

# Fishburn Primary School



## Bereavement Policy

Written: November 2020

Review: November 2021

Approved by: Curriculum Committee

# School Bereavement Policies – Guidance Document

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## Aims of Document

This document aims to set out the considerations that senior leaders will need to create a comprehensive bereavement policy. Senior Leaders will need to think about how it links to other policies, e.g. critical incidents, and how it relates to the overall ethos of the school that has a bereavement aware culture in place.

## Rationale

In every school there will almost always be individuals who are dealing with grief and loss. It is estimated that 45,000 children are bereaved every year in the UK ([www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)). Within school there is an opportunity to support them to be a listening ear, to offer them some structure and normality where it's

needed, opportunities to be a child, and to support their wellbeing as a whole. Having a bereavement policy in a school ensures the preparation and planning needed to support those affected, whether it's an individual or the whole school community. A bereavement policy can provide a guiding framework for managing these events; however, it is important to recognise the range of experiences and losses that might occur, and that each circumstance will be different. If a pupil or a staff member dies, the actions taken will be different from supporting a bereaved pupil, and schools should also refer to their policy on managing critical incidents.

Every school will need to consider their individual context and the culture and ethos of their school community when writing their bereavement policy.

## Communication and Information Sharing

When a death occurs, careful consideration needs to be given as to how to establish the key facts, and what, how and when this information should be shared with other staff, pupils and families. Where a particular family is affected, make sure to establish what they are happy to share with the school community. Stick to key facts and discourage any speculation. If in school, bad news is usually best broken within smaller groups rather than whole school assemblies.

**In case of the death of a pupil, staff member or a serious incident on school premises or on a school trip, please also refer to your critical incident policy and establish how you might deal with any potential media interest.**

### Establishing key information

- Consider the details of the death - who will be responsible for gathering this information?
- Are there other services that need to be consulted?
- Who will be responsible for liaising with the family?
- How and when will information be shared with staff? Ideally this will be done before informing children.
- How will this be managed if the incident takes place during the school holidays/weekends?
- Does the death affect an individual in school or is it likely the whole school community will be affected?
- Are there other children not directly affected by the incident but may be vulnerable (e.g. have previously experienced a bereavement or are anticipating a bereavement)? Can a discrete register be established so that staff are aware of this and can exercise particular sensitivity?

### Informing other children/families

- Consider the circumstances of the death and whether other children/classes need to be informed, and to what level of detail. If an individual/family is affected by the bereavement, make sure you have checked with them what they are happy to share.
- Consider how the information can be shared with children and who will be responsible for this – do they need additional support to do this?
- Ensure information is factual and simple language is used, discouraging speculation.
- Talk briefly about the person who died without eulogising them.
- It can be helpful to give pupils a practical and positive activity to do, for example making a card.
- Remember that children and young people may share information about the loss on social media – how will this be addressed?
- Consider whether parents need to be informed, and if so can advice and signposting be provided in case further support is needed?

# Support in School

## The first few days

Maintaining structure and routine can be important for children and young people affected by bereavement, however staff need to be responsive to how the child or young person is presenting and allow some flexibility within the day to meet their needs at this difficult time.

- What support will be available to children and young people and staff?
- Are there safe spaces that children/young people can go to? How and when can they be accessed?

## Support for children and young people

Best practice suggests that support is usually best given in the first instance by people who are familiar to us. This helps to maintain a sense of calm and consistency where possible. Grief is a natural process that many of us will go through without the need for specialist support, particularly if we already have good support structures. We all respond to grief in different ways and it can take time to come to terms with events.

- Are all staff aware of the range of feelings and behaviours to anticipate from a child who is grieving?
- Does the child/young person need a key person in school to go to?
- Are there any additional needs to think about e.g. SEND?
- Are there other children/young people affected? Consider that while they might not be personally affected by the loss, the nature of events can be a trigger for past experiences, may exacerbate current issues or increase vulnerability in some groups.
- Have self-help materials been made available, and do children/young people know where to go if they have questions or need support?
- Is information about helplines accessible?
- Which external agencies/local services are available?
- Do staff know when to seek specialist advice and a referral to outside agencies?

