



**Nottingham**  
**City Council**

# **Grief and Loss: A Support Pack for Schools**

**Nottingham City Educational Psychology  
Service  
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**With thanks to the Lincolnshire Educational Psychology  
Team**

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You may like to photocopy the next page 'Key Messages' to display on the staff Noticeboard.



## Key Messages about Grief and Loss

**You are not alone:**

Contact and use people who can help

**Be kind to yourself:**

Acknowledge the impact

**Know the facts and give a consistent message**

**Answer questions honestly and appropriately:**

Don't use euphemisms

**However you and others are feeling, that's OK:**

Believe and acknowledge. Grieving is different for everyone

**Create a safe environment to talk and  
opportunities to remember**

**Some may be struggling in silence: Be aware**

**Maintain routines:**

But be flexible when it's needed

**Those who are grieving don't usually need an  
expert... just familiar people who care**

# THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW TODAY

## Grief and Loss – A quick overview

**This pack has been put together to provide:-**

- Clear guidance around issues of grief and loss.
- Suggested resources that schools may find helpful (including useful websites).
- Leaflets that can be photocopied for use with children, young people and adults (including parents and staff).

**Most grieving pupils do not need a 'bereavement expert'; they need familiar people who care.**

School is a safe place where pupils can show emotions without upsetting family members. Opportunities to write, draw and play will allow expressions of these strong emotions in a secure environment and help to make the feelings more manageable.

School can give relief from an emotionally charged atmosphere at home. Children and young people may feel overwhelmed by a grieving family and visitors expressing their own grief. They can find this difficult to deal with. For pupils whose lives have been turned upside down, the routines of school life can give a sense of normality, security and continuity.

Grieving pupils can display altered behaviours in different situations. Good communication with home will help school be aware of this and provide a more realistic picture of how they are coping. This close liaison is also essential in order to share successes as well as concerns, as the family may find this reassuring.

# Informing Pupils

- Pupils should be told simply and truthfully what has happened, in small groups if possible, e.g. class, tutor, year. In some circumstances it may be appropriate to bring pupils together as a whole school. Where this is the arrangement ensure that pupils have an opportunity to ask questions and talk through what they have heard with form/class teachers in smaller groupings afterwards.
- Begin by preparing pupils for some very difficult/sad news.
- Taking account of children's developmental level, needs and backgrounds, give simple, factual information, using language and concepts appropriate to the age of the children.
- Avoid using euphemisms, use words like 'dead' and 'died' etc.
- Pass on facts only; do not speculate on causes or consequences.
- If questions cannot be answered, this should be acknowledged.
- Address and deal with rumours.
- Try to give expression to the emotions that individuals may be experiencing e.g. shock/disbelief etc. Explain that strong and difficult feelings are a normal part of the process of coming to terms with this sort of experience.
- Do not refrain from referring to the deceased by name, perhaps highlighting some positive aspect(s) of their lives.
- Finally, explain what arrangements the school has in hand for coming to terms with what has happened.

## **An example of a script:**

*"I've got some very sad news to tell you today that might upset you. There is a serious illness called meningitis. Sometimes people with meningitis get better, but sometimes people die from it. Some of you will have known that Jane Smith in Year 4 was suddenly taken ill last week. I have to tell you that Jane died in hospital yesterday.*

*Like me, many of you will find it hard to believe that this has happened. It is obviously a very big shock for us all. Jane was such a happy girl who got on well with everybody. We will all miss her.*

*It is important for you to know that strong and perhaps difficult feelings are part of the normal process of coping with this sort of situation. It will help to talk about what has happened and about your thoughts and feelings. Please do take the opportunity to talk to your family, friends, teachers and adults in school. This is likely to be a difficult time for us as a school community and we should all try to support each other. Please come and see me if you have any questions or if you just want to talk."*

# Young People Need:

## 1. **Accurate information – given in an open and honest way**

Consider age/developmentally-appropriate explanations about the cause of death in order to help reduce confusion. Be willing to answer their questions despite the fact that they may be very awkward. If you do not know, say so and talk about how you could help the child to find out. It is best not to use abstract explanations or euphemisms, eg "has gone to sleep", or "we've lost them". Children need a clear explanation of the cause of death using correct terms such as 'die' and 'dead' in order to reduce confusion.

