



Inspire Education Trust

Together we achieve, individually we grow

Bereavement Procedure

Policy Date: March 2025

Review Date: March 2028

Document History

Version	Status		Date	Author	Summary Changes
V1			March 2022	Amy Husband	Initial draft
V2			June 2022	Vicki Shelley	Changes to incorporate secondary school e.g. to flowchart timings and CofE references
V3			March 2025	Gill Bowser	Inclusion of an example script to use when communicating news of a death to pupils

This Bereavement Policy has been developed by a working group made up of:

- Executive Leadership Team / Head Teachers/ Pastoral Manager(s)
- Inclusion Leads
- Staff – including Teachers, Technical staff

The school will monitor the impact of the policy using:

- Surveys / voice questionnaires of:
- pupils
- parents / carers
- staff
- Thrive screening tool (where appropriate for pupils)

1. INTRODUCTION AND AIMS OF THE PROCEDURE

AIMS:

This bereavement policy aims to:

- Set out a guideline for how the school will respond to different types of deaths within our school community
- Set guidelines for communicating deaths in a timely manner that balances our school community's interests and transparency with the wishes of the family of the deceased
- Identify and sign-post to best practices for supporting pupils and/or members of staff experiencing bereavement
- Define the immediate and ongoing roles and responsibilities of key staff members and the governing board

INTRODUCTION:

In line with our Trust vision and values any bereavement within our schools will be approached with a sense of love, compassion and care for all those affected. In our Church of England schools, the Christian faith will be reflected in our approach whilst recognising that our school community represents those of all faiths and none.

We acknowledge that death, while being the inevitable end of life, may be unexpected and traumatic. An unexpected death can cause severe distress and can shock and disturb the whole school community.

We acknowledge that should our school community be informed of a death, our response should be a planned, tested and considered one. The communication of any death within our community must be planned and handled with great sensitivity. Whilst recognising the need to act speedily, we will ensure that the immediate family of the deceased have been consulted prior to any wider communication, for example: through the school website, letter, text, telephone, email.

The Headteacher, in conjunction with the Executive Leadership Team and Local Governing Committee (if necessary) will have overall responsibility for support and liaison in the event of a death or traumatic loss. In the event that the Headteacher is absent then the appropriate school leader will take responsibility, as identified by the Executive Leadership Team.

In the event of an unexpected death, and where the Trust Executive Leadership Team in tandem with the Headteacher deems necessary, we will establish a Bereavement Team to ensure our response is supportive, timely and robust.

The exact composition of the team will depend upon the situation.

Members of the Team **may** include:

- The Headteacher and the Head of Education Primary or Secondary (responsible for liaising with all parties, including the Media)
- The appropriate Assistant/Deputy Head(s) and the Pastoral Manager (responsible for coordinating support to pupils and parents)
- The Human Resources team (to ensure appropriate support for staff)
- The named Governor for Safeguarding (to ensure that staff are supported)
- The Office Manager (to provide admin support)
- The school chaplain
- Those involved with the family outside of school (the Head of a sibling's school, for example).
- The Educational Psychologist for the school, as per Critical Incident Response support at Coventry Local Authority (to support in all areas identified above)

We acknowledge our responsibility to all those who grieve as a result of a life changing significant loss in their lives. We will provide opportunities for pupils to share their feelings in the school environment supported by members of the school Pastoral and Inclusion teams and, when appropriate, through the use of structured programmes provided by external bereavement support services. Appropriate support will also be offered to staff, via the HR team and external bereavement support services. Support and sources of advice may also be offered to school parents. External sources of support and advice are listed in **Appendix 3**.

The Bereavement Team will ensure all staff and governors are aware of our policy and procedures. This policy and the accompanying procedures will be reviewed periodically or in the event of a death within the school community.

2. PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH DIFFERENT TYPES OF DEATH WITHIN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

FOR ALL TYPES:

We will ensure that school office staff are prepared to receive the news of a death within the community and respond in an appropriate manner.