## Support for staff

It can be an emotionally difficult time for staff who are supporting a child who is bereaved, especially if their own experiences of loss are triggered.

- How will the wellbeing of staff be monitored?
- Who can staff go to if they need support, both internally and externally?
- Are there opportunities for more informal peer support?
- Do staff need any additional training to support them in their role? Please contact your link EP or Lead Partner to find out more about training provided by the SEND & Inclusion Service.

## The funeral

- Who will be responsible for finding out the arrangements?
- Are there religious/cultural considerations to be made?
- Will someone from school attend and are there practical implications for this?
- What are the wishes of the family?
- Are any children from school attending and will they need additional support?
- Will there be any flowers/collection/cards sent?

## Returning to school after a bereavement

If the child has taken time off school:

- Who will liaise with them before they return and find out what support they might need?
- Who will meet them on their first day back?
- What support has been put in place for them if they need time out, or someone to talk to?

## Ongoing support

There are no set timeframes for bereavement, and feelings can be triggered at different times during the year and stages of life.

- If a child/staff member has died, consider ways in which their life can be celebrated e.g. special assembly (See Appendix E)
- How will the wellbeing of those affected be monitored over time?
- What school-based interventions are there that support children with bereavement?
- How will anniversaries and other trigger points be managed sensitively? (See Appendix)

## School Curriculum and Ethos

1 in 29 children have been bereaved of a parent or sibling ([www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)) - that around 1 in every class. Children and young people will also likely experience the death of other people who are important to them and across our lifetimes we will all experience bereavement. In order to help children and young people effectively manage bereavement and losses in their lives it is important that we equip them with the skills and resources to be able to cope when they experience the death of someone they know.

By introducing the subject of death and bereavement in the classroom we can help pupils to normalise and understand the process of grieving and help them to develop the skills to empathise with friends who may be going through a bereavement. It will also help children and young people understand that it is ok to talk about death and dying and demonstrate that the adults around them are open to conversations about a topic that can often be difficult to talk about.

Death and bereavement is a topic that can be taught alongside the usual PSHE curriculum within Primary and Secondary schools. There are a range of resources available online to support this including;

- Elephants Tea Party - Created by Child Bereavement UK, this resource offers lesson plans and activities to support discussion round death and grieving. There are resources available to download for free aimed at pupils aged 5-11years and 11-13years (<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Pages/Category/elephants-tea-party>)
- Project Eileen – a multimedia project aimed at Year 10 pupils, currently being piloted in two Secondary Schools and due to make their resources more widely available in 2020. ([www.projecteileen.co.uk](http://www.projecteileen.co.uk))
- Zippy's Friends (ages 5-7) and Apple's Friends (ages 7-9) – A coping and social skills programme for Primary age children which covers death and bereavement within the sessions. (<https://www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk/what-we-do/programmes-for-schools.html>)
- Winston's Wish Guide to Supporting Grieving Children and Young People in Education – the teaching learning and grief section contains some useful ideas which could be incorporated into lessons relating to death and bereavement. (<https://www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/support-for-schools/>)
- Educating and Supporting Children around Death, Dying and Bereavement by St Francis Xavier's Primary School, Falkirk. This resource, containing 5 detailed lesson plans for pupils aged 9-12 years, was developed as part of the school resilience project (this is not linked to Durham Resilience Project) ([https://www.goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk/content/resources/1525951432\\_The\\_Resilience\\_Project.pdf](https://www.goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk/content/resources/1525951432_The_Resilience_Project.pdf))
- Youth Aware Mental Health (YAM) is a universal programme for Y9 young people in Durham schools. While it is not a programme that focuses specifically on bereavement and loss, it supports young people to know that it is ok not to be ok and to know how to seek support from friends, family, teachers and services. The programme is facilitated by a team of staff from a range of services (including SEND and Inclusion and resilience nurses) and is free to schools. For more information contact [epsdurham@durham.gov.uk](mailto:epsdurham@durham.gov.uk)

Although bereavement and loss is an important topic to discuss, schools should remain mindful that this can be a sensitive topic for many people, including staff members themselves. It is important that before engaging in sessions staff are aware of pupils who have experienced a bereavement and that appropriate steps are taken to ensure that pupils feel supported, for example, giving them options about how they would like to engage with the session.

