

Cambo First School



Bereavement Policy

Introduction

The main aim of this policy is to provide a framework for all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, to give guidance on how to deal sensitively and compassionately in difficult and upsetting circumstances. No matter how prepared we think we are death is often traumatic and unexpected. Its unpredictability can severely unbalance a school whose normal working environment is one based on routine. Death, therefore, can be regarded as a potentially dis-unifying force that exists in an unpredictable world. Conversely, however, it can also be unifying; bringing people together in their grief. Intervention is essential in managing and minimising any disruption. The aim should be to help the individual to cope in terms of the unpredictable and to use the reassurance of friends and school community to surround the bereaved person with a predictable routine. A considered, planned and organised response to an event is much more effective than acting on impulse. It is vital that a school maintains a shared course of action. It is for this reason that we have considered the benefits of creating an **Intervention Team** when writing or contemplating policy documents. It is a team that is ready and willing to work collaboratively in any situation that threatens to disrupt the school's normal working environment.

Intervention Team

Key members:

The Head teacher

Class Teacher

Teaching Assistants

Chair of Governors

LA bereavement counselor

Frances Dower, whilst there is no vicar at Cambo

(One of the above needs to be media spokesperson if necessary in discussion with the LA.)

Aims

Cambo First School aims to meet the needs of all of its children and staff. When home circumstances are changed because of a death in the family and all around is 'different', our school aims to be a place that both child and family can rely on, and gain some much needed support. If the death is of a child or member of staff, the whole school community will work together; with outside agencies as appropriate, to support each other.

Procedures

Within school we work in partnership with parents. When children join the school, we find out as much as possible about every child, to tailor the academic, social and emotional teaching in school to match their needs. Parents should make teachers aware of any previous changes that might have profoundly affected their child (divorce, bereavement, moving, new babies' etc). If there has been bereavement, information on what the child was told (in terms of religious beliefs etc.) should be sought, in order that the school does not say anything that could

confuse or upset the child or family. When school is informed of bereavement or loss the following action should be considered:

- The family should be contacted for appropriate support. (See Appendix 1 for addresses and relevant telephone help lines)
- The family should be asked how much and what the child already knows how they have been involved.
- It should be explained to the family how the school can be involved to support the child and family.
- The importance of 'included care' will be explained - both parties assessing changes in behaviour. (Eating and sleeping patterns may change or behaviour in school may deteriorate or the child becomes withdrawn.)
- Involve outside agencies as appropriate e.g. the school nurse, CAHMS,
- Forget-me-not counselling.

When the school is informed of the death of a child or member of staff, the following action should be considered:

- Discussion should take place with the family and their wishes taken into account before decisions are taken on how and what to tell the children in school.
- Counseling should be available if necessary e.g. in cases of sudden or violent death (outside agencies should be involved with this).
- The school may be closed, or as many people as possible released to attend funeral or memorial services should it be appropriate and they wish to do so.
- Staff and children should be supported throughout the grieving period; anyone displaying signs of stress should be offered appropriate support.

Points to Consider

Keep classes informed of changes in daily routine.

Decide how long the school may need for a settling down period. This must be flexible, as it may need to be revised.

Have support available for staff and students.

Be aware of children who overreact.

School life has to continue and appear to be normal, to keep it the safe haven it should be. Momentarily this may be shaken, but bringing things gently back to normality will help to increase the feeling of safety within the school for everyone.

Resources

It often helps to raise difficult concepts with the children through stories. Suitable books are listed in the Appendix

At Cambo we place value on ~

B Bereavement support

Bereaved children are entitled to receive the support they need.

E Expressing feelings and thoughts

Bereaved children should feel comfortable expressing all feelings and thoughts associated with grief, such as anger, sadness, guilt and anxiety and to be helped to find appropriate ways to do this.

R Remembering the person who has died.

Bereaved children have a right to remember the person who has died for the rest of their lives if they wish to do so. This may involve re-living memories (both the good and the difficult) so that the person becomes a comfortable part of the child's continuing life story.

