

## Forres Sandle Manor (Non-Academic) Policy

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| Policy Title                           | <b>Staff Guidance for Helping Children Deal with Bereavement and Loss</b> |
| Policy Lead (Appointment (& Initials)) | <b>Headmaster (JW)</b>  |
| Date of Last Review                    | <b>November 2019</b>  |
| Date of Next Review                    | <b>November 2020</b>  |

### BEREAVEMENT AND LOSS

#### HOW CAN WE HELP POTENTIALLY?

- School is an important part of the community and may be involved directly or indirectly in a disaster.
- School is a significant part of a child's world.
- School is the normal place for a child to be and offers security at a time of insecurity.
- Trauma reactions are normal reactions and are best helped in a normal and familiar environment.
- Children will look to teachers for models of dealing with death and crisis.
- Information and support can be offered to all without stigma.
- Teachers know the pre-trauma behaviour of pupils and are in a good position to identify post-trauma reactions.

#### **RATIONALE**

Each year tens of thousands of children are bereaved of a parent. 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 the Forres Sandle Manor (FSM) 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 pupil.

FSM is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and pupils. We are dedicated to the continual development of a 'healthy school'. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that supports and prepares pupils for coping with separation or loss of a loved one, either through death or divorce.

This policy will provide guidelines to be followed after 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.

A policy within school will help us to support pupils and/or staff before, during and after bereavement in an effective way, identifying key staff and a clear pathway. It fits within our ethos of caring for staff and pupils and providing support where necessary to ensure that staff and pupils receive optimum attention to promote their wellbeing.

### **AIMS**

All staff and pupils faced with bereavement will be provided with appropriate support. This will be by:

- Offering opportunities to express feelings in a safe and supportive environment.
- The development of an action plan to support staff and pupils.
- Gaining access to specialist help if necessary.

### **Following Bereavement:**

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

- Be given space and time to grieve.
- Be given support from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate, if possible, of their own choice.
- Encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement.

### **We recognise that:**

- Grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real.
- Differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment.
- 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, in itself, 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 as a school we state our commitment to any such family as may need practical, emotional and ongoing support.

The family share the bereavement story with you.



Discuss as a team the tasks required and who is best to complete them.



Senior member of the team to send card/letter of condolence.



Appointed person to discuss with the family/child who they want their story shared with.



Inform others – staff then families and young people of FSM as agreed with the bereaved family and child, and be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed by each individual circumstance.



A letter to all FSM families affected should be composed at the earliest opportunity and a decision made as to whom, and how, it should be distributed. A sample letter is included but this should be modified according to the circumstances.



Appointed person to be point of contact for family - discuss funeral arrangements.



Appointed person to arrange to see child at home or in the setting to assess their needs and level of support required at this time.



Appointed person to liaise with child and support their return to FSM.



Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Head.



Appointed person ensures significant dates and events for the child are recorded and shared with all staff for future reference (birthdays, anniversaries).



Appointed person continues to assess the needs of the child. Observation, discussion with significant people, including the child regarding their concerns or worries, and outside agencies if required.



Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate.



Ensure friendships are secure as peer support can be very important.



Continue regular contact with the family- show you still care about them and their child.



The impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life so information should be recorded and passed throughout the setting, particularly at transitional periods and if required to other settings.

*Remember: grief will last a lifetime and can surface throughout with new questions and many reflections.*

## **THE ROLE OF THE HEAD**

- To be the first point of contact for the family/child concerned and subsequent communication.
- To ensure that the school possesses the salient facts about the death.
- To inform staff/pupils/governing body.
- To monitor execution of the policy.
- To ensure that 'bereavement' is established on the curriculum at relevant points during the pupils' education.
- To identify and train bereavement support staff and ensure that their learning is communicated to other staff.