When children have experienced bereavement and loss, there are some considerations to make within school around the curriculum:

- Make their time in school predictable with a sense of calm, consistency and routine
- Consider whether 'new' routines might be supportive
- Ensure they know what to expect from adults around them and what adults might expect of them e.g. we may take a flexible approach to rules and boundaries but let children and young people know about these adjustments

- Reduce the cognitive load where appropriate
- Reduce worries by ensuring they have understanding around what will be happening each day and support that is available to them
- Generate joy – let them know it is ok to feel happy and hopeful and engage with aspects of school they enjoy

## Additional Considerations

### Religion and Culture.

Schools function within a multi-cultural society, in which various beliefs, religious and non-religious preferences should be taken into account. Respect for the differing needs, rituals and practices is essential when acknowledging a death and supporting children, young people and their families. For more information see Appendix F.

### Traumatic bereavements/death by suicide

Sudden deaths and bereavements in traumatic circumstances can lead to additional complexities in the grieving process. Sudden and traumatic deaths can include suicide, homicide, accidental deaths and sudden fatal medical emergencies. In these circumstances, the reality of the situation can be hard to accept, with no chance to say goodbye and possible regrets over unfulfilled plans. There may also be media attention which can be particularly difficult for an individual grieving the loss of a loved one.

In these circumstances the usual processes outlined within the school bereavement policy remain appropriate however further thought may need to be given to liaising with the family and Police Family Liaison Officer as appropriate. In addition, consideration must be given to if and how information is shared with the school community. Additional specific information relating to supporting children with sudden and traumatic bereavements is also available on [www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org) and [www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org).

Where the death involves a pupil or a staff member, schools should refer to their Critical Incident policy and advice can be sought from the Durham EPS and SEND & Inclusion Team. Particular care must be given to suspected suicide as this can raise vulnerability within the school population. The Samaritans have a guide on managing a suspected suicide within school which can be found at <https://media.samaritans.org/documents/samaritans-help-when-we-needed-it-most.pdf>

Local support for individuals and families bereaved through suicide can also be found through 'if u care share' <https://www.ifucareshare.co.uk>.

## Appendix A: Typical responses to loss and bereavement in children

Everyone is affected in a unique way by grief and this can also depend on the age and developmental stage of the child or young person. Some common feelings and behaviours in children include:

- becoming upset by seemingly minor events
- aggression, anger and non-compliance
- difficulty focusing on tasks
- fear of being alone and separation anxiety
- feelings of guilt/confusion
- reluctance to go to school
- complaining of headaches/stomach aches/minor illness
- feeling tired or becoming unusually hyperactive

- difficulties with peer relationships
- sleep disturbances

The way a child processes their grief may also depend on a number of factors:

- The relationship they had with the person who died
- The circumstances of the loss and if it occurred in a traumatic way
- Whether it was anticipated or not
- Whether they have experienced multiple losses
- The external support they have available to them
- Individual resilience factors

### Specialist Support

Although there are no limits as to how long grieving should last and what it should consist of, if over time children and young people are unable to move forward and appear to be 'stuck' in their grief, they may need support from specialist bereavement services. Signs that the child might need specialist intervention include:

- Frequent trouble accepting the death
- Inability to trust others since the death
- Uneasiness about moving on with life
- Detachment from other people to whom the bereaved person was previously close
- The prolonged feeling that life is meaningless
- The view that the future will never hold any prospect of fulfilment
- Excessive and prolonged agitation since the death

(Adapted from Cruse Bereavement Care)

## **Appendix B: Children's understanding of death**

The following information is based on developmental chronology and is taken from CRUSE bereavement care website. It is helpful to consider these developmental levels when thinking about how children with special needs may experience grief.

The nature of a child's understanding of death and bereavement will be different at different stages of development. Although a child's grief is individual, their understanding of the loss of a loved one progresses as they mature. In this section you will find the most common understandings of death by children at certain stages of their development.

