

Bereavement Policy

Approved: March 2025

For Review: March 2027

Introduction

This policy has been constructed to guide us on how to deal professionally sensitively and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances. It seeks to reflect the values and philosophy of Brigg Primary School.

Every death and the circumstances in which it occurs is different and a policy that covers every possible contingency would be excessively long. The school uses its discretion when taking into account requests of the family.

In order to be ready to act professionally sensitively and compassionately staff are encouraged to read material relating to bereavement and visit appropriate websites. In the event of a specific incident, staff will be advised on appropriate materials to read and support and training will be given either on an individual basis or as a whole school as appropriate. A provisional list is included at the end of this document.

Our Aims

At Brigg Primary School we seek to meet the needs of all our children/students/pupils and staff in all situations. When home circumstances are changed because of a death in the family all around is 'different'. We need to be a place that both the child and family can rely on and gain some much needed support.

If the death occurs of one of our pupils or of a member of staff, we will work together, with outside agencies as appropriate, to support each other.

Procedures

We always work in partnership with parents or carers. We will always listen. We sensitively support and encourage parents, carers or family to tell us of any happenings in their child's life that may affect their child's emotional state but we recognise we will never be told everything.

Every death and the circumstances in which it occurs is different. Sometimes we will only get to know that someone important to one of our pupils has died because of the depressed emotional state, disturbed behaviour or other signs of distress we have seen and have needed to respond to in the child. Sometimes the child will confide in a member of staff or a fellow pupil. Sometimes a member or friend of the family will tell us. Sometimes it will be a friend of the child.

If there has been a bereavement or significant loss in a family we will seek their help and advice to help us avoid saying anything that could confuse or upset the child or add further to the distress of those family members most affected.

The fact that the child is bereaved should be recorded prominently on the child's profile to make sure that professionals are aware should the child change school.

In the event of a death of a close member of a pupil's family the procedures should be followed as shown on the information sharing pathways on pages 5 - 7.

The Headteacher or an available senior member of staff designated by the Headteacher will be informed immediately when a member of staff is informed of a bereavement or loss.

If a child has not attended school for a period following a bereavement, plans for the child to return to school should be agreed and reassurance given that the family will be contacted if the child is distressed. It may be desirable to include a visit to the child at home by the child's class teacher and/or a member of the pastoral team prior to the return.

Outside agencies should be contacted if appropriate or if in doubt.

A suitable place in school will be identified for pupils who need some space if too upset to stay in the classroom and people to whom they can go for support.

If the death of a pupil or member of staff occurs.

All staff should then be informed as quickly, quietly and sensitively as possible.

The head teacher or a designated deputy will make contact with the family. They will explain the desire to be supportive and to avoid saying or doing anything that would add further distress.

For this purpose they will endeavour to ascertain information about the situation and how much the child knows in as unobtrusive a way as possible.

The same member of staff will act as a link to the family to ensure good communication and facilitate implementation of the bereavement policy.

Advice will be obtained about any cultural and religious issues if necessary.

The family should be asked if they want the school community to be told formally and if so the sort of arrangements that might be made to let other families know the circumstances. This might be necessary in order to alleviate any risk of rumour circulating which may not be factual and could be upsetting for the family. In some circumstances it will not be appropriate to do this, for example if the death occurred in circumstances likely to stimulate gossip.

If information is to be given to other parents formally this is best done by letter home to the children's parents in envelopes. For young children it would be preferable for this to be given to the parents at the end of the school day when they collect their children. It may also be appropriate to enclose information and guidance about bereavement.

Outside agencies should be contacted if appropriate or if in doubt.

Good communication between school and home is extremely important.

This is likely to cause considerable distress to everyone in the school community and the following additional actions should be undertaken:

Discussions should take place with the family and their wishes taken into account on how and what to tell the school community.

Arrangements should be made for counselling to be available if necessary. This is more likely in cases of unexpected or violent death. Appropriate agencies outside school will need to be contacted.

In some circumstances it may be desirable for the school to be closed so that as many people as possible can be released to attend the funeral or memorial service if they so wish.

Staff and children should be supported throughout the grieving period. There should be systematic observation and monitoring with any signs of complex grieving, brought to the attention of the appropriate professional agencies.