## **GUIDELINES FOR INFORMING STAFF AND OTHER PERSONNEL**

- Arrange a staff meeting as soon as practicable. Ensure that absent staff are informed.
- Tell the story of what happened leading up to the death.
- Give a factual explanation of how the death occurred.
- Be prepared for obvious upset and feeling of anger/guilt. People may connect the incident to their own personal experience of bereavement, so feelings about past bereavements may need to be discussed. This is perfectly natural.
- Inform absent staff over the telephone if a personal visit is impractical.
- If relevant, identify a nominated spokesperson to provide a 'news statement' at an agreed time, as a way of dealing with media intrusion. Essential to liaise with family.
- If the death is traumatic, such as suicide or murder, consider requesting bereavement support services – Simon Says can advise/support.
- Arrange staff condolences with collaborative agreement if felt appropriate.
- Identify someone who can be available to talk things through with a parent, child or member of staff if they are finding the situation particularly hard.
- Nominate staff to prepare a letter to parents and carers (to be given after school) sharing the news.
- Arrange a staff meeting for the end of the day to give staff the opportunity to express their feelings about the day.
- Trained and experienced practitioners are available on the Simon Says help line should you want to check out ideas during the following days, weeks and months ahead.

## **Guidelines for informing children and young people**

- Identify those children who had a long term or close relationship with the deceased to be told together as a separate group. Class or tutor groups are ideal.
- It is more beneficial if all pupils are informed.
- Provide staff with guidelines on how to inform children. For example:

*“I’ve got some really sad news to tell you today that might upset you. I know most of you will have heard of cancer, and know that sometimes people with cancer get better, but other times people die from it. Mrs. Smith, the Geography teacher and Year 7 tutor, has been ill with cancer for a long time. I have to tell you that Mrs. Smith died yesterday in hospital.”*

*“Sometimes people have accidents at work, at home, at school or on the road. People may be hurt or injured in the accident and have to go to hospital for treatment. Sadly, there are some accidents that cause people to die. I have some really sad news to tell you that might upset you. Yesterday Stephen Smith, who is in Year 4, was in an accident and he was so badly injured that he died.”*

- Allow time for fears and feelings to be verbalised or for pupils to share their own experiences of death.
- Be honest about your own feelings and experiences and talk honestly about the relationship that you had with the person.
- Answer pupils’ questions factually, avoiding euphemisms like ‘passed away’.
- Be prepared for children to say or do the unexpected. Adults may be upset by some responses or apparent lack of response but this does not mean that a child does not care.
- Perhaps end the discussion with a moment to remember the deceased and their family.

## **THE FUNERAL**

- It is essential to sound out the family’s wishes. The family may well welcome
  - involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to
  - keep things private.
- The Head and/or the Deputy Head will make arrangements for the school to be represented at the funeral, and identify which staff and pupils may want to attend, together with the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport. For some schools it is appropriate to close, for others it is not, consequently difficult decisions will sometimes have to be made concerning attendance.
- Will flowers be sent and/or a collection made? Involve staff and pupils in the decision.
- Cultural and religious implications need consideration.
- 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.

## **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.

Policy to be reviewed by feedback from bereaved pupils, parents and staff.

With thanks to Child Bereavement UK who provided relevant paperwork to use as a base.



### **CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH**

The following information is based on developmental chronology, and is taken from CRUSE bereavement care website. It is helpful to consider these developmental levels when thinking about how children with special needs may experience grief.

The nature of a child's understanding of death and bereavement will be different at different stages of development. Although a child's grief is individual, their understanding of the loss of a loved one progresses as they mature. In this section you will find the most common understandings of death by children at certain stages of their development.

Do bear in mind that a child's understanding of death during their development will differ in circumstances where the child may be experiencing educational difficulties.

#### **Birth to six months**

Babies do not cognitively understand the notion of death; however that does not mean to say that they do not respond to the loss of someone close, or that they don't experience grief. A baby up to six months old experiences feelings of separation and abandonment as part of their bereavement. The bereaved baby is aware that the person is missing, or not there and this can cause the baby to become anxious and fretful. This can be heightened if it is the baby's primary caregiver who has died and the baby is able to identify that the one who is now feeding them, changing them and cuddling them is not the deceased person. Similarly if it is the baby's mother who is grieving a loss, the baby can pick up on these feelings and experience grief too.

#### **Six months to two years**

At this developmental stage the baby is able to picture their mother or primary caregiver internally if she/he is not present. If it is the primary caregiver who has died the baby will protest at their absence by loud crying and angry tears. It is common for babies to become withdrawn and lose interest in their toys and feeding and they will likely lose interest interacting with others. At the more mature end of this developmental stage bereaved toddlers can be observed actively seeking the deceased person. For instance if granddad spent much of his time prior to death in his shed the toddler might persistently return to investigate the shed in the hope that they will find him there.

