

Leytonstone School

LOSS AND BEREAVEMENT



Approved by:

Date: April 2020

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Policy for use within School following the Covid 19 Pandemic:

BEREAVEMENT & LOSS RESPONSE

April 2020

This summary provides an overview of advice the school will adhere to when a bereavement of a child or adult has occurred. It includes signposts or references to more detailed and comprehensive advice and guidance.

Context

A Staged Response

Grief and Mourning In Children Developmental

Cognitive Stages of Mourning

Information sharing pathway following death of headteacher

Information sharing pathway following death of staff member

Information sharing pathway following death of child/young person

Information sharing pathway following death of close family member of child/young person

Information sharing pathway following death of child/young person in school

Information sharing pathway following major incident

Guidelines for breaking news about a death to staff and Governors

Guidelines for breaking news of the death to children/young people

Things to consider in the days following the news of the death

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- Template of letter informing parents of death of member of staff
- Template of letter informing parents of death of child or young person

Context

In the event of a sudden or unexpected bereavement school staff may feel considerable anxiety about knowing how to best respond. This is understandable in a culture where death is seldom openly discussed.

Every year 20,000 children under the age of 16 years will be bereaved of a parent and many more will experience the death of someone else special in their life. This figure is likely to double in the wake of the current pandemic.

In addition to these individual pupils, schools may also experience the death of a child at the school or a staff member.

It is almost inevitable therefore, that at some time all schools will have to deal with a death that affects the school community.

As children spend a significant amount of their time at school, teachers and staff members will be the primary source of care and support. Bereaved children may see school as a safe haven away from the turmoil of emotions at home and may look to trusted staff members for help.



Death is something that most people choose not to think about so when faced with it we often find ourselves ill prepared.

The purpose of this Bereavement Policy is to help everyone involved at a time when there may be shock, upset and confusion, ensuring that there is as little disruption as possible, effective communication takes place and each member of the school community is supported to help them through a very difficult time.

A Staged Response

The response of the school to a bereavement could be thought of in terms of stages over time.

Short term

- Aim to establish the facts – to avoid the ‘rumour mill’ filling any information gap
- Find out, if possible how the family would like the information to be managed by the school
- Make sure all staff have the same version of event/information
- Decide whether to inform children through assemblies, class groups etc
- The child’s class and friendship group are likely to require a more personalised response
- Are there siblings or extended family at school – what is their understanding of the situations?
- Are there any ‘special circumstances’ that are significant?
- Cultural/religious dimensions
- Are there any practical implications for the day to day running of the school?

Medium term

- How are the emotional needs of staff and children to be monitored? – including behaviour change
- What support – discussion, listening, answering questions – is available, and how is it ‘signposted’?
- Do all staff have a consistent set of responses that are in line with the policy of the school?
- How do children/staff/school want to celebrate the deceased’s life? Is this consistent with the family’s wishes?

Longer term

- Curriculum approaches to consider mortality and bereavement
- Be aware of anniversaries, particularly for siblings or close friends

Grief and Mourning in Children

Worden (1991) talks about the 4 tasks of mourning that children need to complete (in the context of the stage of their cognitive development). These include:

Task 1 To accept the reality of the loss

Task 2 To experience the pain or emotional aspects of the loss

Task 3 To adjust to the environment from which the deceased is missing

Task 4 To relocate the dead person within one’s life and find ways to ‘memorialise’ the person

These tasks are not sequential and may be undertaken simultaneously at times. As they are ‘process’ tasks they may take months and years to accomplish rather than days and weeks.

Developmental Cognitive Stages of Mourning in Secondary School Age ranges:

Preadolescent (Age 11–13)	<p>Attempting to understand the biological and emotional processes associated with loss and death</p> <p>Formal operational problem solving. Abstract thinking. Integration of one's own personality.</p> <p>Concept of Death A more "adult" approach. Ability to abstract. Beginning to conceptualize death. Work at making sense of teachings.</p> <p>Grief Response Extreme sadness. Denial. Regression. More often willing to talk to people outside of family and peer support. Risk taking. Traditional mourning.</p> <p>Signs of Distress Depression. Anger often towards parents. Suicidal thoughts. Non-compliance. Rejection of former teaching. Role confusion. Acting out.</p> <p>Possible Interventions Encourage verbalization. Allow for choices. Encourage self motivation. Listen. Be available. Do not attempt to take grief away.</p>
Adolescent (Age 13–15)	<p>Attempting to integrate loss into emotional life, and philosophical frameworks</p> <p>As above</p>
Adolescent (Age 15–18)	<p>Increasing independence in transition to adulthood may distance adolescents from their family support network</p> <p>As above</p>

The Grieving Process

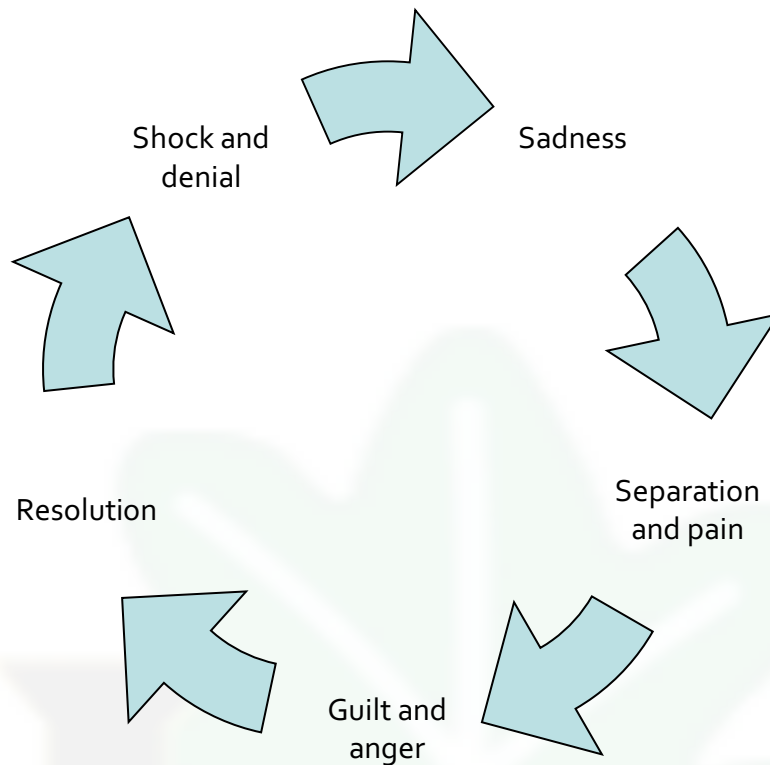
Morgan (1985) has proposed a 3-phase model for children:

Protest - Children refuse to accept that the person is dead and for some children this involves angry attempts to get them back.

