

Social media and young people's views

When a school receives news of a death that will impact on the whole school community the senior management team need to convene and decide on their strategy and pathway forward. First, the family/ies will need to be contacted, the situation clarified and their wishes and preferences taken into consideration. Then the school will need to break the news to staff and pupils. (See fact sheet *Breaking sad news* in this pack.)

The school needs to protect children, parents and staff from the glare of any publicity, particularly just after the event has happened. Keeping communication lines open between the school community and family/ies is crucial and any communication with media should be agreed with the family/ies' permission.

It needs to be remembered that a school cannot 'contain' information that is being shared within the community; it will 'leak out'. Bearing this in mind, consideration needs to be given to the use of social media and how to deal with some of the repercussions it can have.

Social media and media is instantaneous; be aware that there may be other sources spreading the news or an incorrect version of events around the community. Informing the school and the school community as soon as possible with correct information (with the family/ies' consent) in a language appropriate for the audience, will reduce anxieties and, hopefully, prevent the spread of rumours.

As well as communicating the news, social media can be used by the school community and family for information and bereavement support, but be aware that social media can be abused, for example through online bullying/negative comments, which can be very hurtful to bereaved families and young people.

High profile / upsetting events

Media can approach the school for information and their views when reporting on a high profile/upsetting event. When faced with this situation, the local authority may be able to offer help in relation to processes and protocol.

Young People's views on social media

Young people are more likely to use social media as a way of communicating than ever before. In today's society it is difficult to keep up with the implications of social media. Members of Child Bereavement UK's Young People's Advisory Group discussed the pros and cons of social media in two groups. One focused on advantages and the other on the disadvantages for bereaved young people. (See young people's views on the next page.)

Advantages	Disadvantages
Keeps you updated with friends and news	Raising anxieties
Sense of control	Negative comments
Memorials	No immediate support
Provides information	Not all information is there
Fundraising campaigns	Not everyone is on social media
Comforting messages	Shock factor - and impersonal way to find out
Brings people together	Can't control
Sharing stories and pictures	False information
Saves time	Bad hashtags
Reaches a bigger audience	Bullying
Free to use	Fake feelings / messages
Keeps memories alive	Photos being stolen / used illegally
Keeps up with trends	Rumours
Easy to access	Presumptions

Young people's views by Child Bereavement UK's Youth Ambassadors

Rebecca, aged 17

How do you use social media?

I use Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter. I'm not friends with any of my family on Facebook because social media is a part of my life that I keep separate from them and use solely to connect with friends or to read articles online. It's not something I particularly want to share with my family as I feel it isn't something they would understand and it also contains personal conversations.

How supportive did you find social media when somebody you knew died?

When my mother died I was only 5 years old and obviously didn't use any social media. However, as I grew older and began to create social media accounts there was a distinct lack of people talking about bereavement, perhaps because it is not a topic that directly affects everybody but partly, I imagine, also because it is a highly stigmatised topic and one many people feel awkward addressing or talking about. Personally, I have seen YouTube as the platform most people use to talk about bereavement and the experience of being bereaved as it can act as a diary of your inner thoughts and a useful way to express yourself.

Would you choose a particular platform over others to express your grief or support for a bereaved person?

In the past I have openly spoken about my bereavement on Facebook as it reaches hundreds of people and makes them more aware of my personal experience and how to help someone else who has experienced grief. However, I also believe that YouTube is a good social network to talk about grief on, as it can help people who have experienced grief and maybe don't know anyone in their personal life who can help them. YouTube is the best medium for this as you can hear about the experiences of anyone who has published a video, not just a 'friend' you know from your personal life.

What are the pros and cons of expressing grief via social media?

Pros – more people can learn about your experiences and you can connect with people you may not necessarily be close with, but you can bond over your shared experiences. I have also found that it starts conversations about grief, which I personally find cathartic since talking about grief helps alleviate some of the pain and means that other people can respond more appropriately and helpfully to their peers.

Cons – being so open can be awkward and daunting as it makes you vulnerable, especially since grief is such a personal issue and having your peers know all your inner feelings can be scary.

Young people's views by Child Bereavement UK's Youth Ambassadors

Kayleigh, aged 19

The main social media platforms that I use are Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat. I find security paramount when using social media and the majority of my online security settings are set as high as possible. It is important to understand how posting things online can be manipulated and can come across in a different way; because of this I find that knowing the legal aspect of what is right and wrong important. It is hard to control who has access to your personal profile and who can private message you, I found this out the hard way.

When mum first died, I found that being able to talk to friends and family on social media was quite helpful and comforting. It showed me how much people cared about me and my family. I think that using social media to express grief allows you to see that you are not alone and can also be used to help others. However, any situation can have its good and bad side.

When using social media to express grief, others can express their opinion freely regardless of how this can impact on the person who has lost a loved one. The biggest problem with using social media is the expectation.

When someone dies, it feels like you have to post something online, otherwise people will think that you are in denial or just don't care. When you post something, there could be negative comments or other people feel that you should have gotten over it by a certain point.

As social media is now a massive part of daily life, and it is so hard to get away from, it plays a big part in how the grieving process for an individual can change. I occasionally post things on social media, for example on my mum's birthday or the anniversary of her death. Sometimes I find it a comfort as I know people will understand how I feel and why I have posted it, whereas some years, when I don't post anything, I feel that people judge and think that I don't care. This isn't the case; it is mainly that I want to feel the emotion of the day by myself and don't want to be constantly getting notifications from people who only appear when it is suitable for them.

This is how social media is helpful for me and my grief, however, I am aware this might not be the case for others.

A useful *Beginners' Guide to Social Media* can be found here: www.moz.com/beginners-guide-to-social-media