Should we receive the news of a death, in ALL cases the person receiving the news will:

- Confirm the information, check it, record it and check it again. (It is essential to have the facts confirmed)
- Share the news as soon as possible with the Headteacher or an appropriate senior member of staff.

The Headteacher (or senior member of staff) will consult the Trust Executive Leadership Team as necessary, and decide upon the composition of the Bereavement Team (reference those staff listed in section 1).

The members of the Bereavement Team will:

Consider the action required, follow the agreed procedures, take notice of the guidance included in this policy and be aware of the impact of shock on each other and on the wider community.

The Executive Leadership Team at the Trust will:

Consider the immediate support required and deploy Pastoral, safeguarding or leadership staff from across the trust where deemed necessary. This will provide rapid response support whilst the Bereavement Team agree a way forward.

In circumstances where there is an active police investigation into the causes of a death, the Headteacher or a member of the Executive Leadership Team will liaise directly with the appropriate agencies. This may affect the way we share information with the school community and should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

a) THE SUDDEN DEATH OF A PARENT OR CLOSE RELATIVE

If the school is made aware of the death of a parent or close relative of a pupil or staff member during the school day, it is best that a family member breaks the news with the support of a member of staff (as appropriate). If this is not possible, the Headteacher will ensure someone suitable breaks the news to the pupil or member of staff concerned.

The news of the death will be given to all relevant staff as soon as possible.

b) THE DEATH OF A PUPIL

Should we receive the news of a pupil's death, the Headteacher will call appropriate colleagues together having consulted with the family of the pupil (where appropriate) to ascertain their wishes,

We will:

- Consider the most appropriate way of communicating the news within school.
- Encourage staff to voice any concerns they have about telling the rest of the pupils, and provide staff with information such as that provided by the sources of advice listed in **Appendix 3**.
- It may be thought best to communicate the news to parents and ask them to inform their children of the news. (See **Appendix 4** – Points to remember when writing to parents to inform them of a death within the school community.)
- Use factual language, e.g.: death, died. We will refrain from using metaphorical language, e.g.: "gone to live with the stars". This advice mirrors guidance from external bereavement support services listed in **Appendix 3**, and links with our guidelines given to staff who are responsible for breaking news of a death in **Appendix 1**.
- If the news is to be communicated to the children at school then this may be done in a full school assembly, year groups, or a class.
- Give pupils opportunities to express their feelings at the time they are informed and over the following days and weeks. Encourage children to write their feelings down (e.g. using the 'Worry Box') if they feel unable to express their feelings verbally.

- Avoid rumours, exaggerations and embellishment of the event, by agreeing the facts, which will be stated openly and honestly without assumptions or judgements.
- Remember that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotions and feelings, and plan support accordingly.
- It will also be necessary to inform other parents the same day in the most appropriate way via text, website, email, phone or letter depending on the circumstances.
- Ensure time for grieving amongst the staff and enable them to share how they feel about what has happened

In all instances when communication is planned – be it by letter to parents, school assembly, or to year groups or classes – we will endeavour to ensure that sufficient time is built into this process for the Bereavement Team to pause, reflect on the wording to be used and have others read the draft. Whilst it is understandable that we might feel under pressure at the time to communicate quickly, it may be the case that in reality, building in this extra time will be necessary and quite feasible.

(See **Appendix 1** - Guidelines for breaking news of a death to a class, or school assembly – and **Appendix 4** - Points to remember when writing to parents to inform them of a death within the school community.)

c) THE DEATH OF MORE THAN ONE PUPIL

Should we receive such news, members of the Bereavement Team will be called together to be briefed with the salient facts and to decide what steps are to be taken. Information may already have been 'sent' from the incident.

We will consider:

- Who will contact parents, if necessary?
- Who will meet with parents who arrive at school? Where?
- Who will inform the staff? When? Where?
- Who will inform the pupils/students? When? Where?