Despair - Children experience hurt, despair and disorganisation as they begin to accept the fact that the person has gone.

Adjustment - Children come to terms with the loss and begin to reorganise their lives without the deceased.

It is not a linear process and the children move between the stages. It can be described as jumping in/out of the puddles of grief.



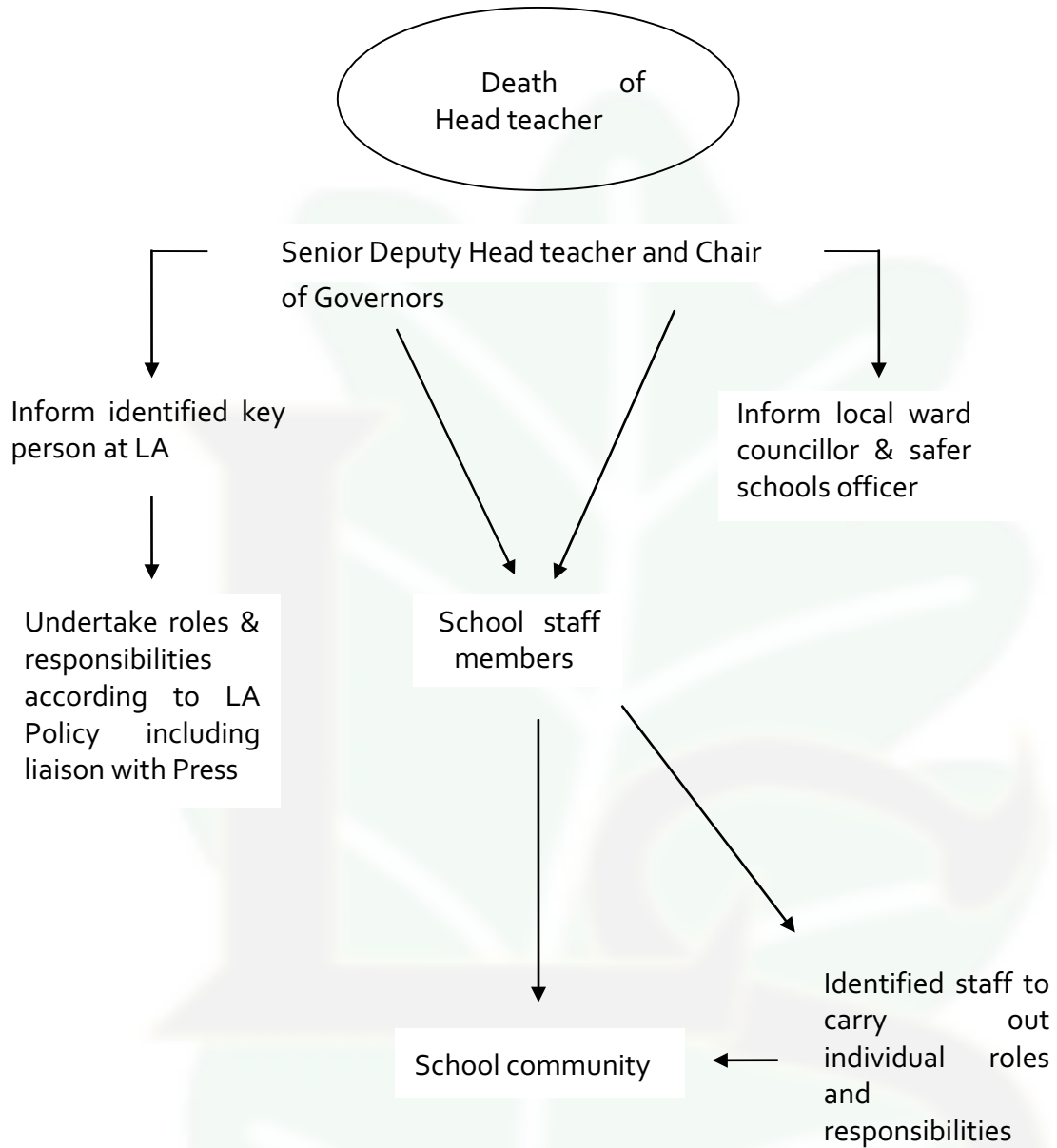
Bereaved children have to accomplish different tasks during the grieving process.

- Early tasks of understanding that someone has died and the implications of this.
- Middle tasks of accepting the reality of the loss and experiencing the pain of grief.
- Late tasks or reorganising the child's sense of identity, adjusting to a new environment, investing in new relationships.

