



Dobwalls Primary School

Bereavement Policy

March 2020

Due to remote working and self-isolation, as a result of Covid 19.

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April 2020

Rationale

We understand that members of our school community face bereavement at different times. When the loss is of a member of our school community – such as a child or staff member - it can be particularly difficult. Pupils need to be supported when they experience family bereavements and other significant losses in the course of their lives while they are at school.

At the time of writing, the nation is engaged in a period of social distancing. This means that only a small minority of pupils and staff are physically on school sites and so a nuanced approach is required.

This policy will provide guidelines to be followed after a bereavement. The aim is to be supportive to both pupils and adults, and for staff to have greater confidence and be better equipped to cope when bereavement happens. Every death and the circumstances in which it occurs is different and this policy has been constructed to guide us on how to deal professionally, sensitively and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances.

Our school is committed to the emotional health and well-being of all staff and pupils. We are dedicated to the continual development in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that support and prepare pupils for coping with separation or loss of a loved one, through either death or divorce.

Following a Bereavement:

We believe that children and adults alike have the right to:

- be given space and time to grieve
- be told sensitively by the most appropriate person
- be given support from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate – if possible, of their own choice.

We recognise that:

- grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real.
- during this time of social distancing extra care needs to be taken over communication
- differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value.
- the death of a child has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/care team of that child and every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far-reaching contacts.

The Management of Bereavement in School

A universally accepted procedure outline will not enable everyone to feel comfortable in dealing with the practicalities of death and bereavement. Each bereavement is unique and comes with its own specific challenges; however, it is helpful to have a framework on which to build. One of our main concerns must be the immediate family of the deceased and we are committed to providing any practical, emotional and ongoing support they require.

Transition

It is vitally important to ensure that if a child has experienced bereavement that this information is passed on to the relevant persons when they move on to a new class or school.

Death of a pupil

During this time, where most children are not attending school, families are likely to contact whoever they know best in the school community. In that instance the member of staff who takes the call should immediately contact the Head teacher and they will assume responsibility for the dissemination of the information.

Sharing information

It is important to agree with the parent before the school can take on the role of informing concerned parties within, or outside, the school community. There can be no definitive list of people to contact and, therefore, it will be different for each child. We will provide details of the local vicar and contact on their behalf, with agreement from the family. We will endeavour that all people who are close to the child are told in a sensitive and supportive manner rather than risk them hearing it 'on the grapevine'. The school needs to ensure it does not add to the sorrow by leaving people feeling marginalised.

The following people should be considered:

- All School Staff
- Previous school staff who worked closely with the child
- Social Work team if applicable
- CEO, Dan Buckley
- Other professionals who work with the child – Ed Psych
- Other parents – if children have been informed, the school needs to send a note to parents informing them of the loss, and they may need to support or comfort their children.
- Some parents may need to be telephoned if their relationship is closer but whom the family may not have informed.

See Appendix C for a flow chart detailing paths of communication.

This advice could include following:

It is important that parents avoid adding worry – for example, if the child died in hospital we do not want to give children a fear of hospitals. Although the finality of death cannot be diminished, if there are mitigating circumstances that may help - such as that the child was in pain and now is free of pain - this can be used to help alleviate sorrow. Children must be told that, while they may feel sad, they do not have to feel guilty if they go on to have fun and pleasure in their day ahead. They must not feel obliged to assume a burden of grief. Children must be allowed to ask questions at this time or at any point in the following days or weeks. Staff must answer honestly and to the best of their knowledge.

The Funeral

- In usual circumstances the family would be asked what involvement they would like the school to have in the funeral. At this present time only immediate family are able to attend funerals, with a maximum attendance of 10 and so it should be assumed that no one from the school community can attend. This should be communicated widely and sensitively to the wider school community so that families are not given the burden of enforcing government guidelines.
- A donation from the school or MAT should be considered in memory of the child to a charity of the family's choosing.
- If the funeral is to be live-streamed, the family will be asked if the link can be shared with the wider church community.
- If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed. Past experience has shown that this can be helpful in their grieving.

Memory Assemblies

It may be appropriate, at a later date, for there to be some sort of act of remembrance and celebration of the child's life. This should depend on the wishes of the family and is best decided by the Head teacher.

