



# HEALTHIER MINDS

## EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

### A Community Approach to Supporting Bereavement, Loss and Grief



### Guidance for Secondary Staff

*East Renfrewshire Educational Psychology Service*



# Contents

This guidance is for the use of Secondary School staff who are supporting children and families who have experienced a loss or bereavement. It is adapted from the Healthier Minds: A Community Approach to Supporting Bereavement, Loss and Grief. Guidance for Educational Establishments. For further detailed information, this document and other supporting resources can be found at

<https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/er/meetinglearnerneeds/support-for-health-and-wellbeing/support-for-bereavement-and-loss/>

	<b>Page Number</b>
<b>Principles for Supporting Young People</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>How Young People Understand Death</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Ways for Children to Remember</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Suggested Resources</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Example of Good Practice</b>	<b>15</b>

# **Role of Secondary School Staff in Supporting Young People and Families**

A young person's school provides a safe place to engage with, create, discuss and explore feelings of loss but staff may be reluctant to engage in these conversations due to a lack of confidence. They may be concerned about making the situation worse or saying the wrong thing.

The following principles should be embedded in practice to aid the thinking of staff when supporting bereaved young people:

## **Normality**

For the majority of young people suffering a significant change in their life, the routines of school can give a sense of normality. The familiarity of attending school with familiar people offers a sense of security, continuity and reassurance. It is good to maintain routines and structure but allow for flexibility.

## **Relief from Grief**

School can provide relief from a tense and emotionally charged atmosphere at home. They may feel overwhelmed by the grief expressed by family members. There may be a constant stream of visitors expressing their own grief which young people can find difficult to cope with.

## **An Outlet for Grief**

When a family member has died, young people can try to protect other family members by hiding their own grief and pretending to cope. School is often seen as somewhere safe to express this grief. Family members struggling to deal with their own grief can find it difficult to support their young person's grief. For a young person who wishes to, school staff can provide an opportunity to talk about what has happened with a familiar and trusted adult in relative peace and calm. It is important that young people are encouraged to express their grief in a way that suits them, whether talking or using more creative means.

## **Nurture and Connection**

Young people often worry about the health of other close adults, friends and also their own mortality after a bereavement. A close attachment with at least one adult will reduce the impact of a loss or bereavement. It is normal for

young people to have a more adult understanding and feelings around loss and death but not necessarily the emotional maturity or coping skills to manage strong feelings so the support of a close adult who can listen, validate, normalise, reassure and offer physical comfort is important.

**Remember:**

**Answer questions as honestly as you can.**

**Use clear language such as 'dead' 'death' 'dying' and avoid euphemisms such as 'passed away' or 'gone to sleep'.**

### **The Opportunity to be a Young Person**

Young people often take on more adult responsibilities in the house so school offers the chance to socialise, laugh and learn without feeling guilty. Evidence suggests that play allows a young person to express, understand and process emotions and is, therefore, a vital activity for bereaved young people to help them cope with loss (Saracho and Spodek, 1995).

### **Developing Resilience**

Create opportunities to discuss issues surrounding loss, bereavement and grief. While it is not possible to fully prepare young people for death and the impact that bereavement can have, young people can develop resilience and coping strategies through activities and discussions. You will find example lesson plans in the appendix. It will be useful to have a selection of resources on the subject of loss and death available. Books, film clips and discussing personal experiences are all effective ways to gently introduce the concept of loss.


e.g. [Death of a parent](#)

## Planning Additional Support

The additional support that a young person will need in school will vary and change over time and should be discussed with the parents/carers and, where possible, with the young person. Some young people will prefer to have no adaptations made and will wish to return to their normal routine. This, however, may change over time so staff should be alert and responsive to any indications, however subtle, that the young person is struggling. The following supports should be considered:

