



Ysgol Bro Gwaun

Bereavement Policy

Approved – Governor's Committee October 2017

Review every 3 years

Next Review: 2020

Signed:	
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Ysgol Bro Gwaun

Bereavement Policy

Many of the children and adults in our school community are likely to encounter death during their time at our school. For a few the loss will be more immediate and traumatic, involving the loss of a parent, sibling or personal friend.

The Aim of this policy is :

- To foster a caring attitude to those suffering a bereavement.
- To encourage a consistent, yet flexible approach to the situation.
- To inform all those concerned, including all staff, governors and parents of possible approaches.

Grieving takes place after any circumstantial loss but impacts most after the death of someone close to us. In some instances adults try to 'protect' a child by ignoring their experience of death. By doing so we may make their feelings worse; anger, loneliness, exclusion, hurt or embarrassment at a chance remark. If children are not helped to mourn losses at the time they happen then problems may be triggered in later life. We need to acknowledge their feeling and needs and this may not always be through counselling.

This policy has been prepared for all staff involved with pupils at Ysgol Bro Gwaun, who are faced with an individual or group of bereaved children. It is not designed to make anyone into specialist grief counsellors but tries to address the very practical questions that are likely to face a teacher / adult in this situation. Children are all different and they will all react to bereavement in their own very unique way. The difference in their levels of awareness, understanding, age, emotional maturity, security and not least, their relationship with the deceased, will have significant effects.

The approach to individual and /or group bereavement aims to encompass the certain aspects of the school's PSE policy. Specifically these are:

Emotional Aspect

- *To know and understand the range of their own and others' feelings and emotions*
- *To understand the scope and variety of feelings at times of change and loss*
- *To understand situations which produce conflict from within*

Spiritual Aspect

- *To recognise the uniqueness and independence of individuals*
- *To understand that people have different beliefs which shape their lives*
- *To acknowledge that there are mysteries in life and death*

The trauma of bereavement can have the effect of throwing a school in at the deep end. Most meet such situations as they arise, without giving much prior thought to the response that will be needed. It makes sense to take time to put even loose

contingency plans into place by reflecting on how the school could or should respond in a tragic situation.

Adults and children can respond in broadly similar ways to grief and bereavement. Reactions will depend on the nature of the incident, their degree of involvement with it and their own personality and coping skills. For adults, reactions may be manifested behaviourally or physically by such symptoms as:

- Tiredness.
- Sleep disturbance.
- Tension.
- Menstrual irregularity.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Intolerance.
- Shaking.
- Tearfulness.
- Irritability.
- Loss of appetite.
- Headaches.
- Depression.
- Nausea.
- Memory difficulties.
- Increased sensitivity.

As well as the above reactions, children may also display the following:

- **increased misbehaviour and acting younger**
- **pretend play and acting out the traumatic incident.**
- **Sleep disturbance including fear of the dark or of being alone.**
- **Clinging behaviour with parents.**
- **Preoccupation with the traumatic event.**
- **Difficulty concentrating in school.**
- **Heightened alertness to danger including sensitivity to loud noises.**
- **Changes in appetite.**
- **Fears for their own safety or for that of family and friends.**
- **Reluctance to talk.**
- **School phobic**
- **“silly behaviour” and regression**

For both children and adults it is their naturally available communities (family, friends and colleagues) who will provide the most appropriate and potential sources of help and support. External sources of support should be sensitive to the needs of these natural communities and should seek to augment, validate and reassure these to enhance rather than detract from their effectiveness.

The following are potential ways that we as a school and community can help:

- If a child feels secure with a particular teacher, it is likely that they will come to that teacher specifically for comfort or enlightenment and it is important that the teacher has given some thought as to how he / she should respond. Children and even older teenagers see things in terms of black and white. The result is that their questions may be disconcertingly blunt and the teacher may find himself / herself upset by the form of the question, or the inability to answer it.
- A natural instinct may be to protect a child from the magnitude of his or her loss. It is probably wiser for the teacher to present reality as it is.
- The child / children should be told as soon as possible that a person has died to prevent him / her learning from some other and often inappropriate source. The teacher should use a normal tone of voice and clear direct language and avoid hushed whispers which may convey unnatural and confused feelings.
- Whenever possible, children should be told by someone close to them, in familiar surroundings where the child will feel more secure.
- It is important to tell the truth as far as you know it. Even white lies will have to be renegotiated later. Children will vary in their ability at any one time to take in particular explanations. If the information is limited, the teacher should tell what he / she knows and then make every effort to find out more.
- It is very important to let children know that it is natural and acceptable to be upset and to cry (even for adults) It is better to share feelings rather than to deny them. Sometimes, however, it may be better to protect a child from the extreme grief reactions and adults who are prostrate with grief may need some time and space initially to release their most extreme reactions.
- The teacher should encourage the child to ask questions and should tailor his / her answers to the child's level of understanding, within his / her home religion or culture and your own belief system.
- It is important that teachers / adults don't force children to behave in a prescribed manner. Some children may have been brought up not to show their emotions. Others, particularly in their teens may repress grief as they see crying as a babyish emotion which means that they will lose face in front of their friends. These inappropriate coping strategies can only work for a while and often leave some children out of synch with their peers i.e. appearing in control when all the others are upset and later cracking up with grief and guilt when all the others have come to terms with the loss.
- There are several phases of grief. The initial stage of disbelief usually passes quickly, but many individuals are in this stage for some considerable time. The feelings of depression have to be passed through, even fleetingly, before the individual can begin again to look positively. This makes it particularly difficult when several children are going through the grieving process (e.g. a class reacting to the death of one of their peers) as they will all be at different stages at the same time and it should be allowed to run its natural course.
- Other very vulnerable children are those from already insecure backgrounds i.e. broken families, marital instability etc, and these children may have severe reactions to the new loss. All children can come to terms with the loss and the aim is to provide support and comfort so that the trauma is gradually overcome, rather than remain a permanent block to their emotional development.
- Traumatic Death. Children who have witnessed a dramatic death or deaths, or been involved in a disaster, or other trauma, may need specialised treatment. Parents, and schools too may need help. These experiences are often too shocking and disruptive to be absorbed and worked through over time.

