



**LONDON DIOCESAN BOARD FOR SCHOOLS**  
**ADVICE ON MANAGING DEATH AND BEREAVEMENT**  
**January 2011**

Schools should have a plan in place so that everyone knows what to do in the event of a death of a pupil, member of staff/school community or a child's relative. This is particularly important in the event of a sudden death. Some schools have included such planning in their Critical Incident Plan.

Training is important for all school staff, particularly if adults are to talk with recently bereaved children/students. Great emotional damage can be caused by people who are not aware of the pitfalls and sensitivities. A number of organisations, e.g. Cruse, offer proven training programmes. Teachers are *not* social workers or counsellors unless professionally qualified.

Training would, for example, address the varying needs of bereaved children at different ages and stages of development. School staff need to know the possible reactions of bereaved pupils.

Schools need information and advice on the various death traditions and customs of faiths other than Christian. Inadvertent insensitivity or ignorance can cause great offence and add to a family's grief (*Some SACREs have issued valuable advice*).

In all classes there should always be age appropriate books about death, so that children begin to know and understand the vocabulary of death (Appendix 1).

Having words to express what they see and hear around them, when and if the time comes, will help them to articulate their fears and distress.

Learning about dying and death should be an ordinary part of the curriculum. Having in the classroom pots of plants that live and die is a way of beginning to talk about the life cycle.

For further advice, please call Liz Wolverson on 020 7932 1154 or email [liz.wolverson@london.anglican.org](mailto:liz.wolverson@london.anglican.org)

## **Things to do on hearing of a death of a child or close relative**

1. The Head briefs the classteacher. The teacher may wish to talk to someone more experienced e.g. the school psychological service, the parish priest, Winston's Wish (tel: 0845 2030 405) who specialise in giving advice (Appendix 2).
2. All school staff are briefed.
3. The classteacher is released from class so that she can meet with the child and talk privately. Ways to start might be:  
*'I am really sorry to hear what happened to your..... . Would you like to tell me about it?'*
4. The child is asked about how she would like the rest of the class informed. Talk about telling them together.
5. Teacher and child tell the class.
6. The Head should visit each class individually and talk to them.
7. The Head writes a letter to all parents of that class and offers support and advice.
8. Informative letter to all other parents at the school (Appendix 3).
9. Letter to the bereaved family (Appendix 4).

## **Follow up**

1. Find out what the arrangements are for the funeral. Do the family want the school involved in any way?
2. Organise cover for the teacher and TA if appropriate.
3. Would the family like other parents to be informed of the arrangements? Are children encouraged to be at the funeral?
4. Will the parish priest plan a service / assembly for the school community?
5. If it is one of your pupils that has died suggest a memorial service to be held in a few weeks time.
6. Talk to the children about a way to remember. Ideas like a bench, a tree, a water feature or similar can be a very powerful symbol.

## **What children may know and understand about death**

### Foundation Stage and KS1

1. Can remember the person that has died and hold their image inside their head.
2. The centre of their world is their family.
3. See everything in relation to themselves, trying to bargain to bring back to the person who has gone (e.g. *'If I do/don't do this – will ....come back'*).
4. Wants facts – e.g. *'Where have they gone?'*  
The facts must be straightforward i.e. died – no euphemisms
5. Not really understanding what 'gone' means – e.g. *'Will they come back?'*  
Needs to be shown the difference between dead and alive – e.g. plants.
6. Confuses magic with reality – e.g. fly up to heaven and get someone back.
7. Expresses themselves through play – need to extend their vocabulary and create play opportunities.
8. Does not understand why other people are upset – e.g. adults crying.
9. Body-centred reactions – e.g. incontinence, tantrums. May also have nightmares.
10. Finds separation more difficult, may not want to go to school. Needs a very secure routine.

### KS2

Some of the issues for younger children may still apply.

1. Will understand about bodies, death, funerals, coffins etc.
2. Will be able to discuss how they feel, but may also be better at hiding their feelings.
3. Will know that death is not reversible.
4. May ask difficult questions – e.g. *'Why did this happen?'*
5. May suddenly be trying to act like a grown up.
6. Less likely to use play to work things through.
7. More aware of other peoples feelings and yet may find it difficult to express their own.
8. Lots of things become worrying (e.g. dark, monsters) and they may have tantrums or wet the bed.
9. May start to draw comparisons between 'before' and 'after' especially if they have become 'carers'.
10. Can use metaphor to explain how they feel.
11. Friends, school and teachers increasingly important.