## 2. **To have their fears and anxieties addressed**

Give reassurance that they are not to blame and give opportunities to make this clear even if the fear is not expressed openly. This may include fears about themselves or other family members.

## 3. **Help to manage their feelings**

Adults should be active in listening and reflect back what the child says. It is important for the adult to talk and listen, but most importantly respect the child's needs. Be accepting. The adult should take the lead from the child as sometimes they may need space (and privacy) but at other times they may to talk. Feelings should be respected and acknowledged as real and genuine. Recognising and expressing feelings will help the child to learn healthy ways of coping with difficult emotions.

## 4. **Appropriate grief behaviours modelled by trusted adults, particularly in terms of remembering**

The adult should not be afraid to use the person's name and share the memories. The adult may want to consider and share their own experiences of loss, including talking about sad and happy memories in the context of supporting the child and modelling sharing of feelings.

## **5. Opportunities to remember**

Keeping photos and reminders such as memorials are important in helping the child to make the loss real, find a way of remaining connected and validate their feelings. Consider setting up a display area for artwork, writing and mementoes that children may wish to contribute. Occasions such as Mother's Day, birthdays and the anniversary of the bereavement may all revive painful memories. As always it's important to take your cue from the child. It is also important that the adult tries to establish a balance between reassuring that time heals whilst acknowledging current feelings. Writing, drawing and music may also help during this process.

## **6. Continued involvement and inclusion in daily activities and school life**

Children need the structure and familiarity of their routines to support them through the period of grief. Where possible, and where this is something that the pupils clearly need, be prepared to deviate from your lesson plan to allow them to talk and ask questions. They may need help to return to school and maintain their social lives. Even when experiencing loss and grief children still need to be children. They need opportunities play, laugh and sing without feeling guilty.

## **7. Calm and discreet intervention...**

If individual pupils are clearly too distressed to remain in class. Ask if they want to remain in class but in an area away from the main body of children. Make sure that they are supported by a friend. If appropriate send them with a friend to whatever pastoral support arrangements are available in school. Inform parents.

## **School Staff Should Be Aware That:**

- Grief is a normal, healthy response essential for healing. All children will respond in different ways. However, some children can show a high level of anxiety or guilt about attending school after a family bereavement. Often this is due to worry about some harm befalling other family members.
- 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.
- Returning to school can be difficult for the child and whilst friends usually rally round and offer support, be on the lookout for teasing and bullying. Make sure that the class are aware and have had an opportunity to talk about the death before the child returns.
- Children may communicate their feelings through their behaviour, and their concentration may suffer due to their emotional response.
- The loss of a loved one involves the loss of part of a child's own identity.
- Supporting a bereaved child may trigger feelings in you and be emotionally draining. These responses are normal and natural; support for you is essential. Remember that even the most difficult situations will improve with time.
- Confidentiality should be respected; however, it may be appropriate to inform key members of staff in order to ensure the child's well-being.

## Staff Should:

1. **Be alert for changes in behaviour** – during the first few weeks 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. Try to help them find an accepted way of expressing strong emotion.
2. **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, reassure 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 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. Allow and encourage children to support each other.
3. **Expect questions and try to answer them honestly** – the child may become intensely curious about death and burial. Try to find out about the family's religious or cultural beliefs so as not to confuse the child, but do not be afraid to say "I don't know". Consider setting up a 'questions box'. Consider how best to follow up questions that are raised.
4. **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 this it's his fault his mum died, or to say to a distressed child that "You'll soon feel better". Children may believe that their behaviour or thoughts can 'cause' or 'reverse' death. These thoughts and feelings must be acknowledged, discussed and worked through in collaboration with the child and possibly other key adults.
5. **Allow younger children to express themselves through their play.** They are likely to feel the need to 'work out' difficult and confusing experiences and play gives opportunities to act out some of the issues. Adults may feel uncomfortable witnessing children's excitable 'playing out' of what has happened and may feel the need to intervene. Try to be accepting and permissive except where this is clearly unhelpful and/or distressing for other children.
6. **Be aware of other children who may not be so visible** but who, nevertheless, may be struggling to cope. Make times and opportunities for them to talk. If you continue to have concerns refer them through the school's pastoral system and inform parents.