E Education and information

Bereaved children are entitled to receive answers to their questions and information that clearly explains what has happened, why it has happened and what will happen next.

A Appropriate and positive response from our school

Bereaved children can benefit from receiving help and understanding from their teachers and peers.

V Voicing important decisions

Bereaved children should be asked if they wish to be involved in important decisions that have an impact on their lives (such as planning the funeral and remembering anniversaries).

E Everyone being involved

Bereaved children should receive support which includes their parent(s) or carers and siblings and which respects each child's confidentiality.

M Meeting others

Bereaved children can benefit from the opportunity to meet other children who have had similar experiences.

E Established routines

Bereaved children should be able to choose to continue previously enjoyed activities and interests.

N No to blame

Bereaved children should be helped to understand they are not responsible and not to blame for the death.

T Telling their story

Bereaved children have a right to tell their story in a variety of ways and for those stories to be heard, read or seen by those important to them.

Reviewed January 2016

To be reviewed 2019 or as and when required

Signed: Paula Cummings

Date: 16th Feb 2016

Appendix 1

Useful Website for dealing with loss and bereavement in the school community:

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Useful telephone numbers and addresses:

1. Winston's Wish Family Line ~ 0845 2030405 - national helpline offering guidance, information and support to anyone caring for a bereaved child, including professionals and family members
2. Childhood Bereavement Network ~ 020 7843 6309 - a network of child bereavement services
3. Forget-me-not Bereavement Counselling ~ Northumberland Hospice Care Foundation. (01642) 296912 or 296913
4. CRUSE Bereavement Care (0870) 167 1677
www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Books dealing with death and loss ~

1. Beyond the Rough Rock
2. Supporting a Child who has been Bereaved through Suicide ~ Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley
3. As Big As It Gets
4. Supporting a Child when Someone in their Family is Seriously Ill ~ Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley
5. The Secret C - Straight Talking about Cancer ~ Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley
6. I Miss You ~ First Look at Death ~ Pat Thomson

Appendix 2

Parents and carers often feel that teachers are experts on their children. They may invariably therefore turn to the school for advice and information, especially on matters of bereavement.

It is important to remember that the family, friends and the immediate community often best support those suffering from bereavement, as is the case with other stressful life events.

Teachers need not be experts on the subject (although training would be a distinct advantage) but they do need to use sensitivity and their skills in understanding children's development and emotional needs.

The following are some points that may be helpful to bear in mind when talking to parents and carers:

- A death in the family will disrupt the family for many months; in fact the family will never be the same again. Family members are grieving, relationships alter, and members may take on new roles. Sometimes there is a change of carer, house or school, all of which add to the disruption and distress experienced by the child. To support the child it is helpful to minimise, if possible, changes and disruptions in their normal daily routine and life in school.
- The bereaved family members may emotionally and physically withdraw from the child, to protect themselves from more distress. Some adults will deny the bereaved child is grieving, as it will be too distressing for them to
- Acknowledge the child's pain. This may cause distress and confusion, causing grief reactions of anger, withdrawal or psychosomatic behaviours such as headaches, stomach-ache or sickness.
- The bereaved child may regress in behaviour, becoming clingy, difficult or withdrawn. His/her schoolwork may suffer. These changes will be partly due to grief but also to the disruption and changes within the family, causing the child to feel confused and

unsafe. Even the simple withdrawal of attention from the child can lead to problems; the child may feel resentment, jealousy or guilt towards the dead person or child. The expression of this verbally can cause the remaining family members distress and shock. Parents and carers need to know this is normal and will decrease as the child and the family become more stable and settled.

- Parents and carers need to be informed of the benefits that a child gains in being involved in the ceremonies and rituals that follow death. An explanation as to how mourning practices help children to express their feelings and come to terms with and accept the reality of their loss can be very beneficial.

Finally, teachers need to remember that parents and carers will often use them as role models, counsellors or extended family; looking to them for support for themselves as well as finding appropriate ways of supporting and talking with their children. Teachers therefore may require their own support structures, so they too can turn to others for emotional support, advice and information if needed. Supporting bereaved families, whilst rewarding, can also be emotionally draining.