12. May try to escape the pain, and have strong reactions – e.g. illness, bullying, school refusal
13. May feel vulnerable and anxious, need routines and a sense of normality.
14. Needs time to discuss how they feel and not be laughed at or dismissed.

### KS3

Some or all the previous issues may still apply.

1. Teenagers coping with physical changes as well, boys and girls may react very differently.
2. Greater sense of finality and of being alone.
3. Friends and school may be more important than family.
4. Finding time and space to grieve may be very difficult – e.g. friends may not want to talk about it.
5. Their reactions may range and change quickly from not wanting to talk about it to being over protective and fussy.
6. Need privacy and encouragement to share their thoughts.
7. Need creative outlets to express feelings.
8. Need security but may start testing boundaries.

### KS4 +

Many issues carried over from previous descriptions.

1. May be confused – on an emotional rollercoaster.
2. Not sure whether to react as a child or an adult.
3. More egocentric again.
4. On the surface may seem to be 'getting on' with things but could be hiding a lot that they didn't want to face up to.
5. Not yet got the emotional intelligence of maturity so may react in unusual ways.
6. May not be able to find time or place to grieve.
7. Friends and school very important, could reject their family because it is too painful, or reject the outside world because it is too risky.
8. Looking for meaning – e.g. *Why are we here? What's the point?*
9. Could find talking and trusting adults even more difficult.
10. Need to begin to develop resilience in order to face the future.

## Appendix 1 – Resource List

### Children's Resources:

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Publisher</b>	<b>ISBN</b>
A Taste of Blackberries	Doris Buchanan Smith	Puffin	0 1403 2020 2
All we know about Heaven	Peter Crowther	Barrington Stoke	1 8429 9032 2
Bridge to Terabithia	Katherine Paterson	Puffin	1 1403 1260 9
Butterfly Summer	Christine Wood	Lutterworth Press	0 7188 2754 6
The Day Grandma Died	Jan Selby	Benjamin Books	0 7151 0318 0
Dogger	Shirley Hughes	Lion	0 0066 1464 7
Emma Says Goodbuy	Carolyn Nystrom	Lion	0 7459 1608 2
Emma's Cat Dies	Nigel Snell	Hamish Hamilton	0 2411 1297 4
Fred	Posy Simmonds	Puffin	0 1405 0965 8
Frog and the Birdsong	Max Velthuis	Red Fox	0 0888 1780 2
Goodbye Max	Holly Keller	Walker Books	0 7445 1455 X
Grandad's Bench	Addy Farmer	Walker Books	1 4063 1139 6
Grandpa's Slide Show	Deborah Gould	Puffin	0 1405 0871 6
Granpa	John Burningham	Puffin	0 1405 0841 4
Gran's Grave	Wendy Green	Lion	0 7459 1556 6
I feel sad	Brian Moses	Wayland	0 7502 1406 6
I remember Miss Perry	Pat Brisson	Dial books	0 8037 2981 2
I'll always love you	Hans Wilhem	Knight Books	0 3404 0153 2
Life's End	Denise Chaplin & Lynne Broadbent	Wayland	0 7502 2803 2
The Lonely Tree	Nicholas Halliday	Halliday Books	0 5939 4598 6
Love you forever	Robert Munsch	Beaver Books	0 0997 1330 6
Mama's going to buy you a Mockingbird	Jean Little	Puffin	0 1403 3173 7
On Eagle's Wings	Sue Mayfield	Lion	0 7459 4890 1
Patterns in the Sand	Sue Mayfield	Lion	0 7459 4891 X
Remembering Mum	Ginny Perkins & Leon Morris	A&C Black	0 7136 3381 6
Sam's Story	Fiona Chin-Yee	Bedford Square Press	
Scrumpy	Elizabeth Dale	Anderson Press	0 8626 4703 7
Vicky Angel	Jacqueline Wilson	Books at Transworld	0 4408 6415 1
Water Bugs and Dragonflies	Doris Stickney	Mowbray	0 2646 6904 5
When Mum Died		Hillins & Sireling	1 8518 3020 0
When Uncle Bob Died	Althea	Dinosaur Publications	0 8512 2727 9
Will my Rabbit go to Heaven?	Jeremy Hughes	Lion	0 7459 1221 4

Teacher's Resources:

