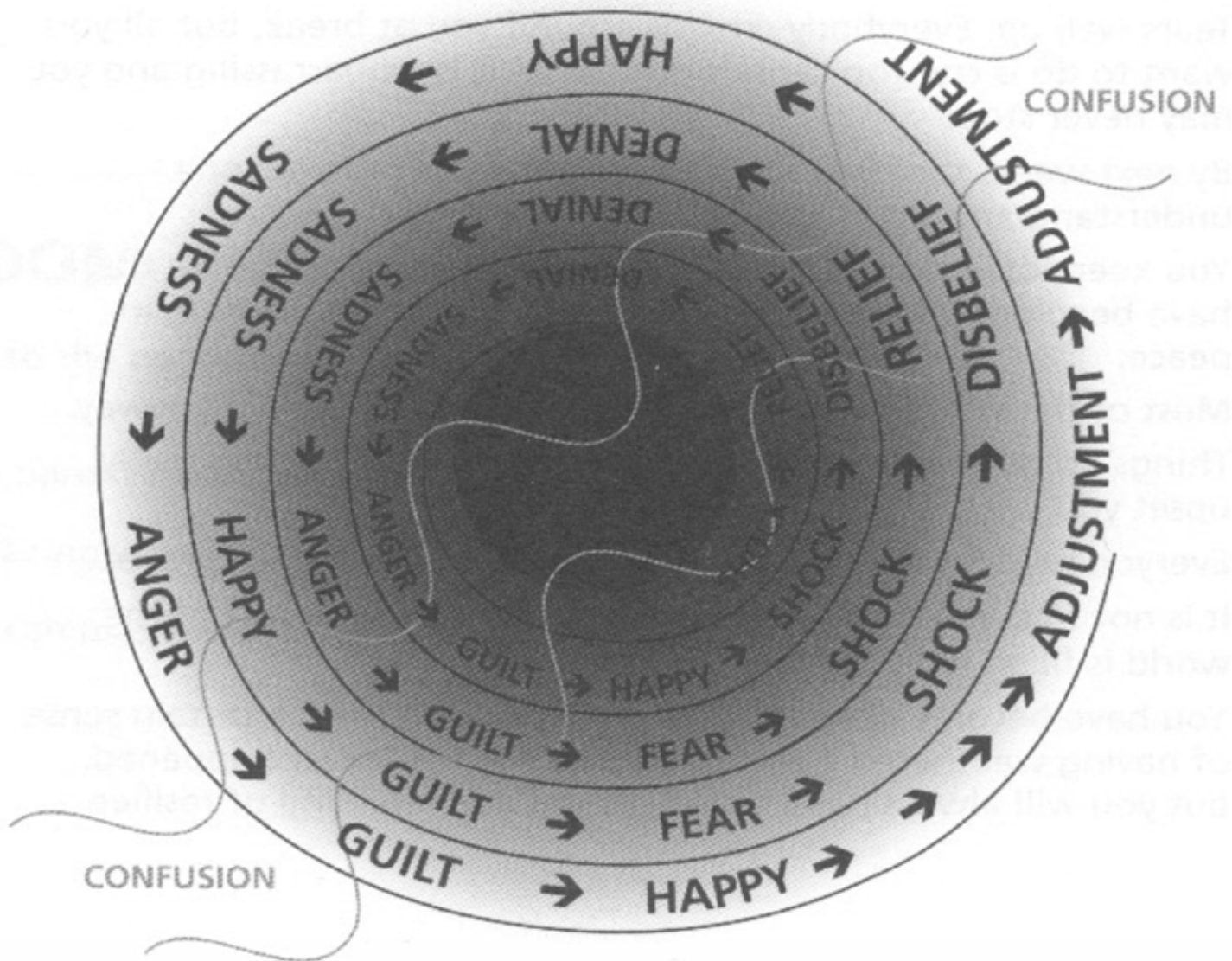
Behavioural reactions of the child or young person

- Avoidance of the subject ('I'm leaving if you mention it again')
- Distraction techniques ('Can't talk, I'm off to football')
- Withdrawal
- 'Acting out'
- Self-harm
- Loss of interest in friends or hobbies
- Tearfulness
- Mood swings
- No obvious reaction/appearance of being unaffected ('I'm fine')



Physical reactions of the child or young person

- Sleep disruption (Sleeping a lot, not sleeping as much or irregular sleeping patterns)
- Exhaustion
- Appetite disruption (loss of appetite or over-eating)
- Restlessness and difficulties with attention and concentration
- Palpitations
- Nausea/digestive problems
- Dizziness
- Tightness in the throat
- Headaches
- Aching
- Psychosomatic replication of symptoms similar to those of the deceased
- Developmental regression.