-  Discuss with the family and, if possible, the young person what information they want shared with young people in the class/school, how they want this to be shared and how comfortable the young person is discussing the loss with others.
-  Break cards - young people often feel embarrassed about showing their emotions and do not want to cry in front of their peers, by offering time away from the class, the young person may feel more comfortable to express their grief.
-  Access to a consistent, quiet space with preferred, comforting activities when a break is required.
-  Regular check-ins and support from an identified member of staff – this could take a variety of forms and should be directed by the needs and wishes of the young person or young person.
-  Transition objects – a young person who is concerned about the safety of surviving family members may benefit from bringing a special object from home, a drawing, message or photograph.
-  Clarity of routines and schedules – individual timetables, preparing for transitions, visual timers and clarifying finish times can help to reduce stress.
-  Explaining loss – depending on the young person's age and ability he/she may need additional support to understand the loss using social stories, story books, video clips (examples are provided in this guidance)
-  Adapted timetable – the young person may benefit from planned breaks on a temporary basis.
-  Modified expectations regarding academic progress – a young person who has experienced loss may also struggle with focus and attention, motivation and energy all of which could affect their presentation at school. This may not be apparent straight away.
-  Reduced homework – home life may be more chaotic or disrupted than usual so reducing pressure on completing homework temporarily can relieve a potential source of stress.
-  Peer support from a friend or an older pupil to reduce social isolation. This would need to be carefully planned, agreed in advance by all

parties and support considered for the peer supporter.

-  Young Person Focused Assessment – as with any additional support need, what the young person requires following a loss will depend on ongoing contextualised assessment of how the young person presents and close collaboration with those who know the young person best.

### **Home-School Communication**

Systems should be in place to keep in contact with family members. Discuss plans for returning to school and keep in touch about progress and supports. Grieving young people can present differently across settings. Good communication will ensure a more realistic picture of how the young person is coping is shared and planned for. Discuss with the parents/carers what the young person knows about the death so that both settings can provide consistent information and answers to the young person's questions.

### **Supporting Parents**

Parents will often seek support and reassurance from school staff in terms of how their child is managing but may also seek support for their own grief. In these situations accept that you can't fix the situation or make the person feel better but you can listen.

### **Taking Care of Yourself**










Talking to a young person about loss or the death of someone close may be one of the hardest things a teacher will ever have to do. It may produce painful emotions and memories and SMTs must ensure there are formal and informal systems in place to support staff who are providing this support to young people and families.

### **Administrative Considerations**

Ensure the names and contact details of the deceased person are removed to avoid any accidental correspondence. Special events for example, birthdays, Christmas, Mother's and Father's Day may be particularly difficult so it is important staff are made aware of the loss even many years after. Pass on information at times of transition to ensure future staff members are aware of the circumstances and can provide further supports as necessary.

Remember to practice Active Listening:

### **Do's**

-  Find a private space to talk
-  Present an open body stance and non-verbal signals to demonstrate you are listening
-  Listen in an accepting, non-judgemental way
-  Echo and reflect back what has been said
-  Validate feelings
-  Tolerate silences
-  Offer reassurances about the normality of grief reactions
-  Answer questions honestly
-  Encourage parents to talk to their young people about the death

“I’m so sorry to hear about the death of your mum”



“It must have been so hard for you”

“I can imagine what a shock it would have been”

“It sounds like you have had trouble sleeping since it happened”

“It’s normal for her to be angry. It might help if you can all talk about him when you’re ready”

### **Avoid**








-  Offering advice or solutions unless specifically asked for
-  Using comments like “I know how you are feeling” (even if you have experienced a similar loss)

## How Secondary Aged Young people Understand and Experience Death

Please also refer to the **Guidance for Primary Staff** for information pertaining to younger children.

This is a crucial stage in the development of identity when young people are developing their own ideas about who they are and what is important to them in their lives. They are more aware of their future. **Death may cause them to reflect on the meaning and purpose of life, or they may not want to reflect, and hide their feelings.** As adults our job is to let them know that **we are there if they need to talk, or that we can find someone else to help if necessary.** Although the grieving process at this age is much like adults, teenagers are still developing emotionally. Teenagers are much more aware of the finality of death and will feel the personal impact deeply. Teenagers can reflect on the longer term impact of their loss; that future milestones will not be shared with the person who has died. **Relationships with others are becoming increasingly important, and any loss can lead to feelings of anger or severe distress.** Older children may take on caring roles within the family which can remove the opportunity to grieve. A loss of confidence may result from bereavement and **it is important to support the young person to build resilience and remember the positive aspects of their life.**