# Looking After Yourself

Being alongside anyone experiencing a loss is emotionally demanding, but supporting a bereaved child is particularly so. The need for support is not an inability to cope or of professional incompetence but a recognition that everyone needs help to carry out this demanding role. Below are some ideas for ways to look after yourself.

## **Share Feelings**

Use friends and colleagues to talk about how you are feeling and share experiences. Just knowing that others are affected can help you to feel less alone and more able to care. Informal peer support in the staffroom can be a welcome opportunity to talk through issues and concerns and reduce feelings of inadequacy by jointly talking through helping strategies.

## **Anticipate That You May Experience an Emotional Reaction**

It is perfectly normal and OK to be emotionally affected. However, recognise that in order to help others, you need to feel reasonably strong yourself. You may become aware of previous losses in your own life that have resurfaced. If it all feels too close to home, do not be afraid to say so. This is not a sign of weakness but merely recognising that we all have our limits.

## **Professional Boundaries**

When working in a school environment, it is very easy to let the carer in us take over and forget our professional boundaries. Getting over involved is not helpful to either yourself or the bereaved child or adult. Remember that you cannot carry their grief for them, but you can share their journey by being there and being aware.

## **Have Information on Resources and Organisations**

Having contact details of bereavement organisations will enable you to feel that you have done something practical to support a grieving family. You will be helping by putting them in touch with people better able to offer the support they need. See Organisations Factsheet.

## **Help Others**

If you become aware that a colleague is stressed or affected by a death in your school community, or know that they have experienced a bereavement themselves, try to find the time to ask how they are.

## **Be Kind to Yourself**

Make time to do something just for you, or give yourself a treat. Physical exercise is a great stress buster.

# Balancing Personal and Professional Roles

Supporting bereaved children is emotionally demanding. In a study by Brown (1993), teachers from five schools cited the following factors as contributing to their stress.

- Witnessing pain and distress experienced by families.
- Feeling unskilled in dealing with emotional responses.
- Physical exhaustion as a result of emotional trauma.
- Poor communication between themselves and families or other carers.

Brown also comments on the tensions that can arise in a school between personal needs and the professional role. Distracting oneself protects, but may be perceived as not helpful, to the bereaved individual. Being over-involved can lead to attachments that are inappropriate or impossible to sustain.

It might help to keep in mind:

***It does not help to offer something that you cannot deliver***

No matter how well meant or strong the desire to take the pain away, try to be realistic with the amount of support that you can give. It is much better to offer something small but constant rather than a grand gesture that is going to be difficult to deliver. Providing a listening ear once a week and sticking to it is more meaningful than the offer to help anytime when inevitably that cannot be achieved within a busy school environment. Other demands will get in the way and you will feel stressed over breaking the arrangement.

***You do not need to be an expert to provide effective help***

Many of us feel inadequate and out of our depth when faced with adults or children experiencing deep sadness or trauma. Being alongside hurting children can remind us of our own vulnerability and mortality. Most teachers and school staff are caring individuals who naturally have the characteristics required to support bereaved children. It is more about being there for them whilst in school and building a relationship with them in your classroom, than being a bereavement professional.

***Try to recognise when you are running on empty***

Working in the education profession is very much about giving in terms of time and energy. Supporting a bereaved pupil may compound this, resulting in very depleted resources. Some of the signs include feeling physically exhausted and overworked, an inability to delegate and generally not on top of things.

## Sample Letter:

### Informing Parents

Dear Parents/Carers

You may have heard/  
it is with great sadness and regret that I have to inform you

*(known facts of the incident)*

As a school community, we are all deeply affected by this tragedy/  
I am sure that you will wish to join me and my staff in offering our condolences and sympathy to those affected/  
to

*(refer to individuals/families affected, only where it is appropriate to release this information)*

I have now spoken to all pupils and staff in school about what has happened and you will need to be aware of the following arrangements that we have now made:

*(Details about*

- *school closure*
- *changes to timings of school day*
- *transport*
- *lunchtime arrangements*
- *changes to staffing*
- *arrangements for specific classes/year groups*
- *counselling support [see resource sheet 7: sample letter to parents re counselling] provision of further information*

*as relevant) (if appropriate advise about media contacts)*

I think it is very important that we all take the time to talk with and reassure children about what has happened. This is likely to be a very difficult time for us as a school community and we will all need to support each other.

