



## Bereavement and Loss

*Information, guidance, and support when coping with death and bereavement in the school community*

Updated January 2025

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## Foreword

Some of the most challenging moments facing teachers and governors are when a death hits their school community. Whether it is a pupil or a staff member, sudden and unexpected, or following a lengthy and painful period of illness, death inevitably hits and impacts every member of a school community – staff and headteachers every bit as much as the children in our care.

In coping with our loss, and mourning those who have died, it will be important that a school community comes together to support and pray for each another. For many this will be their first real encounter with death and the experience of someone disappearing from their lives, never to return.

It is important to remember them and give thanks for all that they have meant to us. We will want to honour them by a service of thanksgiving and things like planting trees and providing memorial benches. And as we remember there will be flashes of laughter and pride alongside the pain and the tears of grief.

There are no simple formulae for such occasions. Yet, difficult though the experience is, there is a profound sense of touching the deep things of life and participating together in these profound moments. This is of the essence of what it means to be human and is an immense privilege. In such moments we have the opportunity of supporting one another in our grief. Then, as we remember someone we loved and who loved us, we declare our conviction that the one we have lost was known by God and is still cherished by God.

I am deeply grateful to those in our Education Team who have put together this incredibly helpful bereavement pack. They have many years of practical experience with the 280+ school communities in the Diocese of Oxford. I strongly commend it to you as a particularly helpful and important resource.

With every blessing,

*+ Gavin Dorchester*

Rt Revd Gavin Collins  
Bishop of Dorchester

# 1. Exploring grief

## 1.1 Lessons on grief (inspired by Ian Gilbert & Luke Johnson)

- Grief is a very personal journey. It is unique to each individual. People will grieve in different ways and at different times.
- Adults may describe their grief like a river, it just pours out of them as they are fully immersed in the torrent of sadness and loss. This will continue for some time.
- Children tend to grieve in puddles, they tend to jump in and out of grief like a child jumping in puddles. Sometimes they are fine, sometimes they are overcome with sadness and grief. You will find some helpful guidance here:  
<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/help-around-a-death/about-bereavement.aspx>
- Grief can be like a pebble you carry. Sometimes it is comforting, and you want to stroke it and remember. At other times, it is heavy, it gets in the way and hurts when it digs into you.
- Grief may look like anger, sorrow, crying, silence, confusion, frustration, laughter, disbelief, pacing, sleeping, disconnection with the world or busyness. The journey of grief is unique to each person.
- Grief is an incredibly tiring process, especially in the early weeks and months. Those who are grieving will be exhausted as their body clocks and routines will be out of sync.
- Grief can totally overwhelm the person, making day to day decisions seemingly impossible and irrelevant. They may struggle with any extra demands on their emotions, time or energy.
- Grief changes your world; it will never be the same again. This may leave the person with lots of questions that challenge their very core, including beliefs about life and faith.
- Grief doesn't go away. Once the initial few weeks have passed, don't forget that the person is still grieving. The world has to keep on turning, but grief will present itself in different ways at different times long into the future. Grief will always be part of their life.
- Grief is not a problem to be solved or fixed, but rather a story to be shared and acknowledged. People who are grieving want to be listened to, this is not time for them to listen to your grief story.

## **1.2 How children of different ages may understand and react to death - and how school can help them**

### **4-6 years (early years and key stage 1)**

#### **Understanding of death:**

- begin to understand the concept of death, but not appreciate its finality
- expect the dead person to reappear “shall we dig granny up now?”
- think in literal and concrete terms, confused by euphemisms - “gone away” or “asleep”
- require repeated explanations of what has happened

#### **Some grief reactions to death:**

- outward signs are not always evident - doesn't mean that the child isn't grieving
- difficulty in expressing feelings in words – not understand, ask inappropriate questions
- yearn for the dead person, demonstrating anger when they don't return
- feel it was partly their fault
- behaviour may regress – become clingy, demand more attention
- become frightened of going to sleep alone or in the dark
- babyish language, temper tantrums and bed-wetting may also increase
- prone to fantasize - if not told what is happening may dream up something scarier than reality

#### **Ways of helping the child:**

- gently repeat the fact that the dead person will not return - answer questions honestly
- maintain daily routines, boundaries - be patient with 'accidents'
- do not try to protect them 'because they don't understand'

## **7-10 years (key stage 2)**

### **Understanding of death:**

- most realise that dead people are different from those that are alive, that they do not feel, they cannot hear, see, smell or speak and they do not need to eat or drink
- by 7 years most accept death is permanent, they won't return, it can happen to anyone
- know that death can come about through illness or an accident
- more able to express thoughts, feelings, but may conceal them and appear unaffected
- need opportunities to ask questions and get information to help them to understand
- may use 'magical' thinking (the dead person watching, talking to them) to create stories around the bereavement
- likely to be very interested in the rituals surrounding death
- awareness of the feelings of others and show empathy to those also affected by the loss

### **Some grief reactions to death:**

- react like younger children: crying, bed wetting, eating, and sleeping problems
- become very irritable, aggressive, or clingy
- become fearful that the same thing might happen to them or others close to them, not wanting to be apart from remaining family members
- develop psychosomatic illnesses; headaches, feeling sick
- decreased self-esteem and self-confidence
- ability to express their feelings can be limited by social peer pressures – they can appear as though everything is fine – brave and in control
- become preoccupied with death

### **Ways of helping the child:**

- give clear information about manner of death - demonstrate they were not responsible
- encourage opportunities for the child to talk with adults and give permission for the expression of feelings through variety of means
- maintain daily routines and boundaries
- keep in close touch with home

## **11+ (key stages 3 & 4)**

### **Understanding of death:**

- understanding almost matches that of an adult, but find it difficult to grasp abstract concepts
- need to know details and may seek answers to very specific questions
- struggle for independence may cause bereaved teenagers to challenge the beliefs and expectations of others - how they should be feeling or behaving.
- increased anxieties about the future - may question the meaning of life and have depression
- may find it easier to discuss feelings with a sympathetic friend or adult than with close family
- may be having difficulty coming to terms with their own mortality and that of those close to them – can cope by experimenting with risk taking behaviour

### **Some grief reactions to death:**

- withdrawal, sadness, loneliness, depression
- anger, rejection
- joking, sarcasm.
- dependence, regressing to younger age
- insecurity, low self-esteem
- bullying, being bullied
- self-harm, eating disorders

### **Ways of helping the child**

- Maintain daily routines
- Ensure boundaries
- Beware of loading adult responsibilities on an adolescent
- Support outside the family can be important

## 2. Initial response

### 2.1 Model bereavement protocol

#### School Background:

XXX school is openly inclusive, welcoming all children from the whole community to a caring and happy environment where they can achieve to the very best of their abilities. (Reference school's Christian Vision and associated values here) We emphasise the development of the whole learner physically, intellectually, emotionally spiritually and ethically.