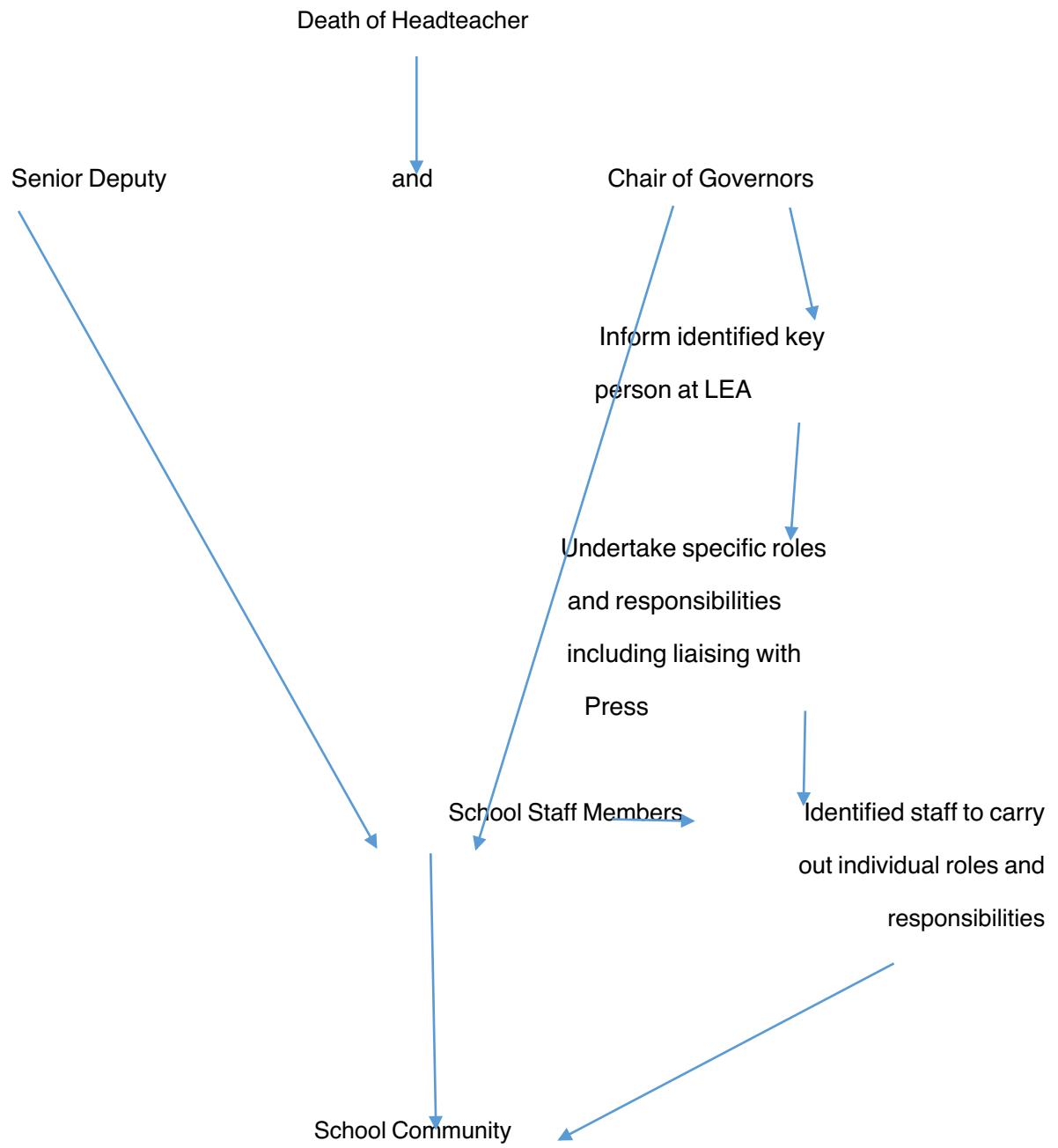
Intrusion from the Press

Should the school receive a call from the media asking about a recent death of a pupil or staff member, staff are reminded that North Lincolnshire Council's press office is on hand to offer help and advice on how to deal with the call. The Senior Media Relations Officer can be contacted on 01724 296353. It is important to ensure that no comment is made until the death has been confirmed and the family informed. Any press release is the direct responsibility of the Headteacher or a nominated deputy.

