



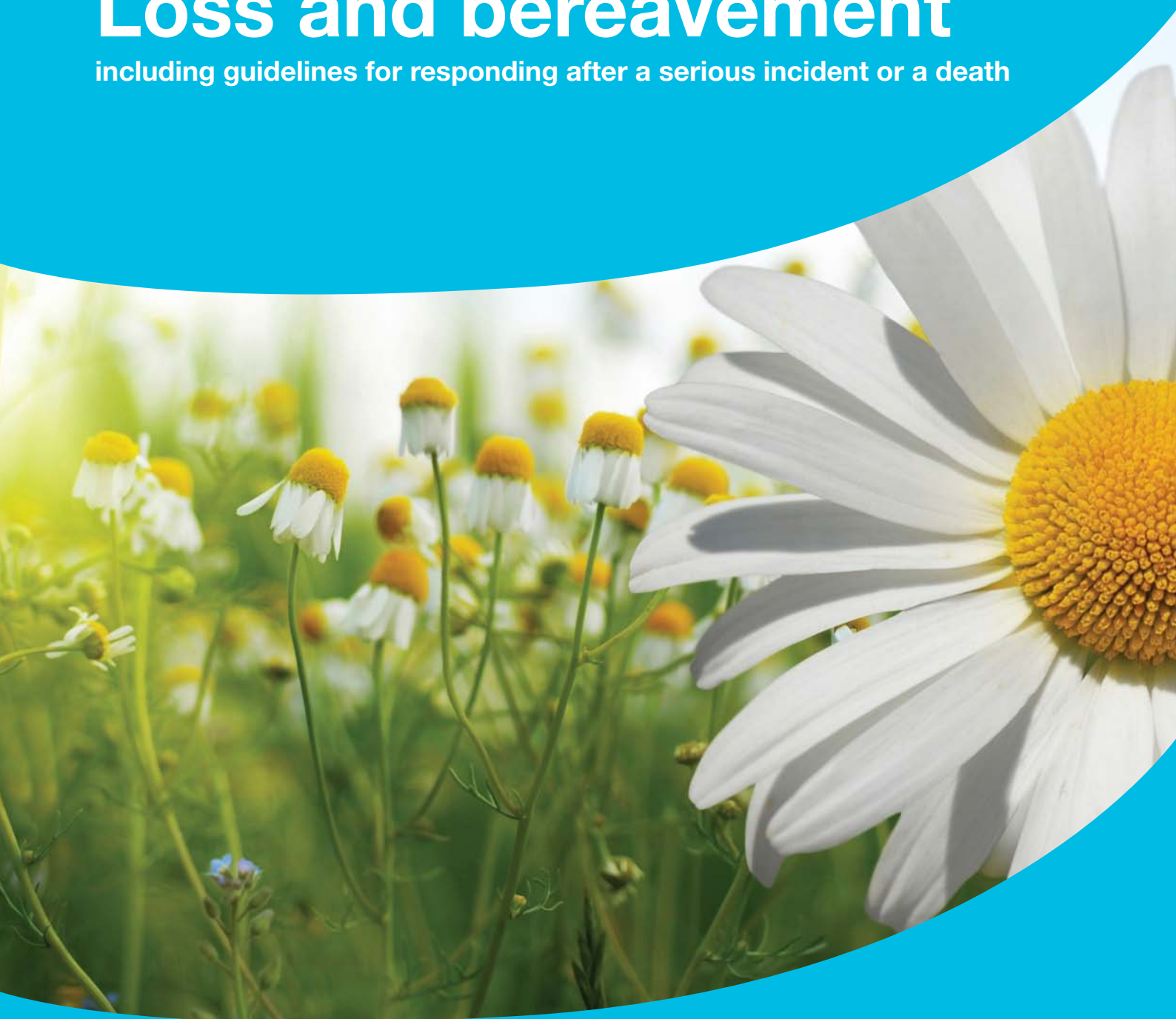
North

Yorkshire County Council

General information for North Yorkshire schools, residential care and alternative homes and early years settings about:

Loss and bereavement

including guidelines for responding after a serious incident or a death



Children and Young People's Service

A responsive County Council providing excellent and efficient local services

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Bereavement and Grief

It is almost inevitable that within any community of young people, there will be some who experience the death or the loss of someone close to them. In such circumstances, adults have a vital role to play in supporting the young person as they go through the distressing but very natural and essential process of grieving. This booklet provides information about bereavement and grief in children and young people, its possible impact on learning and behaviour and how staff in early years' settings, primary and secondary schools, residential and alternative homes might help and support such pupils.

Critical Incidents

Sometimes schools and other institutions for children and young people are faced with having to deal with devastating events which occur on or near the premises, and which involve or are witnessed by children or staff. Such events, occurring outside our normal life experiences, for example, murder, accidents, multiple deaths or violent acts, are referred to as critical incidents. Critical incidents are likely to leave staff and young people shocked, distressed and traumatised. It is helpful in these instances to be prepared with an effective response protocol and to be aware of the appropriate County personnel with whom to be in contact. Schools and residential care homes are likely, for example, to require help from the County Press Officer in dealing with any media interest. The later part of this booklet will address some of the specific issues around critical incidents but much of the general advice and strategies suggested earlier will be relevant in acknowledging and responding to the distress of the children and young people affected by a tragic event.

Staff Training

Please contact the Education Social Work or the Educational Psychology Services if you would like training or additional support about loss and bereavement.

Loss and bereavement

The loss experience

We can approach the subject of bereavement through recognition and an understanding of the loss experiences that inevitably occur in our own lives. Research indicates that unless loss is recognised and acknowledged, then future loss events may become a source of stress rather than a potential for growth (Ward, 1989). It is helpful, therefore, to connect the theory of loss with our own personal experiences and the emotions which occur throughout our lives and how these change over time (Lost for Words, 2005).

Children and young people can experience loss and bereavement in many different circumstances. It is important to have an awareness of this when considering the emotional well-being of the pupils in schools, settings and residential establishments. The death of a pet, the loss of a favoured toy, a change of class, a friend moving away, are all examples of common and natural loss experiences. An increasing number of children are adversely affected by divorce and family separation; an experience which can be as painful and as hurtful as a bereavement through death. Looked after children and young people, refugee and asylum-seeking children and those who have a parent in prison, may all be especially vulnerable to feelings of loss. These feelings might be closely related to issues of attachment, following placement disruptions, adoption breakdowns, removal from families, and loss of contact with parents etc.

Loss is associated with change. Changes occur around us all the time, yet loss is usually only acknowledged in more extreme cases, such as death and divorce. Our ability to cope with major loss in our lives can be influenced by the coping strategies developed in response to earlier life experiences (Brown, 1999). Preparing for loss and bereavement should be seen as a normal and healthy part of growing up.

The impact of loss and the grief subsequently experienced can be understood more fully by referring to the work of Bowlby (1969) who wrote about the human need for security and safety which results in a loving bond being made with another person. This bond is known as an 'attachment'. A grief response will occur if this bond is broken or changed in any way. The intensity of the response will depend on past experiences and the degree of the attachment.

Bereavement can be described as *'the loss of something that is precious'*. As well as the loss of a person, Ward (1989) incorporates in this definition, inanimate objects, change in a particular situation and the ending of relationships. It is helpful to be aware that bereavement in a young person's life is sometimes compounded by other unavoidable changes and consequent losses, such as, a school or house move, a stay with relatives, a significant change in financial status, etc. Regular movements as a result of redeployment or the temporary loss of a parent who is deployed on operations are additional issues that might commonly affect the children of armed services families.

