

CHUMS Bereavement Service



Information for School Staff

Has a pupil in your class
been bereaved?

Do you feel anxious and not
sure what to say?

How can you help?



Mental Health and Emotional
Wellbeing Service



On Hearing the News

These are some things you may consider doing which children and young people have told us they find comforting:

- Send a card.
- Consider attending the funeral. Many children appreciate this.
- Visit the family at home. If you feel anxious or scared this is normal (imagine what the pupil is feeling). Take a colleague with you for support.
- Ask the pupil what they wish the class to be told and how they want to be treated when they come back to school.
- Discuss this with the parents/carers.

Returning to School

- Ensure all those who need to know, including classmates, have accurate information based on the family's wishes.
- It can be helpful to use a "time out" card so that the pupil can leave the room, perhaps with a named person, if they feel overwhelmed.
- It is important that pupils have their grief acknowledged and that they have someone in school with whom they feel safe to talk. Plan this with the staff and bereaved pupil. This is so important as other adults in the pupil's life may be distracted by their own grief.
- Remember classmates and friends may also be affected by the death and they may also need some support. Younger children may worry that someone they care for may die too. Do not dismiss this, it can cause real anxiety. Circle time can be a helpful space to share.

How Children may Exhibit their Grief

Some children who have experienced the death of someone close may struggle when they come back to school for some time, others may not appear to be affected however this does not mean they are not grieving.

These are just a few of the things you may notice:

- Lack of concentration
- Mood swings
- Angry outbursts
- Crying
- Withdrawal
- Tiredness
- Low self-esteem
- Lack of confidence
- Loss/increase in appetite
- Increased risk of being bullied, or becoming a bully
- School refusal
- Self-harm
- Substance misuse

All children and young people are individuals and may express their grief in different ways. Some may be very challenging and angry; others may be very focussed on their work. Some may not want to acknowledge their grief in school, looking for normality, not wanting to be treated differently; others may require a lot of emotional support. Some may show their grief immediately, others not for months, even years. Grief is an ongoing process which children may need to revisit as they grow older.

What is Helpful?

Don't be anxious about initiating a conversation, it shows that you care. Remember, just because a pupil may not outwardly show their grief, this does not mean they are not grieving. Knowing that staff are aware and are supportive can make all the difference.

It can be reassuring for a pupil to be told that what they are feeling is normal – this is how it is when someone close to you dies. It can be helpful to suggest that over time it will get less painful, not that they will ever forget their special person but that they will learn to adjust to living in a different way.

If a pupil's behaviour changes, and especially if they are disruptive, please try to understand that these reactions may be due to their grief and that they may need help. Maintaining normal routine and boundaries can help a pupil to feel safe and secure, however this needs to be a balance alongside an understanding of how bereavement is affecting them. Disciplining the child may not be appropriate, although boundaries must be maintained. Let them know that their behaviour is unacceptable even though you understand why they are behaving badly.

Schools that can show an understanding of bereaved pupils needs make such a difference. Pupils have told us how much it means to them when school staff are sensitive to their needs. It is important to find the balance between overwhelming the pupil with sympathy and being too afraid to say anything in case we upset them. Communication is important, so that the support offered is consistent throughout the school.

Other Things to Consider

- Special days such as anniversaries, birthdays, Mother's and Father's Day etc may be especially difficult. Don't be afraid to ask the pupil how they would like to manage these days.
- Please note that some pupils may have additional sensitivity to certain curriculum topics.
- Some bereaved pupils may fall behind with coursework or revision for exams. Do they need extra support? Who can provide this? Should you inform the exam board?
- Increases in school absence. This can be for many reasons, liaise and check this out with the family. It may be helpful to suggest they contact **CHUMS** on **01525 863924** as they may benefit from additional bereavement advice and support.

Supporting Ourselves

It can be overwhelming for us as we support a bereaved child but remember you cannot take their grief away. It is sad and very hard, but it will be easier for them with your support than without.

Be sure to look after yourself. You can do this by:

- Finding a colleague to talk with.
- Calling **CHUMS** for support and advice.
- Keeping it in perspective with your own life. It does not help the pupil if you allow yourself to be overwhelmed by their sadness.
- Pampering yourself when stressed.
- Remembering that if you are recently bereaved you might not be the right person to support the pupil. Ask for help.
- Realising that not all of us can do this work. If you can't, find someone else who can. Work as a team.
- Please call **CHUMS** if you think we can help you or the child.
- Contact **CHUMS** for advice and support

CHUMS Service

CHUMS offers support and advice to bereaved families. We also offer individual sessions to bereaved children and young people. We facilitate workshop groups bringing bereaved children and young people, along with their parents and carers, together. This helps them to feel less isolated and alone and helps to normalise their experience.

Children tell us that CHUMS help:

- Making them feel better inside
- Talking with others who have been through a similar experience
- Having fun
- Understanding their feelings
- Feeling less isolated and alone
- Sharing coping strategies

Useful Websites

www.winstonswish.org

www.childbereavementuk.org

Please visit www.chums.uk.com/bereavement-service for useful resources.

Training

CHUMS offers Loss and Grief Awareness Training days and 2-hour Twilight sessions – Introduction to Children's Loss and Grief.

Please email chumstraining@chums.uk.com for information on other individual or specific training needs.

Contact

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