8. How may bereavement affect a child or young person's learning?

Following a bereavement a child or young person may experience any number of reactions, as detailed previously. These could present in school in the following ways:

- o The child or young person may lack concentration, which could be because they are thinking of the person who has died or because they are having trouble sleeping.
- o The child or young person may lose interest in their school work. On the other hand, the child or young person may use school work as a distraction from home life and throw themselves into work.
- o The child or young person may become withdrawn from their friends in school.
- o Obsessional behaviours may present as a way of the child or young person coping with their grief.
- o The child or young person may be in floods of tears one minute then playing with their friends the next.
- o Angry and aggressive.
- o Risk taking behaviours.
- o Need to take action in some way – it can be helpful this need into something safe, helpful and productive (e.g. organising a charitable event 'in memory of', organising a book of remembrance).
- o Anxious.
- o Attention-needing.



9. What can schools do if they are aware that a death is expected?

Coping with the expected death of:

A child:

You may know in advance that a child is terminally ill. In this situation, the wishes of the parent(s) will dictate the degree to which you can prepare for their child's death. Some parents find the school a very helpful, supportive place and want as much contact as possible for themselves and their child. Some wish to take an active part in any preparations that may be appropriate. Some do not directly acknowledge the seriousness of their child's illness, or wish such knowledge to be limited to very few people. It is very important that the parents' wishes are sought and respected. There may also be a need to obtain permission from other parents if the preparations go beyond general curriculum-based activities.

Seriously ill and dying children often cope best with their condition by living as fully as they can until they die. The school may represent one of the few areas where the child feels a sense of control and accomplishment. The sick child is often an expert on his or her condition, and can help other children to understand in ways not open to adults.

A member of staff:

Much of the above information may also be appropriate if it is known that a member of staff is terminally ill. Clearly, the wishes of the individual and his or her family will be paramount in planning how the children and young people will be prepared for the event.

A child's parent or someone close to the child:

Preparing children for such an event should be the responsibility of all those who have an influential role in the child's life, including teachers and support staff at school. Providing the child with a sense of security at home and at school is imperative. Children and young people who have consistent loving care, support and opportunities for success, are better able to remain happy, secure and optimistic about the future, even after the death of a loved one.

A family may contact school to share information where it is known that a close family member of a child has a terminal illness. In such circumstances, relevant information should be circulated amongst school staff so that there is a shared understanding of why the child may be experiencing difficulties that have not previously been an issue. For example, if the child starts having trouble with concentration, remaining on task in class or with behaviour more generally, teachers and support staff need to know the reason so that their problems are understood and addressed in context. It may be helpful for one teacher or trusted adult within the school to spend some extra time with the child, especially since life at home may be chaotic.



Sometimes, older children do not want anyone outside of the family to know what is going on, perhaps because they worry about what their peers will think. In general, children do not like being different from their friends, and their wishes need to be respected. In the case of younger children, the wishes of the family should be sought.

Children and young people may find it hard to talk to their friends about the illness. School staff may be able to help the child or young person to talk to their friends and provide help to answer the other children's questions.

To prepare for an expected death, schools need to:

- o Consider who will need to be informed once the death occurs and how this will be done.
- o Make sure everyone knows the roles they will play. Identify staff members who may struggle with some of the tasks and make plans accordingly.
- o Identify vulnerable pupils who may require support – remember that there may be pupils who have experienced bereavement at some point in the past and their vulnerability may not be immediately obvious.
- o Raise awareness to support staff e.g. school counsellor, ELSA etc
- o Clarify if there are relevant charities / hospice care supporting families



10. What can schools do to prepare for an unexpected death?

An unexpected death can have a very traumatic effect on everyone connected with the deceased.

Schools may find it useful to prepare a guide to be consulted in the event of an unexpected death. Useful actions to include in this guide are:

- The gathering of factual information when informed of a death.
- Visiting / contacting the family to express condolences, to extend support to siblings in the family and to ascertain the information the child/family wish to be shared at school.
- Contact details of support agencies, for example, Educational Psychology Service, School Counselling Service, Winston's Wish, Grief Encounter, Social Services, NSPCC, Cruse Bereavement Care.
- A plan for longer term care of those affected.
- Any other actions appropriate to the school and community. Example guides can be found in appendices 8 & 9.



11. How do schools respond in the event of a sudden/unexplained death?

A sudden/ unexpected death can be extremely traumatic and hard to make sense of. Staff need to be particularly sensitive and act appropriately in these cases.