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Publisher</b>	<b>ISBN</b>
Children and Bereavement	Wendy Duffy	National Society	0 7151 4846 X
Grief and Bereavement – Understanding Children	Ann Couldrick	Sobell Publications	0 9517 5371 1
Grief encounter: a workbook to encourage conversations about death between children and adults	Shelley Gilbert	Grief Encounter Project	0 9548 4340 3
Living with Grief in School: Guidance for Primary School teachers and Staff	Ann Chadwick	Family Reading Centre	1 8985 3801 8
When Children Grieve	Alfred Torrie	Cruse Publications	
When Parents Die	Rebecca Abrams	Routledge	0 4152 0066 0
Healing Grief	Barbara Ward	Vermillion	0 0917 7839 5
Saying Goodbye to Greg – Understanding Bereavement	Christine Chapman	Collins	0 0067 5469 4
Then, Now and Always: Supporting children as they journey through Grief: A Guide for Practitioners	Julie A Stokes	Winston's Wish	0 9539 1235 3
Good Grief 1: Talking about and Learning about Loss and Death	Barbara Ward & Jamie Houghton	White Crescent Press	0 9512 8880 6
Good Grief 2: Exploring Feelings, Loss and Death with Under 11's	Barbara Ward and Associates	White Crescent Press	0 9512 8882 2
Supporting Bereaved Children – A Handbook	Diane MacBraidy	Serco Education Bradford	

## Appendix 2 – Organisations and Websites dealing with Bereavements

*(updated January 2010)*

- Winston's Wish – [www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk) - Family Line: 0845 20 30 405 for guidance and information for families of bereaved children and professionals supporting bereaved children.
- Cruse Bereavement Care – [www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk) – Cruse provides counselling and support and offers information, advice, education and training services. It aims to promote the well-being of bereaved people and to enable them to understand their grief and cope with their loss. Daytime helpline 0844 477 9400; Young Person's Helpline freephone 0808 808 1677; email: [helpline@cruse.org.uk](mailto:helpline@cruse.org.uk)
- The Child Bereavement Charity - [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk) – National UK charity providing specialised training and support for professionals to help them respond to the needs of bereaved families. Support and Information line: 014914 568900
- National Bereavement Partnership - [www.natbp.org.uk](http://www.natbp.org.uk) – A charity offering advice and support to both families and professionals. Helpline Number 0845 226 7227; email: [info@natbp.org.uk](mailto:info@natbp.org.uk)
- The Compassionate Friends (UK) - [www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk) – A charity offering advice and support for families who have lost a child. Helpline number 0845 123 23 04 (open 10am to 4pm & 7.00pm to 10.00pm); email [info@tcf.org.uk](mailto:info@tcf.org.uk) or [helpline@tcf.org.uk](mailto:helpline@tcf.org.uk)
- St Christopher's Hospice – [www.stchristophers.org.uk](http://www.stchristophers.org.uk) – A charity providing professional care and supporting the emotional, spiritual and social needs of their patients, their families, children, friends and carers. Telephone: 020 8768 4500.
- Helen & Douglas House: Hospice Care for Children and Young Adults – [www.helenanddouglas.org.uk](http://www.helenanddouglas.org.uk) – A registered charity providing professional care, practical support and friendship for children and young people with life-shortening conditions, as well as support for their families. Telephone: 01865 794749 (office hours only, 9am-5pm Monday to Friday)
- National Children's Bureau – [www.ncb.org.uk](http://www.ncb.org.uk) – not specifically related to death and bereavement but offers information, resources and links about children and young people and their growth and development.

### Appendix 3: Letter to all parents at the school

Dear Parents

You will be sorry to hear that this morning we heard that.....has died yesterday / over the weekend.

We felt that it was right to tell the children rather than they hear through rumours. The teachers have tried, and will continue, to be available to answer the children's questions. We know this can be a difficult subject to discuss with children and if we can be of any help do please contact us.

I have written on behalf of the school to..... expressing the sadness of the whole school community over their loss.

### Appendix 4 – Letter to the bereaved family

Dear.....

Thank you for letting us know your sad news this morning.

.....has had time to talk with her teacher today and was with her teacher when the class was informed of the death of your.....

I have written to all parents so that they know what has happened and why their children may be upset.

I will ring you in the next few days to see if we can help in any way as you begin to make arrangements for the funeral. If you have any concerns about..... please let us know so that we can try and help.

Yours Sincerely

## Prayers

### **Death of a Child**

O God, he is your servant and the son of your servant. You did create him and sustain him and bring him to death and You will give him life. O God, make him for his parents an anticipation, riches sent on before, a reward which precedes... Let neither us nor them be seduced by temptation after his departure and give him in exchange for his earthly home a better dwelling place.