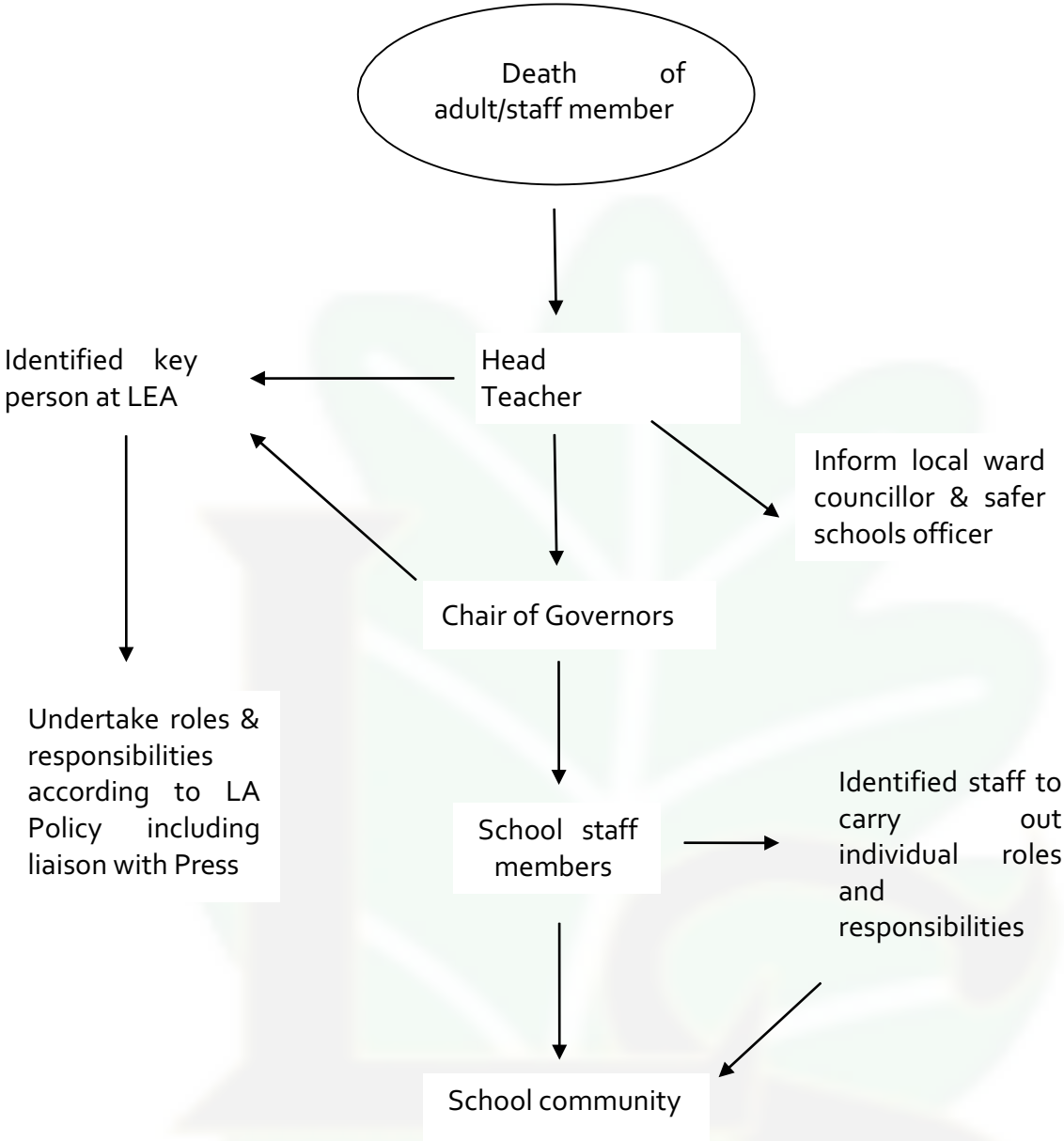
Children's grief is different from that of adults:

- Adults have learnt that they can survive without the presence of another person.
- Children have less experience and cognitive ability to help them make sense of the loss.
- Children are likely to have less ability than adults to verbalise their feelings. They may act out rather than talk.
- Children have limited capacity to tolerate emotional pain.
- Children's response to grief is influenced by the adults around them.
- Children's grief is cyclical, as they go through each new stage in their life, they may work through the loss again.
- Children's grief is not continuously evident. They tend to experience emotions very intensely for a short time and return to more normal behaviour quite quickly.

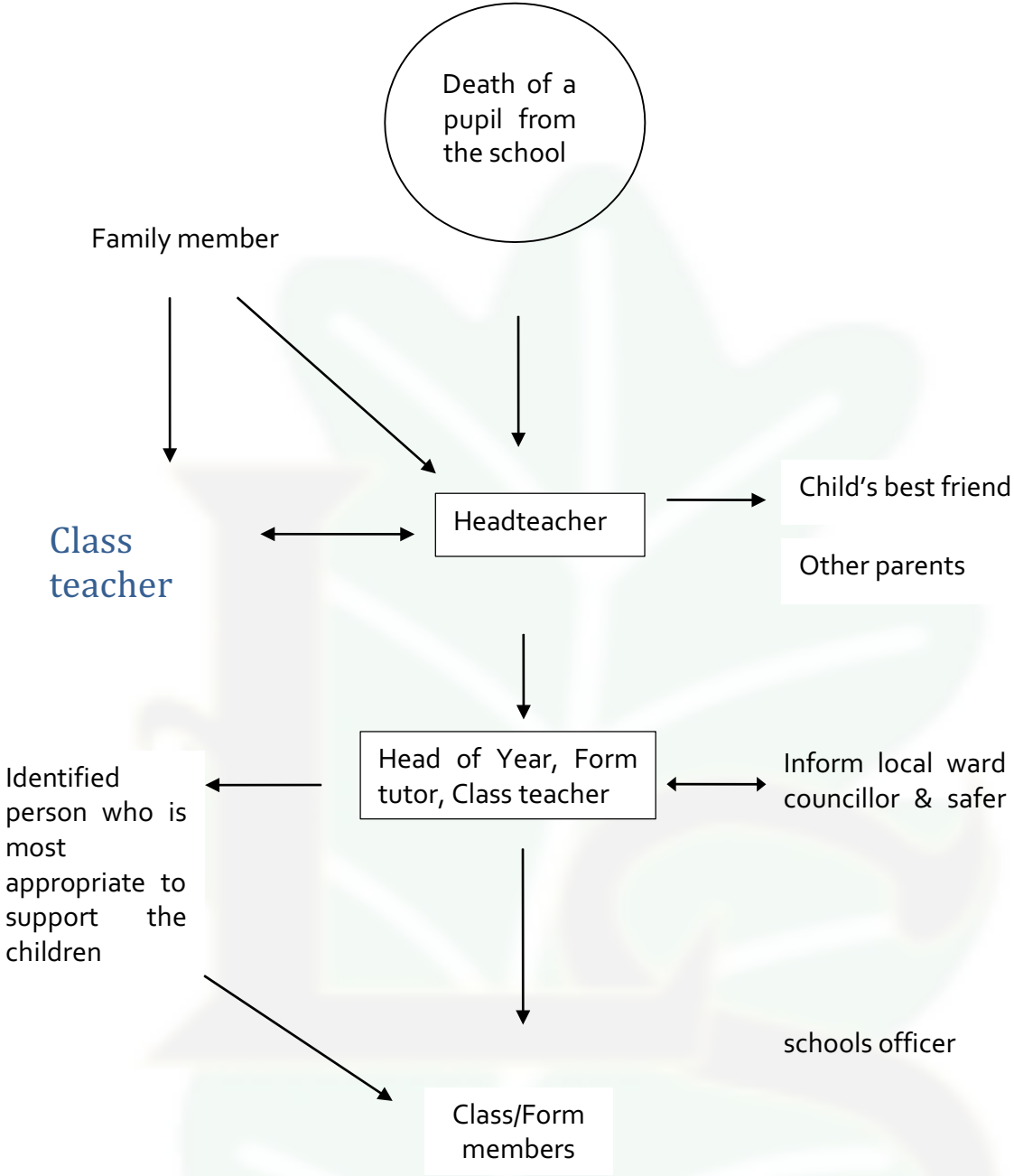
Information Sharing Pathway
following death of Head
teacher