Even if early information suggests that the deceased may have taken their own life, the term, 'suicide' is not advised, particularly with those under the age of 18. In cases of sudden/unexpected and unexplained death, the exact cause of death can often take a long time to determine and may never be confirmed as a completed suicide by the coroner. It is therefore advised that the death is referred to as a sudden death and the use of the term suicide, or suspected suicide, is avoided.

Due to the potential trauma on the immediate family and friends of the deceased, as well as the wider community impact, sudden/unexpected and unexplained deaths are usually treated as Critical Incidents in the first instance and consequently an Immediate Response Group will be convened by CTMSGb and attended by all partner agencies, in order to clarify key information, identify those who are likely to be vulnerable and in need of support and to coordinate the support required to mitigate against further threat, risk and harm.

In the case of a suspected suicide, there are many immediate issues to be considered such as the impact of the news on other pupils. There is a need to contain the risk of 'copycat' suicide attempts and to protect the emotional wellbeing of other pupils. There may also be other implications such as media intrusion, rumours and gossip which need managing by the school. This may also be the case in other traumatic deaths. The Educational Psychology Service and school counselling service work closely with CTMSGb and partner agencies following such incidents and will be able to advise school staff and parents accordingly. Suicide and self-harm training is also available through CTMSGb Training unit.

Schools may consider making a book of condolence available to pupils for a limited amount of time, but permanent memorials need to be carefully considered following a sudden/unexplained death (suspected suicide) and plans for installing permanent memorials should be avoided in the weeks and months after the event, as this may heighten the emotions of those struggling to come to terms with the deaths. Additionally, where suicide is suspected, permanent memorials can be viewed as a shrine and potentially encourage 'copy cat' type behaviour.

Families experiencing a death through sudden/unexplained death (suspected suicide) may find the death hard to talk about, due to the social taboo surrounding the subject. Media intrusion, rumours and gossip can have a considerable impact on the grieving process. A sudden/unexplained death can place a great amount of stress on a family and this can affect the wellbeing of surviving children.



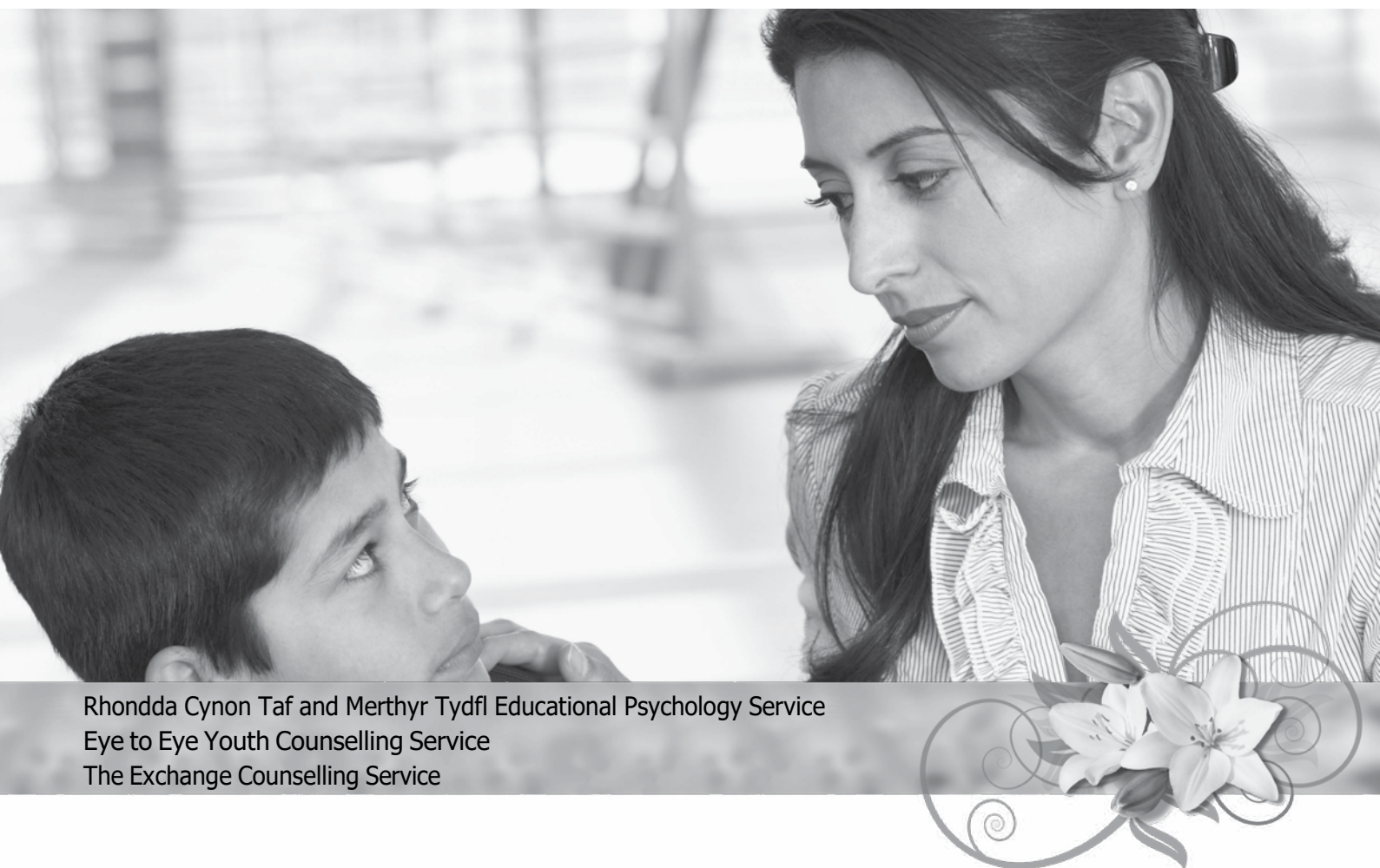
Procedural considerations when dealing with a sudden/unexplained death