Do bear in mind that a child's understanding of death during their development will differ in circumstances where the child may be experiencing educational difficulties.

- Birth to six months

Babies do not cognitively understand the notion of death; however, that does not mean to say that they do not respond to the loss of someone close, or that they don't experience grief. A baby up to six months old experiences feelings of separation and abandonment as part of their bereavement. The bereaved baby is aware that the person is missing, or not there and this can cause the baby to become anxious and fretful. This can be heightened if it is the baby's primary caregiver who has died and the baby is able to identify that the one who is now feeding them, changing them and cuddling them is not the deceased person. Similarly, if it is the baby's mother who is grieving a loss, the baby can pick up on these feelings and experience grief too.

- Six months to two years

At this developmental stage the baby is able to picture their mother or primary caregiver internally if she/he is not present. If it is the primary caregiver who has died the baby will protest at their absence by loud crying and angry tears. It is common for babies to become withdrawn and lose interest in their toys and feeding and they will likely lose interest interacting with others. At the more mature end of this developmental stage bereaved toddlers can be observed actively seeking the deceased person. For instance, if granddad spent much of his time prior to death in his shed the toddler might persistently return to investigate the shed in the hope that they will find him there.

- Two years to five years

During their development between the age of two to five, children do not understand that death is irreversible. For instance, a four-year-old child may be concerned that although nanny was dead, she should have come home by now. This example illustrates how children at this stage do not understand the finality of death and nor do they understand what the term "dead" actually means. It is common for a young child to be told that their aunt has died and still expect to see them alive and well in the immediate future. Children do not understand that life functions have been terminated and will ask questions such as:

"Won't Uncle Bob be lonely in the ground by himself?"

"Do you think we should put some sandwiches in Grandpa's coffin in case he gets hungry?"

"What if Nan can't breathe under all that earth?"

"Will Daddy be hurt if they burn him?"

As the cognitive understanding of children in this age range is limited, they can sometimes demonstrate less of a reaction to the news of the death than might be observed by an older child and might promptly go out to play on hearing the news of the death.

Children aged between two and five years old have difficulty with the abstract concepts surrounding death. For instance, they might be confused as to how one person can be in a grave and also be in heaven at the same time. They will become further confused if they are told that the deceased person is simply sleeping and this in turn could make them fearful of falling asleep or seeing anyone else asleep. They might insist on waiting for the person who has died to wake up or similarly if they have been told that the person who has died has gone on a long journey, they may await their return.

At this age bereaved children can become involved in omnipotence or magical thinking. This refers to the concept that bereaved children believe that their actions, inaction, words, behaviours or thoughts are directly responsible for their loved one's death. This form of thinking is not exclusive to this particular age group and can be experienced by many bereaved children and young people of older ages. It is essential that you explain to the bereaved child that the death was not in any way their fault or responsibility. The need to reassure the grieving child that nothing they said / didn't say, did or didn't do caused the death is paramount.

- Five years to ten years

Children at this developmental stage have acquired a wider understanding of death and what it entails. They begin to realise that death is the end of a person's life, that the person who has died won't return and that life functions have been terminated. By the age of seven the average child accepts that death is an inevitability and that all people including themselves will eventually die.

This understanding can also increase a child's anxieties regarding the imminent deaths of other people who they are close to. Children of this age are broadening their social networks by attending school and are therefore open to receive both information and misinformation from their peers and social circles. With this in mind it is important that the cause of death, the funeral and burial process and what happens to the deceased person's body are explained in a factual and age appropriate manner to the bereaved child. Children will ask many questions and may want to know intricate details pertaining to the death and

decomposition of the body. Again, it is vital that children have such details explained to them clearly so that they understand.

At this developmental stage children can empathise with and show compassion for peers that have been bereaved. Children aged between five and ten often copy the coping mechanisms that they observe in bereaved adults and they may try to disguise their emotions in an attempt to protect the bereaved adult. The bereaved child can sometimes feel that they need permission to show their emotions and talk about their feelings.

The important thing is to let them do this. Avoid remarks such as, "Come on be a big brave girl for mummy" or "Big boys don't cry", such comments however well meant can make children feel they need to hide their feelings or that what they are feeling is wrong. This can cause complications as the bereaved child develops.