#### **Two years to five years**

During their development between the age of two to five, children do not understand that death is irreversible. For instance a four year old child may be concerned that although nanny was dead she should have come home by now. This example illustrates how children at this stage do not understand the finality of death and nor do they understand what the term "dead" actually means. It is common for a young child to be told that their aunt has died and still expect to see them alive and well in the immediate future. Children do not understand that life functions have been terminated and will ask questions such as:

“Won’t Uncle Bob be lonely in the ground by himself?” “Do you think we should put some sandwiches in Grandpa’s coffin in case he gets hungry?” “What if Nan can’t breathe under all that earth?” “Will Daddy be hurt if they burn him?”

As the cognitive understanding of children in this age range is limited they can sometimes demonstrate less of a reaction to the news of the death than might be observed by an older child and might promptly go out to play on hearing the news of the death.

Children aged between two and five years old have difficulty with the abstract concepts surrounding death. For instance they might be confused as to how one person can be in a grave and also be in heaven at the same time. They will become further confused if they are told that the deceased person is simply sleeping and this in turn could make them fearful of falling asleep or seeing anyone else asleep. They might insist on waiting for the person who has died to wake up or similarly if they have been told that the person who has died has gone on a long journey they may await their return.

At this age bereaved children can become involved in omnipotence or magical thinking. This refers to the concept that bereaved children believe that their actions, inaction, words, behaviours or thoughts are directly responsible for their loved one’s death. This form of thinking is not exclusive to this particular age group and can be experienced by many bereaved children and young people of older ages. It is essential that you explain to the bereaved child that the death was not in any way their fault or responsibility. The need to reassure the grieving child that nothing they said / didn’t say, did or didn’t do caused the death is paramount.

### **Five years to ten years**

Children at this developmental stage have acquired a wider understanding of death and what it entails. They begin to realise that death is the end of a person’s life, that the person who has died won’t return and that life functions have been terminated. By the age of seven the average child accepts that death is an inevitability and that all people including themselves will eventually die.

This understanding can also increase a child’s anxieties regarding the imminent deaths of other people who they are close to. Children of this age are broadening their social networks by attending school and are therefore open to receive both information and misinformation from their peers and social circles.

With this in mind it is important that the cause of death, the funeral and burial process and what happens to the deceased person’s body are explained in a factual and age appropriate manner to the bereaved child. Children will ask many questions and may want to know intricate details pertaining to the death and decomposition of the body. Again, it is vital that children have such details explained to them clearly so that they understand.



At this developmental stage children can empathise with and show compassion for peers that have been bereaved. Children aged between five and ten often copy the coping mechanisms that they observe in bereaved adults and they may try to disguise their emotions in an attempt to protect the bereaved adult. The bereaved child can sometimes feel that they need permission to show their emotions and talk about their feelings.

The important thing is to let them do this. Avoid remarks such as, “Come on be a big brave girl for mummy” or “Big boys don’t cry”, such comments however well-meant can make children feel they need to hide their feelings or that what they are feeling is wrong. This can cause complications as the bereaved child develops.

<http://www.cruse.org.uk/Children/children-understanding-death#birth>

**PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF GRIEF**

**Grief is part of recovery and is normal**

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| <p><b>FEELINGS</b></p> <p>Sadness<br/>         Anger<br/>         Guilt<br/>         Self-reproach<br/>         Denial<br/>         Anxiety<br/>         Loneliness<br/>         'Clinginess'<br/>         Helplessness<br/>         Shock<br/>         Yearning<br/>         Relief<br/>         Numbness<br/>         Night fears<br/>         Depression</p>  | <p><b>PHYSICAL SIGNS – Acute</b></p> <p>Loss of appetite<br/>         Over-sensitivity<br/>         Weakness of muscles<br/>         Lack of energy<br/>         Tightness in chest/throat<br/>         Over-reaching<br/>         Breathlessness<br/>         Dryness of mouth<br/>         Bowel/bladder problems<br/>         Headaches<br/>         Fatigue<br/>         Uncomfortable crying/sobbing<br/>         Increased vulnerability to illness<br/>         Somatic changes<br/>         Bodily stress</p> |
| <p><b>BEHAVIOURAL SIGNS</b></p> <p>Bed-wetting<br/>         Sleep disturbance<br/>         Irritability<br/>         Social withdrawal<br/>         Dreams of the deceased<br/>         Increased delinquency<br/>         Increased non-cooperation<br/>         Avoidance of reminders<br/>         Searching and calling out<br/>         Sighing<br/>         Poor school work<br/>         Separation difficulties<br/>         Hostility</p> | <p><b>COGNITIVE SIGNS</b></p> <p>Drop in concentration<br/>         Confusion<br/>         Sense of unreality<br/>         Regression<br/>         Preoccupation with the image of the deceased<br/>         Disbelief</p>  |