#### Rationale:

Every 22 minutes in the UK a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 41,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, and, sadly, around 12,000 children die in the UK each year.

Within our school community there will almost always be some recently bereaved children who are struggling with their own situation –or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil. We would hope to not encounter such circumstances, but the statistical inevitability of such an occurrence implies the necessity of having a Bereavement Protocol in place in order that we might be proactive, rather than reactive, when responding to these sensitive situations. Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children, families or staff require, though referral to more specialist support is always taken into consideration where the impact of grief is more complex.

Additional information and resources can be accessed at [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk) where there is a School Information Pack including a fact sheet: Cultures and beliefs. Other additional information and support can be accessed at [www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org) and:

- Cruse Bereavement Care
- Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)
- Still Birth and Neonatal Death Society (SANDS)
- Support After Murder and Manslaughter (SAMM)
- Child Death Helpline
- Compassionate Friends
- Cancer BACUP
- Young Minds – For Children's Mental Health

#### Objectives:

We will encourage a consistent, yet flexible approach based on a belief in the wellbeing of the 'whole child'. We aim to reflect our Christian vision, including a belief in life after death, whilst being sensitive to various other beliefs and practices. This policy provides a framework within which all staff can work; and give guidance on how to deal sensitively and compassionately in very difficult and upsetting circumstances.

#### The core intentions of the protocol are:

- To support pupils and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement.
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and community.
- To identify key staff within school and the Local Authority, and Diocese to clarify the pathway of support.

### **The role of the Headteacher**

- To contact the school's incumbent.
- To monitor the situation and liaise with external agencies, if appropriate.
- To respond to media enquiries.
- To be first point of contact or nominate someone to be the first point of contact for the family/child.
- To keep the governing body fully informed.
- To advise and support staff. Consider referral pathways and identification of complex grief.
- If a pupil dies by suicide, ensure that staff know that the Samaritans provide a step-by-step programme to support schools. They can be contacted on: 0808 168 2528.
- To refer to relevant policies such as the school's Critical Incidents Policy, Mental Health and Well-Being Policy and/or the Church of England's Mental Health and Wellbeing: Towards a Whole School Approach as required.

### **Procedures:**

1. Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the Headteacher or nominated person and their wishes respected in communicating with others.
2. All staff should be informed including part-time and peripatetic staff before pupils and be prepared to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.
3. Pupils who are affected should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them.
4. A letter to all school families affected should be composed at the earliest opportunity and a decision made as to whom, and how, it should be distributed.
5. Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate. The school's Critical Incident Policy to be used – as appropriate.
6. In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance may be clarified, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances. The Headteacher will inform all relevant parties (Governing Body, Local Authority and Diocese) of any closure.
7. Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Headteacher

### **Points to note:**

Factual information is essential, so people do not make assumptions avoiding rumour and any confusion, whilst being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations.

All staff should be made aware that the school timetable may need a degree of flexibility to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of children affected by the situation. However, minimal disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security and familiarity.

The school should be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life, information should be recorded and shared with relevant people especially on transition from one school to another.

## 2.2 Sample letters

### Sample letter on death of a pupil

Dear Parents,

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the death of XXX, a pupil in XXX. XXX died from an illness called cancer. As you may be aware, many children who have cancer get better but sadly XXX had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home/hospital 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 and teaching assistants are willing to try to answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we would be more than happy to help you. We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating XXX's life.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

### Sample letter to bereaved parents

Dear XXX

We are so very sorry to hear of XXX's 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 her/him very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to her/his friends and classmates. She/He was a much-loved member of our school family. If we can do anything to help as you plan XXX's funeral service or other memorial opportunities, please let us know. In time, we will also ensure that anything of XXX's 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 and prayers at this very sad time and do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of support in any way.

With our greatest sympathy,

Headteacher

## Sample letter on death of a staff member

Dear Parents,

I am very sorry to have to tell you that a much-loved member of our school community **XXX** has died. The children were told today, and many will have been quite distressed at the news. No-one wants to see children sad, but we are very aware that factual information and emotional support are the best means of helping children deal with bereavement. I am sure there will be many parents who are also saddened by the news. Children respond in different ways so may dip in and out of sadness, and questions, whilst alternately playing or participating in their usual activities. This is normal and healthy behaviour. You may find your child has questions to ask which we will answer in an age-appropriate way in school, but if you feel you would like more support and advice yourself, please do not hesitate to contact the school office. You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk) and [www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)