- Teenagers

Young people or teenagers have developed a greater understanding of death, the long term implications of losing someone close and are more keenly aware of the emotional aspects than their younger counterparts.

Due to the developmental changes taking place within the young person at this time their reactions to death are likely to be extremely intense. Many young people will reflect on the injustice of the death asking why the person who has died had to die and they will be considering in greater depth the notion of fate.

The bereaved young person is likely to become concerned about who will pay the bills or care for them if the person who has died was their primary caregiver. The bereaved young person is likely to have a wider social network which they are more likely to seek support from than their immediate family as they struggle to create an identity independent from that of their family.

The young person's tasks of grieving are very similar to that of an adult but the young mourner is often unable to manage the strong emotions that bereavement entails and can therefore present as being extremely angry and even end up in physical fights. Some bereaved young people can revert to childish behaviour in order to relocate some security and normality in their lives where as others might try to "grow up too fast" and see themselves as taking on adult roles.

It is essential to remember that young people are not adults and should therefore not be burdened with adult roles. Like all children and young people, bereaved teenagers need to be allowed and encouraged to share how they are feeling and what frightens them.

There can be a tendency for young people to try and avert their emotions or bottle them up by avoiding the family or by assuming the role of an adult. If this happens, gentle encouragement is needed for the young person to open up and communicate their feelings. Sometimes a bereaved young person may become involved in risky behaviours in an attempt to manage their grief and its associated emotions.

For example, some bereaved young people may use alcohol or drugs as a way of self soothing. Often the alcohol / drugs act as an anaesthetic to the pain they are experiencing. Self-harming can also be employed by bereaved young people in an attempt to help them cope with their sadness. If the bereaved young person is self-medicating or harming themselves help should be sought.

## Appendix C: Talking to children about death and grief

- It is better to say something than nothing
- Allow time to listen to the child or young person, show warmth and empathy.
- Acknowledge what has happened and emphasise that the adults around them are there for them, even if they don't feel like talking about what has happened.
- Let them know that whatever they are feeling is ok – angry, sad, relieved, scared – all feelings are permitted and these feelings may come and go. It's ok to even feel happy at times too.
- Support children and young people to use emojis to help them express their feelings
- Use look inside binoculars to explore thoughts and feelings and be curious 'I wonder how you feel...'
- Avoid euphemisms and use plain language such as dead or death, this is particularly important for younger children who may take time to understand the permanency of death (see 'Children's understanding of death', Appendix B). This can seem difficult and jarring for us, but it's really important.
- Children and young people may dip in and out of talking about their loss and their feelings, and sometimes it might seem out of the blue. It's ok to take the lead from the child and go at their pace.
- Some children may have lots of questions about death, particularly about the practicalities and what will happen next. Answer openly and honestly, even though sometimes this may feel uncomfortable.
- If you are asked a difficult question it's ok to say "I don't know" or try asking the child or young person what they think. It's ok not to know what to say, just emphasise that you are here to listen.
- Talking about their loved one and their feelings might be difficult, especially at first. Some younger children may have limited ability to express their feelings verbally and will naturally process their grief through play. At any age, it's can be useful to encourage other creative means of working through feelings, for example using art.
- Take some time to take care of yourself or talk to someone you trust after having difficult conversations.

## Appendix D: Talking about death to children with learning difficulties

When talking about death and bereavement with a child with learning difficulties it might be helpful to consider: -

- WHO should be key worker working with the child and family - inform parents who this person will be and keep in contact.
- WHERE is the child most receptive to new ideas? – quiet room, pool, outside. Use this space for talking with the child.
- WHAT should be talked about? (as agreed with parents). Ensure that you use the same language and ideas as the family to avoid confusing the child.
- HOW is new information normally given? - signs, verbally, pictures. Use the same format to talk about illness and death.
- HOW is new information normally reinforced? – you will probably need to repeat information a number of times over a long period.
- PROCEED at a level, speed and language appropriate to the child
- BUILD on information given – small bites of the whole, given gradually will be easier to absorb.
- REPEAT information as often as needed.
- WATCH for reactions to show the child understands – modify and repeat as needed.
- FOLLOW child's lead – if indicating a need to talk or have feelings acknowledged, encourage as appropriate.
- WATCH for changes in behaviour to indicate the child is struggling more than they can say and offer support as needed.
- LIAISE with other agencies involved with the child to ensure accuracy and continuity of information.