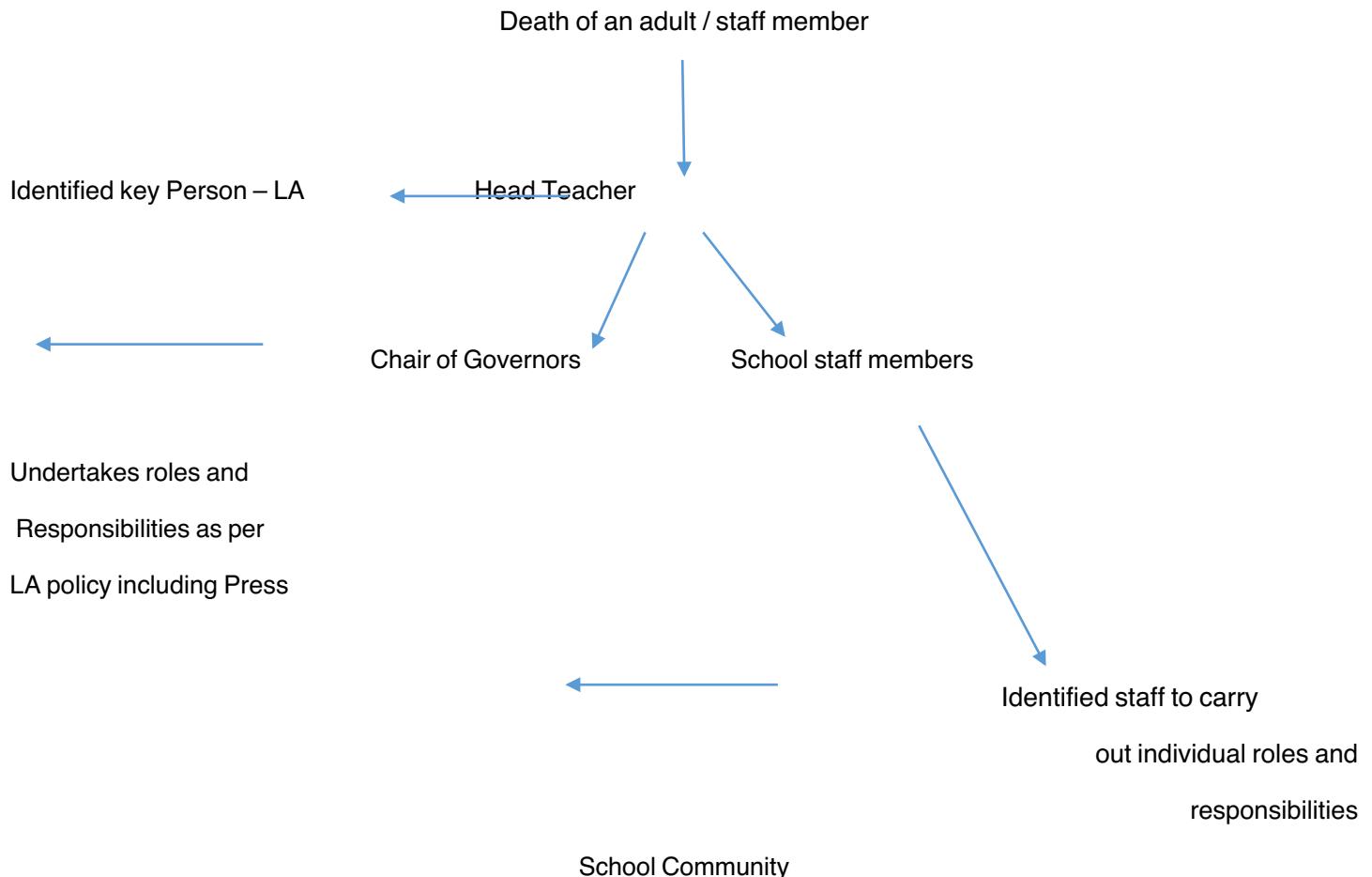
Review

This policy will be reviewed as part of the schools rolling programme by the staff and the governing body.

