



*Nurture-Believe-Inspire-Achieve*

# Danson Primary School

## Bereavement Policy

Created: April 2016  
Reviewed: November 2018  
Next Review: November 2020  
Next review 2022

## **Bereavement Policy**

The school's aim to provide support to pupils who experience bereavement within their families, and support to pupils and staff on the death of a member of the school community, whether it be an adult or a child. The way in which children and young people are treated when someone important in their lives dies has a profound effect on their future ability to manage their own lives. The caring and supportive school environment has a key role to play and we recognise that every situation is unique and demands careful handling, with the wishes of the pupil or family being of paramount importance.

This policy should be viewed as a framework rather than anything prescriptive, acknowledging that different strategies and procedures maybe necessary in the various parts of the school, appropriate to the age of the pupils concerned. Much of the information and guidance in this policy follows the advice given by the Child Bereavement Charity and further advice can be found on their website, [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)

### **Objectives**

The core intentions of the policy are:

- To support pupils and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and community.
- To identify key staff within school and LA, and clarify the pathway of support. The role of the governing body

To approve policy and ensure its implementation, to be reviewed in two years.

### **The role of the Head Teacher**

- To monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.
- To respond to media enquiries.
- To be first point of contact for family/child concerned.
- To keep the governing body fully informed.

### **The role of the Local Authority**

To advise and support staff. Consult on referral pathways and identification of complex grief.

The role of pastoral staff (Including school counsellors, mentors)

To have bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff.

## **Responding to a death**

### **Breaking the news to staff, pupils and families**

News of the death of a close member of a child's family or the death of a pupil or member of staff must be passed to the Head of School who will immediately try to obtain factual information, avoiding unnecessary rumour or assumption, which could only lead to further distress.

Where possible the Head of School will liaise directly with the family and agree exactly what information should be passed on to staff and pupils. Staff will be informed straight away, ideally before the pupils, remembering part time and peripatetic staff that may not be in school that day.

Discussions must take place with family and their wishes taken into account before any information is given to the pupils. Pupils should however, be told as soon as possible to avoid rumour and uncertainty. This is best done in familiar groups by someone they know, probably their class teacher. A large assembly is not usually ideal, particularly for young children. Opportunity should be given for pupils to ask questions and respond to the news. The bereaved child may or may not wish to be present when the news is broken.

It may be appropriate for a letter to go home to all parents that same day, of course respecting the wishes of the family. A suggested letter can be found at the end of this policy.

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

### **The first few days**

As far as is possible, it is best to have as little disruption as possible to the school timetable and school life should try to go on as normal, but with flexibility as necessary. If it is a teacher who has died, the class should be covered by another teacher from the school whom the children know well and feel comfortable talking to. Many bereaved children and young people find returning to school as soon as possible a welcome refuge of normality after the chaos of emotion at home and their return should be as fuss free as possible. A bereaved child will require enormous support but as far as possible school life should go on as normally as possible.

### **Support for Pupils and Staff**

In supporting both the bereaved child and the other pupils, staff will act sensitively at all times, seeking advice when necessary, from both the Head of School and the families involved. The class teacher will be the first line of support for the child but should the child need extra support away from the classroom the Learning Mentors will offer extra support. For example, if a child finds it difficult to stay in the classroom when they are upset, it may be necessary to identify with them a suitable place, where they can go for some quiet time with an adult they trust. Grief is a normal and natural response to loss. Both school and families

need to work together to note changes in behaviour and if necessary counseling from outside agencies may be sought. Where appropriate this will involve the agreement of the families. It should be noted that not everyone needs outside counselling; grief is a natural process that can be aided by the family and school working in partnership.

Children and young people bereaved through suicide or violent death are likely to need skilled help and support but the informal support of familiar adults is still vital.

Following the death of a member of the school community a special assembly or remembrance service may be held as a way of saying 'Goodbye' and as a celebration of their life. This may take many forms, but will always be in accordance with the wishes of the bereaved family. In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance may be clarified, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances.

Supporting a bereaved child is very upsetting and emotionally demanding for staff and therefore informal support between colleagues is vital. Opportunities to discuss feelings and reactions with colleagues, in the staffroom, are necessary and important. Support and counselling is available to any member of staff and can be arranged through the Head of School.

All staff should be aware of colleagues and offer support on an individual basis where necessary and alert a member of the SLT if they become concerned about a colleague's well being. School should be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life so information should be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points.

## APPENDICES

### Template of a letter informing parents of 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 had the sad task of informing the children of the death of \*\*, a pupil in \*\* .

\*\* died from an illness called cancer. As you may be aware, many children who have cancer get better but sadly had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday.

He/She was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. 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 needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we would be more than happy to help you.

We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating life.

Yours sincerely...

## Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a staff member

Dear parents,

I am sorry to have to tell you that a much-loved member of our staff [name] has died. The children were told today and many will have been quite distressed at the news. No-one wants to see children sad, but we are very aware that factual information and emotional support are the best means of helping children deal with bereavement. I am sure there will be many parents who are also saddened by the news. Children respond in different ways so may dip in and out of sadness, and questions, whilst alternately playing or participating in their usual activities. This is normal and healthy. You may find your child has questions to ask which we will answer in an age appropriate way in school, but if you feel you would like more support and advice yourself, please do not hesitate to contact the school office.

You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)

We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Children who wish to attend will be welcome to do so, though it will not be compulsory. It is likely that school will be closed on the morning or afternoon of the funeral as staff will, of course, wish to pay their respects to a very popular colleague. I am sorry to be the bearer of sad news, but I appreciate an occurrence like this impacts the whole school community. I am so grateful for the thriving partnership we have with parents and trust that we, together, will be able to guide and support the children through what may be, for many, a very new experience in their lives.

Yours.....

## RESOURCES- HOW TO HELP

### Children's understanding and experience of loss and grief

Children aged 3-5 years old are unable to grasp the concept of death. Their grief reactions are usually intense but short lived. They are also likely to regress to younger behaviour.

<b>Proactive ways of supporting children aged 3-7 years.</b>	<b>Reactive ways of supporting children aged 3- 7 years old.</b>
Provide opportunities in the natural world for children to explore the differences between "alive" and "not alive".	Provide continuity of care, routines and support.
Provide opportunities within the curriculum for children to use language associate with death.	Talk to the child about what has happened.
Provide opportunities for children to use words to describe feelings, and the language associated with death.	Encourage creative play and activities such as paintings and drawings to allow the child to express how they feel.
Share stories with themes describing emotions, life experiences of loss and change.	Answer questions honestly and in straight forward age appropriate language. (avoid the use of euphemisms and metaphors)
Use the word "dead" to describe the absence of life.	Reassure the child that they are not responsible for what has happened and that they will be cared for.

By the time most children are 8 years old they begin to understand death as having a cause, as being permanent and as being something that can happen to anyone, including themselves.

It is helpful to remember that knowledge comes through experience. What a child understands may depend as much on past child experience as it does on his/her chronological age.

<b>Proactive ways of supporting children aged 8-11 years old</b>	<b>Reactive ways of supporting children aged 8-11 years old</b>
Provide opportunities within the curriculum for children to talk about emotions, life changes and death	Encourage play, drawing and painting to allow the child to express how they feel
Provide opportunities within the curriculum for children to learn about where the end of human life occurs, such as home, hospital, hospice	Talk about what has happened in easily understood language, avoiding the use of euphemisms and metaphors
Provide opportunities within the curriculum for children to express their own ideas about what happens after earthly life is over	Share stories about loss and change Encourage the child to talk through their own ideas about death
Provide opportunities within the curriculum for children to learn about religious and secular customs associated with death	Allow the child to make their own decisions about whether they join in death rituals/attend funerals
Provide opportunities within the curriculum for children to talk about memories	Answer questions honestly and in a straight forward age-appropriate language

The questions children ask generally fall within 4 main categories:

- A need for factual information
- A need to check out emotional responses
- Searching a reason for what has happened
- Spiritual and religious concerns

#### **Websites:**

- Acorns Children's Hospice Trust, an interactive website providing information about the work of Acorns Children's Hospices [www.acorns.org.uk](http://www.acorns.org.uk)
- The Child Bereavement Charity, resources and information for bereaved families, children, professionals and volunteers. Information about a small number of professional development courses for teachers [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)
- Winston's Wish, offers a grief support programme for children who have experienced the death of a parent or sibling. [www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)
- St Christopher's provides bereavement counselling to patients' families. Their Candle Project extends this support to all children, young people and their families in the south east London area. They also offer specialist training, advice and consultancy services to schools and other agencies working with children facing bereavement. [www.stchristophers.org.uk/candle](http://www.stchristophers.org.uk/candle)

## **Books:**

### **For children aged 3-5 years old**

- Scruppy- Dale E, Anderson Press London
- My Grandad- Isherwood S, Oxford University Press, Oxford

### **For children aged 5-7 years old**

- Badger's Parting gifts- Varley S, Picture Lions, London
- Remembering My Brother- Perkins G, The Compassionate friends, Bristol

### **For children aged 7-9 years old**

- Falling Angels- Thompson S, Red Fox, London
- The Blue Pearls- Stuart- Warfel E, Barefoot Books, Bath

### **For children aged 9-11 years old**

- Skellig- AlmondD, Hodder and Stoughton, Sevenoaks
- Vicky angel- Wilson J, Yearling Books, Ealing