## **HELPING BEREAVED CHILDREN IN SCHOOL**

### **GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS**

#### **Loss from a child's perspective**

For many children and young people the death of a parent, caregiver, sibling or grandparent is an experience they are faced with early in life. It is sometimes incorrectly assumed that a child or young person who is bereaved by the death of someone close at a young age will not be greatly affected as they are too young to understand the full implications of death. This is untrue and unhelpful. Even babies are able to experience loss. A baby cannot cognitively process the implications of the bereavement but that does not mean that they do not feel the loss.

The school and teachers can play a vital part in helping children to get through the grieving process. School provides a familiar, predictable and supportive environment. It can also provide some relief from the misery of others at home. Help to keep school and family routines intact.

#### **Accepting the child's experience**

Children and young people need to be given the opportunity to grieve as any adult would. Trying to ignore or avert the child's grief is not protective, in fact it can prove to be extremely damaging as the child enters adulthood. Children regardless of their age need to be encouraged to talk about how they are feeling and supported to understand their emotions.

It is also important to remember that children and young people grieve in different ways. Grief is unique and therefore it is not wise to assume that all children will experience the same emotions, enact the same behaviour or respond similarly to other grieving children and young people. A child or young person's grief differs from that of an adult's grief because it alters as they develop.

#### **Time to grieve**

Children and young people often revisit the death and review their emotions and feelings about their bereavement as they move through their stages of development. Children and young people do not have the emotional capacity to focus on their grief for long periods of time and therefore it is not uncommon for grieving children and young people to become distracted by play. This is a protective mechanism which allows the child or young person to be temporarily diverted from the bereavement.

Bereaved children and young people need time to grieve and in order for them to address the bereavement they need to be given the facts regarding the death in language appropriate to their age or level of comprehension. Avoid using metaphors for death such

as, “Daddy has gone to sleep”, this will make the child or young person believe that Daddy will come back to them and may constantly ask when he is going to wake up. Similarly the child or young person might encounter problems with bedtime and not wanting to sleep for fear of not waking up.

### **Talking to children**

It is understandable that many caregivers are reluctant to talk to the child or young person about the death as they do not want to cause distress or fear. Children and young people who are bereaved need to know that their loved one has died, how they died and where they are now. Failure to be honest with the grieving child or young person means that their grief is not being acknowledged and this can cause problems later on.

<http://www.cruse.org.uk/Children/loss-from-childs-perspective>

### **RETURN TO SCHOOL**

Although it is usually recommended that children return to school as soon after the funeral as possible, it is important to liaise with home over the exact timing and arrangements.

Some children, however, can show a high level of anxiety about attending school after bereavement. Often this is due to worry about some harm befalling surviving parents/relatives.

Let the child know you appreciate their situation and want to help but don't be tempted to spoil them or treat them differently.