We appreciate the expressions of concern we have received, however it would be helpful if parents did not telephone in to the school during this time so we can keep phones and staff free to manage the situation.

Yours sincerely

# THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW THIS WEEK

## Working With a Class

The family is the first line of resource for helping children. However, schools can also have an important role to play.

Class sessions can be a critical step in crisis intervention, allowing pupils to come together as a known group. Class or group sessions are especially important and practical, following crises that affect a large number of students. Within these sessions, children who are needing more individual support can be identified.

It is helpful to have a combination of a large group assembly followed by class group time for pupils to assimilate the information, express their feelings and support each other. It is important that those most closely involved, e.g. extended family members and close friends are informed **before** a large group/assembly announcement.

We recommend the classroom teacher or form tutor take as active a role in the session as possible. It may be helpful to discuss the content and format of the session beforehand or afterwards with colleagues and/or other professionals. One or more sessions may be required, with session length being tailored to the developmental level of the children.

### Suggested Plan of a Session:

1. **Providing facts and dispelling rumours**
2. **Sharing stories**
3. **Sharing feelings**
4. **Empowerment**
5. **Closure**

#### 1. **Providing facts and dispelling rumours**

The most important task is to provide children with the facts and dispel rumours. Dispelling rumours is especially important given that rumours are typically more frightening than reality. Making sure children understand the reality of the event (that is, the facts) is an important prerequisite for coming to terms with what has happened.

## **2. Sharing Stories**

Children are encouraged to tell their story of the event. Through this they will begin to feel more connected to each other and less alone because of their common, shared experiences. Those who verbalise most effectively, and in the greatest quantity, seem to manage recovery better. It is also helpful to allow children to recount their experiences and express their feelings in other ways; art activities can be particularly helpful. These activities are especially important for younger children who may not be able to verbalise what has happened to them.

## **3. Sharing Feelings**

Children are encouraged to share their feelings and their reactions to the incident(s). It is the teachers and facilitators role to explain that their reactions are a normal response to an abnormal circumstance. The teacher and/or facilitator should also let children know that with time, for most people, the symptoms will go away. However, they should also be informed what to do if this does not happen or if they feel that the symptoms are more than they can cope with.

## **4. Empowerment**

The aim is to assist children in regaining a sense of control. They can be asked to share strategies that might help them. The teacher/facilitator can also help children to identify strategies that they can use to help manage their feelings and reactions; for example, the importance of getting enough sleep, healthy eating and exercise.

## **5. Closure**

The aim of this section is to focus on the future. A natural activity for incidents involving death is the development of memorials. The writing of get well cards and letters can also help to bring about a sense of closure. It is important for the teacher/facilitator to reiterate to the young people that they are experiencing normal reactions to abnormal circumstances. They should be assured that while memories will always remain, with time the pain associated with them will lessen and the symptoms will typically disappear. Remind them that, if needed, additional counselling services may be available\*. The teacher and facilitator should praise the young people for their courage and sensitivity.

*\*Please refer to this pack's list of helpful websites for information.*

# The Grieving Process

Grief hits the mind and the body very acutely and a range of feelings, thoughts and reactions can be quite normal. Please refer to the leaflet: "*Coping with difficult life events*" for further information.

**Some of the observable behaviour changes that may occur in school could be:**

- Increased anxiety.
- Increased aggression.
- Lack of attention, short concentration span, which may impact on engagement and attainment.
- Isolation, withdrawal.
- Hypersensitive - may seem stressed by little events.
- May not want to go to school ... "What might happen at home while I'm away?"
- May be worried about leaving a bereaved family member at home alone.

Within the grieving process there are a number of recognised 'stages.' However, it is important to note that the stages of grief do not always follow through in sequence. People may move between them and experience different emotions, sometimes repeatedly. Stages may be brief or protracted, however, it is often helpful for people dealing with loss to have the stages acknowledged and know that they are 'normal' states of grieving.