Children's understanding of death

A developmental approach

The research evidence suggests that children have some understanding of death from an early age. Understanding does of course vary with age, experience, developmental or cognitive level, personality and family circumstances. Children's experience of bereavement is as painful as adults, but there may be differences in how they respond. Adults grieve intensely and consistently, whereas children and young people can be distracted from their grief. They tend to experience periods of intense emotion alongside their more usual moods. This does not, however, mean that children's grieving is superficial.

Having an awareness of how a child or young person might understand death or dying can make it easier for an adult to help or support a bereaved child. A child's questions and observations about death and dying will reflect the level of their understanding. It is thought that a conceptual understanding of death follows the same developmental sequence in most children even if this occurs at different rates or stages in their maturity (Dyregrov, 2002).

It may be useful for adults in school to reflect on what is meant by a mature or accurate understanding of death and how this relates to the understanding and experiences of the children and young people in their care.

Researchers suggest that there are four essential components to a mature understanding of death:

Irreversibility - understanding that the physical body of a dead creature cannot come back to life and so death involves *permanent* separation

Finality - understanding that life-defining bodily functions cease after death; that a dead person cannot move, does not breathe, speak, go to the toilet and is unable to see, hear, smell, think, feel or dream

Inevitability - the understanding that death is universal and that *all* living things die; that death will affect all people including oneself (i.e. everyone will die, irrespective of race, status, money, country, gender, age)

Causality - the understanding of the possible physical and biological causes of death (e.g. illness, accident, violence, war, natural disaster, old age, etc)

There are many factors which might influence the development and understanding of these death concepts in children and young people, such as, age, cognitive ability, emotional maturity, exposure to discussion, cultural norms and expectations and direct experience of death or dying. Some of the concepts involved are noted to be more complex and challenging to understand (e.g. *finality*). As a guide however, the research evidence indicates that children are able to understand some components of death from as young as five, but are unlikely to fully comprehend all components until about nine or ten years of age.

The information below provides guidance regarding children and young people's understanding of death at different ages. However, when considering this, it is also important to take into account the child's developmental level alongside their chronological age.

0 - 4 years (emergent understanding)

At this age, children are egocentric and the importance of 'me' is paramount. Children at this stage are interested in the immediate rather than in the future or the past. Children's thinking in their early years is at a concrete, literal level. It is especially important at this stage therefore, not to use abstract terms or euphemisms (such as 'gone to sleep' or 'gone away' for example) as these may cause confusion or anxiety. Be prepared to give repeated explanations as the child comes to terms and tries to understand what has happened and to respond to misconceptions a young child might have. Children of this age are unlikely to have developed the concepts detailed above and so will have little idea that death is permanent. Separation or abandonment may be their primary feeling. A child of this age may be curious about what happens in death, such as how the dead person keeps warm, eats or drinks (not understanding '*finality*') and ask questions accordingly. Very young children can appear to take things in their stride. This is not to underestimate, however, the powerful reactions they may have.

4 - 8 years (limited understanding)

As children develop and learn more about their world, they begin to understand that death is permanent. It is around the age of 7 years that children are thought to accept the permanence of death and that it can happen to anyone (Child Bereavement Trust, 2005). Children become aware that death has a cause - illness, accident, violence, etc and that it happens to all living things. Children of this age may be interested in the facts about what has happened, are still likely to be concrete in their thinking and may use '*magical thinking*' (i.e. the belief that they can make things happen e.g. bring the dead person back to life). They may act out rituals associated with death, such as playing funerals, making tombstones etc. Children's egocentricity diminishes at this age, so that they become more aware of the feelings of others and are able to show empathy and compassion. As a result, although they are more able to express their thoughts and feelings, bereaved children may suppress their own grief in consideration of others.

8-12 years (mature understanding)

From around 8 to early adolescence, children and young people begin to develop a more mature understanding of the components of death (although '*magical thinking*' may still play a role). Children at this age are able to think in more abstract terms and appreciate the longer term implications and consequences of death. With this realisation, however, comes an understanding of their own mortality, which can give rise to fear and anxiety. Children and young people at this stage still require many opportunities to talk and ask questions.

Adolescence (accurate understanding)

By adolescence, most young people have an accurate understanding of death and dying.

At times, death may seem distant and at other times it may seem frighteningly close. The prospect of their own death becomes more of a reality and a fear of non-existence can pervade. Some bereaved teenagers may feel the need to test their own mortality by engaging in risk-taking behaviours. Others may be vulnerable to depression or anxiety.

It is important for adults to be sensitive to the peer and social pressures that exist during the teenage years. A feeling that others do not know how to respond, may result in a young person suppressing their grief in order to ensure conformity and remain accepted and included within their school or community. Conversely, some bereaved teenagers may find comfort and solace within their peer group rather than their family and may become outwardly challenging of the expectations of the adults around them.

The process of grieving

Adults can help children and young people through the process of grieving by providing age appropriate, factually accurate explanations, using clear language about death. As a result, fears or confusions are minimised. Children are less likely to create fantasies which may be worse than the reality and may compound the distress. Explanations may need to be repeated as children and young people can take time to assimilate difficult information.

The grieving process will be different for each individual. Whilst there are no time scales and no fixed ways in which we should grieve, similarities in the way individuals (both adults and children) respond to bereavements have been identified. The elements of grieving are commonly described as:

Early grief

At this stage there may be shock, disbelief and denial. The bereaved may continue to behave as if the dead person is still alive.

Acute grief

This may be described as the 'disorganisation' phase. The bereaved may experience guilt, anxiety, despair, depression, anger, grief in relation to the death.

Subsiding grief

At this stage, the bereaved person gradually begins to accept the death and begins to move on. This does not mean that the feelings of loss or sadness disappear or that the deceased person is forgotten.

Grieving

Children are affected by their own grief, the grief of those around them and by the degree that grief disrupts the security of their family life. Children bereaved of one parent often suffer the 'loss' of the other parent as well. The remaining parent, affected by their own grief, may be unable to respond to the child in their usual way.

Models of Grieving

Much has been researched and written about how people grieve and adapt to loss. The information below provides a brief summary of three of the models that are well regarded and established in the field of death studies. These models can be helpful in supporting our understanding of the responses of children and young people who are bereaved. Please see the references if you wish to read further about this subject.

Worden Model - The tasks of grieving

Worden (1983) describes grieving as a process and suggests that a bereaved person faces a number of tasks in their new-found situation. In order to adapt to a loss a person must work through the four tasks of grieving which are considered to be overlapping. The tasks are to:

- accept the reality of the loss
- experience the emotional pain of grief
- adjust to a new situation in which the dead person is missing
- withdraw emotional energy from the loss and invest it into a new relationship or situation.

Stroebe and Schut - The dual process model

Stroebe and Schut (1999) describe a 'dual process' model of grieving whereby grieving is seen to be a dynamic process during which people oscillate between coping behaviours; at times focussing on the loss and then at other times avoiding that focus. This can be very evident in children and young people's behaviour as they are perceived to move in and out of their grief.