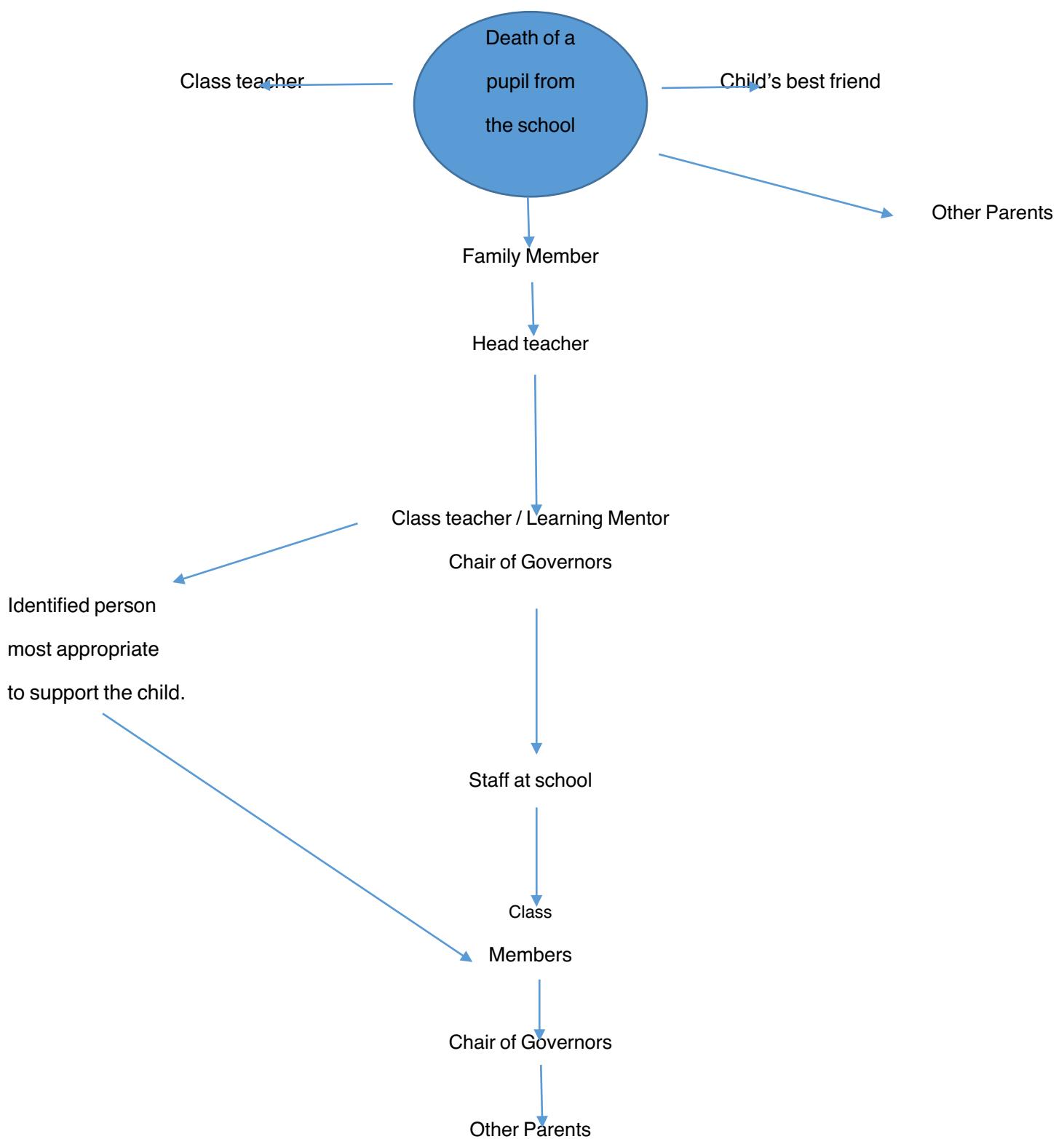
Information Sharing Pathway following death of Head Teacher



Information Sharing Pathway following death of a staff member



Information Sharing Pathway following death of pupil



Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a member of staff

<Address>

<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 a number of years.

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

When someone dies it is normal for family and friends to experience many different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion, and children are likely to ask questions about the death that need to be answered honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.

The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school but if there is anything else you or your child needs to know, or you require further support, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we will be more than happy to help you.

Yours sincerely

<Name>

Head Teacher

NB If agreed with the family include information about a book of condolence.

Enclose guidance on bereavement if appropriate – eg 'How do I talk about it.'

Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a pupil

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

The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the parents and school.

<Address>

<Date>

Dear Parents

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

<Name> died from an illness called cancer. As you may be aware, many children who have cancer get better but sadly <Name> had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday.

He/She was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try to answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, or if you require further support, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we would be more than happy to help you.

Yours sincerely

<Name> Head Teacher

NB If agreed with the family include information about a book of condolence.