- If the sudden/unexpected death is of a child under the age of 18, the Procedural Response to Unexpected Deaths in Childhood (PRUDIC) will commence. This is a legal process to help clarify key information for the coroner. Meetings are chaired by the police and will involve the Local Health Board (LHB), CTMSGb and all relevant partner agencies (e.g. South Wales Ambulance Service, Children's Services, Educational Psychology Service).

If the death is sudden/unexpected and unexplained or suspected to be as a result of suicide, then regardless of the age of the deceased an IRG will be convened by the police.

The group is chaired by a superintendent from South Wales Police and consists of representatives from CTMSGb, Children's/Adult's Services, LHB (Safeguarding Team) and also representatives from the Educational Psychology Service, school counselling Service, Youth Service. If the child or young person is of school age, then a member of the school's senior management team may be required to attend. The Educational Psychology Service will prepare and support school staff before, during and after the PRUDIC or IRG.

- If the death is linked to a wider incident or series of incidents that may potentially impact on the wider community or requires multi-agency coordination to manage threat, risk and harm, then an IRG will be called under the Partnership Protocol for the Immediate Response to Critical Incidents Involving Children and young People and may involve representatives from a wider group of agencies to those listed above.
- Following the IRG meeting, schools will be offered assistance from the Educational Psychology Service in order to identify vulnerable staff and pupils who will need additional or ongoing support, either through their own pastoral system, or who require more specialist counselling intervention. Staff will be assisted to be alert to the signs and symptoms of distress.



12. What can schools do to help when they find out a child or young person has been bereaved?

At beginning, the first act of support may involve visiting the home to convey condolences on behalf of the school. It may be more appropriate to make telephone contact in the first instance. This contact will also relay to the bereaved child or young person that their school knows about the death.

Following this initial contact:

- o Be available to the family; keep in touch.
- o Ask the child or young person/family what help/support they would like.
- o Ask the family if they wish school staff to share the news of the bereavement with other children and if there is any information that the family would especially like to be passed on or restricted.
- o If the child or young person wants the other children to know, consideration could be given to sending the child a class card, or personal messages.
- o Ask about the family's wishes for attendance at the funeral.
- o If a member of staff does attend the funeral, the child/young person who have been bereaved receive the message that the school knows about the bereavement. This provides implicit support for the child or young person without the need for difficult conversations.
- o Schools may consider sending fowers/donations to charity according to the wishes of the family.
- o BASIC Ph – as a model of coping with specific examples



13. How do schools share information with pupils?

The schools need to consider

Who needs to be told and how the information will be given.

- o If the bereavement affects the whole school community, e.g. the death of a pupil or teacher, then it may be appropriate to consider breaking the news in an assembly to all pupils. The news would best be shared in small groups (form groups/classes) by familiar adults. See section 5 on age on stage of development
- o Groups particularly affected (e.g. the form class of the pupil/teacher) should not be told in a large assembly with the rest of the school.
- o Whoever is giving the news should be supported and should not be on their own with pupils.
- o If more than one member of staff delivers the message, ensure that the message is consistent. If possible, brief all staff as to what the pupils are being told so that everyone knows how to answer any questions the pupils may have. App 4 has a script you can follow
- o Be considerate when choosing staff members to break the news to pupils. A recently bereaved member of staff may find it difficult. Choose a member of staff who is comfortable talking about the issue as they will provide a role model for the pupils.