### ***Key Points - Adolescents***

-  have an adult understanding of the concept of death, but do not have the experiences, coping skills or behaviour of an adult
-  may 'act out' in anger or show impulsive or reckless behaviours, such as substance misuse or fighting in school
-  may experience a wide range of emotions, but not know how to handle them or feel comfortable expressing them
-  the reality of death contradicts a teenager's view of himself or herself as invincible, and teenagers may question their faith or their understanding of the world
-  developmental issues of independence and separation from parents can interfere with the ability to receive support from adult family members
-  coping strategies may create tension with family members, as adolescents may cope by spending more time with friends or by withdrawing from the family to be alone
-  boys, particularly in teenage years, are likely to experience academic difficulties in the early months following parental death







## **Ways for Young people to Remember**

*Finding ways to remember isn't only important after a death. Any loss for example moving house, parents separating or a friend moving away can be helped by finding creative ways to remember and cherish.*

### ***Memory Book, Box or Jar***

Use a book, box or jar as a record and reminder. It could also be used more generally to highlight significant moments. The young person might choose mementos which show:

-  happy events or occasions
-  messages and memories
-  photographs
-  possessions

This record can then be used to demonstrate the role of the person had in the young person's life. This role will also be seen in a more general context of life progression as items can be added over time.

### ***Planting Trees or Plants***

Planting a tree or plant can be a good way of remembering the person who has died and provides a focal point for commemorating the life and death of the person.

### ***Be Creative – artwork, photography, crafts, baking, poetry, songs, writing***

Making something in memory of someone special or making it for that person helps us to feel connected to them and provides the bereaved person with something to treasure in the future. Everyone will find comfort in different mediums so explore which ones suit the young person best.

### ***Diary***

Putting thoughts and feelings into words can be a therapeutic way of releasing some of the pain of the loss. It can be helpful to look back on.

### ***Online Memorials***

Create an online space for people to come together to share memories, photos

and stories e.g. on Facebook or specialist sites such as Much Loved.  
<https://www.muchloved.com/>

## Suggested Resources: Secondary

<b>Lesson Plans, Ideas and Activities</b>	
<p><b><i>Supporting Young People Coping with Grief, Loss and Death</i></b></p> <p>Weymont and Rae</p> <p>Amazon ISBN 13: 9781412913126</p>	<p>A complete 12 session teaching programme designed to be delivered to whole classes or groups of students age 11-18. The aim is to enable them to understand about loss, grief and death but also to promote emotional health and literacy. Information on Loss and Grief, facilitator notes and copiable activities included.</p>
<p><b><i>Childhood Bereavement – Developing the Curriculum and Pastoral Support</i></b></p> <p>Job and Francis</p> <p>Amazon ISBN 13: 978 - 1904787143</p>	<p>Using case studies and drawing on best practice, this resource aims to help those working in schools address bereavement from a pastoral and educational perspective. It provides lesson ideas for how to implement in the curriculum.</p>
<p><b><i>A Teacher’s Handbook of Death</i></b></p> <p>Jackson and Colwell</p> <p>Amazon ISBN 13: 978 - 1843100157.</p>	<p>Offers ideas for including death and bereavement in the curriculum, factual and informative around rituals and processes associated with death and dying.</p>
<b>DVDS</b>	
<p><b><i>Grief in the Family</i></b></p> <p>Leeds Animation Workshop</p> <p><a href="https://www.leedsanimation.org.uk/films/">https://www.leedsanimation.org.uk/films/</a></p>	<p>Looks at the ways children and young people respond to grief, and what the adults around them can do to help. Offers practical advice to parents who need to learn how to find support for themselves, while helping their children to express their feelings and handle confusing emotions. Designed as a resource for those working with families and bereaved children. It raises awareness and facilitates discussion in parenting education classes, training courses or schools. It is also suitable for viewing at home by parents, carers, and children.</p>
<p><b><i>Teenage Grief</i></b></p>	<p>This animated DVD/video contains six separate episodes about young people from a wide range of backgrounds, facing different kinds of bereavement. The pack aims to help</p>