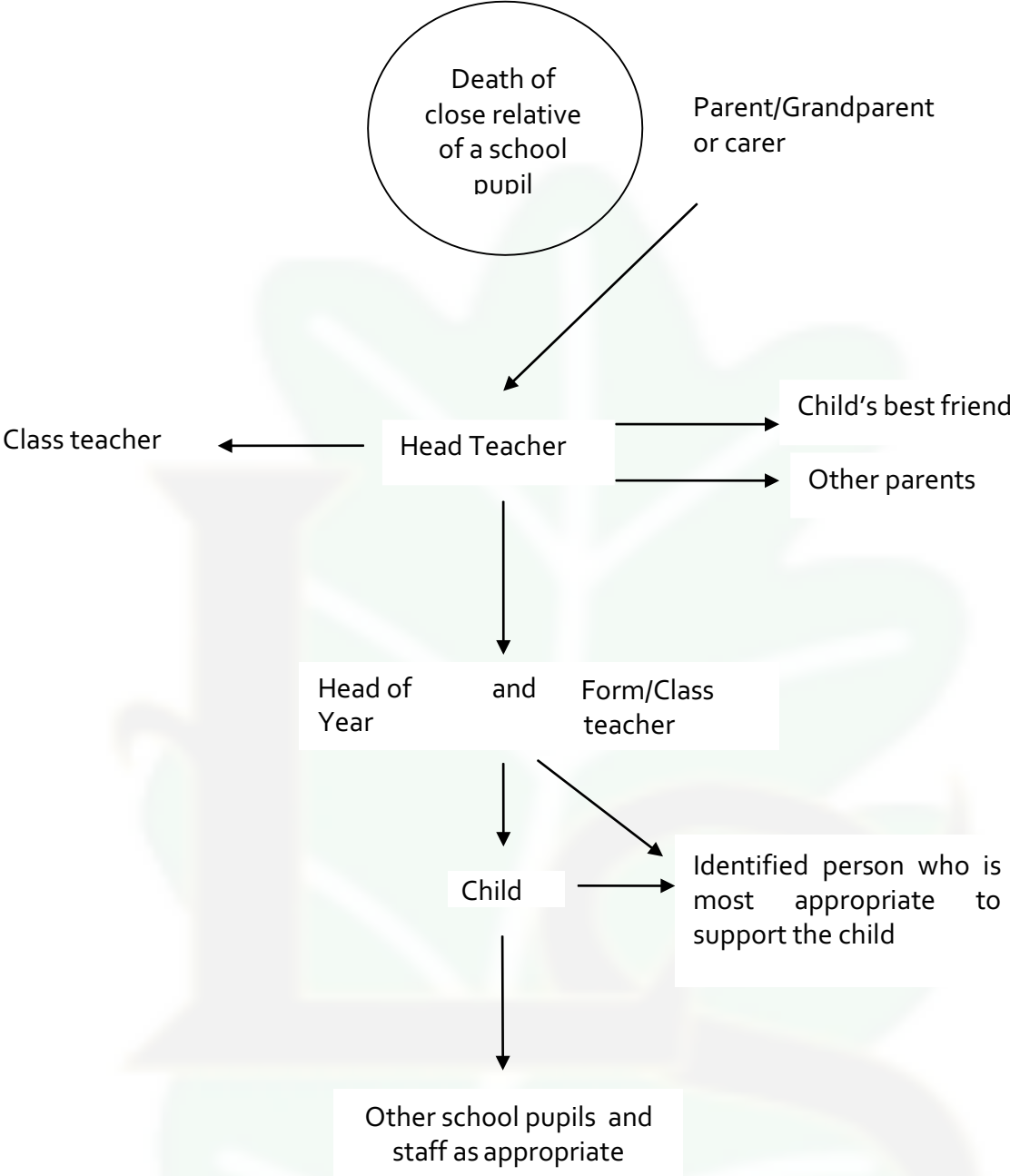
Information Sharing Pathway following death of a staff member