Responding to the media

Some deaths, particularly those in sudden or traumatic circumstances, attract media attention. All members of staff are advised not to respond to journalists and to refer all enquiries to the Head, who will make a considered response after seeking assistance from our media advisers.

On-Going Support

For staff:

Following bereavement, it is only to be expected that some members of staff will be emotionally affected and would benefit from the provision of some time for reflection. The following support may be helpful:

- The chance to meet virtually with other staff
- Ensure a named member of staff is checking in and providing regular emotional support – mutually agreed by the head and the staff members
- Head teacher to main open lines of communication
- Availability of information about accessing bereavement support outside of school, e.g. Penhaligon's Friends, counselling support provided by the Trust

For Pupils:

- At this time, the burden of support will be from their immediate family. However, teaching staff should make themselves available to talk on the phone to children who are particularly struggling and require extra support.
- Trauma Informed Schools trained staff, are able to work with siblings or other children who are affected on a 1:1 basis as needed with a personalised programme and give time to talk and be listened to. In the time of remote working, this can be arranged over the telephone.

For The Family:

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support. Send a letter of condolence from the school. **See Appendix D for guidance.**
- Give parents and family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died.
- Hold a collection /flowers to be sent as appropriate.
- Invite parents/family to any commemorative events held by the school in the future.
- If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed.

Parents will be told that they are welcome in the school and will be encouraged to come and visit when this becomes possible. Past experience has shown that this can be helpful in their grieving. The first visit to the school is often difficult and will be arranged sensitively in accordance with the parents' wishes. It will then be for the parents to decide if they wish to maintain on going links. Each family will be different, with differing needs. Therefore, the school will always be there to act as a source of support and information.

The Death of a Member of Staff

All of the principles and procedures listed above apply to the death of a staff member.

Responsibilities

The designated person within the school who has overall responsibility for support and liaison in event of a death or traumatic loss is the Head teacher. In the event that this person is absent then the CEO will take responsibility.

His/her responsibilities are:

- Policy development and review, involving pupils, staff, governors, parents/carers and relevant local agencies.
- Implementing the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities.
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies.
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary school.
- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff.

The nominated Trustee with responsibility for bereavement is **Sue Brownlow**

Her responsibilities are:

- To contribute to generating and updating the policy.
- To support the Head/CEO in overseeing the way in which bereavement is managed.
- To review practice.

Appendix A - List of Online Resources and Information

First port of call: www.penthaligonsfriends.org.uk A Cornish charity supporting bereaved children, young people, parents and carers throughout the county.

www.schooladvice.co.uk The Schools Advisory Service offers confidential advice and support.

www.winstonswish.org.uk A useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community.

www.chums.info A bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

www.childbereavement.org.uk A bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

www.juliesplace.com A support resource for bereaved siblings

www.bhf.org.uk/smallcreature British Heart Foundation site to help children come to terms with loss using cartoon creatures. An animated film and we have a printed pack to go with it.

www.bbc.co.uk/.../bereavement/bereavement_helpchildren.shtml Information on the way bereavement affects children

<http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk> An organisation offering local bereavement support to both adults and children

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/index.htm> Federation of organisations

Appendix B - Books on Bereavement

GRANPA

John Burningham (Puffin, 1998, ISBN 0099-43408-3)

Designed to stimulate discussion rather than to tell a story, the book has a series of scenes of a little girl and her granddad, with comments from each or both of them. At the end, she is shown staring at his empty chair, without comments. The book allows the adult to direct discussion about not only the good things that the child remembers, but also the not so happy memories.

WHEN DINOSAURS DIE

L & M Brown (Little, Brown, 1996, hb, ISBN 0-316-10197-7)

Charming busy anthropomorphic pictures of dinosaurs illustrate topics, questions, and a range of answers about death: Saying Goodbye; Customs and beliefs about death; why do people die. What does "dead" mean?. It is also quite acute psychologically, acknowledging that disbelief, anger, fear, and sadness are common feelings when someone dies. Expensive, but attractive and appealing to children.

REMEMBERING GRANDAD

Sheila and Kate Isherwood (Oxford, ISBN 0-19-272368-5)

A girl's grandfather has died and looking back over the happy times they enjoyed together helps her to cope with the loss. Very specific episodes and illustrations give it a life-like feel. Sensible and sound if a little stereotyped in its pictures of family life, it could help children to think about how to remember someone.