<p>Leeds Animation Workshop</p> <p><a href="https://www.leedsanimation.org.uk/films/">https://www.leedsanimation.org.uk/films/</a></p>	<p>professionals and carers understand the ways young people grieve and how best to support them. It can be used with parents and with groups to raise awareness or start a discussion. There is a free downloadable training package based on this film.</p>
<p><b><i>A death in the lives of...</i></b></p> <p>Childhood Bereavement Network</p> <p><a href="https://www.ncb.org.uk/product/194">https://www.ncb.org.uk/product/194</a></p>	<p>A group of teenagers discuss the support they needed to help them cope with bereavement. Includes a section about what was, and what was not, helpful at school. Can be used to facilitate training and discussion and is accompanied by a leaflet.</p>
<p><b><i>It Will Be Ok</i></b></p> <p>Childhood Bereavement Network</p> <p><a href="https://www.ncb.org.uk/product/220">https://www.ncb.org.uk/product/220</a></p>	<p>Young people have made this 15 minute film to help others in identifying emotions and behaviour which they may experience after a bereavement. The film aims to provide support to other bereaved children and young people by emphasising that they are not alone and that their feelings are normal. Suitable for bereaved children and young people to use in a supported environment. It is also a useful resource for the practitioners, parents and carers supporting them.</p>
<p><b>Books for use with Bereaved Children and Young People</b></p>	
<p><b><i>Finding a Way Through When Someone Close has Died</i></b></p> <p>Mood &amp; Whittaker</p> <p>Amazon</p> <p>ISBN 978-1853029202.</p>	<p>A workbook by young people who have experienced the death of someone close. They offer advice based on their own experiences. The activities encourage young people to express their feelings and responses.</p>
<p><b><i>Grief Encounter</i></b></p> <p>Shelley Gilbert</p> <p>Amazon ISBN 978-0954843403</p>	<p>A workbook to encourage conversations between adults and bereaved children. Hands on, user friendly, with many ideas to encourage communication and provide support.</p>

<b>Fiction Books</b>	
<p><b><i>A Monster Calls</i></b></p> <p>Jim Ness</p> <p>Amazon ISBN 978-1406336511</p>	<p>Book and major film about love, loss and hope. Conor has the same dream every night, ever since his mother first fell ill, ever since she started the treatments that don't quite seem to be working. But tonight is different. Tonight, when he wakes, there's a visitor at his window. It's ancient, elemental, a force of nature. And it wants the most dangerous thing of all from Conor. It wants the truth. Tale of mischief, healing and above all, the courage it takes to survive.</p>
<p><b><i>Flamingo Dream</i></b></p> <p>Donna Jo Napoli</p> <p>Amazon ISBN 13: 978-0688167967</p>	<p>In this bright and colourful book, a young boy tells the story of his Dad who is seriously ill and dies soon after a trip to Florida to see the place where he grew up. A sensitive but honest book which emphasises the importance of memories.</p>
<p><b><i>The Lost Boys Appreciation Society</i></b></p> <p>Alan Gibbons</p> <p>Amazon ISBN 13:978-3425048512</p>	<p>Teenage life is difficult enough for Gary and John, but when their Mum dies in a car accident, things get steadily worse. John struggles to keep the peace as Gary goes off the rails. With exams looming and his Dad going out on dates, things become unbearable for John. A gripping book exploring relationships and how different people react to life events.</p>
<p><b><i>Before I Die</i></b></p> <p>Jenny Downham</p> <p>Amazon ISBN 13:978-1849920452</p>	<p>With only months left to live, 16-yearold Tessa makes a list of things she must experience: sex, petty crime, fame, drugs and true love. Downham's wrenching work features a girl desperate for a few thrilling moments before leukaemia takes her away.</p>
<p><b><i>Two Weeks with the Queen</i></b></p> <p>Morris Gleitzman</p> <p>Amazon ISBN 13:978-0141303000.</p>	<p>Twelve-year-old Colin, an Australian boy, is sent to stay with relatives in England when his brother becomes ill with cancer. He is determined to find a way of curing his brother, which leads him into all sorts of adventures including trying to visit the Queen! Colin finds a friend in an older man named Ted who helps him express his feelings and understand what he has to do.</p>