Some guidance about how to break the news:

The news should be given at the beginning of the day, where possible. It can be tempting to wait until the end of the day but this tends to lead to heightened tension as the day progresses.

The news should be relatively short:

- o Give relevant factual information about the death using straightforward language, avoid phrases such as 'loss' or 'gone to a better place'.
- o Explain what happened.
- o Explain what is NOT known.
- o What support is available e.g. school counselling service, ELSA, etc.

Close by acknowledging that everyone will react to the news in different ways and that this is normal.

keep in mind section 5 – particularly with younger people – just enough information



When the news has been given, allow some classroom time before lessons return to routine. This period can be used for teachers to reinforce the points made and to answer questions. Try to anticipate questions pupils will have, such as:

- How did it happen?
 - o Be guided by the family and what they want released.
 - o Tell the pupils there are things we don't know and that rumours are inevitable and should be ignored as far as possible, but that they can seek staff support if they are upset by what they hear and explain that they may hear rumours and stories – they should ignore them. In some circumstances, you can mention that police/medics etc will be working to give the answers everyone wants but it will take time and people must be patient and not listen to speculation.
- When is the funeral? Can we go?
 - o Tell the pupils that the funeral arrangements will be a decision for the family and everyone needs to respect their views. Explain that you will let them know about funeral arrangements when you know.
- Can we do something to remember them by?
 - o Explain that you will talk to the family before any decisions are made.
 - o It is worth remembering that living memorials such as trees need to be cared for long term, and may die. o A permanent memorial is never appropriate if it is an unexplained death, although it may be worth considering making a book of condolence available for a limited amount of time.

It is important to listen to the pupils and to limit any comments. Staff should not be under pressure to 'find the right thing to say' or make everyone feel better.

Don't be afraid to show emotion – this just shows that you are human! However, it can be disconcerting if you are not expecting to react this way.

School are advised that memorials (particularly permanent structures or objects) require time and thought. It is better to take time to consider what might be appropriate.



14. What can schools do to help a child or young person return to school following bereavement?

- o Ensure that appropriate members of staff are aware of the bereavement and of the date that the child or young person will be returning to school.
- o Consider asking one member of staff to keep a “special eye” on the child or young person. Let the child or young person know that they can talk to any member of staff, should they become upset in school.
- o Understand when the child or young person forgets their homework/books/PE kit, can’t concentrate in class or is preoccupied (all staff should be aware of the list of common emotional and behavioural reactions).
- o Remember that some lessons/days will be better than others.
- o Ensure that the child does not become anxious about work-load, catching up with missed work or forthcoming exams.
- o Be aware of any potential bullying from other children.
- o Maintain school routines as far as possible, but allow for flexibility if necessary.
- o Be mindful that the reactions of a child or young person with learning difficulties may be that of a younger developmental age.
- o Signpost to counselling or other support services (e.g. ELSA,, Winston’s Wish) to empower them to access these services in the future, if they need to.
- o Members of staff may be unsure about how or if to approach the subject with the pupil. It is better to say something than nothing at all. It is ok to say ‘I heard about your grandfather, I’m sorry that he/she died’ , or even to say you don’t know what to say.



15. How can schools support children/young people in the longer term?

- o It may be helpful to note the date of the anniversary of the death, so that staff can be particularly understanding if the child or young person seems to be distracted, withdrawn or angry. The date need not be mentioned, but discrete support and kindness may be helpful. Holidays, birthdays, Mother's/Father's Day and Christmas may also be times of particular emotional vulnerability.
- o Schools could consider producing a card containing a brief, individual "life- history" summary from reception throughout school, to be passed on to the next class-teacher and passed up to secondary school. This could contain key pieces of information such as bereavement. The anniversary date could be included so staff can be aware of potentially emotional times.
- o Many children /young people who have been bereaved report that they have been bullied. All staff should be particularly vigilant to ensure that this does not happen. Children should feel confident that there is a member of staff who will listen and deal appropriately with any incidents of bullying.
- o When a new child or young person arrives at a school, any history of bereavement should be noted and relevant information shared with staff.



16. When should schools refer the child/young person for counselling?

Generally, counselling is not usually appropriate straight after bereavement, although a short session with the school counsellor may help to normalise grief and empower them to access the service in the future if needed. Children and young people need to be able to work through their feelings on their own, with the help of family, friends and school staff.

If you feel that a young person is finding it hard to come to terms with the bereavement, then specialist help may be useful. It is worth remembering that this may be months or even years after the bereavement.