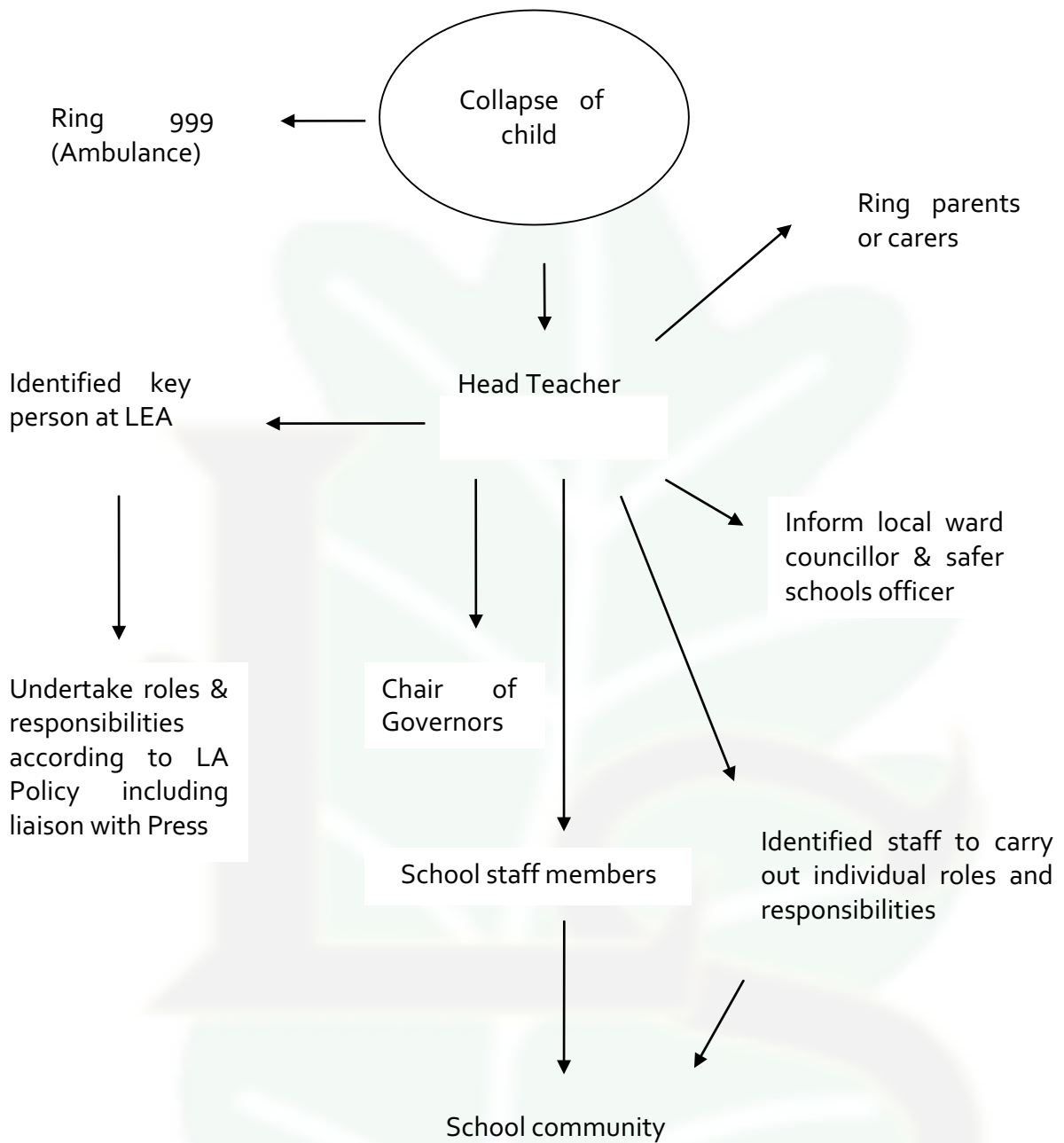
Information Sharing Pathway following death of pupil



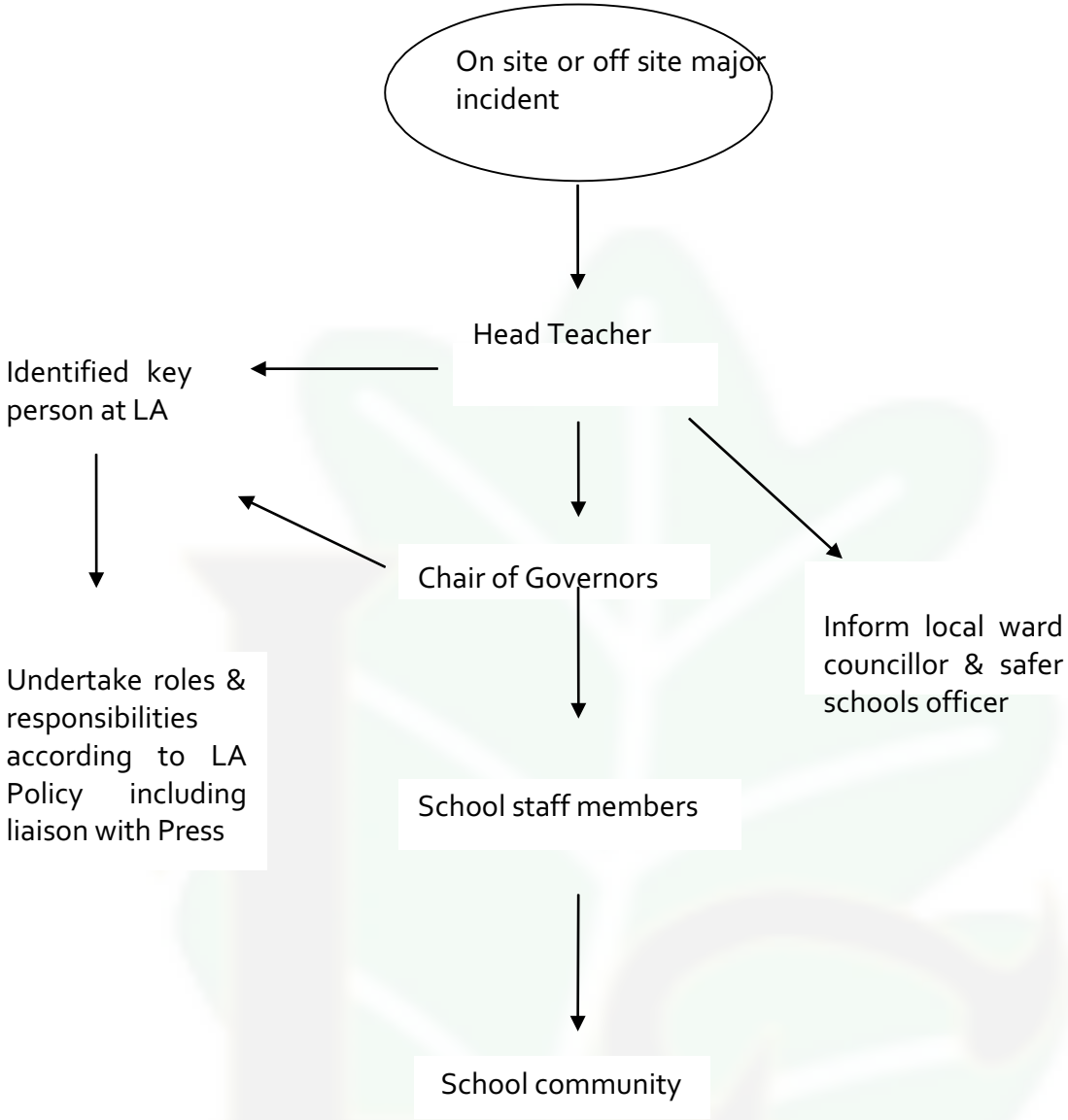
Information Sharing Pathway following death of close family member of child or young person