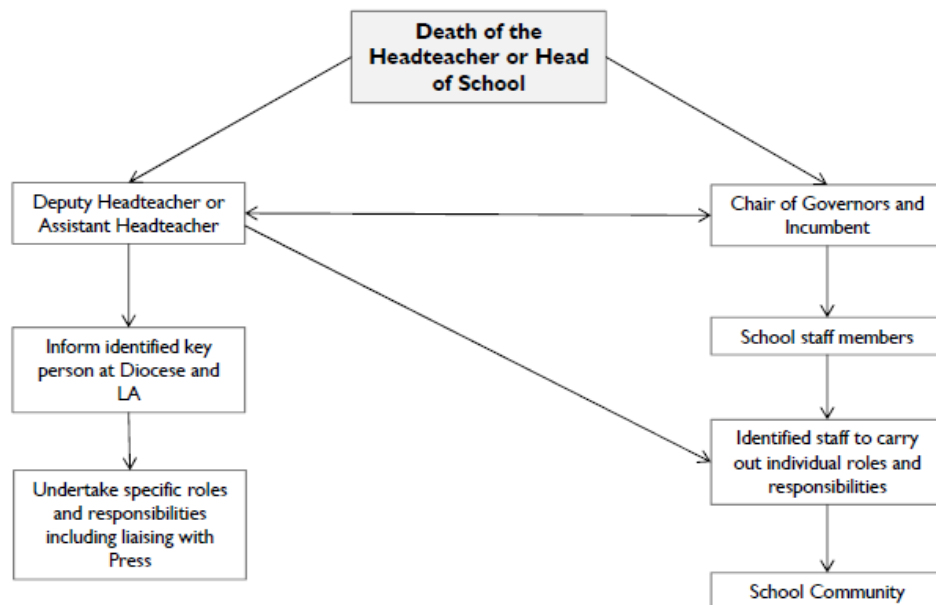
We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Children who wish to attend will be welcome to do so, though it will not be compulsory. It is likely that school will be closed on the **morning/afternoon/day** of the funeral as staff will, of course, wish to pay their respects to a dearly loved colleague.

Yours sincerely,

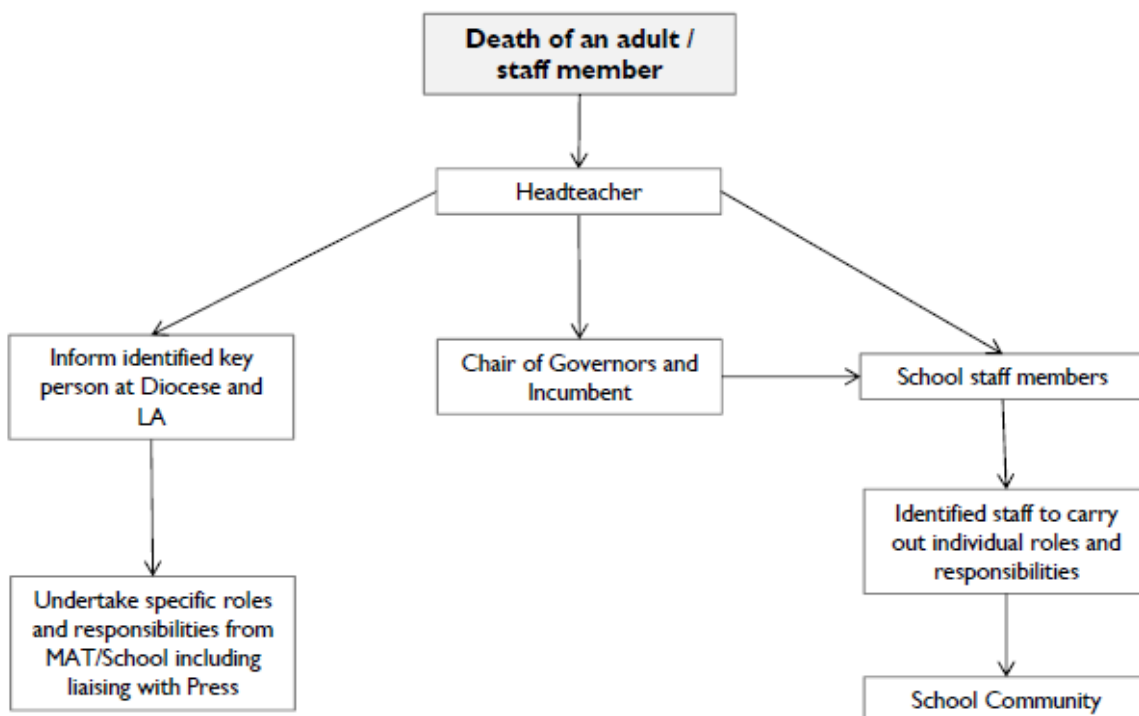
Headteacher

## 2.3 Information sharing pathways:

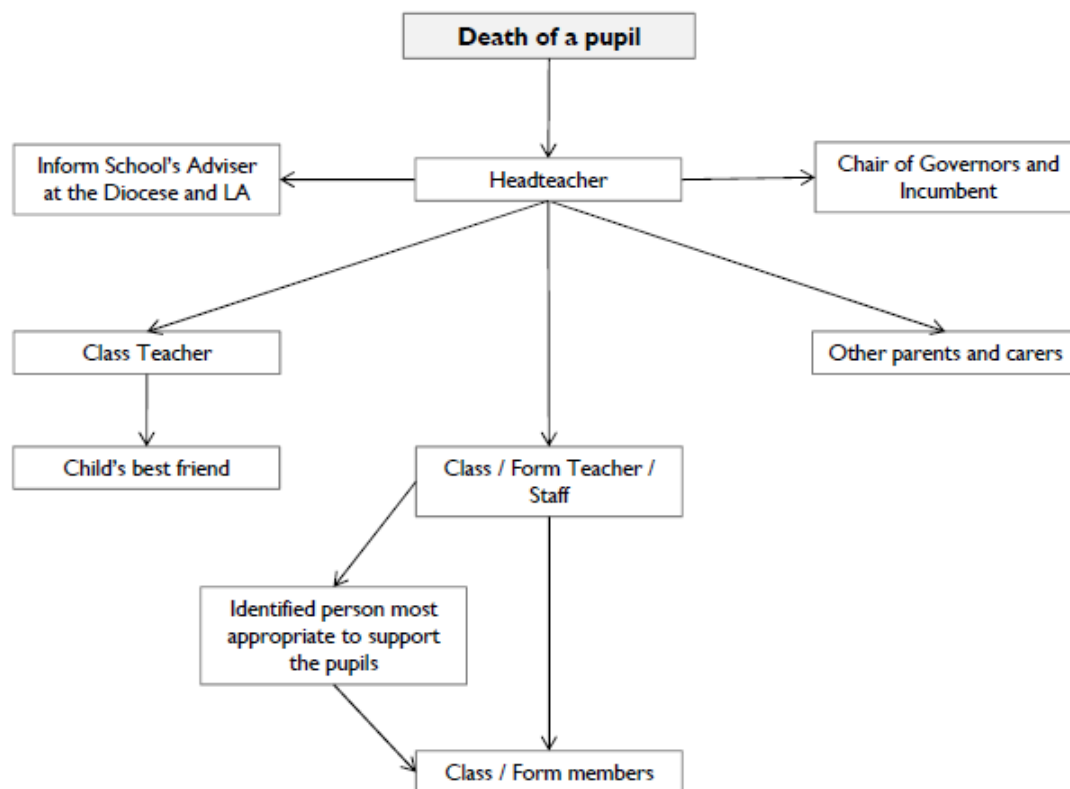
### a. Following the death of the Headteacher or Head of School