Klass et al - The continuing bonds model

Klass et al (1996) present a theory of grieving which proposes that people do not have to 'detach' or 'let go' of their attachment to the deceased person. The continuing bonds model suggests that a bereaved person will go on to maintain a relationship (a continuing bond) with the deceased person; that this will change over time and be integrated within and compatible with new relationships. This model acknowledges the role of the past in the present and the continuity between the two.

Timescales

There are no set timescales to grieving. It is important to consider the individual variations in how a child or young person may grieve. These will be determined by the context of the loss, the degree of attachment to the deceased person, the young person's previous experiences of loss and death and the support mechanisms around them. In general, the initial stage of disbelief and shock passes quite quickly. However, the more complex stage of adjustment and readiness to move on can take a long time - perhaps many years. The second year following the death of a loved one has been identified by some children as more difficult to cope with than the first. Of course, feelings of loss and sadness may be present to some extent for a lifetime. Suggesting that most people will get over the loss within a certain time may result in the bereaved feeling they 'are doing it wrong' (grieving) and should be 'getting over it' from subtle messages they get from those around them, including from well-meaning professionals.

Behavioural responses to death in children and young people

Children, like adults, react to death in individual ways. Some children do not react immediately and it may be that a minor unrelated loss some time later will trigger a grief reaction. Changes may be evidenced in a child or young person's responses in school and other settings. Responses may be emotional, social, behavioural, physical or academic.

Common examples of behavioural changes might include:

- reluctance to go to school/reluctance to attend lessons
- unwillingness to go out to play/mix with peers
- problems with focussing on or completing school and other work
- difficulties making and maintaining relationships
- fear of being alone
- becoming upset by seemingly minor events
- changing patterns of social relationships e.g. becoming withdrawn, nervous or starting to bully others
- aggression, anger and non-compliance
- lower self-esteem and self-confidence
- sullenness/irritability/clinginess/dependency/separation anxiety
- regression to younger patterns of behaviour
- sleep disturbance/nightmares
- eating problems/change in eating patterns
- complaining of headaches/stomach aches/pains or be prone to illness or infection
- feeling tired and listless or becoming surprisingly hyperactive.

Emotional responses to death in children and young people

Like adults, children experience a range of emotions as a consequence of bereavement. The following are the most likely:

Fear

Children and young people can be fearful for a number of reasons. They may be fearful of:

- their own mortality
- going to sleep - nightmares or bedwetting may result
- separation from the remaining parent - 'Will they still be there when I go home?'
- being deserted and unprotected - 'Who will look after me?'
- sharing feelings with others - 'They'll think I'm silly'
- upsetting other people by a display of their own grief - 'Will I make them cry too?'
- further loss - 'Who will be next?'

Guilt

Guilt is often felt after the death of someone significant. A child may feel guilty because:

- they believe the death to be a punishment for their misbehaviour
- they once wished the person dead
- the chance to make amends has been removed
- they did not love the person enough
- others may idealise the deceased person and this may further complicate matters.

The feelings of guilt are not easily expressed or recognised and can be long lasting.

Anger

Anger is a very normal reaction to death. Children may feel angry

- with the person for dying and abandoning them
- with themselves for not doing something to prevent the death
- for the injustice of life.

The anger may manifest itself outwardly by verbal outbursts, temper tantrums, irrational behaviour, fights, aggressive and destructive behaviour. The anger may, however, also be turned inwards and present as depression, withdrawal, illness and accident-proneness. The death of a parent or close family member can result in children feeling worthless. For example, 'If my parent could die and leave me, I cannot be very important'.

Confusion

Children often experience confusion with regards to death. They may be confused:

- about their perceptions and memories of the dead person (especially in the face of others' idealisation)
- about God and religion
- about the explanations for death which are given to them
- by the moodiness and unpredictability of those closest to them who are suffering from their own grief
- by being torn between childhood and adulthood. For example, they may feel they have to look after the surviving parent at a time when they desperately need to be looked after themselves.

How school and setting staff can help

Staff in schools and other settings are in a good position to offer support and to consider the needs of children and their families. Across a setting or school community, it is likely that there will be many pupils experiencing some form of loss which may have an impact on their family or school life. Settings and schools can provide children and young people with a safe and secure environment in which to grieve. When supporting children in school or in a setting, it is important not to make assumptions about family beliefs and cultural values. Careful consideration is needed to develop sensitive and empathic communication with the family to ascertain factual information, their rituals, customs and wishes. More information about different cultural beliefs about death can be found in the Schools' Information Pack (Fact sheet 11), The Child Bereavement Trust (www.childbereavementtrust.org.uk; see also reference list).

Helpful approaches when talking with children and young people

- Listening is important - listen carefully. Set time aside - be available. Prepare for a session - when and where will you meet?
- Show warmth and empathy and be respectful.
- Try not to interrupt - allow silences if need be, a pause may mean that the child may want to re-order their thoughts before continuing.
- Take time to clarify if you think you do not understand a point being made.
- If you need to ask a question, try to use open questions. What/ Where/Who/When/How? are good words to start with e.g. *How are you feeling about this? How did this make you feel? Who would you like to know/tell about this? When would be a good time to share this?*

- Paraphrasing helps to establish an understanding of an important point. The provision of a brief summary or paraphrase at a convenient point can help the child feel they are being listened to and can also help clarify that you have understood correctly. For example:

Child: "I was stunned when I was told and could not believe it"

Teacher: "So it shocked you and it was hard to believe" (summarising)

- Acknowledge what has been said - respond appropriately to non- verbal cues- the child may not wish to give you eye contact, but may nod or shake their head in response to a question.
- Encourage the learning of coping strategies so that a young person does not become over dependent.
- Allow the child to cry - reassure them that it is safe to express their emotions.
- Be honest: it is fine to say, "I don't know" if you cannot answer the question.

Things to avoid

- **platitudes**, "Don't get upset, it'll be alright"
- **relating your own losses**, "Yes I remember when my mother died, I felt ..."
- **overcompensating**, "No, don't ask her to do that, she's been through such a lot, the poor child"
- **changing the subject**, "Try not to think about it, now how about if you got on with ..."
- **minimising the loss**, "Yes, I know your hamster died but it is not the end of the world"
- **telling the child what they should feel**, "I know you're upset now but you'll soon feel better"
- **Euphemisms** are generally used when people find it difficult to talk about something. Euphemisms about death and dying should be avoided when talking with bereaved children and young people. Sometimes adults, feel it is kinder to use a euphemism, especially when talking with very young children. Examples of euphemisms about death might include; 'gone to sleep', 'gone away', 'been taken', 'passed away' 'gone to the angels'. Euphemisms can lead to mis-understandings and confusion as children do not appreciate the meaning implied in the euphemism. This is especially the case for children and young people who are literal thinkers (e.g. those on the Autism Spectrum) or at a concrete stage in their cognitive development. The use of euphemisms can lead to anxiety which can complicate the grieving process and may encourage young people to build up fantasies and myths around death (Lost for Words, 2005).

Death through suicide

- Although this shares many characteristics with reactions to other deaths, a child or young person who has been bereaved through suicide can be placed under considerable emotional pressure if they believe that the person who has died did so as a consequence of something they think they did or did not do.
- The child or young person in this situation may have feelings of anger towards the person who has died for abandoning them. Often they will struggle with why the person took their own life so it is important for adults working with them to find out the known facts from the family, police or health services in order to help and reassure the child that they were not responsible for the death in any way.
- Do not underestimate or dismiss the guilt the young person may be feeling but talk to them sensitively about why they feel guilty and what it is that they said or didn't say, did or didn't do, that they feel might have caused the death. This is more than just the magical thinking that we discussed earlier in relation to younger children's beliefs about death.
- Suicide still has a social stigma within some communities where it is viewed as a moral, cultural or religious transgression and families can sometimes feel isolated or ostracised and shameful. There may be mental health issues associated with the death which can prompt unhelpful and unkind responses sometimes leading to bullying, so staff should therefore be vigilant.

