

Appendix 2: School support for bereaved pupils and their families whilst schools are closed (adapted from the Winston's Wish website)

Support from teachers and school staff is crucial for bereaved children and young people, especially during the coronavirus pandemic when children are isolated from their usual support networks and routines.

Schools should remain mindful of the following three principles in supporting children and young people during this anxious time:

1. Keep in touch - Where possible, the contact and support from teaching staff can be helpful to children and young people who may be feeling anxious, or who may be experiencing the illness or death of a loved one. Scheduled points of contact using social media, apps, and phone calls may be helpful. For pupils known to be vulnerable, additional opportunities to check in with a key member of staff should be established.

2. Maintain a routine - Try to support with an element of normality and structure to the day. This is important and containing for all children and young people.

3. Listen and reassure - This involves acknowledging how strange and difficult the situation is, rather than trying to make it better. It helps children if someone they know and trust listens to their worries and fears, hears them and offers reassurance.

All the principles above are **especially** important when a child or young person in your care is facing or has experienced the death of someone close. Usual school bereavement strategies can't be put into place. There are, however, some things that schools can do to show students that they are remembered and supported at a distance. Many of these are what the school would normally do, taken into a virtual space.

Your initial response (EPs can support schools to adapt to their own needs)

1. Head teacher (or identified staff member) makes contact with the family to:
 - Acknowledge what has happened.
 - Express condolence and support.
 - Discuss how to share the news with the rest of the school community.
 - Check if the family want their contact information shared.
2. Head teacher (or identified staff member) shares the information with senior staff and wider support network e.g. the EPS or Social Care. Where possible, the school follows the family's lead on how this news is to be shared more widely with a) the child's peers and b) the rest of the school. (There are a few exceptions to this, for example, when the death is known about and already widely discussed within the school community).
3. Head teacher (or identified staff member) shares information with the governing body.

4. Head teacher (or identified staff member) makes contact with the young person via a card or letter to the child/young person / family to acknowledge what has happened and express support.
5. One or two contacts are agreed with the family to liaise with them and the child. This may be the head teacher and class teacher, or a less obvious supporter chosen by the child.
6. Information is shared with the school community, as agreed with the family. A simple form of words that parents can share with their children may be appreciated. For example:

We have some sad news to share. We heard today that the [relationship e.g. father] of [name] in Year [X] has died. S/he died suddenly/had been ill for a long time. We are in touch with the family and have expressed our sadness and our support. The family would appreciate any condolences which can be sent to [contact details]/At the moment, the family would prefer some time to absorb what has happened but will appreciate your condolences in a while. If you have concerns about your child, contact their class teacher/tutor.

7. The impact of this news on any other children in the school who have been bereaved or whose relative is seriously ill should be considered and direct contact made by their class teacher or tutor.
8. Check in on staff through concentric circles of support. Any death affecting a student can trigger other remembered griefs and, at this time of crisis, a sense of helplessness in not being able to respond in the way that they might have chosen.

Further support

9. Maintain support at a distance coming at intervals through chosen contact/s.
10. Consider how best to compile condolences for the child from their peers. This may include collecting messages to create an electronic book of condolence to email to the family. There could be a way to gather photos or drawings to remember them by. Once school is open again, you could offer a memorial of these drawings to display in school and then give to the family afterwards.
11. Obtain and share resources for the family (see resource list in appendix 2). Teenagers may be signposted to helpful websites. There are many available including: www.help2makesense.org; www.hopeagain.org.uk; www.themix.org.uk and ask@winstonswish.org
12. When the school re-opens, remember the support needs of bereaved children in planning their return to the classroom. This may include talking to the children about a way to remember the person who died, as appropriate. Ideas like a bench, a tree, a water feature or similar can be a very powerful symbol.