Some indicators that specialist help (not necessarily counselling) may be required are:

- o overly aggressive behaviour
- o sudden drop in attendance/erratic attendance
- o extremely withdrawn behaviour
- o talk of hurting self or others
- o an extreme change in personality or academic behaviour

If you think that counselling may be of use then ask the pupil if they would like to talk to someone. Counselling support could come from a number of agencies:

- o School counselling service.
- o Community Counselling Service
- o CRUSE bereavement counselling service.

Children will need to go through the stages of the grieving process and for most young people, children, family, close friends and relatives.



17. How may bereavement affect members of staff?

When supporting bereaved children or young people, staff should be aware that they may be vulnerable to feelings of grief from their own personal history. It is important that staff are mindful of their own circumstances, and take this into consideration when offering support.

Dealing with bereavement can be stressful, and in order to help others, staff members need to make sure they are looking after themselves, physically and emotionally. It is useful to consider personal support networks, such as family, friends, colleagues and agencies such as Teacher Support Cymru (see appendix 2 for details).

School staff will also be able to access support through the Local Authority Occupational Health Department.



Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil Educational Psychology Service
Eye to Eye Youth Counselling Service
The Exchange Counselling Service

APPENDICES

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PLEASE NOTE:

All details are correct at time of going to press



APPENDIX 1

Websites offering bereavement support and resources

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Winston's Wish is the leading childhood bereavement charity and the largest provider of services to bereaved children, young people, and their families in the UK. Its services include:

- National helpline for anyone caring for a child coping with the serious illness or death of a family member (08452 03 04 05)
- Range of publications, resources and educational films
- Support programme for schools
- Tailor-made training and consultancy for professionals
- Designated section on website for young people
- 08088 020021 option of online chat

www.griefencounter.org.uk

- Kids zone with games and resources
- Teen zone with resources, memory board and blog
- Adult zone with blogs and resources
- Section for professionals e.g. school teachers
- E-counselling
- Family events for bereaved children to meet
- Helpline – 08088 020111

www.youngminds.org.uk

Young Minds is the UK's leading charity committed to improving the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people.

Its services include:

- Specialist sections for children and young people, parents and professionals
- Parent helpline – 0808 802 5544



www.getconnected.org.uk

- The helpline is available by phone, email, and web-chat every day.
- o Call 0808 808 4994 (1pm-11pm)
- o Email: help@getconnected.org.uk (usually answered within 24 hours) or Free Text 80849 (usually answered within 24 hours)
- o Free app

www.cruse.org.uk

- Cruse Bereavement Care exists to promote the well-being of bereaved people and to enable anyone bereaved by death to understand their grief and cope with their loss. Services are free to bereaved people. The charity provides support and offers information, advice, education, and training services .
- Specialised website for Young People,
- RD4U – site specifically for young people 08088 081766

www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/bereavement.asp

- Self help guide for young people affected by bereavement

www.daisysdream.org.uk

- They only work directly with families in Berkshire and the surrounding area but some nice resources for schools and professionals.



Other websites you might find useful

www.childbereavement.org.uk

- The Child Bereavement Charity (CBC) provides specialised support, information and training to all those affected when a child dies, or when a child is bereaved.
- Their dedicated Support and Information Service provides help and guidance for families and professionals.
Childhoodbereavementnetwork.org – Papyrus – suicide – useful apps
- They have a national confidential Support and Information Line (01494 568900)
www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk
- The Childhood Bereavement Network (CBN) is a national, multi-professional federation of organisations and individuals working with bereaved children and young people. It involves and is actively supported by all the major bereavement care providers in the UK.

www.tcf.org.uk

- The Compassionate Friends (TCF) is an organisation of bereaved parents and their families offering understanding, support and encouragement to others after the death of a child or children. They also offer support, advice and information to other relatives, friends and professionals who are helping the family.
- Education Support (UK charity dedicated to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of education staff in schools, colleges and universities)
www.educationsupport.org.uk
Helpline 08000 562 561

www.tcfsiblingsupport.org.uk

- There is also a Compassionate Friends website especially for the siblings of a person who dies.