<p><b><i>Vicky Angel</i></b></p> <p>Jacqueline Wilson</p> <p>Amazon ISBN 13:978-0440865896.</p>	<p>When Jade's best friend Vicky is run over by a car and dies in hospital everyone at home and school starts treating her differently. 'Vicky Angel' then starts following Jade around, distracting her and getting her into trouble. This moving but amusing story illustrates how hard it is to carry on with everyday life after a tragic accident.</p>
<p><b><i>Ostrich Boys</i></b></p> <p>Keith Gray</p> <p>Amazon ISBN 13: 9780099456575.</p>	<p>3 friends are about to embark on a remarkable journey. Stealing the urn containing the ashes of their best friend Ross, they set out from Cleethorpes on the east coast to travel the 261 miles to the tiny hamlet of Ross in Dumfries and Galloway. After a depressing and dispiriting funeral they feel taking Ross to Ross will be a fitting memorial for a 15 year-old boy who changed all their lives through his friendship.</p>
<p><b><i>Ways to Live Forever</i></b></p> <p>Sally Nichols</p> <p>Amazon ISBN 13: 978-1407105154.</p>	<p>If I grow up," 11-year-old Sam informs readers, "I'm going to be a scientist." He says "if" because he has acute lymphoblastic leukaemia and knows he probably won't. With the encouragement of his tutor, he starts to write a bit about himself, then more, until he is using his writing to sort out his death.</p>

## **Craig's Story - Example of Good Practice in an East Renfrewshire Secondary School**

The following illustrates the [response of a school to a family dealing with the news and later death of a father with a life limiting illness](#). It highlights some of the stages and issues that may prove helpful in managing the impact of the death on your community or school setting.

### ***Immediately following the news of the illness***

- We took the initial lead from the parent who called in. They were understandably struggling with their own emotions but wished to maintain a consistent approach to their child's education. The parent expressed concerns over their child who was already anxious about their school workload. They wished staff to be informed of the family situation so that allowances could be made when things became harder for the family.
- Pupil support passed on the information to relevant teachers making them aware that if they have any concerns or see any changes to allow the pupil out of class or contact pupil support.
- The relevant DHT was also informed of the situation.
- Pupil Support met with the pupil and offered them support and gained a sense of how this news might impact on their emotional wellbeing and academic progress. The pupil was reassured that their mental health and welfare were the main concern and priority.

### ***Continued support***

- Pupil support continues to liaise with the family on a regular basis and met with the pupil regularly. The pupil had a couple of occasions where they felt overwhelmed with the demands of the year.
- Attendance became affected due to low mood.
- The pupil was discussed at the Joint Support Team and a subsequent referral to the Youth Counselling Service was made.
- A catch up tutorial period within the Support for Learning department was put into place to support the pupil following absences – it was agreed to retain as much subject commitment as possible and this time will come from core PE and PSE. This is a reviewed measure based upon need.

### ***Immediately following the news of the death***

- Information was taken by the Pupil Support Teacher of the funeral arrangements and condolences given.

- Teachers were informed of death and time expectations of absence.
- Pupil support teacher and DHT attended funeral to represent school.
- Pupil support shared information with other Pupil Support staff in case other pupils were affected– either as friends of the bereaved or because they too have suffered a recent bereavement.

### ***Medium Term – On the pupil's return to school***

- A meeting was organised with DHT, parent or carer, pupil and pupil support staff to ensure safe and appropriate return to school and to plan for the pupil's additional support needs.
- Staff were informed of the pupil's return to school and that they would have a card allowing them to leave class if required.
- Catch up tutorials were arranged and monitored in collaboration with the pupil.
- The pupil's timetable was reduced from 8 Nat 5's to 7 and extra time was given to other qualification subjects.
- The pupil's pupil support teacher continues to be a point of contact and support for the family and pupil.