



## Westfield Nursery School Bereavement Policy

### **Philosophy**

Our school is fully committed to the emotional health and well-being of our children and that of our staff. We are dedicated to the continual development of a healthy and thriving school community and strive to work towards this in all aspects of school life. We are passionate about providing an ethos, environment and curriculum that can provide support during difficult times, including time of death or dying. Everyone experiences grief differently and there is no 'normal' or 'right' way to grieve.

### **Objectives**

Bereavement is an experience which will be faced by all members of our school community at some point. This policy will provide guidelines to be followed a bereavement. The aim is to:

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

### **Children's Understanding of Death: Two Years to Five Years Old**

During their development between the age of two to five, children do not understand that death is irreversible. For example, 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" means.

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 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 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. 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. 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.

### **Children's Grief**

For many children, the death of a parent, caregiver, sibling or grandparent is an experience they are faced with early in life. Sometimes people think a child or young person who is bereaved 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. See Appendix 1 with emotions which can be experienced when grieving.

### **Accepting the Child's Experience**

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

### **Time to Grieve**

Children 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 to become distracted by play. This is a protective mechanism which allows the child to be temporarily diverted from the bereavement.

Bereaved children 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.

### **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.

If the bereaved child wants to ask questions about death and what dying means, answer them truthfully and if you do not know the answer to a specific question don't be tempted to make the answer up. Assure the child or young person that although you do not know the answer to their question you will find out for them. See Appendix Two Different Cultures and Beliefs.

### **Traumatic Bereavement**

A traumatic loss is one that is sudden and unexpected, and often results from horrific or frightening circumstances. This includes death from violence/ crime, suicide and deaths through alcohol and drugs. A traumatic loss can give rise to special problems and specialist support should be advised.

### **Coronavirus and Bereavement**

During the global coronavirus pandemic, we are facing a tragic loss of life, often under exceedingly difficult circumstances. Bereaved people may have to deal with increased trauma and may be cut off from some of their usual support network. Those who are already struggling with bereavement, or whose relatives or friends die through other causes will also be affected. See Chums information:

-Breaking the News to Children and Young People When Someone is Seriously ill With Coronavirus (COVID-19)

-Telling A Child / Young Person Someone Has Died from Coronavirus (COVID-19)

### **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's grief is unique
- Encourage the child to talk about the death and how they feel
- Children may 'revisit' the death and review their feelings about the bereavement as they develop
- Use language that is appropriate to the child's age and level of comprehension.

### **Do's and Don'ts**

#### **Do:**

- Be there for the person who is grieving.
- Accept that everyone grieves in their own way, there is no 'normal' way.
- Encourage the person to talk.
- Listen to the person.
- Create an environment in which the bereaved person can be themselves and show their feelings, rather than having to put on a front.
- Be aware that grief can take a long time.
- Mention useful support agencies such as Cruse Bereavement Care.

#### **Don't:**

- Avoid someone who has been bereaved.
- Use clichés such as 'I understand how you feel'; 'You'll get over it'; 'Time heals'.
- Tell them it's time to move on, they should be over it - how long a person needs to grieve is entirely individual.
- Be alarmed if the bereaved person doesn't want to talk or demonstrates anger.
- Underestimate how emotionally draining it can be when supporting a grieving person. Make sure you take care of yourself too.

### **What Can You Say?**

Be honest. Acknowledge the news by sharing your condolences, saying how sorry you are that their friend or relative has died. Remind them that you are there for them, as much as you can be. Don't worry too much about saying exactly the right thing. The feeling will come across and it is more important that you say something than that you find the perfect words. Here are some suggestions if you are finding it difficult.

- I don't know what to say but I am so sorry to hear this news.
- I am so sorry for your loss – you are in my thoughts.
- I'm so sad to hear this and I'm here if you need to talk.

### **The Role of the Head teacher**

The head teacher is often the first person to become aware of the death of a pupil or a member of staff within the school or member of the community and will therefore hold several key responsibilities such as:

- liaising with outside agencies, the Local Authority and keeping the governing body informed
- be first point of contact for family/ child concerned.
- responding to media enquiries and acting as spokesperson for the school.