APPENDIX 2

Local support agencies

Educational Psychology Service
01685 724642 (Merthyr Tydfil)
01443 744333 (Rhondda-Cynon-Taf)

Eye to Eye Youth Counselling Service (based in schools and the community in Rhondda-Cynon-Taf)
01443 202940/01443 204551
Text-07873 434322
info@eyetoeyewales.co.uk
www.eyetoeyewales.co.uk

Exchange Counselling (based in schools and the community in Merthyr Tydfil)
Phone: 03302 02 0283
www.exchange-counselling.com
Email: **admin@exchange-counselling.wales**

2 Wish Upon a Star
01443 853125
www.2wishuponastar.org

Rowan Tree Cancer Care (Rhondda-Cynon-Taf)
01443 479 369
www.rowantreecancercare.co.uk

Cancer Aid Merthyr Tydfil
01685 379633
www.canceraidmerthyr.co.uk
info@canceraidmerthyr.co.uk

Teacher Support Cymru
08000 855 088

Cruse Bereavement Care (Merthyr Tydfil & Rhondda-Cynon-Taf branch)
01685 876020
merthyr.rct@cruse.org.uk



APPENDIX 3

Recommended books

Winston's Wish has a comprehensive booklist organised into the following categories:

- Books for children under 5
- Books for age 5 to 8 years
- Books for age 9 to 12 years
- Books for age 13 to 16 years
- Other helpful books (not directly about death)
- Books for families when someone is seriously ill
- Books for families bereaved through suicide
- Books about the death of a new baby
- Books for adults supporting a bereaved child
- Books for families bereaved through murder

The booklist can be accessed using the following link:

http://www.winstonswish.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Suggested_reading_list_Sept13.pdf

Selected books that are particularly useful are:

- **Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine** by Diana Crossley
 - o ISBN 978-1869890582
- **When Someone Very Special Dies** by Margot Sunderland
 - o ISBN 978-0962050206
- **Little book of bereavement for schools**
 - o ISBN 978-0962050206
- **My Grieving Journey Book** by Donna and Eve Shavatt
 - o ISBN 978-0809166954
- **The Day the Tide Went Out and Never Came Back** by Margot Sunderland
 - o ISBN 978-0863884634
- **Water Bugs and Dragonflies: explaining death to children** by Doris Stickney
 - o ISBN 978-0264674414



APPENDIX 4

Breaking sad news

Suggested words for an assembly following the death of a child

I have some very sad news to tell you. <Name> in <class> died on Saturday morning. He was crossing the road with his mum on the way to the local shop when he was knocked down by a car. An ambulance was called and <Name> was taken to hospital. The doctors and nurses did all they could to try and save his life but his injuries were too severe and he died. His mum is not injured.

<Name> was well known throughout the school for being a Manchester United fan and a very keen member of the football team.

This is really sad news, and some of you may be feeling upset. But we all feel things differently, and not everyone will feel the same way. When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of conflicting emotions - sadness, anger, and confusion - which are all normal. It is really important that we remember to be especially kind and supportive to each other in the days, weeks and months to come.

Please be mindful of what you write on social media sites

When you go back to class, you can spend some time thinking about what I have just told you. Your teachers will try to answer any questions you may have.

(Explain where and how to access support systems available in school and the plan and location for a book of condolence)



APPENDIX 5

Sample letter: Informing parents of the death of a teacher

<Date>

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the tragic death of <Name>, who has been a teacher at this school for <number> years.

Our thoughts are with <Name>'s family at this time and in an effort to try and respond to his/her death in a positive way, all children have been informed.

The children were told that <Name> died from an <asthma attack> on <Date>. A number of pupils have been identified as being <asthmatic> and <Name>, the School Nurse has today reassured them that it is unusual for a person to die from <asthma>.

When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of feelings - sadness, anger, and confusion - which are all normal. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school. If you would like some information on how to best to support your child at home this is available from the school office.

(Explain where and how to access support services available in school and the plan and location for a book of condolence)

Our thoughts are with the family at this sad time.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher



APPENDIX 6

Sample letter: Informing parents of the death of a pupil

<Date>

Dear Parents

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

They were told that <name> died from an illness called <cancer>. <Name> had been ill with <cancer> for a long time and died at home yesterday.

When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of conflicting emotions - sadness, anger, and confusion - which are all normal. But we all feel things differently, and not everyone will feel the same way. It is really important that we remember to be especially kind and supportive to each other in the days, weeks and months to come.

The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school, but I have made available some information which may help you to support your child at home. You can obtain this from the school office.

(Explain where and how to access support services available in school and the plan and location for a book of condolence)

When we are informed of the details of the funeral we will let you know, if the family ask us to do so.

Our thoughts are with the family at this sad time.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher



APPENDIX 7

Information sheet for families affected by bereavement

Supporting the death of someone you love is like being parachuted into a strange land where you have no map and don't know the language. Navigating your own way, let alone helping a child find a way through this land of pain and loss is very hard work.

Surviving this experience is something you and the children you care for will carry with you into the rest of your lives. Even if you are feeling crushed by your own grief, you are one of the best people to help your child.