It is imperative that rumours and interpretations of the truth be avoided. In a case of multiple deaths there is bound to be some media interest. Members of the Bereavement Team and the Executive Leadership Team who are responsible for dealing with the media will prepare all necessary statements. Such statements should deal only with facts in as sympathetic a way as possible. We will agree a format of response to telephone inquiries, including approaches from the media.

(See **Appendix 1** - Guidelines for breaking news of a death to a class, or school assembly – and **Appendix 4** - Points to remember when writing to parents to inform them of a death within the school community.)

d) THE DEATH OF A MEMBER OF STAFF

We acknowledge that if such a death occurs it is doubly traumatic for the staff; supporting the pupils but also grieving on a personal level for a colleague.

Should we receive the news of the death of a member of staff; the Headteacher or appropriate senior member of staff will call together colleagues from the Bereavement Team.

We will use the guidance notes below:-

- Gather together the staff and inform them of the news
- Allow time for grieving amongst the staff
- Allow the staff to share how they feel about what has happened
- Inform the teachers that they may need to address what has happened in their classes
- Impress on the staff what facts are to be announced to the pupils/students. To avoid rumours, exaggerations and development of the event, the agreed facts should be stated simply
- Communicate to the staff how the announcement will be made. Should it be a full school assembly, year groups, or a class/form group?
- It must be remembered that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotional feelings. Some will deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some may show feelings of anger. There may be tears and distress; everyone will react in their own way.
- Under such circumstances some staff may have difficulty coping with the loss themselves. Colleagues will need to be aware of those staff who seem particularly affected by the death.
- Practical issues, such as lesson cover, will need to be addressed.

(See **Appendix 1** - Guidelines for breaking news of a death to a class, or school assembly and **Appendix 4** - Points to remember when writing to parents to inform them of a death within the school community.)

3. MEMORIALS AND FUNERAL SERVICES

Should we need to consider our involvement with any funeral services or memorial services or memorials, we will first refer to the "Guidelines for Memorials and Funeral Services" (**Appendix 2**). We may also need to be aware of any Armed Forces connection.

4. RETURN TO SCHOOL

We acknowledge our responsibility to closely monitor pupils who have been bereaved, especially on their return to school and for at least a two-year period and at times of transition. We further acknowledge our responsibility to prepare staff and pupils appropriately before a bereaved member of our community returns. Members of our Bereavement Team will advise an appropriate response, depending on the individual's circumstances

5. MANAGING ANTICIPATED DEATH AND TERMINAL ILLNESS

We acknowledge that the anticipated death of a member of our community, whilst very difficult to manage, enables us to establish appropriate communication with the family to support those likely to be most affected before and after the death.

We acknowledge our responsibility to support adults, children and young people within our community who have to face the painful reality that a parent or someone close to them is terminally ill.

When supporting children and young people who are experiencing anticipatory grief, we will:

- Confirm the facts concerning the pupil's sick relative or friend
- Communicate the information as appropriate (in line with school procedures and the family's wishes)
- Never give false hope to the child or young person
- Discover what the pupil has been told of the illness
- Allow the pupil to talk freely about the sick person in an appropriate setting
- Enable the pupil to talk freely about how he/she is feeling
- Be honest! If we do not know the answer to a question we will say so
- Not inform the pupil about any progression concerning the illness unless the family have given permission and requested us to do so.

6. THE PLACE OF DEATH AND BEREAVEMENT WITHIN THE SCHOOL ROUTINE

We acknowledge the importance of remembering anniversaries of death. If a child has lost an immediate relative, consideration will be given as to whether or not this anniversary should be mentioned within the pupil's personal pastoral support plan. We also acknowledge the importance of remembering bereaved pupils at certain times of the year, such as fathers' day or Christmas.

Where appropriate, we will hold a special assembly or act of remembrance, to celebrate the life of those members of our community who have died.

Whilst we recognise the significance of anniversaries, we also acknowledge the importance of normal routine for our pupils, staff and families. Structure, familiarity and routine are vital to school communities and for that reason, we will seek to restore a sense of normality as soon as is possible and appropriate.