Stage of Grief	Possible Feelings and Responses
Shock and disbelief	Feeling numb – may go into 'automatic pilot' or want to withdraw. Trying to keep busy and carry out tasks may give some self-assurance as well as reassuring others.
Denial	Tendency to soldier on. Individuals have not had time, or often the emotional or physical strength, to adapt to the new circumstances.
Accept reality of the loss and work through the pain	The reality begins to hit home and emotions kick in. Energy levels can drop, especially if the 'automatic pilot' was the driving force earlier. Consequently, individuals can feel tired and feel (and become) less competent than they were. Frustration can set in as the roller coaster of emotions take their toll. Competence levels are often at a low. Disorganisation, guilt, anger, depression, anxiety.
Adjust to the changed environment	The 'healing process' has begun as individuals put energy into accepting the new situation, developing and applying new skills. Begin to put less emotional energy into grieving and instead put it into something new (in other words, moving on).

# Children's Developmental Understanding of Death

*"Children and young people mature at different rates and their understanding and responses to bereavement are likely to be based as much on their experience of life as their chronological age. The age categories given are guidelines only and it is important to realise that responses do vary and occur at other ages".*  
(Monroe, 1993; Monroe & Kraus 1996) **Child Bereavement UK**

## **Below the Age of Five Years:**

Younger children may be aware that death occurs, but they do not understand that it is final, and therefore irreversible. For example some children may expect the dead person to reappear. They may therefore use the word 'death' without understanding its full meaning and because of a literal understanding they may also become confused by euphemisms such as 'gone to sleep'. However, even though the concept of death is not fully developed, young children can react strongly to the loss.

Younger children are generally egocentric at this stage and can think in very concrete terms. They may believe that they are the 'centre of the universe' and that their thoughts, wishes and actions caused what happened. As a result, children in this stage of thinking may believe that, somehow, they are responsible for the death.

Children may need repeated explanations of what has happened to clarify and help them to understand they have not been the cause and are not to blame. This is because children at this age can fantasise and may imagine something more fearful than what has actually occurred.

## **Age Five to Eight Years:**

Between the ages of five to eight children develop a gradual understanding of death as something where life has ended and is irreversible. They begin to recognise that people who have died no longer move, breathe, eat or drink. They also come to understand they will no longer see that person or hear their voice.

Most seven-year olds will have an understanding that death is inevitable and can happen to anybody. This could mean that the child may develop separation anxiety, for example becoming distressed when leaving their parents as they fear that something may happen to them. This is because they now understand that death could happen to anybody at any time. They may also demonstrate an interest in the different rituals associated with death.

Children in this age range understand that death has a cause. They may make direct causal interpretations, such as feeling that their 'bad' behaviour made their parent get sick and die. Guilt is very prominent at this stage and children commonly express how they feel *responsible* for the death.

It is important to provide opportunities to answer any questions that the child may have. However it is important to be aware that children may not always show their true thoughts and feelings, and may give the impression that they are unaffected.

### **Age Eight to Twelve Years:**

Between the ages of eight to twelve years children gradually develop an understanding of death that approaches adults' understanding of death. Death is understood as irreversible, as something that will happen to everyone, and something that will result in permanent separation.

A key aspect of this stage is the developing realisation of the possibility of the child's own death. Children may become fearful, and avoid experiences as a consequence of this. This frightening reminder can also lead to thoughts and feelings of confusion and stress. It is important for trusted adults to be able to provide sufficiently detailed responses to questions that the child may have.

### **Age 12+ Years**

From 12+ years, understanding of death is broadly in line with that of adults. A young person's experience of death may impact thoughts and feelings about the future; for example a young person may begin to question their beliefs and their purpose in life. For the young person, one way of 'defying' their own mortality could be to engage with risk-taking behaviour. Additionally, young people at this stage often have a need to assert their independence, which may lead to challenging beliefs and expectation of those around them. It is important for a young person to have the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and feelings with someone they trust. They might find it harder to do this with close family and friends, and so opportunities could be offered in school.

# Attending the Funeral

Different faith groups have different beliefs, customs and rituals. It is important to ensure that you are aware of, and respect the family's wishes. Ask the family about the funeral arrangements and ascertain their feelings about representatives of staff and pupils attending. Some families will want quiet private services, whilst others will be happy for everyone to attend. Similarly some families may request flowers or others may prefer a donation.