Important factors to consider in schools and settings

- For a bereaved child or young person, returning to the school or setting environment can be a difficult transition. Once the child is in the school or setting however, it may provide some respite for/from other family members, who are also going through the grieving process. If handled appropriately, the return to school can give the child or young person some security and stability. The routines are important as it brings some normality back into the child's life. However, some children can become quite anxious after a significant loss and revert to the behaviour of a younger child.
- If possible, discussion should take place with the family before the child returns to the school or other setting. The child's worries and anxieties need to be addressed. Subject to the permission of child and parent(s) the class or peers should be informed. You may wish to consider telling other parents of the loss, as their children may also wish to discuss this and how they should respond.
- Regular contact needs to be maintained with the bereaved family to communicate how the child is coping at school or in the setting. Adjustment to bereavement can sometimes be a long and painful process. You may see changes in behaviour, e.g. reluctance to attend, poor concentration, becoming withdrawn and tearful. These changes could occur over a period of time. Significant dates may be important to note and possibly mark e.g. Mother's Day, Father's Day, the anniversary of the loss, the birthday of the deceased.
- It is important to let your genuine concern and caring show. Children need permission to talk about the loss as much and as often as they want to. They should be allowed to express their unhappy feelings too when they are willing to share them.
- The bereaved child's friends may also need to talk. They may be feeling uncomfortable and uncertain about their attempts to make contact. Being avoided by friends can add to existing pain.

- If adults show their feelings, children, in turn, will know that it is all right to grieve. The loss is painful and there are no shortcuts to getting through that pain. Adults need to continue to be supportive and to be available for as long as it takes.
- Adult vigilance is required regarding a young person's physical as well as their emotional well-being. Following bereavement, children and young people may be more vulnerable to illness or to mental health problems such as eating disorders or self-harming.
- Do remember that grieving can take a long time for some children and young people.

Other areas that you may need to consider are:

- keeping the School Governing Body or Management Committee informed and the role of the Chair or other nominated Governor in supporting the Head teacher/Manager and other staff;
- if you become increasingly concerned about the child over time you may wish to consider specialist counselling services, following discussion with the child, family members and support agencies;
- the language and manner that staff might use with a young person with special educational needs or disabilities, who has been affected by a bereavement;
- how a death might be marked, both for an individual or for the wider community (e.g. memorial service, special assembly);
- providing support for the member of staff who is predominantly helping the bereaved child, ensuring they are the right person to support in this demanding role and not too upset themselves;
- adult reactions as people's personal grief responses are triggered. Experience of working with Early Years' Settings suggests that this is often the first time that some young members of staff have experienced any death of someone they know well or are close to and they may need support to come to terms with their own unfamiliar reactions;
- staff welfare and support systems outside of the school or setting.

Who else can help a bereaved young person?

- immediate family members
- extended family members
- the child's friends
- school doctor and school nurse
- community and/or religious leaders
- specialist voluntary organisations for bereavement support
- Educational Psychology and Education Social Work Services

Be prepared: adopting a pro-active approach within school or setting - ongoing whole organisation considerations

- to consider opportunities for all staff to undertake bereavement support training
- to incorporate loss and bereavement into the curriculum e.g. through SEAL or PSHE and acknowledge it when circumstances arise within school life
- to ensure that the contact information for local/nearest bereavement support service is available
- to have relevant resources (books, leaflets, videos) available for both staff and young people across the age range. To contact NYCC Library Service regarding reading material for pupils across the Key Stages.
- to develop a whole organisation response to loss and bereavement including how to respond to a death in the school, setting or community
- to ensure staff have a knowledge and understanding of the cultural diversity within the work community and the associated bereavement customs and rituals.

Children and young people attending funerals

Funerals provide public recognition of a person's life within a community. School, setting and residential staff are often asked for advice about whether a child or young person should attend the funeral of a close relative. Whilst this should remain a family decision, it can be difficult to make. As families are likely to be distressed and emotional themselves, it is not always easy for them to think through what a child might need. Staff may find it helpful therefore to suggest that the family consider the following:

- Funerals are a formal, ritualised and recognised way of saying good bye to someone and can effectively incorporate the presence of children and young people who were important to the deceased person. They can benefit in the long term from being included in the funeral and its arrangements and from being given the chance to say good bye along with their family. In a research study, (Holland, 2004) two thirds of the children who attended the funeral of a deceased parent reported it as a positive or helpful experience and were glad they had been included. Three quarters of those who did not attend the funeral later wished they had done so.
- Adults should recognize that children and young people do grieve and need to be able to formally mark the death of the deceased. Attending a funeral at an early age can introduce a child to the customs and rituals of their culture which are associated with death and to realise that they are not alone in their loss and grief and that others are suffering and affected too. This can help later in life when more significant losses are experienced. It should be noted however that in some cultures or religions, a child may have no choice about attending a funeral - to not go might be seen as disrespectful.
- Children and young people need to know what is involved. It is important that adults do not make assumptions about what is known or understood by the young person, but explain things carefully using clear and honest language. Children need to know what to expect, what will happen. Consider language and the words a child or young person may need to understand e.g. church, temple, mosque, priest, imam, coffin, casket, burial, grave, cremation, cemetery, ashes, undertaker, hearse, crypt etc.

- If children are to attend a funeral, it is helpful to prepare them for the conventional things they may hear people say or have said to them which they may not understand (e.g. 'I am sorry for your loss'). Many funerals are followed by a wake or other gathering at which people often display different emotions from those expressed in a funeral service. This may be confusing for a child or young person but can be explained to them. Additionally, the language used in funerals may idealise the deceased person and that may be at odds with how the child viewed them, for example in those circumstances where the deceased had abused them.
- Most children and young people usually appreciate being given a choice along with the necessary information and to know that it is all right to change their mind. They should not usually be forced to attend if they do not want to be there - but see the caveat about cultural differences above. Arrangements could be made for a child or young person to attend some but not all of the funeral events or they can be involved in another 'goodbye' ceremony of their own. Formal memorials are important.
- If young children are attending a funeral, it can be helpful to identify an adult (e.g. an aunt or uncle) who is well known to them, who can be asked to keep a special eye on them and take them out, distract them etc if necessary, as sitting still and listening in a formal setting may be difficult for them for any sustained period. This means the parent can continue to focus on the funeral service and not worry about the child. Adults are often keen to help a family in any way and like to be given a role.

Further information about children and young people attending funerals can be found at:

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Critical incidents

Most of the guidance in this booklet to this point has been about children and young people's understanding of death and the impact on them of being bereaved. Sometimes this can be partly planned for, e.g. a parent dying as a result of a terminal illness, and sometimes it comes completely unexpectedly, e.g. a child being killed in a road traffic accident. Major accidents and unexpected deaths in the school community have a big impact on adults and young people and are perhaps more common than would be expected.