7. LONG TERM SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO GRIEVE

We acknowledge that bereavement has lasting effects and we will support pupils throughout their time at school, recognising that traumatic life experiences will resurface as children develop, especially at times of change and transition. Through our curriculum and our Thrive approach, we will offer pupils access to a range of age-related support, through their teacher and other appropriate staff, the pastoral manager and any external bereavement support services that may be appropriate to the situation.

8. SUPPORT FOR STAFF WHO ARE SUPPORTING A BEREAVED PUPIL OR COLLEAGUE

We will ensure that this policy is available to all staff, and appropriate supervision is undertaken with any staff who are supporting a bereaved pupil or colleague. Whenever necessary, the

Headteacher or Executive Leadership Team will request additional support from colleagues across the Trust or from external support agencies, such as Educational Psychology Services.

Appendix 1

BREAKING SAD NEWS - GUIDELINES FOR BREAKING NEWS OF A DEATH TO A CLASS, OR SCHOOL ASSEMBLY

On receiving news of the death of a pupil or a member of staff please follow the agreed procedures which will include the following points:

- Consult with the bereaved family concerned to ascertain their wishes.
- Those to be informed of a death should be gathered together in an appropriate place. This is best done in familiar groupings by someone they know.
- Whoever is giving the news should prepare themselves with what to say.
- Try to be as composed as possible as this helps to reduce the possible anxiety and distress felt by pupils or staff receiving the news. Remember, however, it is perfectly human and understandable if you are moved by the events.
- Start by acknowledging that you have some sad news to give them.
- Be honest; give the news stating simple facts which have been checked for accuracy.
- Use factual language. E.g. "death" and "died". Avoid any metaphorical language, e.g. "gone to be a star in the sky"
- Talk about the person who has died.
- Underline how important their support is at this most difficult time and that it may be appropriate to involve them in a school response e.g. letters, flowers, cards, funeral attendance, memorial etc.
- All staff should keep a watching brief throughout the assembly/meeting and for a period of time afterwards to pick up and support that pupils and staff showing signs of distress.
- Keep in contact with the family suffering the loss. Make a note to remember the anniversary.
- Confirm any agreed arrangements by email or letter to parents and ensure details are posted on the school's website but not before all members of the bereaved family have been informed.

Example script: (In the event of having to break the news of a death within the community, it is important to consider what will be said, how it will be said and how the situation will be managed by staff)

Start:

There is no easy way to say this to you and the event that has happened will affect us all in one way or another but I have to tell you.....

You may have heard already

That N... has died ... The information that we have and therefore can tell you about is that.....

.....While we are all deeply shocked at this awful, sad news, before we do anything else and while we are all together to support and help each other, may I suggest that we be still now for one or two minutes to honour and remember N...

Thank you.....

There will be many opportunities for us to show our feelings during the next few days. As more details come to us, we will let you know what is happening and how the family would like us to be involved. There will be a variety of ways of honouring N's life and their life amongst us. Your ideas will be most welcome. Talk tobut talk to any of the staff with your thoughts and feelings. We are all here to help each other; that is what our community is about.

Appendix 2

MEMORIAL AND FUNERAL SERVICES

Funerals and memorial services are a way in which the family, friends and society can say goodbye to someone who has died.

The values of funerals and memorial services are:

- They acknowledge the deceased person and provide an opportunity for the person to be remembered
- They give the opportunity for the death to be put in a religious context, if that is appropriate for the family and/or for the school community
- They give significance to what has happened
- They provide a time when the bereaved try to come to terms with what has happened
- They provide a time to express sorrow. Such an occasion helps in the grieving process and should be encouraged at every opportunity

If the funeral is that of a parent, then the school may wish to send a representative or representatives in support of the pupil who has lost a parent. Should the school wish to send children then please check with the family of the bereaved and ensure permission has also been given from the parents of those attending.