Enclose guidance on bereavement if appropriate – eg 'How do I talk about it.'

Guidelines for breaking news about a death to staff and Governors

- Arrange a staff meeting which should take place as soon as possible.
- Impart factual information. Never make assumptions or repeat what has been said by rumour.
- Give news sensitively and empathetically, being aware that people may react in different ways.
- Be cognisant of the relationships staff may have had with the person who has died.
- Ensure that there is someone responsible for telling people who are unable to attend the staff meeting i.e. part time staff, peripatetic staff, lunch time supervisors. Consider the best way of imparting the information to those absent e.g. by doing home visit, by telephone, text or e-mail etc.
- Identify individual members of staff who feel able to:

a) support members of staff

b) support groups of children

The most appropriate person to support the children should be well known to them and trusted.

- Identify a member of staff who will liaise with the individual's family, to deal with staff condolences and any funeral arrangements (if necessary).
- Identify an appropriate member of staff who will take 'phone calls and/or direct them as appropriate. Try to establish a "protected" telephone line to ensure free flow of accurate information.
- Telephone line providers may provide an additional line if the situation requires one.
- The Head teacher or representative will provide a letter for parents (see examples of letter templates) which should be sent under guidance from the family regarding timings..
- Arrange a staff meeting at the end of the day to ensure staff are coping with the situation.
- Identify any unresolved problems or ongoing issues.
- Ensure that those staff who live alone have contact numbers of friends in case of need.
- Identify sources of advice and support to access for help in coming to terms with the bereavement.

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

- Prior to any decision being taken, confirmation of the circumstances should be established through contact with the family or their representative. The LA should also be contacted for additional advice.
- Wherever possible, parents/carers should be informed about the death by sealed letter, allowing them to tell their child/ren themselves. If a high percentage of children arrive at school already knowing about the death then the rest of the class should be given the information through a class “circle time”. Parents will also then be informed that their child has been made aware of the death in school and the support which has been given.
- Identify those children who had a long term and/or close relationship with the person who has died so they can be told separately.
- If appropriate, a special assembly could be held at a later time in the day or in the following days to remember the person who has died.
- Allow the children/young people to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.
- Allow the children/young people to verbalise their feelings.
- Allow the children/young people to discuss the situation and share their experiences of death.
- Be honest about your own feelings and talk about your relationship with the person.
- Avoid using euphemisms.
- Those children/young people who have had more involvement with the person should be given the opportunity to share their feelings and experiences either within the group or on a one-to-one situation.
- Ensure the children/young people understand that the death is nothing to do with anything they have said or done. It is in no way their fault.
- Reassure them that not all people who are ill or have had an accident will die and that many people get better.
- Put an appropriate time limit on the discussion. It is preferable to resume normal school activities as soon as possible thus ensuring minimal disruption within the school.
- Conclude the discussion with a prayer or special poem to remember the person who has died and their family.
- Be available for any child/young person who needs additional help and support.

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

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

Consider practical issues like:-

- Sending flowers to the home or to the funeral, making a collection etc.
- Book of condolence.
- Who will attend the funeral, making a collection etc.
- Cover for any staff who may be going to the funeral.
- Transport to and from the funeral.
- Informing the parents of those pupils who will be involved.
- Possible closure of the school. This should only be done after advice from the LA and approval from the governing body. If this is the case remember to tell lunchtime supervisors, caretaker etc in advance.

Contact Details:-

Heather Nicklin - MacMillan Specialist Palliative Care Social Worker,

Brumby Resource Centre (tel: 01724 298000)

Sarah Williamson - Senior Media Relations Officer for North Lincolnshire Council (tel: 01724 296353; Mobile 07717586353) or email: sarah.williamson@northlincs.gov.uk

The Child Bereavement Trust www.childbereavement.org.uk

Useful site with lots of information- leaflets and contacts.

The Schools Training and Support Coordinator on 01494 446648 can offer ideas, guidance and information over the telephone. Any member of staff is welcome to contact her.

The Support and Information Line: 01494 446648. This number offers a confidential listening service and can be given out by school staff to families affected by the death of a child, or who are caring for a bereaved child.

Training - comprehensive schools training programme.

Teachers Forum make contact with colleagues to share thoughts, ideas and concerns.

St Christopher's Hospice- www.stchristophers.org.uk

Provides a lot of information, resources and contacts. St Christopher's also runs training courses for teaching and support staff.