

Sample Bereavement Policy

– c/o Rosedale Training

Early Years Settings are encouraged to devise and implement a bereavement policy so that a common understanding is developed, and a consistent approach is taken within the setting. A bereavement policy will be most useful if it is a working document and used by all staff. The policy should emphasise the need to ensure the wishes of the family are heard throughout.

We strongly suggest that the bereavement policy should be used in conjunction with a critical incident policy, which includes procedures for dealing with the death of a child or a member of staff.

Please feel free to make any changes to this sample bereavement policy so that it meets the needs of your setting and your community.

BEREAVEMENT POLICY

Introduction/Rationale

Around 1 in 25 school aged children in Great Britain will have experienced the death of a parent or sibling. Whilst the numbers of under 5's who have experienced the death of a family member are much lower, there are still some, and many young children will make their first experiences of death following the death of a pet.

The way, in which all staff in our setting can respond to the needs of bereaved children, plays a crucial role at a time of great need.

Research shows that suffering a bereavement in childhood has the potential to have a significant impact on children's future well-being. Bereavement can be linked to a number of issues, for example bereaved children are more likely to be bullied, and a change in behaviour can sometimes lead to an increased likelihood of exclusion from school.

Aims/Objectives Of The Policy

The aim of this policy is to provide some basic information and practical advice, including approaches that can help all of us to know how we can support bereaved children and their families. We want to offer children appropriate support, which can have a positive and long-lasting impact on children's well-being.

Whilst it may not seem possible to get it right all the time, acknowledging the death of a family member or friend, and taking pro-active steps can make a difference.

Children's Experience Of Bereavement

Children's understanding of death will vary with their age and stage of development. Young children may not have the language or cognitive ability to tell you how they feel. Because of their age they will have difficulty with understanding the irreversibility, finality, inevitability and causality of death.

Children are affected by bereavement in different ways. Some may be sad and withdrawn, others may be angry and display challenging behaviour. Some children show their grief immediately, whilst others may not at the beginning, but later, after weeks or even months. Grief is an ongoing process which child revisit as they grow up and their level of understanding increases.

Children will not 'get over it', but with time learn to cope with all the changes. We know that many bereaved people continue to have a bond with the person who died – in a different way.

What Settings Can Do To Help

Children will understand death through the language we use to describe it. Using euphemisms and other words for death (loss, asleep) can be confusing, especially for young children. It is helpful for children if we use the word 'death' and 'died', and do not avoid these. Honesty and clear language around death will help prevent misunderstanding. We will try and answer children's questions honestly, but it is also okay to say 'I don't know, but I will try and find out'. Young children may need to be reminded, for some time, that their loved one is not going to come back and will be dead forever. Providing opportunities for children to remember the person they loved can be helpful.

Staff do not have to be 'bereavement experts' to help grieving children. Kindness, compassion and a listening ear go a long way to supporting bereaved children.

Whilst acknowledging that not every bereaved child needs counselling and it takes time for children to adjust, children and families might benefit from specialist bereavement services.

It is important to know what organisations are available both locally and nationally so that staff can signpost families for additional support.

Useful Websites:

www.Ataloss.org

www.childbereavementuk.org

www.natureandnurturetheraputicservices

www.rd4u.org

www.winstonswish.org

www.nelsonsjourney.org

When children display ongoing problems for a significant amount of time, where problems are not getting better or deteriorating, or when there are serious issues like not sleeping, not eating, not attending the setting, then a referral to specialist services may be needed.

Sometimes the death of a family member might be covered widely in the media. It is helpful to know what information is in the public domain. When children are bereaved by suicide, families are often left with agonising questions. Settings can sometimes be a hotbed for rumours and speculation. It is important to acknowledge this, and respond

appropriately, taking into account the wishes of the child and family. When deaths are investigated by the coroner, maybe because it was an unnatural death or the cause of death was unknown, this information is often covered in the media.

The organisation Seesaw gives some helpful tips of helping children through grief:

- Be there
- Initiate and anticipate
- Listen
- Silence is golden
- Accept and acknowledge the expression of feelings
- Offer opportunities for remembering
- Learn about the grief process
- Help the child find support and encouragement
- Allow the child to grieve at their own pace
- Be patient...
- Provide for times of fun
- Give a child choice
- Believe in the child's ability to recover and grow
- Be yourself.

We place great importance on working in partnership with parents/carers. Some families may wish to have close involvement with the setting, whilst others prefer things to be more private. It is important that we ensure that the children's needs are met, whilst taking account of the families' wishes. Children may have a wide ranging religious and cultural beliefs and traditions, and it is important to respect differences. Whilst respecting family's wishes, it must be remembered that we have a duty of care towards all children. We are committed to meet the social, emotional, and behavioural needs of our children; we will also follow our safeguarding procedures.

Immediately After Being Informed

- Contact the parent/carer to express sympathy – this might be difficult, but it is much easier if you get in touch with the family early on.
- Gather as much information as possible about the circumstance of the death and find out what the child has been told.
- Encourage children to come back to the setting as soon as is possible.
- Explain that support will be available for them and that you will discuss this in detail upon their return.
- Share information with all staff – and talk with them again after you have met with the child and family and know their wishes, e.g. what kind of support would they like from staff.
- Meet with the parent/carer and child to find out their views of how they would like to be supported. We all acknowledge that this might be difficult, but unless you discuss this with the child you will not know what support will be helpful to them.

Discuss

- if and how children would like the information to be shared with the other children
- who would be the best person to provide support for them, and who they can talk to when they are finding it difficult?
- discuss how children can access time out if they are finding it difficult to cope with a session
- identify a person who will keep in touch with home.

