



# **Anytown Nursery/Primary Bereavement Policy**

**This exemplar policy has been written in collaboration with City of Glasgow Council for use when new Scottish legislation comes into force in August 2016**

**NB – Deputy First Minister John Swinney has advised the named person and child’s plan provisions in Parts 4 and 5 of the Children and Young People Scotland Act 2014 scheduled to commence 31<sup>st</sup> August 2016 have been delayed following a decision of the Supreme Court.**

# Rationale

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 22 minutes in the UK a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 41,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, and, sadly, around 12,000 children die in the UK each year.

Within the school community there will almost always be some children who are struggling with bereavement – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil. We would hope to not encounter such circumstances, but the statistical inevitability of such an occurrence implies the necessity of having a Bereavement Policy in place in order that we might be *proactive*, rather than *reactive*, when responding to these challenging situations. Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children – or staff – require, though referral to more specialist support should be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex. Additional information and resources can be accessed at [www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)

# Objectives

The core intentions of the policy are:

- To support pupils and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement.
- To ensure effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and community.
- To identify key staff within school and the Local Authority, and clarify the pathway of support.

## **Children & Young People (Scotland) Act 2014**

Enshrines elements of the GIRFEC approach in law.

Every child in Scotland has a named person who has a responsibility to provide help and support when asked and can draw together other services if needed, co-ordinating help for the child or parents. The named person plays a key role in helping bereaved children. In the early years context the named person will be the health visitor. For Primary and Secondary it will be a named member of staff within the school.

### **The Role of the Head Teacher:**

- has overall responsibility for the policy and its implementation
- liaison with the named person, Parent Council, Local Authority, psychological services and other relevant outside agencies
- The Head Teacher in collaboration with the Local Authority must decide whether the school will manage an incident or if it should be dealt with as a **critical incident (see page 4 )**

### **The Head teacher in collaboration with the named person will:**

- Be first point of contact for family/child concerned
- Keep staff and Parent Council informed
- Monitor progress and liaise with external agencies
- Respond to media enquiries

# Critical Incidents

## Critical incidents can include:

- Death of a child or young person due to an accident, serious illness, suicide or murder
- Death of a child or young person's sibling or parent due to an accident, serious illness, suicide or murder
- Children witnessing accidental deaths of others
- Death of a member of staff
- Death during a school journey or school trip

## Critical Incident Management Team

In the event of a critical incident, schools should establish a Critical Incident Management team, of a size and composition appropriate to the establishment (you should refer to your school/ local authority's policy/procedures).

## The functions of the team will include:

- Liaison with the Emergency Services and Education Services
- Logging all relevant calls
- Opening and maintaining a chronology
- Information gathering
- Communicating links with authority press officer and education services
- Liaison with named person/parents and chair of the Parent Council
- Care and welfare of children, staff and visitors

# Procedures

## Short Term:

1. Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the Head of Establishment and the family's wishes respected in communicating with others. What facts are the family consenting for us to share? Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion, whilst being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations. *NB: We need to be mindful of the use of social media sites and their impact throughout this time as rumour and gossip spread quickly.*
2. All staff should be informed of the family's wishes about communication at the earliest possible opportunity so that they are prepared to respond appropriately to children and be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance. Ensure all staff have the same version of event/information.
3. A letter in a sealed envelope to all families should be sent at the earliest opportunity after consultation with the deceased's family. The letter should explain that:
  - a) the children **have not** been informed as it was felt that the parents would wish to do this  
or
  - b) the children **have been** informed already by staffThe letter should contain signposting for support for parents and children and useful downloadable information (*see appendices i and ii*)
4. Staff, children and parents/carers affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate.
5. In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance clarified.
6. Establishment website and social media should be reviewed to ensure sensitivity.
7. Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Head Teacher/Press Officer.

## Medium term

1. The impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life so information should be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points. Establishments should be aware of any ongoing bereavement issues for new children. To this end it is important to have effective communication at all levels.
2. Monitor the emotional needs of staff and children, including behaviour change. Ensure support – discussion, listening, answering questions – is available, and staff and pupils know clearly how to access that support.
3. Staff should respond in an age appropriate manner and in line with the family's wishes to children's questions
4. Establishment website and social media should be reviewed to ensure sensitivity taking notice of the family's wishes.
5. Consider how to celebrate the deceased person's life. Ensure this is consistent with the family's wishes.

## Longer term

1. Curriculum approaches to consider mortality and bereavement may be helpful – see Whole School Approach to Supporting Loss and Bereavement document. Aspects of the Health & Wellbeing Curriculum can be adapted.
2. Be aware of special dates which may evoke memories (e.g. Mothers Day/Christmas) particularly for siblings or close friends.
3. The impact of loss and bereavement can be felt over a long period of time, it is important to be aware of the impact of this over time.

**NB:** Many of the guidelines in this policy are only appropriate when the school community as a whole has experienced a death, for example a teacher, or another staff member.

Perhaps a more common experience for staff is that of a child experiencing the loss of a parent or carer. Whole school or class activities will not always be appropriate in this situation, but the needs of that individual child should still be given careful consideration.

If a child has been bereaved it is important to involve them in decisions about how the school manages issues relating to their loss. If appropriate, talk to the child about their preferred way of doing things.

**Sample of a letter informing parents of the death of a pupil –  
*parent/carer inform children***

Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a child registered at their establishment, permission must be gained from the deceased child's parents.

The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the bereaved parents and the Head of Establishment. The letter should be sent home in a sealed envelope.