Peers may wish to attend the funeral service. This should be a personal decision for the child/young person to make with their own parents/carers. Should they decide to go along to the service it would be advisable for their parents/carers to go with them to support them.

Attending the funeral can be a helpful experience in the grieving process, providing an opportunity to:

- Face the reality of the loss.
- Deal with unresolved issues.
- Experience celebrations of the person's life.
- Say a formal goodbye. This may help the grieving process.

## Preparing for the Funeral

The child/young person should be given prior information about what will happen during the funeral. It is important to listen to their questions/fears/anxieties and discuss the reality of the funeral. This could include sharing information about:

- Where the body will be ... eg will it be on view?
- What will happen to it ... cremated or burial?
- How to respond to expressions of sympathy/what to say to grieving friends or relatives.

It is important there is an adult available who can 'look out' for the children during the funeral to ensure they are supported if they become distressed.

# Support Ideas and Resources

*(Acknowledgements to Bereavement UK)*

## **The Curriculum**

Within the curriculum there should be opportunities to talk about grief and loss – **do not wait for a tragedy to occur**. In this way, by bringing such topics into an age-appropriate curriculum, the children learn that their teacher can be approached on any subject and have developed the language to talk about such issues. 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.

## **Time Out Cards**

The pupil is given permission to leave the class when beginning to feel out of control or just to get some 'personal space' when upset. A card giving permission is carried in the pocket and the pupil may leave the room without having to ask. It is important that staff are made aware of the situation to avoid embarrassing scenes for either pupil or teacher. It is essential that the pupil does not just wander around the school but goes to a designated place and person for as long as required.

## **Pocket Comforter**

A pupil can discretely carry in their pocket a soft piece of fabric or a pebble or stone. Holding onto something solid such as a smooth pebble can help a pupil to remain grounded and in control if upset. Equally, touching a soft piece of garment that belonged to the dead person can provide a comforting memory.

## **Secret Diary**

A way to communicate with a bereaved child who finds it difficult to verbalise feelings is using a notebook. The pupil just leaves it on the teacher's desk having written or drawn whatever they wish. The teacher responds in the diary and either discretely returns it to the pupil or just leaves it to be picked up from the desk again.

## **Happy/Sad Faces**

The bereaved pupil has a sheet of paper/paper plate or even a stone with two drawings of faces on either side, one happy, one sad. The pupil shows the side that reflects how they are feeling on a particular day. This gives the teacher an idea of how they are and therefore what approaches to use.

## The Whirlpool of Grief

(Description taken from [www.careforthefamily.com](http://www.careforthefamily.com))

In this image, the River of Life represents our life before bereavement. For some people the waters are choppy, whereas for others they are smooth. The Waterfall of Bereavement is the shocking experience of our loss, where powerful emotions hit us alongside an overwhelming sense of sadness.

The whirlpool at the bottom of the waterfall illustrates the emotional upheaval and disorganisation that follows, including emotions and reactions such as pain, anxiety, despair, guilt, poor sleep patterns and physical symptoms. It can feel just like being battered against the rocks. All of this is normal. There are no rules about how you should feel. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

Being 'All Washed Up' represents being stuck in your grief and unable to move forward. Some people don't allow themselves to grieve, while others are overwhelmed by their emotion and struggle with daily tasks.