Appendix 3

Self Care for those Working with the Bereaved including Teachers and Members of the Intervention Team

It is easy to overlook the stresses and anxieties placed on those dealing with the bereaved. In many instances these can be quite exacting and yet because our sympathy and attention naturally rests with those grieving we can easily forget the emotional weight resting on the shoulders of those offering support. In these terms, the following points we think are worth bearing in mind:

- Anticipate possible reactions you may experience with grief and loss. Each one of us is likely to react differently depending on our age, personality, cultural and religious backgrounds. If you are ever unsure about how you should react to others' grief, honesty is always the best line of approach.
- Try to accept that you may experience emotional reactions yourself. Such an event might trigger thoughts of your own past grief experiences. You may even find yourself doubting your own abilities and questioning your own beliefs.
- Panic attacks and worries about death - your own, or perhaps that of your family - may also become a preoccupation.

- Try to accept that giving such support can affect you in perhaps ways you had not considered. Normally these reactions will subside after a few days or weeks, but if they persist do not be afraid to ask for professional support.
- Never take on too much. If you find that you are having difficulty in managing to cope, look to others to offer support - a partner, friend, or colleague.

It is important to remember that you alone cannot carry other people's grief.

Appendix 4

Working with Bereaved Pupils

("When Someone Dies" - Education Welfare Service Guidance for Teachers pamphlet)

How to Help a Pupil Deal With Bereavement When a Member of their Family Dies

- The teacher's reaction can act as a role model for the class.
- If you think it is appropriate, visit or telephone the family before the pupil returns to school.
- Ask if you may inform other pupils in the class.
- Advise classmates not to overdo sympathy, just a simple "I'm sorry to hear about the death of" can help.
- Watch out for reaction from pupils who have previously suffered loss.

- Do not give extra homework to make up for their absence. They will have difficulty in concentrating and social behaviour may deteriorate.
- Watch out for signs of recurring grief for some months, but especially on anniversaries.
- Be sensitive to the risk of increased absence at this time, which may be due to strong feelings of insecurity. Prolonged absence may be indicative of the need for professional intervention within the family. Extra support may be accessed through the EWO.

2. Talking to the Bereaved Pupil

- Try and be available to listen and support if possible, arrange a one-to-one session as soon as possible after the pupil returns to school.
- Be calm and show them that you are listening and understanding by occasionally repeating what they have said and by acknowledging their emotions.
- If people feel like crying they should cry - crying is not a sign of weakness, but often a sign of deep feeling.
- Beware of using platitudes e.g. "I know how you feel", (young people may feel offended that you presume how they feel).
- Over the next few months or years, reactions to death may erupt suddenly.
- Watch for aggression, violence, anger or extreme withdrawal, loss of friends, increased sickness or talk of suicide may all be symptoms of complicated grieving, and may need a referral to a professional counsellor.

3. How Children React to Death

The death of a significant person in our lives can trigger many emotions which are experienced by both adults and children. These may include:-

- Shock: feelings of panic, confusion and immobilisation.
- Numbness: this is a survival mechanism, which many people experience, in the initial stages after death.
- Anger: this is a common response to bereavement, which can erupt in sudden outbursts at anytime.
- Guilt: feelings of not having done enough for, or with, the person who has died.
- Fear: feelings of insecurity; worries that someone else or the pupil themselves might die.
- Loneliness: feelings of extreme isolation from family and friends.
- Relief: in certain circumstances death may be a relief as well as a loss.
- Religious questioning: doubt and worries about spiritual matters.
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4. The Impact of Death on 5 to 10 Year Olds

- Death is usually understood as irreversible, final and inevitable but with an expectation of a natural order.

- Death of a parent may result in strong feelings of insecurity, causing fear for the death of the surviving parent or over their own death.
- Regressive behaviour is common.
- Sporadic grieving and sudden outbursts of anger are not unusual.
- Curiosity about all aspects of death may increase.
- Euphemisms or complex explanations of death may be confusing.