FRED

Posy Simmons (Jonathan Cape, 1987, ISBN 0-2240-2448-5)

When Fred the cat dies, his owners Nick and Sophie attend his funeral and learn about his secret life as a famous singer. The story raises the idea of celebrating a life in a good-humoured and touching way, with entertaining pictures and not much text.

GRANDAD, I'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER YOU

De Bode and Broere (Evans / Helping Hands, 1997, ISBN 0237-51755-8)

A picture book about loss and memories, and potentially a good stimulus to talk about a bereavement.

LIFETIMES

Beginnings and endings with lifetimes in between – a beautiful way to explain life and death to children

Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen (Belitha Press, 1997, ISBN 1-85561-760-9).

places human life and death firmly in the natural world, and the tone is quietly reflective: "All around us everywhere, beginnings and endings are going on all the time. It may be sad, but it is the way of all things. For plants; for people; and for birds".

BADGER'S PARTING GIFTS

Susan Varley (Collins Picture Lions, pb, 1992)

An old favourite, a charming illustrated book in which a very old and much loved badger dies. The forest animals gather and reminisce about the important part Badger played in their lives, and as time passes memories of Badger make them smile. These memories were different for each of them, including very recognisable things like a favourite recipe or showing someone how to knot a tie - Badger's "parting gifts"

WE LOVE THEM

Martin Waddell (Walker Books, 1990, ISBN 0-7445-7256-8)

Death is seen very much as part of life in this nicely illustrated story of life in the country, which conveys the idea that life goes on and that old creature's give way to young ones. But it is a bit too matter of fact about loss - barely is the old dog dead than the children have found a new one, is there an implicit message that dead pets (and people?) are easily replaced.

GRANDMA'S BILL

Martin Waddell (Macdonald Young Books, pb, ISBN 0- 7500-0307-3)

Bill's grandma is a widow, and he learns about her "other Bill" by looking through her photo album with her. A bit too stereotypically suburban and middle class for general appeal perhaps. Some like its ordinariness, gentleness and factual accuracy, and could not fault what it had to say about death and living on in memories and in the family.

I'LL ALWAYS LOVE YOU

H Wilhelm (Hodder & Stoughton, 1985)

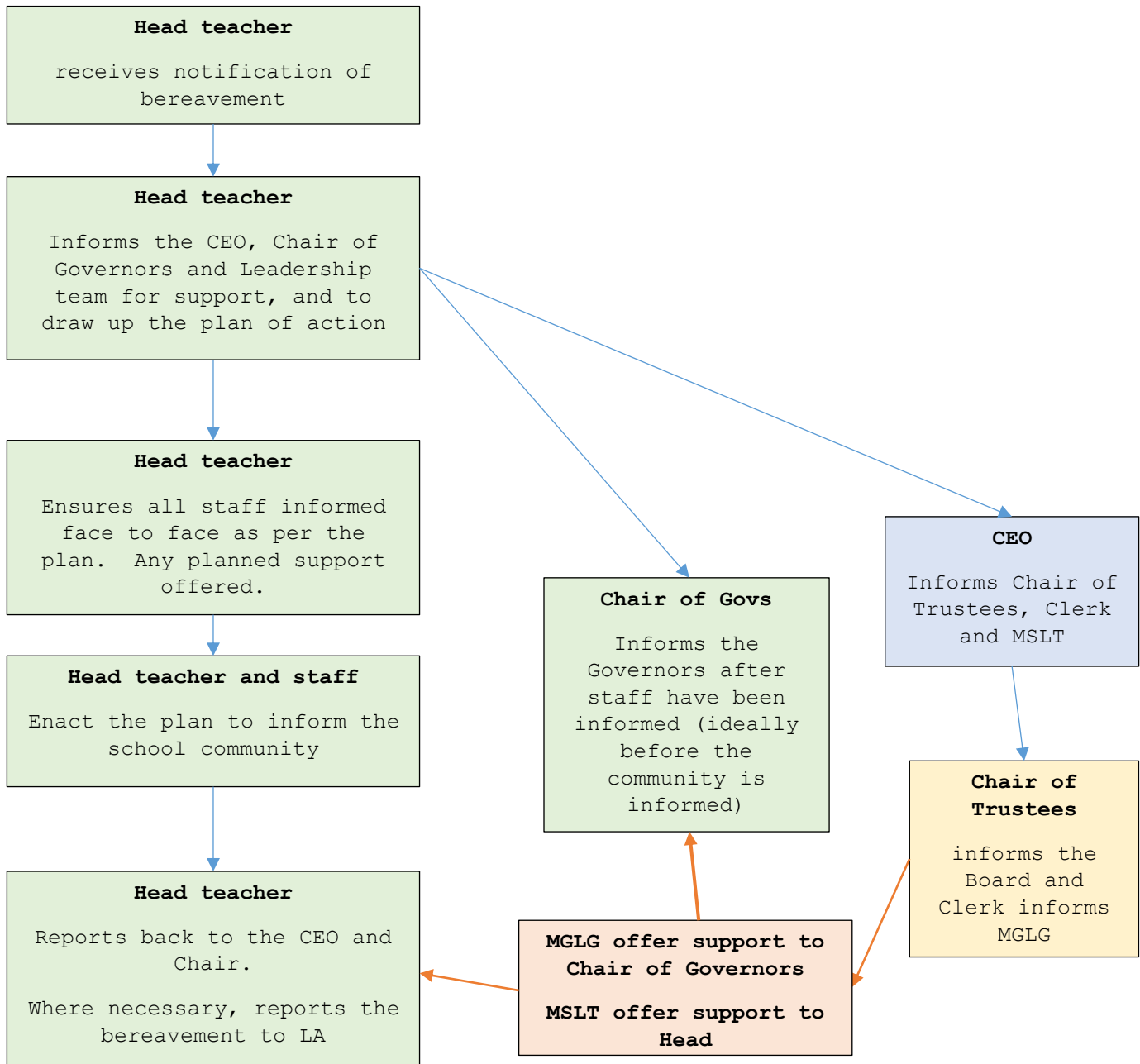
A touching story of the love between a little boy and his dog, who have grown up together. When the dog dies, the boy says that, although he is very sad, it helps that he used to tell the dog "I'll always love you" every night. An opportunity to discuss the importance of telling how you feel. Aimed at 4 to 7 year olds and delightfully illustrated.