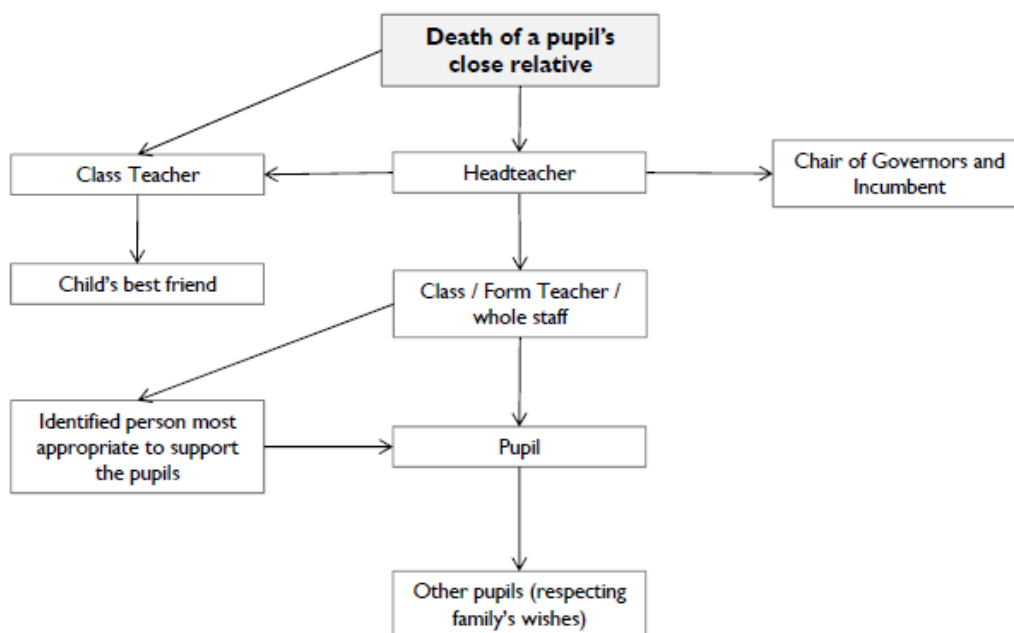
### b. Following the death of an adult/staff member



**c. Following the death of a pupil**



**d. Following the death of a pupil's close relative**



## **2.4 Engaging with your local church and incumbent (contact your diocesan link adviser if you need support with this)**

Most of your school community will recognise and have a relationship with your Incumbent and local church community. They can be a constant source of support, encouragement and source of wisdom in times of bereavement, as they are likely to have dealt with many situations of death during their ministry. So, call on them to support you through a bereavement.

### **How can they help?**

- Pastoral support for leaders, staff, parents, children.
- Pastoral support for the bereaved family.
- Prayerful support.
- Support with words when having to deliver news of a death.
- A companion to support you as you lead the school through a bereavement.
- Support in arranging a memorial service in school.
- Provide a space and forum for those who want to question, challenge, cry and grieve.
- Support the family with funeral arrangements.

## 2.5 Guidelines for breaking news of the death to staff and governors

- Arrange a staff meeting, which should take place as soon as possible.
- Discuss this with the clergy and invite them to be present when the news is broken.
- You might like to open or close your time together with a prayer – see resources.
- 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 conscious 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 and lunch time supervisors. Consider the best way of imparting the information to those absent i.e. by making a home visit, by telephone, text or email, etc.
- Identify individual members of staff who feel able to: a) support other members of staff; b) support groups of pupils. The most appropriate person to support the pupils 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.
- Identify a member of staff who will provide a newsletter for parents (see examples of letter templates) which should be sent the same day.
- Arrange a staff meeting at the end of the day to ensure staff are coping with the situation.
- 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.
- Engaging with your local church and Incumbent.

## 2.6 Guidelines for breaking news of the death to the pupils

When breaking any distressing news to young people it is best to concentrate on these three areas:

1. The **FACTS**, what do we know? Dismiss any rumours or gossip.
2. Their **FEARS**, what are you worried about, what questions do you have?
3. The **FUTURE**, what happens now, will I always feel like this, what might the future look like?
  - Inform the pupils as soon as possible about the death. Consider carefully how and when this will be done.
  - If appropriate discuss this with the clergy and invite them to be present when the news is broken.
  - Where possible, the pupils should be informed in small groups i.e. class or tutor groups.
  - Identify those pupils 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 to remember the person who has died.
  - Those pupils who have had more involvement with the person who has died should be given the opportunity to share their feelings and experiences either within the group or in a one-to-one situation.
  - Allow the pupils to verbalise their feelings.
  - Allow the pupils to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.
  - Allow the pupils 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.
  - Ensure the pupils 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.
  - Conclude the discussion with a prayer or special poem to remember the person who has died and their family.
  - Ensure that there are people available for any pupil who needs additional help and support.

## 3. Ongoing support

### 3.1 Long term support strategy

The response to a bereavement in school should be thought about in stages over time. Healing and processing time needs to be built into school life.

