

Bereavement Protocol Cassiobury Junior School March 2019

Introduction

At Cassiobury Junior School we are very aware that bereavement is a part of life, whilst difficult to discuss, we must not ignore it. Our aim is to support the staff and pupils at our school to approach issues around bereavement in a consistent, sensitive and proactive manner. This protocol has been devised with advice from the Peace Hospice staff who work to support bereaved families and children locally.

Practice

As a school we need to ensure that we 'talk' about death. That we include endings and death as part of our language and life in general. We should avoid too many euphemisms that make death confusing. Our PSHE learning should include talk of death and endings. All staff should understand our approach and be expected to follow this. Talking about our own bereavements; such as explaining when we are going to a funeral, make death a part of all of our lives and models this experience for children. Too much detail is unlikely to be helpful!

Notification

We ask that all staff and parents inform the school office of a bereavement so that there is a consistency of reporting and to avoid 'assumptions' that information has been 'passed on.' A notice will be put on the 'be aware' noticeboard in the staffroom and staff working directly with a pupil/s will be told by the school office. This should always include the head, class teacher, school counsellor, TA etc.

Response

Everyone responds differently to a bereavement and we need to be mindful not to judge how people grieve. Our role is to respond consistently and respectfully of different belief systems. The following needs to be considered:

- Avoid unclear language- use 'died' rather than 'lost' or 'gone away' to avoid misconceptions.
- Don't overload children with too much information.
- Let children know that we are there if they need us.
- Make it clear that children can ask questions when they need to. Listen don't fill the silences.
- Be prepared to say, 'I don't know' rather than give vague or unhelpful responses.
- Ascertain what the family's belief system is.
- Don't give conflicting responses to the belief systems of the family.
- Don't assume that you know what is bothering a child- they might be worried about something or someone else not the direct bereavement. As an example a child may be more concerned that this will happen to the other parent or grandparent.
- Avoid judging how a child is reacting, it is surprising to know that many children are criticised by family members for not being 'sad enough' when a family member has died. Understand that children can react differently to death and it may not sit with them as a consistent reaction.
- Avoid telling them that they shouldn't cry, 'dry their eyes', 'xxxx wouldn't want you to be crying/upset,' tell them that you know how they are feeling etc as this can cause more harm than good.
- Don't force children to 'talk' if they do not wish to. Children may choose silence as a coping strategy.
- Understand that bereavement may cause changes in behaviour and, whilst the school rules cannot change, the school should consider the wider circumstances when dealing with changes in behaviour.

- Try and stick to routines for the child; routines provide comfort for many children which can be different for adults.
- Make it clear that there is not a deadline to feel better and you cannot 'fix' this.

Signs and symptoms of grieving

- Changes in behaviour
- Anxiety
- Sadness and longing
- Anger and acting out
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Vivid memories
- Changes in health
- Changes in eating habits
- Changes to self care/routine
- Concentration/thinking changes
- Changes in emotions
- Physical symptoms
- Sometimes none of these but may still be experiencing grief

Signposting

The school office has a pack of advice for parents experiencing bereavement and this can be offered to parents and regularly signposted in the newsletter. Themed events and talks can also signpost support.

The school counsellor will manage an information board and leaflet supply for pupils and parents on a variety of themes.

- Grief encounter www.griefencounter.org.uk
- Child Bereavement UK www.childbereavementuk.org.uk
- Winston's Wish www.winstonswish.org.uk
- Cruse Bereavement Care www.cruse.org.uk/schools
- Childhood Bereavement Network www.childhoodbereavement.org.uk

Pass it on

When children move on to new schools or classes be mindful to pass this information along. Just because xxx died before the summer holidays does not mean that the grief has gone away before they come back to school in September. Make sure that a supply teacher knows when they are taking on a class with a bereavement issue, they may cause unintended distress.

Support

Supporting an adult or child with bereavement can be tough on anyone and the school recognises the need to support colleagues and parents at times of need.