A BIRTHDAY PRESENT FOR DANIEL

Juliet Rothman (Prometheus Books, ISBN 1-57392-054-1)

This story of a little girl whose brother has died is intended for children aged 8-12. "A difficult subject handled very well and movingly".

Appendix C - Bereavement Flow Chart of Responsibilities



Appendix D – Writing Letters of Condolence

Letters of Condolence

It is tragically the case that in the present Covid 19 crisis some of our Head teachers might have to write a letter of condolence in respect of the death of a child, parent or colleague.

It is very difficult to construct any sort of template for this because, by their nature, they always need to be personal.

Above all, they have to be sincere and this must be very evident. What is written will therefore depend on the circumstances and the relationship the writer had with the deceased.

Please try to bear in mind the following points:

- You are writing both as an individual and on behalf of the school. This needs to be clear so perhaps ***'I was so very sorry to hear of the death of Xxxxx and all those of us here at Xxxxx School would like to express to you our sincerest condolences at this sad time.....'***
- It is often comforting for someone to receive a highly personal statement of what the writer most remembers about the deceased and so perhaps ***'My abiding memory of Xxxxx will be the way in which she would often delight us all by***' You may wish to include more than one thought here.
- In the current Covid 19 situation it is unlikely that there will be a funeral at which the school could be represented. However, it might well be appropriate to say that if there is to be a memorial service of any kind in the future that representatives of the school would very much like to attend and so perhaps ***'If you decide to hold a memorial service when circumstances have again become more normal, the school would feel very privileged to attend and be represented by ...'***. This might be adults but it could also be children.
- Include in your letter offers of how the school might support the family of the deceased. Please see the Bereavement Policy for suggestions about this. The writer of the letter will have to make some judgements about what might be appropriate and so perhaps ***'If you would like to attend/see/etc xxxxxxx you may be assured that we will all make you very welcome***'
- Make it clear how this support can be accessed and so perhaps ***'If any of my suggestions would bring you comfort, please do not hesitate to contact me and I will make the necessary arrangements'***.
- Conclude by again expressing condolences and so perhaps ***'May I say once again how very sorry we are to hear of the death of Xxxxxx and please know that all of us here at Xxxxxx School would like to support you in any way we can'***