Short term	Medium term	Long term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How and when will the information be shared with the school community? Consider who will do this and how it might be delivered for different groups within school, e.g. child's class, close friends. See below for guidance on this.</li> <li>Share facts as soon as possible in a way that has been agreed with the bereaved family.</li> <li>Consider any special circumstances, or cultural and religious dimensions that this situation may impact on or be impacted by.</li> <li>What will be the immediate response as a school to the bereaved family?</li> <li>Are there any practical implications for the day to day running of the school?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How are the emotional needs of staff and children to be monitored, including behavioural and emotional change?</li> <li>What support for discussion, listening, answering questions, and space will be available for those who need it?</li> <li>Do all staff have a consistent set of responses that are in line with the policy of the school?</li> <li>How do children/staff/school want to celebrate the person who has died life? Is this consistent with the family's wishes?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What curriculum approaches will be put into place to consider bereavement, loss and grief across the school over time?</li> <li>How will we continue to remember the person who has died and their family?</li> <li>How can we be aware of anniversaries, particularly for siblings or close friends?</li> <li>How will information be shared with future teachers and education settings about the bereavement?</li> </ul>

## 3.2 Ways of remembering

Here are just a few ideas which you might consider:

- Art work
- Drawing pictures of the loved one
- Writing a letter to the person who has died, (What I would like to say to . . . )
- Writing a poem for the person who has died
- Make a Memory Box (Possibly using Winston Wish's resources)
- Writing memories of the person who has died
- Create memories to send to the bereaved pupil/family, eg for a pupil whose father has died, the father might have been a keen cricketer and the other children could write messages on cricket balls for that pupil
- Having a place where people can respond both as individuals and collectively, eg a Book of Remembrance; space in the school (the chapel if there is one) where people can come and light a candle
- Present every pupil with a Germini flower to treasure and to be a living memory of the person who has died, each time they see it
- Name a Cup after the person who has died and present it to the winners of a termly/ annual competition of the person's favourite game
- Hold a 'Bank Holiday' to mark the birthday of the person who has died. On that day in school, instead of the normal school timetable, do the things that the person who has died particularly liked to do
- Have fundraising efforts/a collection in memory of the person who has died, eg for the hospital that cared for the person who has died/the charity that gave so much to the person who has died
- Writing prayers
- Circle Time and saying prayers
- Hold a Celebration/Service of Remembrance of the life of the person who has died  
*This can include the pupils and staff being part of the readings, sharing their prayers and memories and choosing the favourite hymns of the person who has died*
- Produce a Memory Booklet to support the Celebration Service/Service of Remembrance.  
*The booklet could be written in the favourite colours of the person who has died*
- Framing some of the school's photographs of the life of the person who has died and displaying them around the school
- Create some form of visual memorial for the person who has died, eg a bench, sculpture, water fountain, pebbles of words display, etc
- Planting a tree for the person who has died

### 3.3 Bereavement poetry

#### What Is Dying?

A ship sails and I stand watching till *s/he* fades on the horizon and someone at my side says,  
“*s/he* is gone.”

Gone where?

Gone from my sight, that is all; *s/he* is just as large as when I saw *her/him*.

The diminished size and total loss of sight is in me, not in *her/him* and just at the moment  
when someone at my side says, “*s/he* is gone,”

There are others who are watching *her/him* coming and other voices take up a glad shout,  
“There *s/he* comes!”

And that is dying.

*Bishop Brent*

#### Do Not Stand At My Grave and Weep.

“Do not stand at my grave and weep,

I am not there, I do not sleep.

I am a thousand winds that blow,

I am the diamond glints on snow.

I am the sunlight on ripened grain,

I am the gentle Autumn rain.

When you awaken in the morning’s hush,

I am the swift uplifting rush

Of quiet birds in circled flight.

I am the soft stars that shine at night.

Do not stand at my grave and cry,

I am not there; I did not die.”

*Stephen Cummins*

### **When a Loved One's Gone.**

Those we love remain with us,  
For love itself lives on.  
And cherished memories never fade because a loved one's gone.  
Those we love can never be more than a thought apart.  
For as long as there is memory they'll live on in the heart.

*Anon*

### **Sometimes I feel sad.**

Sometimes I feel sad.  
I feel like there's a cold, rainy day inside me.  
I miss XXX  
Sometimes I feel angry.  
I feel like there's a thunderstorm inside me.  
I wish XXX was still here.  
Sometimes I feel scared.  
I feel like there's a dark path in front of me.  
I want everything to be alright.  
Sometimes I feel happy.  
I feel like sunshine is making me warm again.  
Sometimes the sadness creeps in like a rainy Winter's day.  
Sometimes I'm raging in anger like an unstoppable storm.  
Sometimes I'm scared of what's ahead, because the future is too dark to see.  
Sometimes I'm just sick of life; and sometimes I feel nothing.

*Anon*

## **The Heavy Stone**

My grief was a heavy stone,  
rough and sharp.  
Grasping to pick it up  
My hands were cut.  
Afraid to let go,  
I carried it.  
While I had my grief  
you were not lost.  
The rain of my tears  
smoothed it.  
The wind of my rage  
weathered it,  
making it round and small.  
The cuts in my hands have healed.  
Now in my palm it rests,  
sometimes almost beautiful,  
Sometimes almost you.

*Averil Stedeford*

### 3.4 Bereavement prayers

God, I'm thinking about XXX today, even though they're not here anymore.  
Sometimes I feel sad.  
I feel like there's a cold, rainy day inside me.  
I miss XXX.  
Sometimes I feel angry.  
I feel like there's a thunderstorm inside me.  
I wish XXX was still here.  
Sometimes I feel scared.  
I feel like there's a dark path in front of me.  
I want everything to be alright.  
Sometimes I feel happy.  
I feel like sunshine is making me warm again.  
I say 'Thank you for XXX and for the fun we had.  
God, you're the best at loving people.  
Help me to remember that you are looking after XXX and you are looking after me.

**Amen.**

God, I'm thinking about XXX today because someone they love isn't there anymore.  
Maybe they feel cold or rainy or stormy on the inside today.  
Help them feel safe even though they feel sad.  
Help them know it's ok to feel angry.  
Help them talk to you when they feel scared.  
Help them know that you love them and that you're looking after the person they miss.  
Please make it sunny for them again.  
God, sometimes it's hard to be with people who are really sad.  
I don't know what to say and it makes me feel sad too.  
You're the best at being a friend, so please help me to be a good friend to XXX.