Statistics from the Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) annual report 2010 recorded 76 deaths of school age children between 2001 and 2005 and 8 school age deaths in 2009-10. As an Incident Response Team in the Educational Psychology and Education Social Work Service we have responded to 16 incidents in Primary Schools; 15 incidents in Secondary Schools and 5 in Special Schools between January 2009 and January 2011. Some of these involved the unexpected deaths of adults associated with a school or early years setting but most were deaths of children and young people and have a considerable impact on the feelings and behaviour of other people in the setting or school.

Responding to a child death: *(See also Checklist below and Quick Guide in the Appendices).* Schools, settings and residential homes should report such incidents to the CYPS Directorate (01609 532234) who will contact those services that may be helpful to you.

Any death will cause upset as a natural reaction and you should be prepared for an outpouring of grief. Our experience suggests that young people and caring staff, who already know them, can deal with this very well without the immediate intervention of "counsellors". The Local Authority has a team of educational psychologists and education social workers who can and will respond as an Incident Response Team.

Our aim is to help senior staff to return an abnormal situation to normality as quickly as possible whilst acknowledging people's feelings and supporting those who need particular help to cope with their emotional, physical and behavioural responses to the incident. (See *Appendices 5 & 6 for more detail on how this team can support you*).

The **Quick Guide** outlines what you need to do immediately after hearing about a serious incident and the **Checklist** goes through the questions that senior managers need to ask themselves about how to manage the aftermath in the school or setting, and the practical and philosophical issues that need to be dealt with. We can support managers in making such decisions and we will work with individuals or groups of children, young people or staff who are having difficulty in coming to terms with the loss.

Responding to an adult death: If this is the death of a parent, close relative or friend affecting a child, who is subsequently absent from the school or setting for a period, then staff should maintain contact with the family and be reassuring about the return to that institution. Be aware of emotional or behavioural changes that you might witness and be sensitive to how the child or young person might be feeling but the school or setting may be a stable and normalising place to be when much of the rest of their world is in turmoil and therefore be seen as a welcome place to come to. Prepare for the return and nominate or ask the child to choose a person from whom they can seek help if they are feeling overwhelmed. (See *Checklist and flowchart about procedures for children of armed forces personnel - Appendix 1*)

If this is the death of an adult associated with the institution, then you should still inform the Local Authority and make preparations for the inevitable upset of young people and staff. Agree circumstances in which young people can be out of the classroom or building, how they will be supervised and when they should return; discuss attendance at the funeral and how condolences and memorials should be managed.

In any of these circumstances, adults should be vigilant for apparently unexplained changes in behaviour in children or staff who were not necessarily directly involved with the original incident. This is often a sign that the event has acted as a trigger for some unresolved loss or trauma that they have previously suffered and for which they may now be receptive to being helped. The Incident Response Team has some staff trained in Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) techniques which might be helpful for people suffering regular flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, sleeplessness or nightmares etc to prevent post - traumatic stress disorder. Talk to us about this, if you are aware of anyone with such problems.

Checklists

A Death in the Community – Response Checklist

This checklist is intended to act as a prompt for possible action in response to bereavement. It may be helpful for one person to record action taken and to revisit the checklist over time.

Immediate action in the event of any unexpected death	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On hearing of a bereavement in or related to the school¹, check that the information is accurate and factual. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocate a key person who will be responsible for co-ordinating action and communication within the establishment. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform the Local Authority (tel 01609 532234 or for out of hours assistance 01609 777398), who will mobilise agencies for advice e.g. through Public Relations Office and support e.g. from CYPS Incident Support Team and information e.g. Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) or building assistance 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform all school staff (including part-time staff, midday supervisors, staff on sick leave etc.) and the governors or managers. Give clear, factual information. (Be aware that news of a death may be distressing for those not directly affected, as connections are made with personal experiences of loss). 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decide how to inform the other young people. Who will break the news? Where and when will this be? What would the family/child like people to know? Remember to use simple language, to avoid the use of euphemisms and to give a clear and accurate message. Expect that where there are gaps in information, rumours will start. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anticipate and plan for distress. Agree arrangements for young people to be out of class, where they can go, how they will be supervised, at what point they should return to class. Consider support for staff as well as young people. Are additional staff needed to help to support? Aim is always to acknowledge grief but to normalise situation as soon as possible. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make contact with schools attended by other family members and share information about the death and the support on offer. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will parents in the school community be informed? A short, simple letter sent home can help to avoid confusion or disbelief and will support communication as young people return home at the end of the day. (See sample letters in Appendices) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform other agencies that were involved with the child² 	

¹ For 'school', read 'school, setting or residential home' wherever that is appropriate

² For 'child' read 'child or young person' wherever that is appropriate to do so

Where an adult has died	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware that news of a death may be distressing for those not directly affected as connections are made with personal experiences of loss. This might be a particular issue for families of serving armed forces personnel (<i>“not us this time, but ...”</i>) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where serving forces personnel are killed or seriously injured, the Casualty Notification Officer or the family’s Visiting Officer will request the family’s consent for the Unit Welfare Officer to inform the school (p. 27) A Chaplain, attached to the Unit can also offer support to the family and if necessary to the school. • All welfare support within the RAF system is contracted out to SSAFA (<i>Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen’s Families Association</i>) Forces Help who will work directly with families and inform the school or setting if needed; <i>this is instead of Army Welfare, Unit Welfare, Welfare Support Offices and Casualty Key Worker as used by the Army.</i> <p><i>Also bear in mind that families or the Armed Forces may not wish to release the name of the deceased immediately and such information must therefore be treated as confidential until informed otherwise.</i></p>	
Where a pupil has died	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking registers – <i>when taking the register for the first time with a group in which the child would have been then: pause to acknowledge that would have been his/her space and carry on</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing with personal and school property – <i>collect exercise books and personal property, empty lockers etc and explain to children who ask that the family will decide what to do with the belongings</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seating arrangements in classes – <i>if the child would usually sit in a particular place in any lesson then decide how to manage that or ask other pupils how they wish to manage it</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports teams and clubs – <i>agree with other team members what to do about position in team or shirt number etc</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School uniform vs. ‘mourning’ wear – <i>make a decision as to whether black/mourning clothing is acceptable and if so for how long or on what occasions and explain the reasons for your decision</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove deceased person’s details from all school computer software e.g. register, mailing lists, examination entries, school transport arrangements etc. 	