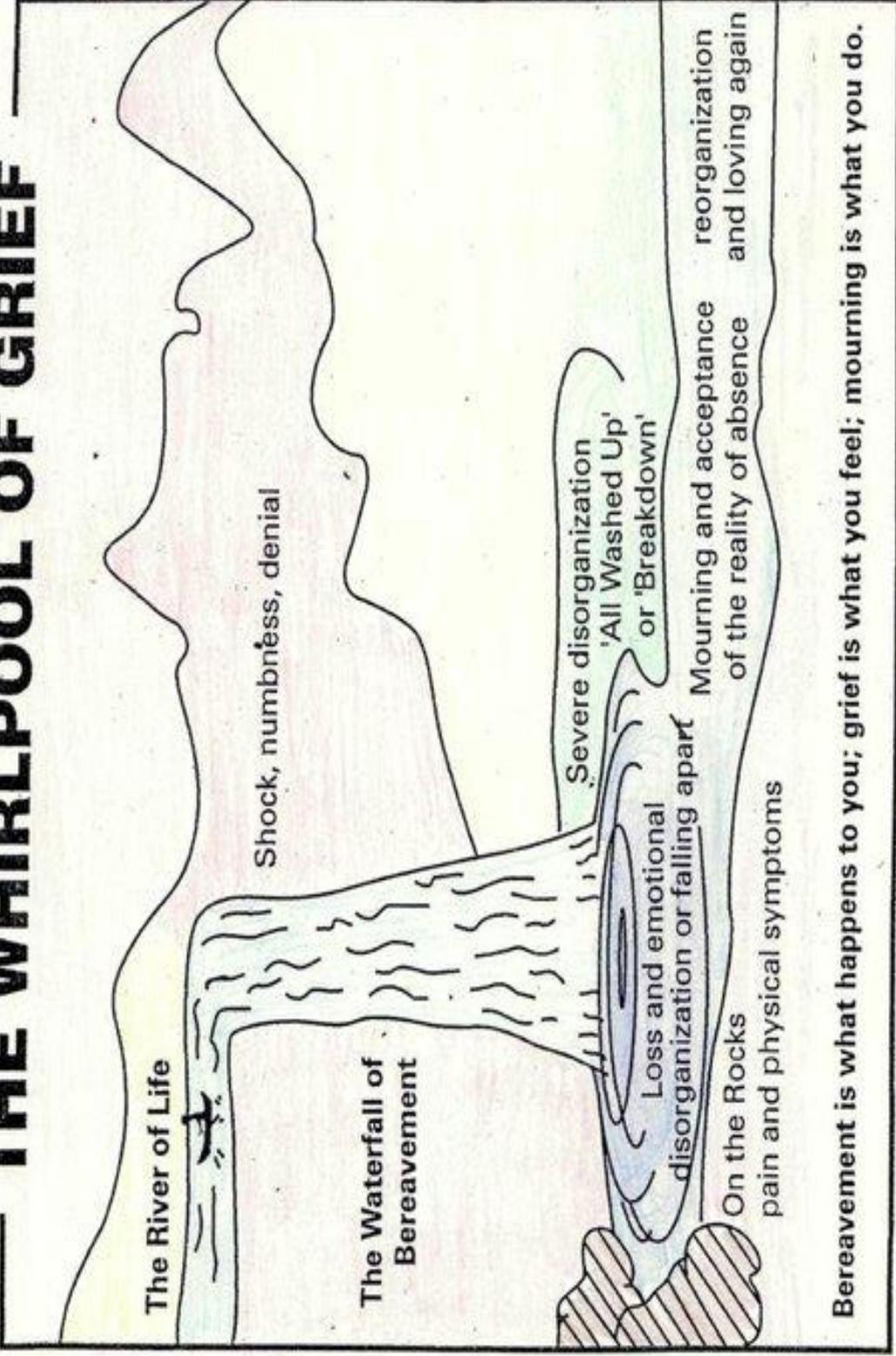
It is very important that we are supported through our grief and that we access help from as many sources as we can. Keeping a journal, creating art and crafts that focus on memories, and talking with people who understand all allow mourning to take place. 'Breakdown' points to when we can no longer function and need professional health support.

Eventually in our bereavement journey we will reach a point of acceptance – this is different for every individual and will happen at a time that is right for us. Support groups, family and friends can help us to reorganise our life and find a 'new normal'.

A 'new normal' involves embarking on a new way of life and is perhaps the most difficult task of all, often feeling like a betrayal. It is a way of reinvesting in life again, while holding on to the memories we have and knowing that they will never be forgotten. We need to try and push aside feelings of guilt about this, as it's important to look to the future and find new meaning in life.

There can be setbacks, of course, and it is normal at anniversaries and other significant times for feelings of grief to stir up again and be as vivid as on the day we were bereaved, but over time these emotions will become less raw. With help, we can build a new life, even though it is still difficult at times, and we can begin to accept the different journey that we are on.