If the funeral is that of a pupil or member of staff then the numbers of pupils and teachers wishing to attend may be considerable. Again, please check with the family of the bereaved and with the parents of those attending. There will be practical considerations to address with regard to the continued functioning of the school, e.g. lesson cover.

The following should always be considered:

- An appropriate member of the school Bereavement Team should always contact the family of the deceased to discuss funeral arrangements and to ascertain the family's wishes regarding representation from the school.
- Such wishes are paramount and should always be respected.
- If the school is to be represented at the funeral by pupils, it would be good if the pupils received support from the appropriate members of staff before and after the funeral service.
- Under certain circumstances a form/class close to the bereaved may wish to send messages of sympathy to the bereaved family. These messages may be in the form of poems, cards, flowers etc. The appropriate staff should ensure that all such presents are appropriate.

Often a memorial service may be held in school. This could be a whole school assembly or within a class situation. The planning of such an occasion, choosing readings, poems, music, hymns, pictures, tributes etc. all assist in the grieving process. It might be appropriate to invite members of the bereaved family to share in such a service. Again, on such an occasion, staff members should be on hand to lend support to the pupils who could be upset when sharing in this part of the grieving process.

Appendix 3

External sources of advice and support:

- Sudden - a charity who support people who have experienced an unexpected death. Their information focusses on the support that can be provided to children who have experienced a bereavement (e.g. the sudden and unexpected death of a parent or sibling). www.sudden.org
- Cruse Bereavement Care - <https://www.cruse.org.uk> Coventry Tel. No: 02476 670714
- Alliance of Hope – Suicide Loss Survivors Charity - <http://www.allianceofhope.org>
- Winston's Wish – Child Bereavement Services - <https://www.winstonswish.org>
- Child Bereavement UK – services for children, families and professionals- <https://childbereavementuk.org/>
- The death is the result of suicide (Samaritans provides a [step-by-step programme](#) to support schools if this happens)
- The death is due to murder or family violence (Child Bereavement UK has a guide to 'Supporting children and young people bereaved by murder or manslaughter' <https://childbereavementuk.org/>)