Where a young person has been bereaved: Short term action (i.e. in the next few days)	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make contact with the bereaved family. A home visit may be necessary to establish, for example, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The family's religious/cultural beliefs and practices • The family's wishes regarding school representation at any funeral/ceremony, floral tributes etc • Likely changes for the children affected by the bereavement 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan carefully for the young person's return to school and, if at all possible, include them in decisions. <i>Consult with them. Inform them what others in the school know and have been told. Recognise that some young people may feel embarrassed or not want anyone to know that someone close to them has died.</i> 	
<p>Note the date and circumstances of the bereavement on the young person's records. <i>Discuss with a family member significant dates that are likely to affect the young person throughout the year (e.g. birthdays, anniversaries, Mother's Day etc) and prepare for these dates appropriately</i></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan for the pupil's short-term absence (e.g. photocopy missed work) and be aware they may fall behind with work on their return. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum activities - <i>if the curriculum throws up 'sensitive' subjects, do not avoid them but use the emotion and energy that they generate to explore the issues</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss with the bereaved child who especially they would like to support them in school when they return. <i>(Remember this member of staff will need support too).</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss how the death may be marked and the deceased remembered in the establishment, if this is appropriate e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book of condolence - <i>agree where this should be and how young people may access it either to write in or to read it</i> • Memory box - <i>allow other young people to make or collect items that provide a reminder of the deceased: pictures, photos, poems, small tokens of significance etc</i> • Blogs, internet site - <i>consider whether you want this as part of the establishment website or not; if you don't, then be certain that someone will post something on the internet anyway</i> • Memorial Services - <i>talk to staff, children about how you might remember the person and then discuss with the family, when appropriate, how they would like to arrange or be part of a service</i> 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanent memorials - <i>as above; a lot of people will have an opinion about this and the family should be closely involved ... but this can be left until some time in the future</i> 	
Longer term action i.e. in the next few weeks or months	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be vigilant on the child's return to school and for the months following. <i>The child may experience changes in their learning style or usual emotional/behavioural responses.</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure details of the bereavement are passed on if the pupil moves or transfers school. Note: <i>families of armed forces personnel may choose to move away after the death of a serving soldier or airman or may have to look for other accommodation after two years.</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a note of the child's birthday. <i>This and other events such as holidays, Christmas etc. are likely to be especially sensitive times.</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remember the anniversary of the death and consider how this may be marked or remembered by the pupil and/or others. <i>Remember the possible long term nature of bereavement and that every bereavement is unique. Grieving comes and goes. It will vary in its duration and intensity</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware that any significant changes in school (e.g. of teacher, of class) may adversely affect the child, even after a considerable period of time has passed. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep ongoing contact with the child's family. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See earlier in this booklet re talking to a bereaved young person. <i>Listen to the pupil; do not be afraid to talk about the deceased. A bereaved child needs reassurance, to be listened to, to have questions answered honestly, to feel loved and cared for.</i> 	

Resource lists

This booklet is based on the following source materials which are also recommended for further reading. Some of these resources may be available for loan from the Educational Psychology Service. Alternatively ask the Library Service to make up a pack for temporary loan from which you can choose more permanent resources. Check the websites listed for free downloadable resources.

For reference/general adult reading

Barnardos		Just B Service Brochure, supporting children, young people and adults. Bereavement Support Booklet for children and young people Terminal Illness Booklet for children and young people.	
Brown, Erica	1999	<i>Loss, Change and Grief. An Educational Perspective</i>	David Fulton Pub, London ISBN: 978-1853464652
Dyregrov, Atle	2008	<i>Grief in Children. A Handbook for Adults</i>	Jessica Kingsley, London ISBN: 978-1843106500
Holland, J M	1997	<i>Coping with Bereavement: A Handbook for Teachers</i>	Cardiff Academic Press ISBN: 978-1899025053
Holland, J M	2001	<i>Understanding Children's Experience of Parental Bereavement</i>	Jessica Kingsley ISBN: 978-1843100164
Holland, J M, Dance, R, McManus N, Stitt, C	2005	<i>Lost for Words</i>	Jessica Kingsley ISBN: 978-1843103240
Job, N & Francis, G	2004	<i>Childhood Bereavement: developing the curriculum and pastoral support</i>	National Children's Bureau, London ISBN: 978-1904787143
Klass, D, Silverman, P R, Nickman, S L	1996	<i>Continuing bonds, new understandings of grief'</i>	Taylor & Francis ISBN: 978-1560323396
Worden, William	1991	<i>Finding a Way through When Someone Close has Died</i>	Routledge, London ISBN: 978-1853029202
Worden, William	1996	<i>Children and Grief. When a Parent Dies</i>	OUP, Buckingham ISBN: 978-0335211166
Wells, Rosemary	2007	<i>Helping Children Cope with Grief. Facing a Death in the Family</i>	Sheldon, London ISBN: 978-1847090225
Worden, William	2003	<i>Grief Counselling and Grief therapy. A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner. 3rd Ed.</i>	Routledge, London ISBN: 978-1583919415
Worden, William	2002	<i>Children and Grief. When a Parent Dies</i>	Guildford Press, London ISBN: 978-1572307469

Working with school staff – a sample of the many resources available

Lost for Words (training resource), Jessica Kingsley

Good Grief, Ward et al

A Pocket Full of Posies (2002), Kent County Council (CD-Rom)

Loss and the Development of Resilience (training pack for primary schools) Gloucestershire EPS (April, 2007)

Grief in the Family

Teenage Grief

Not Too Young to Grieve (Re Early Years)

All 3 DVDs are available from www.leedsanimation.org.uk

Video/DVD titles from the Childhood Bereavement Network (National Children's Bureau)

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/>

- 'A Death in the Lives of' (young people discuss support they needed)
- "You'll always remember them... even when you're old" (Children aged 6 – 12 years discussing support)
- 'It will be OK' (Young people aged 13 – 18 years discussing support)

Supporting Bereaved Children and Young People in School (Information Pack) The Child Bereavement Trust, 2005 <http://www.childbereavement.org.uk>

'I Can You Can' Childhood Bereavement Network (a series of four postcards for bereaved children and young people to share)

Memory Garden – a Bereavement Card Game, Winslow, UK

Seasons for Growth is a loss and grief peer-group education programme for young people aged 6-18 years and adults. www.seasonsforgrowth.co.uk

Useful websites for staff, families and young people:

<http://www.childbereavement.org.uk>

<http://www.winstonswish.org.uk/> Inc curriculum related materials

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/>

<http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk>

<http://www.serviceschoolsmobilitytoolkit.com/resourcedownloads/news/GuidanceOnPupilMobilityDocument.pdf> Information for schools with service children

<http://www.justb.org.uk> and info@justb.org.uk Barnardos bereavement services

Workbooks and fiction for children and young people

Collins, M	2005	<i>It's OK to be Sad. Activities to help children aged 4-9 manage loss, grief or bereavement</i>	Sage Publications Ltd ISBN: 978-1412918251
Goldman, Linda	2005	<i>Children also Grieve (Hardback version)</i>	Jessica Kingsley, London ISBN: 978-1843108085
MacGregor, C	2009	<i>My Daddy's Going Away ... temporary separation from parents</i>	Giddy Mangoes Ltd ISBN: 978-0-9564651
Mundy, M	2004	<i>Sad isn't Bad. A Good Grief Guidebook for Kids Dealing with Loss</i>	Abbey Press, USA ISBN: 978-0870293214
Rogers, M et al	2002	<i>Managing Emotions: Death and Bereavement</i>	Chalkface Project ISBN: 978-1860254468
Rosen, M	2011	<i>Michael Rosen's SAD BOOK</i>	Walker Books, London ISBN: 978-1406317848
Sanders, Bruce	2007 New Edition	<i>Talking about Death and Dying (Asks and answers the questions)</i>	Franklin Watts, London ISBN: 978-0749670115
Smith, W	2007	<i>Grandad's Ashes (Hardback version)</i>	Jessica Kingsley, London ISBN: 978-1843105176
Stickney, D	2004	<i>Water Bugs and Dragonflies</i>	Continuum, London ISBN: 978-0826471819
Sunderland, M	2003	<i>Helping Children with Loss. A Guidebook (includes story The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back)</i>	Speechmark, Oxford, UK ISBN: 978-0863884719
Sunderland, M Hancock, N	2001	<i>Helping Children who Yearn for Someone they Love (includes story The Frog who Longed for the Moon to Smile)</i>	Speechmark, Oxford, UK ISBN: 978-0863885020
Thomas, P	2005	<i>I Miss You. A first look at death.</i>	Hodder Children's Books, ISBN: 978-0340911068
Turner, M	2006	<i>Talking with Children and Young People about Death and Dying, 2nd Ed.</i>	Jessica Kingsley, London ISBN: 978-1843104414
Wymont, D and Rae, T	2006	<i>Supporting Young People coping with Grief, Loss and Death (11-18 year olds)</i>	Sage Publications Ltd ISBN: 978-1412913126