Returning to school can be difficult for the child and whilst friends usually rally round and offer support, be on the lookout for teasing or bullying.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS**

1. **Find time to listen** – always take your cue from the child, when they want to talk, try to find the time to listen. If this is not possible immediately, explain to the child that you would like to talk and name a time and place when you can have some quiet time together. Be patient and reassuring. Gently encourage the child to talk of their lost parent, sibling or friend and do so yourself. Reassure the child that you are there to help.
2. **Expect questions and try to answer them honestly** – the child may become intensely curious about death, what dying means and burial. Try to find out about the family's religious or cultural beliefs so as not to confuse the child, but otherwise answer them truthfully and if you do not know the answer to a specific question do not be afraid to say “I don't know”. Assure the child or young person that although you do not know the answer to their question you will find out for them. Children may fear or resent a God that takes to heaven someone they love and need.
3. **Be alert for changes in behaviour** – for some time after bereavement, the child may be withdrawn, feel abandoned, helpless, desperate, anxious, apathetic, angry,

guilty and/or afraid, have sullen moods and lack concentration. These are common and are often acted out aggressively because they may be unable to express feelings verbally. Try to handle them all patiently and calmly; do not seem surprised by them and do not get cross.

4. **Help the child to recognise and express their feelings** – this will help to avoid the child developing unhealthy defences in order to cope with difficult emotions.
5. **Let the child know it's okay to laugh and to cry** – adults and other children may also feel tearful at times, but it's okay to lighten the mood with recollections of happier times with the lost parent, sibling or friend.
6. **Believe what the child says and acknowledge their feelings and thoughts** – resist the temptation to make comments such as “I'm sure you don't mean that” when a child says that it's their fault their mum died, or to say to a distressed child that “You'll soon feel better”. These strong feelings must be acknowledged, believed and discussed. Children have magical thinking and may believe that their behaviour or thoughts can cause or reverse death.
7. **Close liaison between home and school is particularly important at this time** – it will help the child feel more secure and provide extra information on how the child is coping.
8. **Be sensitive to special days** – for example, Mother's Day, birthdays and anniversary of the bereavement may all revive painful memories, and as always it's important to take your cue from the child.
9. **'Death' as part of the curriculum** – Teachers should take the opportunity to talk about death and other taboo subjects such as stealing, lying, illness, hospitals whenever the opportunity arises – don't wait for a tragedy to occur. Children need a clear explanation of the cause of death using correct terms such as 'die' and 'dead' not 'going away' or 'asleep' as this merely adds confusion.

In this way, by bringing such topics into casual conversation, the children also learn that their teachers can be approached on any subject. The patterns for coping with loss and grief begin in early childhood and often continue through to adulthood. It is therefore important that death and dying is not seen as a taboo subject and is introduced into the curriculum through activities such as art and drama, science and literature.

### **KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER**

- Babies can experience feelings of loss.
- Be honest with the bereaved child or young person.
- Avoid using metaphors for death.
- Every child and young person's grief is unique. Children can all respond differently.
- Grief is a normal, healthy response, essential for healing and is a long term process.
- Encourage the child or young person to talk about the death and how they feel.
- Children and young people may 'revisit' the death and review their feelings about the bereavement as they develop.

- Use language that is appropriate to the child or young person's age and level of comprehension.
- Children act out their feelings through their behaviour. Some of these feelings might not emerge or be revealed in their behaviour for a considerable amount of time after a traumatic event.
- Work, attention and behaviour will suffer through their emotional distress.
- The loss of a loved one involves the loss of part of a child's own identity.
- If a child in your school is bereaved make sure the necessary people know.
- When supporting a bereaved child maintain contact with the family.
- Dealing with a bereaved child will give rise to feelings in yourself, these are normal and natural. Support for yourself is essential. It is often helpful for adults to seek additional support and education to understand their own grief process and model a healthy reaction to loss by expressing their feelings and receiving support. Children will generally learn their response to loss from other adults in the family.
- Children may feel frightened and insecure because they sense the grief and stress of others, and feel powerless to help. They will need additional love, support the structure in their daily routine.

**RELAXATION SCRIPT**

**This type of script may be useful with some of our older pupils and adults**

Make yourself comfortable in your seat and start to breathe slowly and calmly. Concentrate on your breathing and allow your breaths to come gently and evenly. *(Pause for a few seconds)*

Now, as you continue to breathe slowly and calmly in and out, start to concentrate on the muscles of your body. Starting with your feet, scrunch up your toes as hard as you can and then let them gradually relax, feeling the tension go as you release your toes. *(Pause for a few seconds)*

Now move up to your legs, still breathing slowly and evenly, tighten the muscles in your calves, hold them tight for a few minutes and then slowly release them and let them relax, feeling all the tension go as you do so. *(Pause for a few seconds)*