Appendix 4

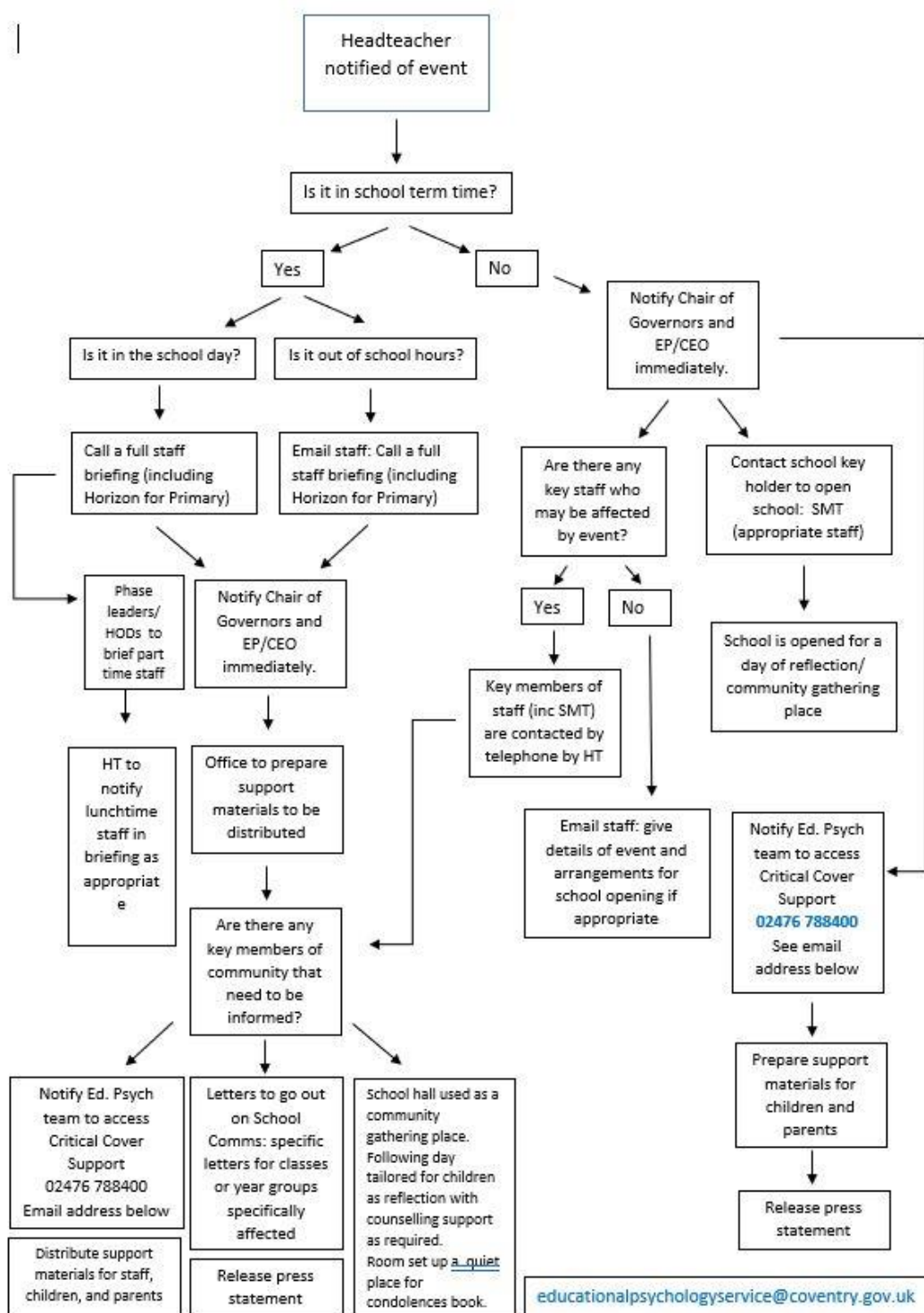
Points to remember when writing to parents to inform them of a death within the school community.

- Ensure that any information given to parents (and the wording of this information) has been agreed with the family of the deceased
- Acknowledge that all members of the school community may be affected in different ways
- Explain why the school has decided to ask parents to inform their children if this is the chosen outcome.
- Perhaps mention Social Media explicitly. Be aware that pupils may share information via Social Media and that in doing so there are inherent risks. Consider whether pupils should be given instructions about the use/restrictions of using social media.
- Detail the school's immediate plans for the next few days – give details of any assemblies the next day, and of what support will be available for the children at school.
- Reference external sources of advice and support.
- Detail the procedure for parents who wish to contact the family of the deceased (having agreed these with the family).
- Urge families to get in touch with the appropriate people in school should they have any further concerns.

Make sure that sufficient time is built into this process for the Bereavement Team to pause, reflect on the letter and have others read the draft. Whilst it is understandable that we might feel under pressure at the time to communicate quickly, it may be the case that in reality, building in this extra time will be necessary and quite feasible.

Appendix 5

Actions in the event of a traumatic event in the school community:



Appendix 6

Supporting Children to Understand Death and Grief Book List for children

The text in italics provides some additional information about the book – most often that information is from the blurb or author's notes.

Primary Age Children

Non-fiction

When Someone Very Special Dies – Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief

Written by Marge Heegard to be illustrated by children (1988)

This workbook was designed to teach basic concepts of death and help children understand and express the many feelings they have when someone special dies. Communication in increased and coping skills are developed as they illustrate their books with their personal story.

When People Die

By Sally Hewitt (2011)

Part of the 'How can I deal with...' series. Case studies combine with sensible, practical advice to help children find out what to do in a difficult situation

Fiction

Water Bugs and Dragonflies – Explaining Death to Young Children

By Doris Stickney (1997)

Doris Stickney first wrote this story to explain to children in her neighbourhood the death of a five-year-old friend. It was revised and expanded in 1982 with illustrations by Gloria Ortiz Hernandez.