Dear Parents

We have the sad task of informing you of the death of <Name>, a child in <Primary/Nursery>. We feel that the parents/carers are the best people to inform children of this and ask that you pass on this sad news.

<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. Staff 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 office and we would be more than happy to help you. You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at [www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)

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

## **Sample of a letter informing parents of the death of a pupil – *school informs children***

Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the deceased child's parents.

The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the bereaved parents and the Head of Establishment. The letter should be sent home in a sealed envelope.

Dear Parents

Staff had the sad task today of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a child in <Primary/Nursery>.

<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 staff are willing to try to answer their questions but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the office and we would be more than happy to help you. You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at [www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)

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

## **Sample of a letter to bereaved parents**

**Dear**

**We are so very sorry to hear of *Andrew's* death. There are no words to express the sadness of losing a child and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through. Clearly, as a school community, we will miss *him* very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to *his* friends and classmates. *He* was a much loved member of our school/nursery family.**

**If we can do anything to help as you plan *Andrew's* funeral service or other memorial opportunities, please let us know. In time, we will also ensure that anything of *Andrew's* that remains in school is returned to you, including photographs we may have on the school system.**

**Be assured that you are in our thoughts at this very sad time and do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of support in any way.**

**With sympathy,**

**Headteacher**

**Sample of a letter on death of a member of staff – *parents/carers inform children***

Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a staff member, permission must be gained from the deceased's family.

The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the family and the Head of Establishment. The letter should be sent home in a sealed envelope.

**Dear Parents/Carers**

I am sorry to have to tell you that a much-loved member of our staff, [name] has died. We feel that the parents/carers are the best people to inform young children of this and ask that you pass on this sad news.

Your child may be quite distressed at the news. No-one wants to see children sad, but we are very aware that factual information and emotional support are the best means of helping children deal with bereavement. I am sure there will be many parents who are also saddened by the news. Children respond in different ways so may dip in and out of sadness, and ask questions, whilst alternately playing or participating in their usual activities. This is normal and healthy. Your child may ask questions which we will answer in an age-appropriate way in school, but if you feel you would like more support and advice yourself, please do not hesitate to contact the office. You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at: [www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)

We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Parents who wish to attend will be welcome to do so. I am sorry to be the bearer of sad news, but I appreciate an occurrence like this impacts the whole school community. I am so grateful for the thriving partnership we have with parents and trust that we, together, will be able to guide and support the children through what may be, for many, a very new experience in their lives.

Yours.....

## **Sample of a letter on death of a member of staff – *school informs children***

Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a staff member, permission must be gained from the deceased's family.

The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the family and the Head of Establishment. The letter should be sent home in a sealed envelope.

**Dear Parents/Carers**

I am sorry to have to tell you that a much-loved member of our staff, [name] has died. The children were told today and many will have been quite distressed at the news. No-one wants to see children sad, but we are very aware that factual information and emotional support are the best means of helping children deal with bereavement. I am sure there will be many parents who are also saddened by the news. Children respond in different ways so may dip in and out of sadness, and questions, whilst alternately playing or participating in their usual activities. This is normal and healthy. You may find your child has questions to ask which we will answer in an age- appropriate way in school, but if you feel you would like more support and advice yourself, please do not hesitate to contact the office. You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at: [www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)

We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. I am sorry to be the bearer of sad news, but I appreciate an occurrence like this impacts the whole school community. I am so grateful for the thriving partnership we have with parents and trust that we, together, will be able to guide and support the children through what may be, for many, a very new experience in their lives.

Yours.....

## Websites and Contacts

These are some local services which may be able to help you:

### **Brightest Star**

[www.brighteststar.org.uk](http://www.brighteststar.org.uk) Supporting bereaved families

### **Child Bereavement UK**

Room 5 Maryhill Community Central Halls, 292-316 Maryhill Road, Glasgow, G20 7YE.

Telephone 0141 352 9995

[www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org) – information for schools, general information about grief and bereavement, an app for 11-25 year olds, support and information line for children, adults and supporters

### **Muslim Bereavement Support Service**

Serves the Muslim community by supporting bereaved mothers and siblings. We work with other organisations, the NHS and hospices in particular, to give a spiritual and cultural context to the bereavement support services they offer. Our confidential service is provided by trained volunteers and is a befriending service. We support bereaved mothers and siblings who have lost a child at any stage.

[glasgow@mbss.org.uk](mailto:glasgow@mbss.org.uk)

[www.mbss.org.uk](http://www.mbss.org.uk)

### **Richmond's Hope**

Provides a specialist bereavement support service for children and young people aged 4-18. We will provide individual support, group support and family support in the form of family days. We will be based in Ibrox Parish Church however will serve the city of Glasgow. Referrals can be made via telephone (phone number will be provided at a later time) or through our website [www.richmondshope.org.uk](http://www.richmondshope.org.uk) before opening all calls regarding the service provision can be made directly to our Edinburgh Service on 0131 661 6818.

### **The Prince & Princess of Wales Hospice**

[www.ppwh.org.uk](http://www.ppwh.org.uk) -Provide high quality clinical, emotional, social and spiritual care for patients who have a progressive, life threatening illness and support for those who care for them.

## **Acknowledgements**

Grateful thanks to Greater Glasgow Council for their invaluable help in developing this Policy Document Exemplar and especially to:

Kathryn Farrow, Quality Improvement Officer for her time and expertise

Patricia Madden, Early Years Manager

Linda Quinn, Teacher, Saracen Primary School