*Muslim Devotions*

### **Death of a Child**

O merciful God, Your Son Jesus Christ took children in his arms and blessed them, we commit this child (*name*) to your care. We ask you to surround his/her parents with your love so that they are not overwhelmed by grief, but, supported by their family and friends, they may in due course rediscover meaning and hope. Amen.

*Marcus Braybrooke*

### **A Time to be Born and a Time to Die**

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

- a time to be born, and a time to die;
- a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
- a time to kill, and a time to heal;
- a time to break down, and a time to build up;
- a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
- a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
- a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
- a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
- a time to seek, a time to lose;
- a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
- a time to tear, and a time to sew;
- a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
- a time to love, and a time to hate;
- a time for war, and a time for peace.

*Bible: The Book of Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8*

### **Nothing Can Separate Us From the Love of God**

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword...?

Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus Our Lord.

*Bible: St Paul, Romans 8: 35-39*

### **Tell it Again and Again**

This has happened to us, we tell it again and again.

We pour out our hearts, full of grief.

You are in heaven hear our prayer.

You, O Eternal, are a God of mercy and compassion.

*Forms of Prayer for Jewish Worship*

**God Be In My Head**

God be in my head,  
And in my understanding:

God be in my eyes,  
And in my looking:

God be in my mouth,  
And in my speaking:

God be in my heart,  
And in my thinking:

God be at mine end,  
And at my departing.  
*Pynson's Hoare (1514)*

**Safe in God's Hands**

All our laughter, all our sadness,  
Safe now in God's hands.

All our anger, all our gladness,  
Safe now in God's hands.

All our stories, all our memories,  
Safe now in God's hands.

Those we remember, those we love,  
Safe now in God's hands.

*Ruth Burgess*

**What is Dying?**

What is dying? I am standing on the sea-shore. A ship sails to the morning breeze and starts for the ocean. She is an object of beauty and I stand watching her till at last she fades on the horizon, and someone at my side says, 'She is gone'. Gone where? Gone from my sight, that is all; she is just as large in the masts, hull and spars as she was when I saw her, and just as able to bear her load of living freight to its destination.

The diminished size and total loss of sight is in me, not in her; and just at the moments when someone at my side says, 'She is gone', there are others who are watching her coming, and other voices take up a glad shout, 'There she comes' – and that is dying.

*Bishop Brent*

**We Can Never be Separated From God**

God is sitting inside you,  
Nearer than your hands and feet.  
The distance between you and God  
Is as thin as an insect's wing.  
We can never be separated from God,  
Neither at birth nor at death.

*A Sikh Prayer*

**God Gives Life and Death**

Say, 'It is God who  
Gives you life, then  
Gives you death; then  
He will gather you together  
For the Day of Judgement'.

*Qur'an 45: 26*

**Tears**

Almighty God, Father of all mankind,  
in your Son you took upon yourself the world's sorrow.  
We offer you our own sorrow and sadness  
knowing that you can help us to bear our grief  
through the infinite understanding and love  
of Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Be Comforted, Be at Peace**

Be comforted. Be comforted, dear ones;  
There is eternal life for all souls who love God, Who is love; and where there is love  
there can be no separation. Your loved one is by your side. Death cannot separate  
you. Be comforted and at peace.

*A Saying of White Eagle*

### **Bereavement**

Lord God, Father and creator of us all, thank you for...  
We feel very sad.  
Through our own sadness, help us to  
understand the sadness of others  
and try to make the world a kinder place.

### **The Death of a Grandparent**

Lord in heaven, you have promised us new life  
through your Son, Jesus Christ;  
help us to live with that promise  
in our hearts and in our lives,  
so that our sadness can be turned by you  
into blessing and strength in the days ahead.

### **On the Death of a Grandparent**

Dear Lord, thank you for grandparents.  
My gran was fun.  
She used to laugh a lot and read me stories.  
She was warm and friendly.  
I'll miss her now she's dead.  
But I know I'm lucky –  
Some children never even meet their grandparents.  
It's funny to think  
that one day I'll be old like my gran.  
I hope I'll be as smiley and kind as her.  
Thank you, Lord, for grandparents.

### References:

Braybrooke, Marcus (2003) *World Prayers 1000*. John Hunt Publishing.

Herbert, Christopher (ed) (1993) *Prayers for Children*. National Society/Church House Publishing.