Badger's Parting Gift

By Susan Varley (2002)

When old Badger dies, his friends think they will be sad for forever. But gradually they are able to remember Badger with joy and to treasure the gifts he left behind for every one of his friends. This sensitive book can help children come to terms with the death of those they love.

Grandad's Ashes

By Walter Smith (2007)

This beautifully illustrated full-colour picture book for children aged four to eight tells the story of four children who embark on an adventure to find their Grandad's favourite place – but they are faced with plenty of challenges on the way. Told with gentle humour, this is a charming story for children and real resource for parents or counsellors to read with a child as a way of broaching issues surrounding loss or bereavement.

Michael Rosen's Sad Book

By Michael Rosen and Quentin Blake (2004)

We all have sad stuff – maybe you have some right now, as you read this. What makes Michael Rosen most sad is thinking about his son Eddie, who died. In this book he writes about his sadness, how it affects him and some of the things he does to try to cope with it. This is a very personal story

that speaks to everyone; whether or not you have known what its' like to feel really, deeply sad, its truth will surely touch you.

Grandpa

By John Burningham (1988)

This special friendship between one small girl and her grandfather is captured in this gently humorous, touching story that will delight adults and children alike.

Goodbye Mog

By Judith Kerr (2002)

Wise, sometimes wistful but ultimately triumphant, this picture book really is something special. Judith Kerr's previous Mog stories have always hit the highest standards; this is her best yet; clever, affectionately illustrated and totally life-affirming – The Independent

Always and Forever

By Alan Durant – Illustrated by Debi Gliori (2003)

In their hearts and memories and their laughter, Fox was still there... always and forever.

The Blue Pearls

By Elizabeth Stuart Warfel (2001)

The story is inspired by the example of the author's daughter Elise, who died of cancer in 1993. Shortly before her death, the author had a dream, and from the dream came the story, which is offered to everyone who reads it, but especially to children who are suffering from terminal illness and to the children of parents who are terminally ill.

Secondary Age Children

Non-fiction

Living with loss: a grief guide for young people

This publication is written for adolescents, providing information, advice, and activities to support them when faced with the death of someone close to them.

Sometimes Life Sucks: When someone you love dies

By Molly Carlile

Teenagers experience loss in all kinds of ways. Whether it's the death of a grandparent, pet or school friend, a teen fatality, a peer with terminal illness, living without a mum or dad, or the death of a celebrity. Like everyone else teenagers also struggle to come to terms with their shock and grief. Full of great tips, stories and gentle advice, Sometimes Life Sucks helps teens to navigate their personal experience of grief.

You will be OK

By Julia Stokes

In this honest, comforting and strength-building guide Julie Stokes, a clinical psychologist and founder of childhood bereavement charity Winston's Wish, provides readers with the tools they need to navigate this tough and turbulent time. Packed with practical exercises, such as creating memory boxes and managing different kinds of memories using 'memory stones', this guide will give readers helpful ways to manage their grief so they can begin to move forward with life.

Fiction

A Monster Calls

By Patrick Ness

12-year-old Conor O'Malley has a close bond with his seriously ill mother and maintains the household during her regular chemotherapy treatments at the hospital. His grandmother often visits, and suggests he come live with her in the event of his mother's death. One night, Conor is visited by a tree-like Monster at 12:07 AM which tells that he will tell three true stories to Conor; in return, the boy will tell his own story to the Monster about the truth behind his dreadful nightmare.

Letters from the Grief Club

By Beth French and Kate Moreton

A book containing letters from a diverse group of bereaved young adults, written to themselves on the day their loved one died. The letters reflect on their immediate grief whilst offering advice and support to their current selves. The editors, Beth French and Kate Moreton, have experienced loss themselves, with Beth losing her mum, and Kate losing her dad at the young age of 17.

Reviewed by: G Bowser March 25

Senior Lead Review: R Darling March 25

Next Review Date: March 2028

Approved by CEO: 19 March 2025

Signed:



Lois Whitehouse
CEO