Information Sharing Pathway following death of child in school



Information Sharing Pathway following major incidents



Guidelines for breaking news about a death to staff and Governors

- Arrange a staff meeting which should take place as soon as possible.
- Impart factual information. Never make assumptions or repeat what has been said by rumour.
- Give news sensitively and empathetically, being aware that people may react in different ways.
- Be aware of the relationships staff may have had with the person who has died.
- Ensure that there is someone responsible for telling people who are unable to attend the staff meeting i.e. part time staff, peripatetic staff, lunch time supervisors. Consider the best way of imparting the information to those absent e.g. by doing home visit, by telephone, text or e-mail etc.
- Identify individual members of staff who feel able to:
 - a) support members of staff
 - b) support groups of children

The most appropriate person to support the children should be well known to them and trusted.

- Identify a member of staff who will liaise with the individual's family, to deal with staff condolences and any funeral arrangements (if necessary).
- Identify an appropriate member of staff who will take 'phone calls and/or direct them as appropriate. Try to establish a "protected" telephone line to ensure free flow of accurate information.

Telephone line providers may provide an additional line if the situation requires one.

- Identify a member of staff who will provide a newsletter for parents (see examples of letter templates) which should be sent the same day.
- Arrange a staff meeting at the end of the day to ensure staff are coping with the situation.
- Identify any unresolved problems or ongoing issues.
- Ensure that those staff who live alone have contact numbers of friends in case of need.
- Identify sources of advice and support to access for help in coming to terms with the bereavement (see bereavement toolkit).

Guidelines for breaking news of the death to the children/young people and possible ways in to discussing death due to the Coronavirus Pandemic

- Inform the children/young people as soon as possible about the death.
- Where possible, the pupils should be informed in small groups i.e. class or tutor groups.

Identify those children who had a long term and/or close relationship with the person who has died so they can be told separately.

If appropriate, a special assembly could be held at a later time in the day to remember the person who has died.

- Allow the children/young people to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.
- Allow the children/young people to verbalise their feelings.
- Allow the children/young people to discuss the situation and share their experiences of death.
- Be honest about your own feelings and talk about your relationship with the person.
- Avoid using euphemisms.
- Those children/young people who have had more involvement with the person should be given the opportunity to share their feelings and experiences either within the group or on a one-to-one situation.
- Ensure the children/young people understand that the death is nothing to do with anything they have said or done. It is in **no** way their fault.
- Reassure them that not all people who are ill or have had an accident will die and that many people get better.
- Put an appropriate time limit on the discussion. It is preferable to resume normal school activities as soon as possible thus ensuring minimal disruption within the school.
- Conclude the discussion with a special poem or quote to remember the person who has died and their family.
- Be available for any child/young person who needs additional help and support.

Things to consider in the days following the news of the death

It is important to consider any cultural or religious implications and seek advice if necessary.

- Ensure nominated staff with responsibilities for supporting staff and children, are available to do so.

It may be necessary temporarily to provide staff cover for their normal activities.

- Identify an allocated quiet place where children, young people and staff can go if necessary. (Potentially the old ER room in the inclusion department).

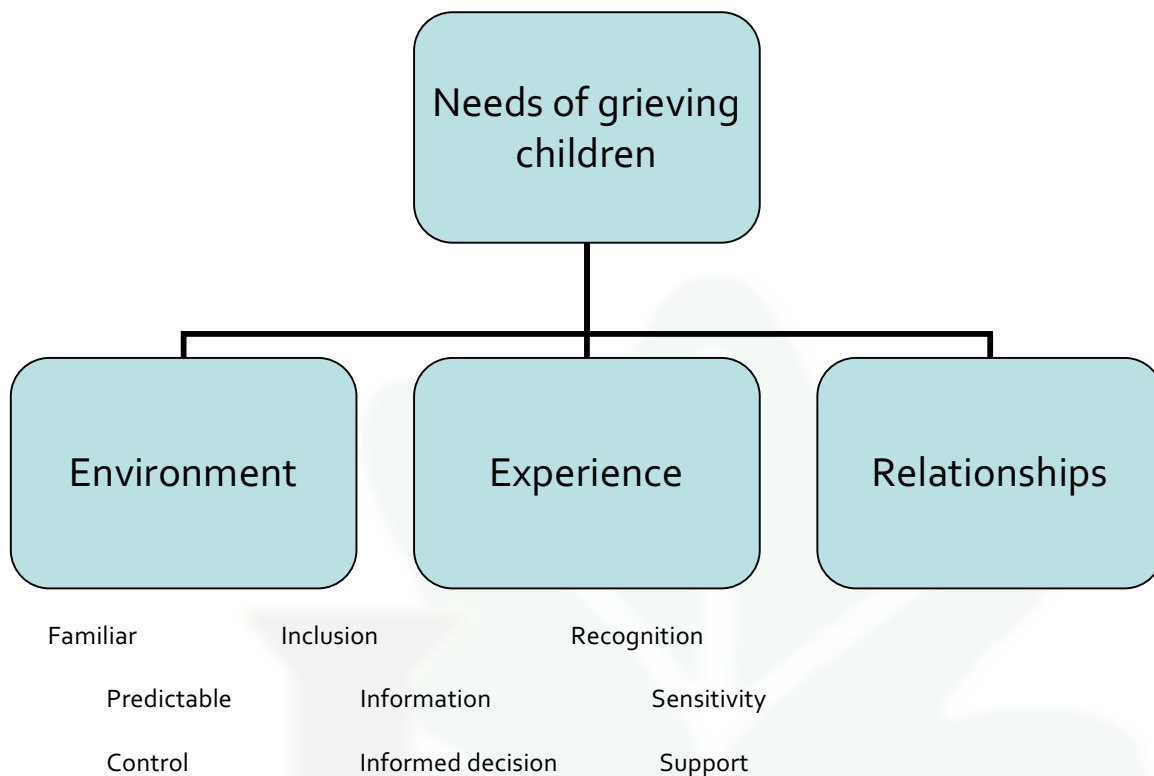
It is preferable for there to be minimum disruption to the timetable but some flexibility may be required.