References from the text not included in the lists above:

Bowlby, J. (1969) Attachment and Loss

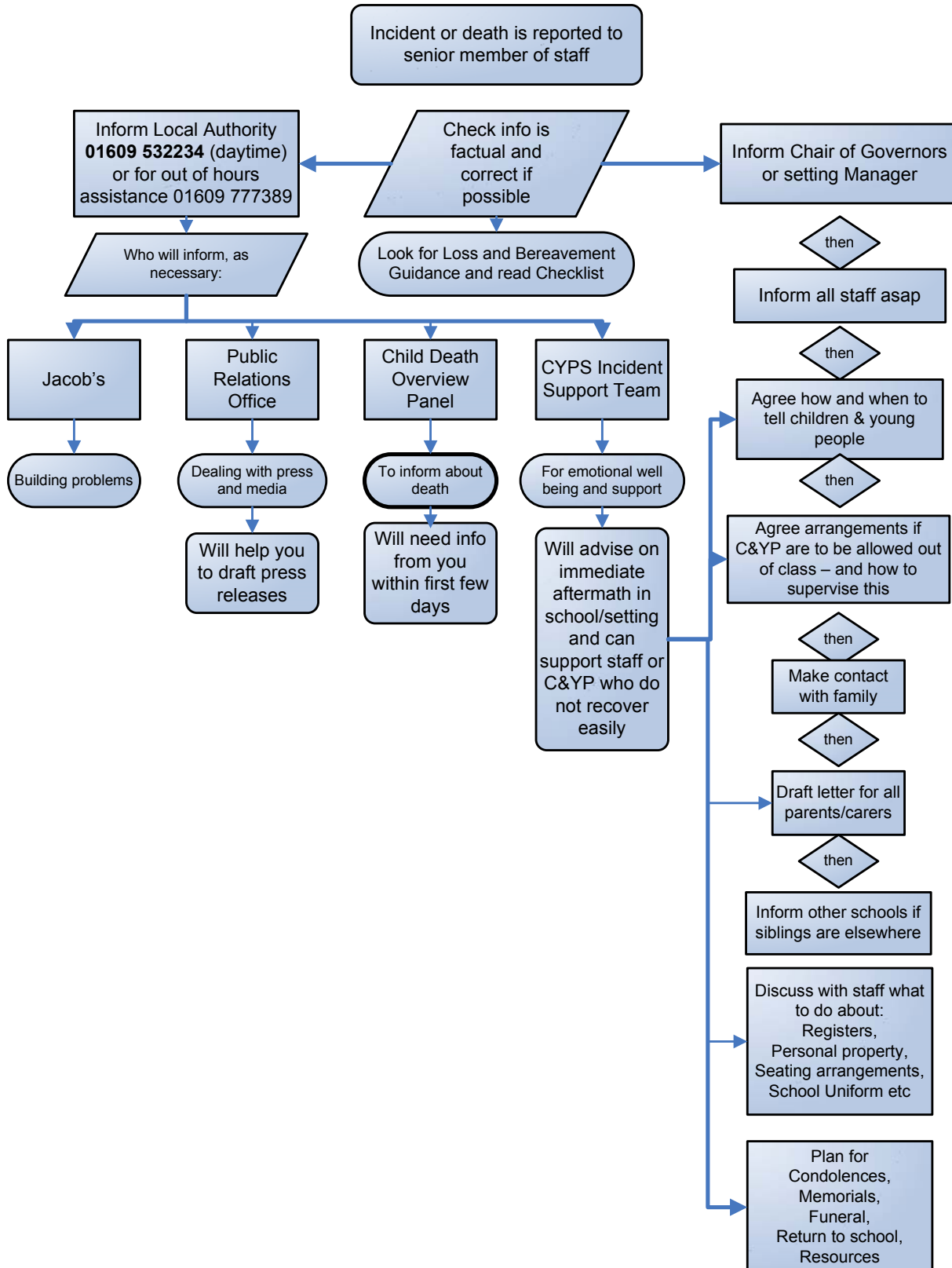
Dyregrov, A. (2002) Grief in Children

Holland, J. (2004) Children and Funerals, download from www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Stroebe, M. & Schut, H. (1999) The dual process model of coping with bereavement. *Death Studies*, 1999, Vol 23.

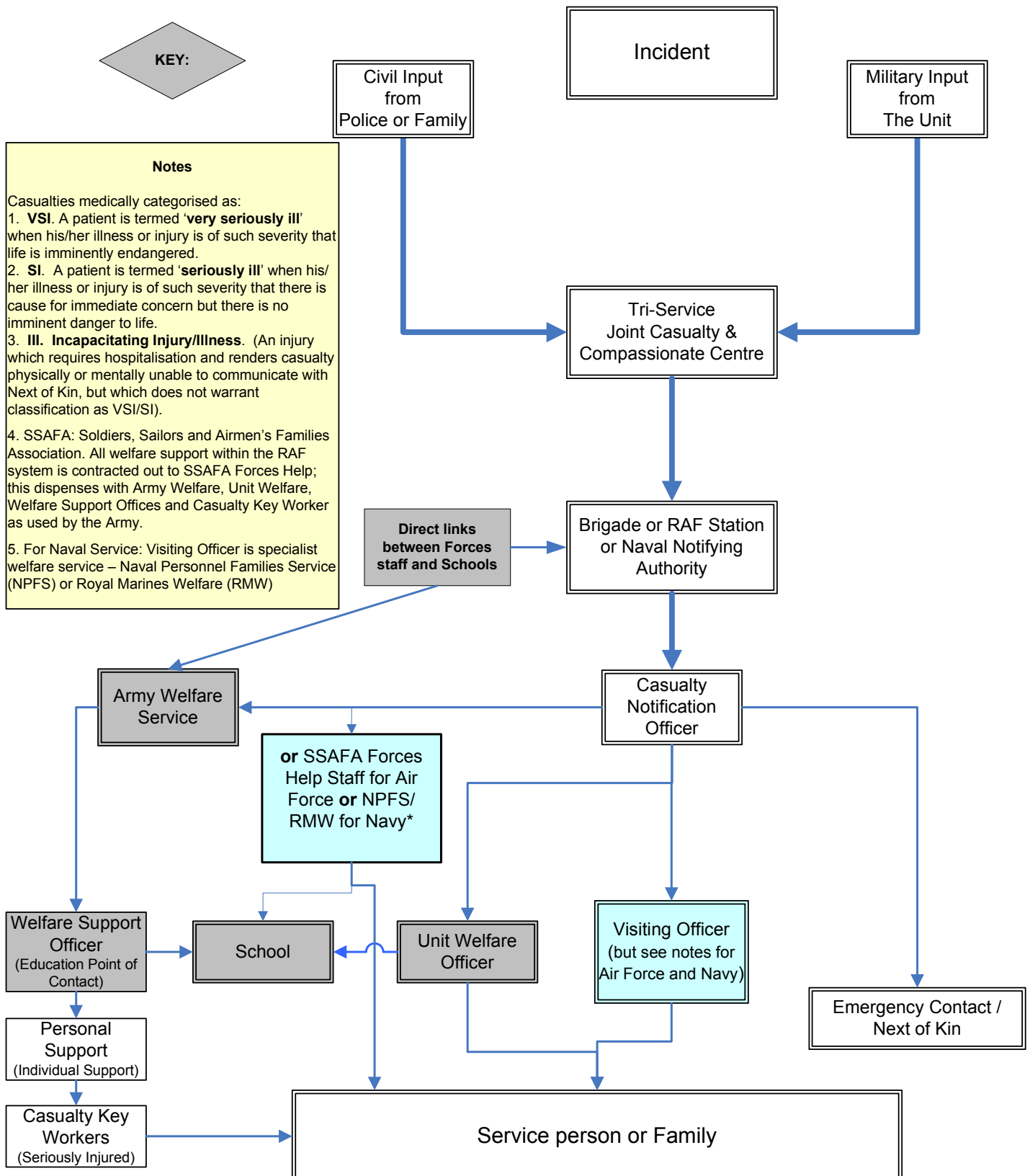
Worden, W. (1983) Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy

Quick guide for schools and settings in the event of a tragic incident or a death



Appendix 2

Notification process for death or serious injury of armed forces personnel



Sample letter for Parents – child’s death

<Name of> School/Setting

<Date>

Dear Parents/ Carers

Your child’s tutor had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>

They were told that <name> died from an illness called cancer. Sometimes people who have cancer can get better, but other times people die from it. <Name> had been ill with cancer for a long time and died at home yesterday.

When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of feelings of sadness, anger, and confusion - these are all normal. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school, and you can help by talking to them at home and answering their questions honestly. Support will be available to the school if your child is having difficulty coming to terms with this loss. Please contact your child’s form tutor if you wish for further support.

The funeral will take place at <Named Church or Crematorium> on <Day and Date> at <Time>. Your child may wish to attend the funeral. If this is the case you may collect your child from school and accompany them to the church. Please inform the school of your child’s absence, if this is the case.

Yours sincerely

<Name>
Head teacher

Appendix 4

Sample letter for parents – adult's death

<Name of> School/Setting

<Date>

Dear Parents/ Carers

Your child's Head/ Class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the sad death of <Name>, who has been a member of staff at this school for <number> years.

Our thoughts are with <Name>'s family at this time and in an effort to try and respond to his/her death in a positive manner, all children have been informed.

The children were told that <Name> died from an asthma attack on <Date>. A number of pupils have been identified as being asthmatic and <Name>, the School Nurse has today reassured them that it is unusual for a person to die from asthma.

When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of feelings - sadness, anger, and confusion - which are all normal. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school, and you can help by talking to them at home and answering their questions honestly. Support will be available to the school if your child is having difficulty coming to terms with this loss. Please contact your child's form tutor if you wish for further support.

The funeral will take place at <Named Church or Crematorium> on <Day and Date> at <Time>. Your child may wish to attend the funeral. If this is the case you may collect your child from school and accompany them to the church. Please inform the school of your child's absence, if this is the case.

Yours sincerely

<Name>
Head teacher

Critical incident support for schools and settings

The role of the Children and Young People's Service

What do we do?

Our role is to support the Head teacher or Manager and staff of any North Yorkshire School, Setting or Residential Home in the event of a major accident or traumatic incident (one where somebody's life was in actual or threatened danger), when invited to do so by the Head teacher/Manager.

What is a critical incident?

A critical incident can be defined as an event that is outside the range of every day events, for example, the unexpected death of a child/young person or a member of staff. A near-death experience, serious accident or sad event involving a death, for pupils or staff could also fall into this definition.

What kind of help can we give?

We will try to:

- Help staff deal with the initial shock of crisis situations.
- Support Senior Management Team with the re-establishment of normal routines
- Help identify vulnerable individuals – staff and young people
- Provide information about other support services and suggest appropriate resources
- Provide time-limited support to the organisation or to individuals within it
- Provide information on loss and bereavement that is appropriate to age and stage of development

How can you contact us?

In the event of a crisis or emergency situation being reported to the Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Services, support from the Incident Support Team will be offered if it is felt that this is required.

Telephone **01609 532234**

What do we do?

Support Co-ordinators: Principal Educational Psychologist or Principal Education Social Worker may speak to you in the first instance. They are available on the telephone to discuss relevant issues with Head teachers and Managers. The roles and responsibilities of the Team and of the school/setting/home will be discussed with you prior to any involvement. If required, the Co-ordinators will then contact other members of the Team who will offer support as required.

Who are we?

Members of the Team include Educational Psychologists, Education Social Workers and other colleagues with a background in support and counselling.

Useful numbers

Communications: **01609 532917** (Office Hours)

North Yorkshire Out of Hours Emergency Planning: **01609 777389** (if you are in need of immediate assistance only).

Critical incidents – NYCC internal protocols

Incident Support Team – Roles and Responsibilities when providing additional support to schools and organisations.

What can schools/settings/residential homes expect?	What can the Incident Support Team expect?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a group of people who are trained in providing support to organisations after traumatic incidents• within the Incident Support Team there will be a nominated co-ordinator for each occasion• the team members will work closely with staff to identify, reinforce or establish support systems within the school/ organisation• in the immediate aftermath of an event, the team will largely be providing reassurance and an independent but sympathetic presence• members of the team will be prepared to work with children, young people and adults affected directly or indirectly by the event. This work might be on an individual or small group basis.• they may help with drafting letters for parents or how to address assemblies in such circumstances• at the end of each day the Incident Support Team will:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• review the situation with key staff• make telephone contact with the CYP Service Senior Manager who will agree whether there is need for, and level of, ongoing support.• the aim of the support is to ensure that the organisation is able to manage the longer term, if this is necessary, and that usual routines are re-established as soon as possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• an opportunity for the Incident Support Team to meet with the Head teacher or Senior Manager soon after arrival• the name of a senior staff member to act as contact person to facilitate the work of the team, to help with access to resources, decision-making etc.• suitable room/s in which to meet with children, young people and adults on an individual or small group basis with a suitably supervised waiting area and a checking in and out system• arrangements for young people to meet with team members will be organised and monitored by school staff• the organisation will remain responsible for normalising routines as soon as possible• daily opportunities for debriefing with school staff• access to facilities, refreshments etc.• telephone availability of CYP Service Senior Manager

Reviewing a critical event

What occurred?	
How did you find out?	
Who was involved?	
What were your priorities?	
What did you do that seemed particularly useful in the circumstances?	
Was there anything you would have done differently?	
What were the short-, medium- and long-term systems you have put in place?	
What could be done better?	

Contact us

North Yorkshire County Council, County Hall, Northallerton, North Yorkshire, DL7 8AD

Our Customer Service Centre is open Monday to Friday 8.00am - 5.30pm (closed weekends and bank holidays). Tel: **0845 8727374** email: **customer.services@northyorks.gov.uk**

Or visit our website at: **www.northyorks.gov.uk**

If you would like this information in another language or format such as Braille, large print or audio, please ask us.

Tel: 01609 532917 Email: communications@northyorks.gov.uk