## Specialist Help

<b>NHS</b> The NHS website has information on bereavement <a href="https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/coping-with-bereavement/">https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/coping-with-bereavement/</a>	
Support is still available from GP's, NHS 111, NHS hospitals and mental health services.	
<b>Samaritans</b> Telephone: 116 123 Website: <a href="https://www.samaritans.org/">https://www.samaritans.org/</a>	<b>Childline</b> Telephone: 0800 1111 Website: <a href="https://www.childline.org.uk/">https://www.childline.org.uk/</a>
<b>Bereavement Advice Centre</b> National Information Helpline: 0800 634 9494 Monday-Friday 9.00am-5.00pm Website: <a href="http://www.bereavementadvice.org">www.bereavementadvice.org</a>	
<b>Cruse Bereavement Care</b> Telephone: 0808 808 1677 (free helpline) Email: <a href="mailto:helpline@cruse.org.uk">helpline@cruse.org.uk</a> Website: <a href="https://www.cruse.org.uk/">https://www.cruse.org.uk/</a> Local: <a href="mailto:bedfordshire@cruse.org.uk">bedfordshire@cruse.org.uk</a>	<b>Child Bereavement UK</b> Telephone: 0800 02 888 40 Website: <a href="https://www.childbereavementuk.org/">https://www.childbereavementuk.org/</a>
<b>Chums Bereavement Service Bedfordshire 3-18 years</b> Phone: 01525 863924 Email: <a href="mailto:info@chums.uk.com">info@chums.uk.com</a> Website: <a href="http://chums.uk.com/">http://chums.uk.com/</a>	

## Conclusion

This policy will support those who have suffered a loss.

**Policy written: May 2020**

**Agreed by governors: May 2020**

**To be reviewed: May 2022**

## **Appendix 1**

### **Feelings which may be experienced when someone is bereaved**

**Anger:** Sometimes bereaved people can feel angry. This anger is a completely natural emotion, typical of the grieving process. Death can seem cruel and unfair, especially when you feel someone has died before their time. People may also feel angry towards the person who has died, or angry at themselves for things they did or didn't do or say to the person before their death.

**Depression:** Many bereaved people experience feelings of depression following the death of someone close. Life can feel like it no longer holds any meaning and some people say they too want to die.

**Guilt:** Guilt is another common reaction. People who have been bereaved of someone close often say they feel directly or indirectly to blame for the person's death.

**Longing:** Thinking you are hearing or seeing someone who has died is a common experience and can happen when you least expect it. "Seeing" the person who has died and hearing their voice can happen because the brain is trying to process the death and acknowledge the finality of it.

**Pain:** Feelings of pain and distress following bereavement can be overwhelming and very frightening.

**Shock:** It may take a long time to grasp what has happened. The shock can make people numb, and some people at first carry on as if nothing has happened. It is hard to believe that someone important is not coming back. Many people feel disorientated - as if they have lost their place and purpose in life or are living in a different world.

**Worry:** There are many signs of worrying including experiencing restlessness, feeling "edgy", being easily tired, having difficulty concentrating, irritability, muscle tension and difficulty sleeping. Any of these may be experienced following a bereavement.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Different Cultures and Beliefs**

Our school functions within a multi-cultural society, in which various beliefs, religious and non-religious, require to be taken into account. Respect for the differing needs, rituals and practices is essential when acknowledging a death. It is this diversity that enriches our lives.

#### ***Christianity***

Christians believe that there is just one God and that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. They believe that Jesus died on the cross (The Crucifixion), and that three days later, God raised him from the dead (The Resurrection). Christians believe in an afterlife and the idea of resurrection but the details around what happens at the time of death and afterwards, varies within the different denominations. For some, as soon as a person dies, he or she is judge by God and will immediately go to Heaven or Hell, dependent on how good or bad a life they led. For Roman Catholics, there is a half-way place called Purgatory, where an impure soul can stay until fit to enter Heaven. Others believe in the Day of Judgement, when the world will end, and the dead will return to life to be judged by God. Within the different Christian denominations, there are many variations on what happens at a funeral. When someone dies, the body is taken to an undertaker who will carry out the necessary preparations for the body to be laid out. This is to enable those who wish to view it before it is placed in a coffin. The funeral, organised by an undertaker, is about one week after the death. This usually takes place in a church, but sometimes a crematorium, or a combination of the two. The coffin will remain closed. Wreaths or bunches of flowers may be placed on the coffin. It is traditional to wear black, but this custom varies. If held in a church, the funeral service may include a Holy Communion, Eucharist, or Mass. The body will either be buried or cremated, dependent on the wishes of the deceased and the family. A churchyard grave is often marked by a headstone but for a cremation, the family may choose a more informal way to mark where the ashes are buried or have been scattered.