- Try to engender an awareness of when people need help and support, particularly those who worked closely with the person who has died and secretaries/administrative staff who are taking telephone calls, dealing with parents/ families etc.
- Through the nominated staff member who has responsibilities for liaising with the individual's family, ascertain their wishes about the school's involvement in the funeral, if any.

Consider practical issues like:-

- Putting an obituary in the paper, sending flowers to the home or to the funeral, making a collection etc.
- Who will attend the funeral, making a collection etc.
- Cover for any staff who may be going to the funeral.
- Transport to and from the funeral.
- Informing the parents of those pupils who will be involved.
- Possible closure of the school. If this is the case remember to tell lunchtime supervisors, caretaker etc in advance.

Appendix 1 Supporting Bereaved Children in school – Information for Staff



Bereaved children do not always react in the same way so it is important to take cues from the child's behaviour about the grief tasks they are working on.

- Watch for changes in the child's behaviour, especially during the first weeks and handle the child with patience.
- Use straightforward words like "dead" and "dying". Do not say someone has "gone to sleep" or "we lost Gran" because they confuse bereavement with everyday occurrences. Don't use platitudes such as "you'll soon get over it".
- Make it clear that the body of the person is no longer working, they don't need to eat, they feel no pain, they cannot move.
- Time out cards - the child is given permission to leave class for a short time when beginning to feel out of control or to get some personal space. It is essential that the child does not wander around the school but goes to a specific person/space.
- Pocket comforter - A pupil can discreetly carry a soft piece of fabric, pebble. Holding onto something solid can help a pupil remain grounded and in control if upset.
- Social stories - Describe a situation in terms of common responses.
- Tree of support - Child maps out their social network on a tree.
- Worry dolls - Child tells their worries to a worry doll and sleeps with it under their pillow (specific dolls can be purchased).
- Worry eaters - Child writes down their worry and the doll eats it (specific dolls can be purchased).

- Find time to listen if the child wants to talk. Be sensitive to what the child says, accept the child's feelings. Don't dismiss them. Be prepared for questions. Answer questions honestly. Don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer. Help the child to express their emotions and accept that his/her feelings are normal. Let the child know that is ok to cry/have fun /laugh.
- Try to keep in touch with child's family. This will help the child to feel safe.
- Maintain school routines for the child and try not to single them out for special privileges or overcompensate. Aim to keep the child with their peer group as much as possible.
- Provide support during lessons if the child has difficulty in concentrating.
- Ensure that other children in the class know about the child's bereavement but don't dwell on it.
- Have books about serious illness/death and loss available for the child to read/be read to (and to other children).
- Use different areas of the curriculum to teach that loss and death are part of life e.g. death of current people in the news or historical figures.
- Be aware of special days or occasions which may be difficult e.g. Mother's day/Father's day.
- Be aware of children who may need specialist help after some months or a year.

Reactions Shown by Children.

- Anxiety
- Panic
- Denial
- Guilt, self-reproach, shame
- Sadness and longing
- Vivid memories of the deceased
- Regression (e.g. bedwetting)
- Sleeping difficulties
- Lack of appetite
- Physical complaints e.g. headaches/stomach aches
- Increased illness
- Separation difficulties
- Withdrawal
- Discipline problems, including anger and acting out
- Problems with learning often related to difficulties in concentratin

Appendix 2: Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a member of staff

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher/form tutor/head of year had the sad task of informing the children of the tragic death of <Name> who has been a teacher at this school for a number of years.

Our thoughts are with <Name>'s family at this time and in an effort to try to respond to his/her death in a positive way, all the children have been informed.

When someone dies it is normal for family and friends to experience many different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion, and children are likely to ask questions about the death that need to be answered honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.

The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school but if there is anything else you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we will be more than happy to help you.

Yours sincerely

<Name> Head Teacher

Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a pupil

Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the child's parents. The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the parents and school.

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher/form tutor/had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>.

<Name> died from an illness called cancer. As you may be aware, many children who have cancer get better but sadly <Name> had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday.

He/She was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try to answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we would be more than happy to help you.

We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating <Name's> life.

Yours sincerely

<Name> Head Teacher

REFERENCES AND READING RESOURCES LIST

Reading for Adults

Good Grief – Exploring feelings, loss and death with U11's (separate book for over 11's) Barbara Ward & Associates.

Excellent school resource. Written for teachers – contains information, activities and ideas to help children explore issues around separation, loss and death. Photocopiable material.

Helping Children Cope with Grief Rosemary Wells

Very helpful and easy to read. Practical advice and suggestions, real life examples of children's reactions to bereavement. Particularly suitable for adults working with children.

Grief in Children – a handbook for adults Atle Dyregov

Useful and readable. Explains how children understand and react to death. Contains specific information about how to handle death in school and school's response to the needs of bereaved children.

