

Bereavement support for children and families

How schools can help support bereaved children [Target audience: school staff]

How Schools can help

Schools, just by carrying on with their usual day to day activities where possible, can provide support to a grieving child. Schools provide the opportunity for grieving children to experience:

Normality

For a child, or young person, whose life has been turned upside down, the routines of school life can give a sense of normality. Everything else may have fallen apart but school and the people within it are still there, offering a sense of security and continuity.

Relief from grief

For children and adolescents, school can give relief from an emotionally charged atmosphere at home. Children may feel overwhelmed by a grieving family. There may be a constant stream of visitors expressing their own grief. Children and young people can find this difficult to deal with.

An outlet for grief

When a parent, sibling or someone close to the family has died, children and young people can try to help support their immediate family by hiding their own grief and appearing to be OK. School is often seen as somewhere safe to express this grief.

A listening ear

Children can be overlooked by family members struggling to deal with their own grief. For a child who wishes to, school staff can provide an opportunity to talk about what has happened with a familiar and trusted adult in relative peace and calm.

The opportunity to be a child

Even when deeply sad, children still need to be children. School offers the chance for children to play, laugh, sing and generally just be a child without feeling guilty.

General Support

Keep in contact with home. Discuss concerns but equally important are successes. The family or carers will find this reassuring. Grieving children and young people can display altered behaviours in different situations. Good communication with home will help school be aware of this and provide a more realistic picture of how the child is coping.

Resources

Have in school a selection of resources on the subject. Stories are a wonderful way to gently introduce young children to the concept of death. Novels and poems offer young people a chance to learn through reading, listening and discussion. (see the organisations below for recommended resources)

Helpful organisations

- Diocese of Plymouth Diocesan Education Service Helen.Brown@prcdtr.org.uk
- Rainbows Bereavement Support <https://rainbowsgb.org/corona-virus-how-rainbows-can-help/>
- Child Bereavement Network www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk
- Child Bereavement UK www.childbereavement.org.uk
- CRUSE www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk
- Winston's Wish www.winstonwish.org.uk

Some points to consider

- Anniversary of the death – this might be a particularly sad period of time
- Father's Day / Mother's Day – ask the child what they would like to do
- Times of transition – even if the bereavement took place a few years earlier
- Funeral - parents may ask advice as to whether their child/ren should attend

When to seek additional support

- Complicated grief occurs when the bereaved child or young person becomes 'stuck' within their grief – this is where further professional support might be considered.

For further help and advice please contact Helen Brown (Diocesan RE and Catholic Life Adviser) Helen.Brown@prcdtr.org.uk