Now on to your thighs, again tighten those muscles as tight as you can, feel your kneecaps moving up and then gradually let the tightness go and the tension flow out as you relax the muscles at the tops of your legs. *(Pause for a few seconds)*

Remember your breathing is still slow and gentle and even, you are quite relaxed now. *(Pause for a few seconds)*

Now on up to your bottom, tighten those muscles really tight, feel yourself lift slightly in your seat as you do so and then slowly let them loosen and relax as you sink gently and comfortably into your chair. *(Pause for a few seconds)*

Now those stomach muscles. Tighten them as hard as you can, pulling your stomach so it's as flat as a board and then, as you continue to breathe slowly and gently, gradually allow the muscles to relax, let it all sag and feel calm, relaxed and peaceful. *(Pause for a few seconds)*

Next, continuing to breathe slowly and gently, think about the muscles in your chest and your back. Feel how tense they are. Pull them tight and then let them relax. Let all the tension flow out as you breathe slowly and calmly. *(Pause for a few seconds)*

Now your shoulders and neck. Lift your shoulders up until they are nearly touching your ears, then let them slowly relax as the tension eases from the muscles in your shoulders and neck, slowly relaxing and gently drifting away. *(Pause for a few seconds)*

Move down your arms, through the muscles in your arms to your hands. Make a fist. Tighten the muscles in your hands and in your arms. Keep it tight, hold it and then gradually relax and let the tension flow out. Your arms become floppy and loose and hang gently at your sides. *(Pause for a few seconds)*

And finally concentrate on your face. Scrunch your face up, feel the muscles tighten and tense, think about the muscles in your cheeks, in your chin, in your forehead and let them gradually relax, along with the rest of your body as you continue to breathe slowly and gently. *(Pause for a few seconds)*

You are now sitting comfortably and relaxed in your chair, feeling calm and peaceful, breathing slowly and evenly. Enjoy that feeling and let it last for a while. *(Pause for a few seconds)*

As you begin to remember where you are and feel ready to come back to us, you will continue to feel relaxed and comfortable and you are still feeling relaxed and calm as you come back to us now.



**SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS RE THE DEATH OF A PUPIL**

*Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the child's parents.*

*The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the parents and school.*



Dear Parents,

Your child's class teacher/form tutor had the sad task of informing the children of the death of (Name), a pupil in (year/Class...) We have the permission of the parent(s) to notify you and they have approved this letter.

(Name) died from cancer. Many children who have cancer get better but sadly (Name) had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday. He/She was a very popular member of the class/school and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try to answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child need to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and someone will contact you. Please do inform us if you feel that your child is particularly distressed.

We will be arranging a special assembly to celebrate (Name's) life.

Yours sincerely,

## SAMPLE LETTER ON DEATH OF A STAFF MEMBER



Fordingbridge Hampshire SP6 1NS

Telephone: 01425 653181  
E-Mail: [office@fmschool.com](mailto:office@fmschool.com)  
Website: [www.fmschool.com](http://www.fmschool.com)

Dear Parents,

I am sorry to have to tell you that a much-loved and respected member of our staff (Name) has died. The children were told today and many may have been distressed by the news.

Children respond in different ways and may raise issues around 'death'. If you feel you need any advice/support please ring the school office and we will return your call. You will find some very useful advice and resources online at [www.simonsays.org.uk](http://www.simonsays.org.uk). The children will have the opportunity at school to discuss the death.

The school website will give details of the funeral and arrangements re staff/pupil attendance.

I regret being the bearer of sad news. Our priority is to respond sensitively and thoughtfully to any issues that arise.

Yours sincerely,

## LIST OF ONLINE RESOURCES AND INFORMATION

[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk) A useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community.

[www.chums.info](http://www.chums.info) A bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss.

[www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk) A bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss.

[www.juliesplace.com](http://www.juliesplace.com) A support resource for bereaved siblings.

[www.bhf.org.uk/smallcreature](http://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](http://www.bbc.co.uk/.../bereavement/bereavement_helpchildren.shtml) Information on the way bereavement affects children.

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

## 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 grandad, 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 and 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

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

Beginnings and endings with lifetimes in between – a beautiful way to explain life and death to children, 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 creatures 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 couldn't 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".