# THE WHIRLPOOL OF GRIEF



# Charlotte's Story

## Guidance for Schools Regarding the Positive Management of a Pupil Who Has Experienced Bereavement

*In Britain, every 30 minutes a school age pupil loses a parent*

- Inform all staff at an appropriate opportunity, but respect pupil's right to privacy. Who, when and how other pupils are informed should be determined by the pupil themselves.
- Have a 'back to school' meeting with the pupil, parent/carer, Head of Year and tutor to plan their re-entry to school and appropriate school response eg consider providing catch up sessions for the pupil before they return to normal classes or will the pupil need help with coursework or flexibility with deadlines.
- Think about the pupil's closest friends. Issue the guidance leaflet to those the pupils identified who might take on such a supporting role;
- Provide a safe space for the pupil which they can access when things get too much, with the minimum amount of fuss.
- Don't use the bereavement as the explanation for all subsequent behaviour. If unsure ask! "Are you feeling angry because of what has happened?" is significantly different to stating "I know you're angry because of what has happened". Language is subtle, but its effects are not.
- Consider how you can support the pupil feeling as if they are in control. This will aid their recovery.
- Think about future lesson content and plan proactively. If you think the content may be an issue, then forewarn the pupil and ask if they want to complete an alternative activity. Ask don't assume.

- If you are worried about new behaviour eg not eating, self-harm, think carefully about which person might be appropriate to raise the concern with the pupil. Is there an adult at school who they have a secure relationship with? A previous teacher might be more appropriate than a new tutor. Who is best suited to support the pupil - irrespective of job title? However, don't presume that the new behaviour is due to the loss.
- Provide the information leaflet to the pupil who has suffered the loss. Send it in the post with a condolence card. The pupil can then access it when they are ready.
- Help the pupil develop a social support network. With the card and leaflet, enquire if there is anyone at school that the pupil would like to be told about the loss.
- Consider issues such as management of dinner money and entitlements. Small issues can add significantly to the distress.
- As a teacher, be honest with colleagues. Our personal circumstances might make it appropriate that another adult takes the lead role with the pupil.
- Be patient, the mourning process lasting two years is not unusual. Be mindful of anniversaries and other potentially challenging occasions such a Mother's Day etc.

Above all, in all the decisions that you make, think about where the control is and aim to keep it with the pupil concerned.

*This guidance has been written by Charlotte Purser Year 11, who sadly lost her father when she was a Year 9 pupil*

*She worked with Nicki Hammill, Educational Psychologist, to produce this guide for schools, a leaflet for the bereaved pupil and a guide for their friends*

## What you can do...

The following resources can be given to a child/young person to help them to communicate what would help them. This can be repeated at different times.

To my <b>teacher</b> ... what you can do...	
Someone close to me has died. These may affect my feelings and behaviour. I have ticked some of the ideas that other young people have found helpful...	
Understand that it is hard for me to feel motivated. I may have difficulty meeting deadlines.	Understand that I will not 'get over it' or 'be able to put it behind me' but with time I will learn to cope with all the changes.
Inform other teachers about my loss. I may not wish to speak to them about it.	Give me extra encouragement for all the things I am managing to do and keep me in mind.
Talk to me about what happened. I may need more information, advice and education about loss.	Give me a note which allows me permission to leave class briefly, without having to explain myself.
Try not to put the spotlight on me. I will participate when I can.	Treat me the same as everybody else.
Please understand that this is for now and my needs will change. Please check up on this as time moves on.	

To my <b>friends</b> ... what you can do	
Someone close to me has died. These may affect my feelings and behaviour. I have ticked some of the ideas that other young people have found helpful...	
Be yourself and be my friend - even if you don't know what to do or say. Just knowing you are there helps.	Give me a hug if you think I need one.
Ask me how I am feeling - even though I may not always be able to tell you.	Listen to me if you can - it helps me to get stuff off my chest and makes me feel better.
Give me a break if I'm acting a bit strangely. I'm feeling very confused right now.	Help me to have fun and laugh sometimes. This does not mean that I am 'over it' or have forgotten my feelings for the person.
Sometimes I may feel lonely. If you phone, text or visit me I'll know you are thinking about me even though I may need time alone.	Try to understand that I may not always feel like joining in just now - but please don't stop asking me.
Stand up for me if I'm having a hard time.	Ask me if there is anything I can do if you notice I am having a bad day.
Please understand that this is for now and my needs will change. Please check up on this as time moves on.	