**Amen.**

Loving God, help me as I feel sad and let me know your love. It's hard that I won't see XXX again but thank you that you will look after them. Thank you for all the happy memories I have of them.  
Keep me in your loving care, in Jesus' name.

**Amen.**

God, I'm thinking about XXX today and how I feel about them not being around anymore.  
Sometimes I'm sad. It's heavy and grey in me, like a freezing rainy day.  
I miss XXX and I can't stand the thought of not seeing them again.  
Loving God, please help me feel warm again.  
Sometimes I'm angry. It's like a raging storm in me. I feel like I might explode.  
I don't understand why I had to lose XXX and I'm not ok with it.  
Storm-calming God, please help me feel peaceful again.  
Sometimes I feel scared. The path ahead looks so dark and I'm worried about the future.  
I don't know what life will be like without XXX and that frightens me.  
Rock-solid God, please help me feel safe again.  
Then sometimes I feel happy – like the sun has just come out. It's great, but it confuses me.  
I want to be happy, but I don't want to forget XXX.  
Gift-giving God, help me remember all the good times we had and help me be thankful.  
Even though XXX and I are not travelling together on the same path anymore, help me  
remember that you are always with me.  
Help me trust you, because you love and care for XXX and you love and care for me.

**Amen.**

God, our friend and companion,  
we thank you that you travel with us through dark times.  
We bring you our feelings trusting that you accept us just as we are.  
We bring you our thoughts and questions, asking you to help us find peace of mind.  
We bring you our hurts and pains, knowing that you are a God who can heal.  
Give us the strength to keep travelling forward until we step out into the sunlight again.

**Amen.**

### 3.5 Collective worship during bereavement

Worship can seem to be incongruous in circumstances of bereavement but occasions where the community gathers are highly appropriate for dealing with loss and grief. They provide the possibility of remembering together and of thinking of life in a Christian context.

These two acts of worship are forms of memorial; the first is a celebration of the deceased's life among us, the second reflects the cycle of life and death in the context of harvest. They complement the use of such material as 'Waterbugs and Dragonflies' which speak of death in a more general way in that they both encourage the community to use the name of the deceased person and recall their place among us. Both are suitable for use (and have been used) very close to the time of death.

These both encourage reflection on our appreciation of the person who has died. We have suggested Bible readings to use and some prayers, but others can be added or substituted as you wish. You might also include a favourite poem or picture.

As a guiding principle it is a good approach to keep things moving and to use fairly short sections, avoid long 'tributes' such as might occur in 'adult' funerals or memorials, older students, of course, will deal better with longer sections. With all ages do not be afraid of allowing some periods of silence.

You may have to make a decision about which name to use – do you refer to a teacher for instance by first name or as 'Ms Jones'? The answer will need to be a sensitive response to the feelings of the community. In the first instance of using 'The Flame' which was a in an Infant School the worship included all the staff, all the governors and all the children – it was decided that the person's first name should be used.

As with any 'script' for worship do make such adjustments as you feel appropriate for your context. Different parts can be read or led by different people, including pupils. However please bear in mind that many members of the community may not be confident in these circumstances.

## The Flame

Preparation:

*Lay out a table with a candle large enough to be seen by everyone. Tea lights are needed later - you might wish to put these on the table ready or have them ready but hidden from view.*

*Gather – use a song or music that the deceased liked as people are gathering.*

*Use a simple introduction.*

*Say that we are gathered to remember XXX and what he/she meant to us all.*

It can be difficult and sad to remember XXX who has died. The Bible has some beautiful and comfortable words about when we are in difficult times

*A simple Sentence from the Bible "While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light." John 12:36*

## Psalm 23

'The Lord is my shepherd;  
I have everything I need.  
He lets me rest in fields of green grass  
and leads me to quiet pools of fresh water.  
He gives me new strength.  
He guides me in the right paths,  
as he has promised.  
Even if I go through the deepest darkness,  
I will not be afraid, Lord,  
for you are with me.  
Your shepherd's rod and staff protect me.  
I know that your goodness and love will be with me all my life;  
and your house will be my home as long as I live.'

**Light the candle and use the following or similar words.**

'We are going to use this flame  
To help us remember **XXX**.  
Our candle burns brightly.  
The flame lives and moves, it is hot  
And as we all know the flame moves down the candle.  
Gaze at the flame,  
Get to know the flame  
Watch its movements'  
*(blow gently - or wave a hand - at the candle flame to cause it to sway – don't blow too hard!)*

'Now close your eyes and think about the flame  
Can you imagine it?  
You may even be able to still see it.  
Open your eyes and look again,  
See the flame, the flame you know so well.  
Now close your eyes and see the flame in your mind again.  
As you think about it make the flame in your mind grow bigger  
And smaller  
Make it change colour.  
Look again at the candle  
at the flame flickering for all of us.'

'The flame has life and we have got to know it quite well now.  
All of us are a little like this flame  
We change and move,  
We can get bigger and smaller  
And each of us can share with others around us  
by the things that we do and say in the same way that the candle shares its light  
**XXX** shared **his/her** light with each of us and we remember **him/her**  
Just the same as we can remember the candle flame.'  
'Let's close our eyes again and remember **XXX** as we've been remembering the candle flame.'  
*(pinch out the candle, don't blow as people will hear it, use damp fingers to stop smoke)*

'Open your eyes again, see the candle is out.  
The flame is gone.

Well perhaps not...

if we concentrate, we can still see the flame if we want to, though we might have to close our eyes.

And the same is true of **XXX** we cannot see **him/her** any longer, but we still remember

We still have **XXX's** light among us

And when we look around our school

We will see **XXX's** light wherever we go.'