It is important therefore to:

- Try to maintain feelings of security, of being cared for, of being loved.
- Maintain all the necessary practical care.
- Be honest at the child's level of understanding.
- Continue to talk and communicate.
- Do not pretend to believe what you don't believe.
- Don't be afraid to share your own feelings.
- Remember there are others who can help.
- Don't be afraid to admit to colleagues, family and managers that you can't cope at any particular time.

There are other world events which can have an effect on pupils. In our time of 9:11, tsunamis, earth quakes and the atrocities which occurred in London in July 2005, children see and witness many disturbing events through the media. Many people tend to associate bereavement with a permanent deprivation of a loved one through their death. However, it is worthwhile remembering that for many children there are other losses which may be experienced as though it were bereavement. The emotional and behavioural outcomes as mentioned above can be similar to those in the bereavement process. Examples could include the following:

- **divorce.**
- **death of grandparents or other close relative.**
- **death of a pet.**
- **parents in prison.**
- **disabled or seriously ill sibling.**
- **parent returning to paid employment.**
- **parents changing jobs. Changing schools.**
- **violence, sexual Harassment.**
- **drug problems.**
- **hospital stay.**
- **children in care**
- **a class mate or friend who moves away**
- **moving classes or schools**

These situations may not affect the whole of the class but it can to a large extent affect individual pupil performance in class. It would be very demanding to create a specific contingency plan for each situation but in general the initial response to an upset child should be, as is normally the case, to identify the source of the distress, the child's response and the support required with the assistance of various specialists if required: educational psychologists, school health visitor, PCC Counselling Service (Sandy Bears), external sources. The normal referral routes should apply but in general, consideration should be given to the following:

- **What support can the child expect at home?**
- **What can teachers do?**
- **Does the situation demand the involvement of the whole class?**
- **Can a visit to the home or a meeting with the parents be useful?**

- Has the pupil close, supportive friends?
- Should external agencies be contacted?

Procedures to follow:

When death occurs outside of school.(e.g illness, accident, suicide, murder)

An immediate action plan will include:

- the development of routines which ensure that the headteacher is informed by parents or other authorities (police, hospital)
- the headteacher verifies information about the child's death before informing teachers and classmates. The headteacher gathers as many facts as possible about the event from parents and others (police, fire brigade, hospital) Information should be gathered :
 - when, where and how it happened ?
 - were other pupils present ?
 - where is the child now ?
- the headteacher takes responsibility for information to
 - all members of staff, Chairman of the Governing Body, members of the Governing Body and the LEA
 - class and other pupils (assisted by teachers) for death notification.
- plan for the rest of the day is activated to include support in the classroom.
- If Press approach, they should be referred to the Pembrokeshire County Council's Press Officer and affected family, classmates and staff should be shielded. **AT NO TIME SHOULD ANY STATEMENT OR CHANCE REMARK BE MADE.**
- A meeting should be held to discuss plans for the following day. All members of staff in classes affected by the death should attend.

A pupil's parent or sibling dies.

The pupils' homes should be informed that in the case of a death in the child's closest family, the headteacher or the classteacher should be informed. If the death happens while the child is at school, a representative for the family, preferably a parent, should come to the school to inform the child. In many circumstances, a teacher will have to give the death notification.

Before notifying fellow pupils, the class teacher should speak with the bereaved child to determine what information should be given to his / her classmates and in what form. Some children prefer to be absent while this information is given, some want to participate. It is helpful if classmates are informed about how their bereaved classmate wants to talk about what has happened (i.e. speak openly and take the initiative, or let the bereaved child decide when he / she wants to talk)

It is a symbolic gesture to the bereaved child and the family if a representative of the school, preferably the class teacher, is present at the funeral. The teacher can also encourage the bereaved child's closest friends to participate in the funeral, send cards and express their thoughts visually as well as verbally.

Following the death of a parent, the teacher must accept a longer period with a reduced capacity for school work. Because of this, the bereaved child might need extra help at a later time, when working capacity becomes normal again. Let the child decide how much he / she wants to talk about what happened, but let the child know that you are willing to listen if he / she feels the need to talk.

The death of a member of staff.

- If the death happens suddenly and unexpectedly, arrange for a meeting where colleagues can talk through what has happened.
- Try to establish continuity in the classroom as soon as possible. The supply teacher or member of staff should be informed properly on how pupils and other staff were affected and which ones were most distressed. This member of staff will require support.
- In the case of the class teacher, if appropriate let some of the children participate in the funeral, accompanied by trusted adults.

Preparing for loss and bereavement is part of the preparation for life. Teaching about loss will help children cope with the inevitable losses they will face throughout their life – not only death, but separation, divorce, moving house, moving school, growing up and growing old.

Pembrokeshire County Council offer a Counselling Service for support in all forms of crisis.

Pembrokeshire Behavioural Support Service will also provide support for pupils.

Further information may be obtained from:

www.mabf.org.uk/help_advice_slp.asp

Good Grief Pack. Cruse Bereavement Care.

Turning Points NSPCC 1997.

Dealing with Bereavement. Cambridgeshire County Council.

Helping the Bereaved Child. City of Salford Education Department.

Useful books:

Winston's wish

A child's grief

Grief in children: a handbook for adults

Heaven : Nicholas Allan

See ya Simon: David Hill

Goodnight Mister Tom: Michelle Magorian