Bereaved children need to be acknowledged, listened to and supported. Here are some ideas to help you at this difficult time;

- o Answer your child's questions simply and factually. Use language such as "death" and "dead" not "gone to a better place" or "gone to sleep".
- o Help your child to understand that the person is not going to come back. Explain the cause of death in a simple way and make sure the child knows it was not his/her fault. Sometimes you may be asked the same questions over and over; be patient with this, it is the child's way of making sure that the facts have not changed.
- o Give the child the opportunity to take part in the mourning process. Explain what will happen at the funeral and help them to decide whether or not they want to attend. If they don't, they may like to put flowers or write a note to the person.
- o Give your child plenty of love, affection and reassurance, so s/he knows that they are still loved in the middle of the sadness and grief.
- o Keep to school routine and let the child continue to see friends, go to clubs etc. Keeping routine and consistency helps a child feel more secure.
- o Give the child a chance to be quiet and alone from time to time. o Let them talk at their own pace, in their own time. Allow them the chance to express their feelings openly, and give reassurance that many different feelings are common to people who have been bereaved, including sadness and anger.



- o Help the child to remember the person who has died. Creating a memory box with photos and special mementoes can be helpful.
- o Let them know that there are adults around who can listen and help.
- o Children jump from sadness to joy quickly and back again (puddle jumping)– if they are happy, let them be happy! This does not mean they do not care.
- o Be honest and show your own grief; it's ok to cry! But try not to overwhelm the child.
- o Look after yourself – grief is tiring.
- o Be aware of changes such as clingy, aggressive or moody behaviour; these are all expressions of grief.
- o Don't feel like you have to have all the answers or get it right all the time – doing your best is good enough.
- o Keep in contact with school and let them know how you can be helped.
- o Take one day at a time.
- o Charities who can offer support, advice and guidance:

Winston's Wish (www.winstonswish.org.uk)
Tel: 0845 2030405

Cruse Bereavement Care (www.cruse.org.uk)
Tel: 0808 808 1677/ 01685 876020

Eye to Eye Youth Counselling Service
01443 202940/204551

The Exchange Counselling Service



APPENDIX 8

A quick guide to coping with the unexpected death of a pupil or staff member

1. Senior management to obtain factual information regarding death.
2. In the case of an unexplained death, senior management should refer to the Procedural Response to Unexpected Deaths in Childhood (PRUDIC).
3. Senior management inform Director of Education/ Chief Education Officer.
4. Senior management to brief staff and give factual information.
5. Senior management to contact family.
6. Set up support structure i.e. quiet room, with tissues, pens, paper, water etc made available
7. Nominate a member of staff to liaise with support services
8. Contact local agencies for support, if necessary
9. Identify high risk or vulnerable pupils and staff
10. Decide type of condolence book and location (if appropriate); ensure staff, pupils and support services are informed.
11. Pupils to be given factual information in classes, year groups or forms (if requested by family).
12. Some pupils may find the routine of the school day helpful. Be mindful of the class the deceased pupil would have been in. Staff will need to consider how to deal with the empty chair etc.
13. Send letter home to parents of other pupils (if appropriate).
14. Decide as appropriate the arrangements for the school on day of funeral (consult family).
15. School staff to promote discussion of events over days/weeks that follow – dependant on need and on the pupils most affected.
16. Monitor high risk pupils/staff. Implement time out card system.
17. Whole school to consider a memorial service and/or a selected chosen memorial (consult family). This is not appropriate in cases of an unexplained death
18. Continue to support all involved for as long as required (this could be for several months/ years following the death).



APPENDIX 9

A quick guide to supporting a bereaved pupil in school

1. Headteacher to obtain factual information when informed of death.
2. Headteacher/ allocated teacher to visit/ contact family to express condolences.
3. Headteacher/ allocated teacher to ask child and family what information they wish to be shared at school.
4. Headteacher to share agreed information with relevant staff members and other pupils e.g. classmates.
5. Allocate a staff member to actively support the child's return to school.
6. Find out what support the pupil needs i.e. time out/ quiet room/ access to telephone to phone home, put this in place before they return to school.
7. Access support agencies if required (for staff and/ or pupil).
8. Allocate a staff member to monitor bereaved child throughout school life. Note anniversaries, Mother's Day, Father's Day etc. Pass this information onto any new school on transition.
9. Continue to liaise with family/support agencies as required (this could be for several months/ years following death).



Notes







Rhondda Cynon Taf and
Merthyr Tydfil Educational Psychology Service
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The Exchange Counselling Service