'We will remember **XXX** when we... '

*Repeat several times and add a memory from the group with every repetition.*

*Each time **XXX's** name is spoken light another candle.*

*The memories can be prepared earlier or gathered spontaneously. If you wish to be spontaneous it may be wise to prepare a couple of contributors in advance to bet the ball rolling.*

*When you have gathered a number of memories and lit a tealight for each, pause for a moment. Then say ...*

'Look! See how much light we can see, many lights all burning because of our memories of the life of **XXX**.'

'I invite you to join me in a prayer ...

Father God,

Your care and warmth are always with us, we see them in our friends, family and teachers.

We read about them in the tales of Jesus and hear of them in his words.

Your love is around us today when we are thinking about **XXX**.

Thank you for **XXX** and for the warmth, care and love which **he/she** brought to us all,

help us to remember **him/her** when we think of you and to think of you when we remember **him/her**.

Please be with all **his/her** friends and family as they remember **his/her** life and help them to understand **his/her** death.

(Through Jesus Christ, our Lord)

Amen'

### **Notes:**

*This worship can include a song. This can be a favourite of **XXX's** or it can be a school favourite – or both.*

*An important emphasis in this worship is the communal sharing of memory and grief. Grief is not to be avoided. The tealights can be kept and used on subsequent occasions. There was a tradition of keeping an 'octave' for instance where memories would be shared for 8 days. Something similar can occur in school for perhaps a week. You do need to take care to bring the period to an end. Some schools have been trapped in permanent mourning which has had a detrimental effect on the community.*

## **The Harvest**

As with The Flame this can be embellished with song and/or prayer

*Gather together a 'harvest table' as a worship focus. Gather also a number of items which were favourites of **XXX** demonstrating important occasions, interests etc (eg walking boots, a camera, guitar...)*

Read Genesis 1

Or this part of Ps 104

LORD, you have made so many things!  
How wisely you made them all!  
The earth is filled with your creatures.  
There is the ocean, large and wide,  
where countless creatures live,  
large and small alike.  
The ships sail on it, and in it plays Leviathan,  
that sea monster which you made.  
All of them depend on you  
to give them food when they need it.  
You give it to them, and they eat it;  
you provide food, and they are satisfied.  
When you turn away, they are afraid;  
when you take away your breath, they die  
and go back to the dust from which they came.  
But when you give them breath,  
they are created;  
you give new life to the earth.

May the glory of the LORD last for ever!  
May the LORD be happy with what he has made!  
He looks at the earth, and it trembles;  
he touches the mountains, and they pour out smoke.

I will sing to the LORD all my life;  
as long as I live I will sing praises to my God.  
May he be pleased with my song,  
for my gladness comes from him.

Each year we look around our world at harvest time and see so many good things, grain and fruit, all ripening and good.

As we look at this wonderful harvest we remember **XXX**, the wonder and work that made them.

The green shoots in the soil and the clouds of blossom on the trees.

The sunlight and rain which fell upon them and gave them strength and helped them grow.

Remember too how we played in the sun and splashed in the rain.

The biting frost which whitened their leaves and the wind which wailed in the branches.

Remember too how the frost nibbled our fingers and how we shouted louder than the wind.

And now among the gifts of nature we put some things which help us remember **XXX**.

We remember ...

*(Here insert a few (6 at most) short memory moments that people shared with **XXX** and add something to the table/focus which helps that memory, as noted above)*

Just as the fruits of the harvest are gathered in, we are all gathered together in the end.

In a moment of quiet we think of each other and all the things we share ...

We think of **XXX** and the special times **he/she** brought to us

And we give thanks for the life of **XXX** and the many wonderful things that happened because of the person that **he/she** was in this life and still is in our many memories.

Thank you for the life of **XXX**.



## 3.6 Bereavement books

### 3.61 Picture books

#### **BADGER'S PARTING GIFTS (Susan Varley)**

The tale of a dependable, reliable and helpful badger who realises that his old age will soon lead to death. His friends learn to come to terms with his death in an enchanting tale. With full colour illustrations throughout.

#### **WATER BUGS AND DRAGONFLIES: Explaining Death to Young Children (Doris Stickney)**

This book uses the analogy of the waterbugs' short life under water as humans' time on earth and their emergence as dragonflies into the bright sunlit world above the water as humans' life after death. It is designed to provide adults with the opportunity to talk about death as being part of the life cycle, which can be a reassuring way of explaining death to children.

#### **THE FALL OF FREDDIE THE LEAF: A Story of Life for All Ages (Leo F Buscaglia)**

How Freddie and his companion leaves change with the passing seasons, finally falling to the ground with a Winter's snow, is an inspiring allegory illustrating the delicate balance between life and death.

#### **I MISS YOU: A First Look at Death (Pat Thomas)**

This bright and very colourful picture book very simply talks about life and death. It briefly covers a range of issues such as why people die, how you may feel when someone dies and what happens afterwards. It includes questions for the reader to answer about their own experiences and a section at the back for adults on how best to use the book. An excellent educational book, which could be used as a starting point for discussion.

#### **SAD (Michael Rosen)**

Very helpful. This book has large illustrations and small snippets of text. It is wonderfully honest and will appeal to children and adults of all ages. We all have sad stuff, but what makes Michael Rosen most sad is thinking about his son who died. This book is a simple but emotive story. He talks about what sad is, how it affects him and what he does to cope with it. In true Michael Rosen style, this book manages to make you smile as well.

#### **ARE YOU SAD LITTLE BEAR? Learning to say goodbye (Rachel Rivett)**

Grandmother Bear has gone forever, so it's no wonder that Little Bear is feeling sad. His mother wisely suggests that perhaps the Wildwood can help him understand his loss. Little Bear's day of exploring and asking questions brings him comfort and hope.

#### **ALWAYS AND FOREVER (Alan Durant)**

Otter, Mole and Hare miss Fox when he falls ill and dies. They stay at home and don't want to talk about him because it makes them sadder. Then Squirrel visits and reminds them of all the fun times they had together. They all find a way to remember Fox and get on with their lives. Colourful, detailed pictures in this book emphasise the importance of holding on to memories.