Short-term Support

We will be sensitive to the needs of the bereaved child – these might be different for different children. Some children might appreciate the availability of a quiet space – but others might just want the usual opportunities to be with their friends and experience a sense of normality.

We will also need to be aware of other children who might be affected because they have also experienced a recent bereavement. Children sometimes provide support to their friend, even at a young age – we may need to consider how they are supported, and whether to make parents aware.

Reassure children that their feelings are normal in their situation.

We will monitor how children are continuing to learn, as we know that many bereaved children do not achieve as well as their peers. Many children struggle with difficulties with concentration as the bereavement takes up a lot of thinking time. Good communication across the setting is important. Staff cannot be supportive if we are too precious about the information we share – all staff need to know.

We will give praise for any achievements and reassure the child that things will improve in time. We acknowledge that it is a challenging task for our staff to find a balance between allowing for difficulties whilst not lowering expectations.

Be consistent with expectations for appropriate behaviour but do offer support if a child has difficulties.

Arrange regular 'check in' meetings with their trusted adult to monitor their progress and take account of issues as they arise, offering early support.

Funerals

Families are all different, some may hold a large funeral where members of the setting are invited, others might hold a small private funeral. In any case, as a setting we need to find out the family's wishes regarding the attendance of a representative, where appropriate. It is important to discuss whether this should be the manager of the setting, or whether it is important that staff who know the child and family well, attend.

Long-term Support

We are aware that grief does not operate on a timetable, and it may be months or years later that a child is most in need of support. As children are growing up, their understanding and needs change, and many will revisit their bereavement at different stages of their life.

Our staff are aware that when we are tackling sensitive topics we will not avoid them, but will be sensitive to the needs of bereaved children.

It might be helpful for us to make a diary of significant events (such as birthdays, anniversary of death) that can be passed on from year to year and to school during transition.

People sometimes think it best to avoid painful reminders such as Mother's Day or Father's Day, but giving children the choice of what they want to do is really important. Avoiding the topic can leave children feeling that others do not care or have forgotten their loved one. Providing opportunities when children can remember their loved one can be important.

Supporting Parents/Carers

A death in the family can cause a disruption for many months. Family members are grieving, relationships alter, and members may take on new roles.

If appropriate, we will acknowledge the death by sending a card or phoning parents. Parents often report that other people avoid them because they do not know what to say. Coming back on the playground, taking their children back to the setting for a first time after a bereavement can be very difficult and as a setting, we can make arrangements to make it easier for them, e.g. meet them, allow them to drop their child a bit earlier/later, etc. We will do our best to support parents in these circumstances.

Keeping in touch with families and letting them know how their children are doing can be helpful. We will find out from parents/carers what would be most helpful to them. If helpful, we will provide a named link person for families.

How Staff Will Be Supported

Bereavement is 'not only painful to experience, but also painful to witness' (*Bowlby, 1980*).

Supporting bereaved children can be very stressful. Support needs to be offered for a long time, and there are no easy solutions. Witnessing another person's grief can also remind staff of their own experiences of bereavement.

As a setting we have a duty of care towards our employees, and we will ensure that staff are appropriately supported when dealing with difficult issues, like supporting bereaved children. Managers are responsible for putting appropriate support mechanisms in place for staff. They should be reviewed on a regular basis.

Staff can also support each other. It is important to know one's limitations. There is only so much staff can offer, and sometimes it is time to refer children on to specialist bereavement services.

Learning About Death And Bereavement

Death happens to children of all ages – it does not wait for them to be old enough to understand. Death seems to be a subject that nobody wants to address. Through acknowledging and addressing death and bereavement in our setting we can improve the skills of children to deal with and emerge positively from it.

As a setting, we are committed to provide learning opportunities about death and bereavement. These will include both child-initiated activities, e.g. a child talks about their pet that has died, as well as pro-active activities, e.g. a story may cover the topic and we will then talk about death and bereavement.

Occasionally staff may feel that they can share their own experience of death and bereavement, which can provide a basis for group discussion.

Materials for learning about death and bereavement, including a booklist, are available and can be requested from the Critical Incident Service.

Roles and Responsibilities

Manager

As Manager, I will ensure that this policy is implemented, and that a co-ordinated response is provided to bereaved children and their families. I will ensure that all staff know what is expected, and that everyone can contribute in a way that is consistent with the ethos of the setting. I will ensure that information is shared with all staff, and passed on to schools at times of transition. I will put appropriate support in place for staff, and allow staff to attend appropriate training opportunities. As manager, I will promote learning about death and bereavement in our setting.

Committee

The committee will approve the policy and ensure that it is implemented consistently across the setting. We will review the policy on a regular basis, involving the manager and staff who are delivering support for bereaved children.

Further information

This policy has been adapted by our setting from the sample bereavement policy for Early Years Settings, written by the Norfolk Critical Incident Lead Officer (*October 16*), taking account of their own experience, as well as good practice guidelines, please see references below, and in consultation with bereaved children and parents.

References

Bereavement and Loss: Guidance for schools – *Leicestershire County Council*

Supporting bereaved pupils in school – *SeeSaw's Information Pack for School*

Bereavement policy framework – *Surrey Healthy Schools*

Childhood Bereavement Network

Not yet good enough: Personal, social, health and economic education in schools – *Ofsted 2012*

Advice/Support and Training

Rosedale Funeral Home and Rosedale Training are always on hand to offer support and advice and training. The importance of early intervention and support may be the difference between a child thriving and just surviving.

www.rosedalefuneralhome.co.uk

www.rosedaletraining.co.uk

E-mail: lucy@rosedalefuneralhome.co.uk with any questions.