#### ***Islam***

Muslims believe in life after death when, on the Last Day, the dead will come back to life to be judged by Allah. The good will reside in Paradise, the damned in Hell. Muhammad teaches that all men and women are to serve Allah and that they should try to live perfectly, following the Qur'an. Devout Muslims believe that death is a part of Allah's plan and open expressions of grief may be viewed as disrespectful to this belief. As cremation is forbidden, Muslims are always buried, ideally within 24 hours of the death. Ritual washing is usually performed by the family or close friends at the undertakers or mortuary. They will wrap the body in a clean cloth or shroud. The coffin is often very plain as traditionally one would not be used. The grave is aligned to enable the head of the deceased to be placed facing the holy city of Mecca. Muslim graves are unmarked but to meet UK requirements, a simple headstone is used as a compromise. There is an official mourning period of three days when the family will remain at home and be brought food by friends and relatives. For forty days after the funeral relatives may wish to make regular visits to the grave on Fridays.

#### ***Hinduism***

Hindus believe in reincarnation and a cycle of rebirths. When a person dies, the soul is reborn in a new body, returning to earth in either a better or worse form. What a person does in this life will influence what happens to them in the next, the law of Karma. Those that have performed good deeds in this life will be reborn into higher order families, those whose behaviour has been bad will be born again as outcasts. A Hindu funeral is as much a celebration as a remembrance service. Hindus cremate their dead as it is the soul that has importance, not the body which is no longer needed. White is the traditional colour and mourners usually wear traditional Indian garments. If attending, it may be worth asking what appropriate dress would be. During the service, offerings such as flowers or sweetmeats may be passed around and bells rung so noise is a part of the ritual. The chief mourner, usually the eldest son, and other male members of the family, may shave their heads as a mark of respect. In India, the chief mourner would light the funeral pyre. Here, he will press the button to make the coffin disappear and, in some instances, may be permitted to ignite the

cremator. Ashes may be taken back to India to be scattered on the River Ganges. In the UK, some areas of water have been designated as acceptable substitutes. The mourning period lasts between two and five weeks.

### ***Sikhism***

Sikhs believe the soul goes through a cycle of rebirths, with the ultimate objective being to reach perfection, to be reunited with God and, as a result, break the cycle. Thus, death holds no fear and mourning is done discretely. The present life is influenced by what happened in previous ones and the current life will set the scene for the next. The deceased is cremated as soon as possible after death. The coffin is taken to the family home where it is left open for friends and family to pay their respects. It is then taken to the Gurdwara where hymns and prayers are sung. A short service follows at a crematorium, during which the eldest son presses the button for the coffin to move behind the curtain. In India, the eldest son would light the funeral pyre and no coffin would be used. After the funeral, a meal may be held at the Gurdwara. The ashes may be taken back to India to be scattered. Here they may be sprinkled in the sea or river. The family remain in mourning for several days after the funeral and may listen to readings from the Guru Granth Sahib (Holy Book).

### ***Buddhism***

Buddhists believe that nothing that exists is permanent and everything will ultimately cease to be. There is a belief in rebirth but not of a soul passing from one body to another. The rebirth is more a state of constantly changing being rather than a clear-cut reincarnation. The ultimate objective is to achieve a state of perfect peace and freedom. Buddhists try to approach death with great calmness, and an open-minded attitude of acceptance. There are few formal traditions relating to funerals and they tend to be nonreligious events. Cremation is the generally accepted practice and the service is kept simple. It may be conducted by a Buddhist monk or sometimes family members.