Death and Loss – compassionate approaches in the classroom Oliver Leaman

For teachers involved in the pastoral care of pupils. Includes ideas about curriculum content within PHSE

Giving Sorrow Words (Video and Book) Killick & Lindeman

Useful training package designed for school staff to help them deal with the effects of bereavement. Offers practical advice and demonstrates effective techniques for working with children and young people (Available via www.luckyduck.co.uk)

Wise before the Event - William Yule & Anne Gold

Describes some of the ways crises can affect schools, and suggests ways that schools can lessen the physical and emotional effects of disasters. Very readable and useful

The Social Curriculum – Death and Bereavement – Guidance for Schools Essex County Council

Very useful and readable booklet detailing all aspects of managing death and bereavement in schools. (Available via Essex County Council Learning Services 01245 431021)

The Death Of A Member Of Staff: Supporting Bereaved Pupils In Schools – Seesaw.org.uk – Oxfordshire County Council

Loss Change and Grief – An Educational Perspective Erica Brown

Useful book exploring the experiences of bereavement within an educational setting including suggestions about supporting children with learning difficulties.

Reading for Teenagers

Vicky Angel - Jacqueline Wilson

Even after she dies Vicky makes her presence felt through her close friend Jade.

The Charlie Barber Treatment - Carole Lloyd

When Simon's mum dies he begins to find life difficult. Through his friendship with Charlie he re-builds his life and relationships.

When a friend dies - Marilyn E. Gootman

Practical suggestions about what can help and full of quotes from bereaved adolescents

When Parents Die - Rebecca Abrams

Written for older teenagers/adults. Looks at issues surrounding bereavement. Autobiographical.

Straight talk about death for teenagers - Earl A. Grollman

Easy to read, concise and informative about what feelings and issues might arise for adolescents.

Websites

www.winstonswish.org.uk – information for schools, downloadable lesson plans, message board for young people, booklists, general information about grief and bereavement

www.teachers.tv – School Matters – Coping with bereavement – video about two schools managing a death

www.childbereavement.org.uk – information for schools, general information about grief and bereavement

www.rd4u.org.uk - designed by young people to help other young people through bereavement (Cruse)

www.seesaw.org.uk - Grief Support For The Young In Oxfordshire Tel: 01865 744 768

Book List

Suggested Books for Children and Adolescents by Age Group

Compiled by Edie Stark, Educator and Counsellor, Miami, Florida

Pre-teens – Ages 9-12

Cleaver, Vera and Bill. Grover. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1969
Cohen, Barbara. Thank You, Jackie Robinson. Lothrop Press, 1974
Moody, Anne. Mr. Death: Four Stories. New York: Harper & Row, 1975
Pringle, Laurence. Death Is Natural. New York: Four Winds Press, 1977
Smith, Doris B. A Taste of Blackberries. New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1976
White, E.B. Charlotte's Web. New York: Harper & Row, 1982

Junior High School Level – Ages 12-14

Armstrong, William H. Sunder. New York: Harper & Row, 1972
Erdman, Lola G. A Bluebird Will Do. Dodd, 1973
Frank Anne. The Diary Of A Young Girl. New York: Doubleday, 1952
Lund, Doris. Eric. New York: Dell, 1974
Marxhausen, Joanne. If I Should Die – If I Should Live. Concordia, 1975

High School Level – Ages 14-17

Armothy, Christie. I am fifteen And I Don't Want To Die. New York: School Book Service, 1974
Buck, Pearl S. The Good Earth. New York: John Day Company, 1984



Crane, Stephen. Red Badge Of courage. New York: Random House, 1951 Craven, Margaret. I Heard The Owl Call My Name. New York: Doubleday, 1973
Dooley, Thomas A. Doctor Tom Dooley, My Story. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Company, 1960 Johnson, Margaret. Eighteen – No Time To Waste. Zondervan Press, 1971
Klein, Stanley. The Final Mystery. New York: Doubleday, 1974 Rhodin, Eric. The Good Greenwood. Westminster Press, 1971
Rosenthal, Ted. How Could I Not Be Among You? New York: Avon Books, 1973
Service, Robert. The Shooting Of Dan McGrew And The Cremation Of Sam McGee. Young Scott Books, 1969
Stolz, Mary. The Edge Of Next Year. New York: Harper & Row, 1974

Suggested Books for Adults and Parents

Bernstein, Joanne E. Books To Help Children Cope With Separation And Loss. New York: R. r. Bowker, 1977
Davidson, Glen W. Death: What do You Say To A Child? Springfield, Illinois: Order of The Golden Rule, 1979
Gordon, Audrey and Klass, Dennis. They Need To Know: How to Teach Children About Death. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1979
Grollman, Earl. Explaining Death to Children. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970
. Talking About Death: A Dialogue Between Parent And Child. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970 Jackson, Edgar. Telling A Child About Death. New York: Channel Press, 1968
LeShan, Eda. Learning To Say Goodbye: When A Parent Dies. New York: MacMillan, 1976 Stillman, Peter. Answers To A Child's Questions About Death. Stamford, New York: Guideline Publications, 1979
Vogel, Linda J. Helping A Child Understand Death. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975

Suggested Books for Educators and Counsellors

Anthony, Sylvia. The Discovery Of Death In Childhood And After. New York: Basic Books, 1972
Bluebond-Langner J. The Private Worlds Of Dying Children. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978
Erickson, Eric. Childhood And Society. 2nd Edition. New York: W. W. Norton, 1963
Kastenbaum, Robert. "Death And Development Through The Lifespan", in H. Feifel, New Meanings Of Death. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977
"Intimations Of Mortality: In Children's Hour", Death, Society And Human Experience. St. Louis: C. V. Mosby Company, 1977, pp 114-134
Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth. Questions And Answers On Death And Dying. New York: Collier Books, 1974 Mauer, Ada. "The Child's Knowledge Of Non-Existence". Journal Of Existential Psychiatry, 1961, Vol. 2, pp. 193-212
Nagy, Maria. "The Child's View Of Death", in H. Feifel: The Meaning Of Death. New York: McGraw- Hill, 1959, pp. 79-98
Rudolph, Marguerita. Should The