### 3.62 Books for children to read

#### **MUDDLES, PUDDLES AND SUNSHINE (Diana Crossley)**

This book offers a structure and an outlet for the many difficult feelings which inevitably follow when someone dies. It aims to help children make sense of their experience by reflecting on the different aspects of their grief, whilst finding a balance between remembering and having fun. This book is a useful companion in the present and will become an invaluable keepsake in the years to come.

#### **EMMA SAYS GOODBYE (Carolyn Nystrom)**

Emma has a favourite aunt, her Aunt Sue. When Aunt Sue comes to stay with them, Emma believes it will be great. Only it's not. Aunt Sue has Cancer. This book follows Emma as she goes first through hope, then sadness as she comes to accept her Aunt Sue is dying. Through faith and love, Emma's family learn to accept the unacceptable - the loss of a loved one.

#### **WHERE DID GRANDAD GO? (Catherine House & Honor Ayres)**

"Where Did Grandad Go?" aims to help very young children to come to terms with the idea of death and missing somebody very much, remembering all the good things about them. Tackling a difficult question with sensitivity and compassion, this book aims to guide young children to an understanding of the special place that God has for those who love him when they die.

#### **HEAVEN (Nicholas Allan)**

Dill, the dog, knows his time is up, so he packs his case and tells Lily, his owner, that he's off "up there."

"Can I come too?" asks Lily.

"Er. . . not yet," replies Dill.

While he is waiting for the angels to collect him, Dill explains to Lily what he thinks Heaven is like: hundreds of lampposts to pee against, lots of whiffy things to smell and bones everywhere – with meat on them!

But Lily completely disagrees; she thinks Heaven is quite different. Luckily, they agree to disagree just in time for a fond and very poignant last goodbye.

#### **ROSIE - COMING TO TERMS WITH THE DEATH OF A SIBLING (Stephanie Jeffs and Jacquie Thomas)**

Jenny's sister Rosie was not well. She didn't have a sore throat. She didn't have spots and she didn't feel sick. But Rosie was still unwell. This sensitive story shows a warm and caring family who learn to deal with Rosie's long-term illness. Through it, they understand that God hates pain and suffering too, but promises to take care of all of us and, when we die, makes a special place for us to live with Him in Heaven. It's a place where we will never hurt again and we will always be better.

#### **JOSH - COMING TO TERMS WITH THE DEATH OF A FRIEND (Stephanie Jeffs and Jacquie Thomas)**

Max was a painter and decorator. He lived near Josh and his big sister Jane. Last year, Mum had asked Max to decorate Josh's bedroom. When it was finished, it looked brilliant. Josh wanted to be just like Max when he grew up. Then, one day, Max was killed in a road accident. This sensitive story, taken from the child's perspective, moves through the pain and emptiness of grief and loss to the sadness and acceptance of death. It explains not only what happens to the body of a dead person, but also the safe place awaiting everyone who puts their faith in God.

### **3.63 Books for adults working with children**

#### **CHILDREN ALSO GRIEVE – Talking about death and healing (Linda Goldman)**

An imaginative resource, fully illustrated with colour photographs that offers support and reassurance to children coming to terms with the loss of a close friend or relative.

#### **SOMEONE VERY IMPORTANT HAS JUST DIED: Immediate help for people caring for children of all ages at the time of a close bereavement (Mary Turner)**

When a family member or close friend dies, it can be difficult to know how best to help the children and teenagers involved. 'Someone Very Important Has Just Died' is a practical book written for those caring for children and teenagers suffering a close bereavement. Intended for use immediately or soon after the death has occurred, this book gives practical and detailed guidance on what adults might say and do to help children. This much-needed resource tackles the sensitive issues of what to tell children, how far to include them in the events immediately after the death and how to tend to their physical and emotional needs. The material is suitable for anyone regardless of their background and beliefs and is supplemented with information on where to go to obtain longer term bereavement support. 'Someone Very Important Has Just Died' is an ideal resource for professionals in all areas of work relating to bereavement. It is designed to be given to adults with children in their care at the time of a death.

#### **WHEN SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENS (Marge Eaton Heegaard)**

A workbook to help children work out feelings about a traumatic event. Traumatic events in the lives of their families, friends or community leave children feeling confused, insecure and frightened. Recreating the event on paper reduces the child's terror and creates feelings of empowerment. Drawing puts the child in charge, providing the opportunity for exploring feelings. With the help of this book, nightmares and post-traumatic stress symptoms can be relieved. 43

#### **SAYING GOODBYE TO GREG (Christine Chapman)**

Saying Goodbye to Greg is a bereavement training resource set in story form, using a real-life situation involving children in a primary school. Its aim is to lead primary teachers through the bereavement process in the event of a tragic death of a pupil. The sensitive and professional handling of the subject gives inspiration to guide schools through difficult circumstances and help teachers prepare for the unthinkable. The material includes: examining children's attitudes, coping with the school day; exploring spiritual issues; explaining the funeral, cremation and the role of the funeral director; considering our own experiences and attitudes towards death; understanding the process of bereavement, complications and referral, questioning where God is in the situation and moving on.

#### **WILL I LIVE FOREVER? (Carolyn Nystrom & Jo-Anne Shilliam)**

A tiny bird falls to the ground. It sets a little girl thinking sad thoughts. Will the bird go to Heaven? Will I die some day? Where is Heaven? With carefully chosen words and bright, attractive illustrations, this simple, yet profound, book answers these important questions in a positive way. Very helpful for parents and teachers who want to guide children through bereavement issues.

## 4. Other Resources

### **‘Never the Same’**

A suite of resources for school leaders on grief, bereavement and loss – reflections, discussion questions and a range of practical activities for schools – for this season and beyond.  
Part of ‘Faith at home’ from The Church of England.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/faith-home/i-am-school-leader/never-same-resources-school-leaders#na>

### **Winston’s Wish**

Winston’s Wish is a childhood bereavement charity which supports bereaved children, young people, their families and the professionals who support them.

<https://www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/support-for-schools/>

### **Seesaw**

Grief support for children and young people in Oxfordshire

<http://www.seesaw.org.uk/>

### **Child Bereavement UK**

Child bereavement support for families in the UK

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