All children benefit from being given simple, honest “bite size” pieces of information about difficult issues - often repeated many times over. For some children with special needs, it might be more appropriate for symbols to be used to convey ideas rather than language. This can include the use of ‘talking mats’ or other symbol support resources.

## Appendix E: Ideas for Remembering loved ones

### Assemblies / services in school

Invite pupils, staff, any family members that may wish to come. If someone wishes not to attend then that is OK. Allow the pupils to be involved in planning the service; this will give them a sense of involvement. You could; light a candle, have songs which the deceased liked, have staff and pupils read stories about the person. Place some photographs of the person who has died but remember that a big image may be too much for a grieving family.

To close, you could give a memorial box/book to the family, or blow out a remembrance candle, or allow pupils to write a private farewell message which can be placed in a box at the end or play reflective yet uplifting music. You may want to hold the assembly before a break to allow everyone to compose themselves to return to normal timetable or at the end of the day so everyone can return home. (St Cuthbert's Hospice)

### Remembrance Tree

Placing a tree in the entrance to school can provide staff, pupils and their families with opportunities to remember a loved one by writing a message to them on a leaf or flower and hanging it from the branches. This can help staff to notice when someone in the school community might need some additional support.

Important anniversaries can be remembered and having a remembrance tree can support those grieving with understanding others' may be experiencing similar feelings of bereavement.

### **Dedicated member of staff**

Asking who the person would like to be their dedicated supporter in school can allow for regular check ins and gives permission to the member of the school community who is bereaved to talk about their loved one when they would like to. Meet and greet at key points of the school day can help children and young people know they are being held in mind's eye.

### **Post Box**

Having a post box in a central location in school can allow staff and pupils to write notes, letters and draw pictures for their loved one. This can allow children and young people to express and process their grief. It is important to let everyone know who will look at the post and how they can indicate whether they would like to talk to someone about their letter or drawing or whether they would like it to be private e.g. If they want to talk or have their post acknowledged they could post it so it can be seen, if private they could place it in an envelope.

### **Memory Jar**

Support children and young people to create a memory jar that they can keep discreetly in school to look at. This might include a small item belonging to their loved one, a photograph and an item that provides them with comfort.

### **Remembrance Garden**

Particularly when a member of the school community has died, a remembrance garden with seating can be a place to go to remember a loved one. Make this a place in school grounds that is quiet and can provide a place for peace and reflection but that is also easily accessible.

### **Guided journaling**

Keeping a diary can be helpful for children and young people:

- I am....
- I feel.....
- I hope.....
- I wish...

This can include what their loved one would want for them, sharing memories of happy times with their loved one and remembering what used to bring joy and happiness to prompt doing more of the things they enjoy.

### **Special occasions**

Be mindful that special occasions are likely to intensify memories and generate feelings that might be difficult to manage. Check in with family members and the child / young person as to how they would like to be involved in celebrations and support them to engage as they would like. Mothers and fathers days are likely to be particularly difficult for children who have lost a parent but it is important to support them to make a card and remember their parent as they would like to.

## **Appendix F: Cultural and religious considerations**

Schools function within a multi-cultural society, in which various beliefs, religious and non-religious preferences should be taken into account. Respect for the differing needs, rituals and practices is essential when acknowledging a death and supporting children, young people and their families.

Within a faith there are also often many variations so it will be very important to talk to family members where possible about their preferences for marking the death of a loved one.

Some faiths involve family members in the preparation of the body and the arrangements for a ritual or funeral and this can vary in terms of time. It goes without saying that families should be supported with this, for example in terms of time children and young people are required to be absent from school.

At request of the family, or in support of a child or young person, a member / members of staff may attend the ceremony; it will be important for discussions with family members to be held to ensure for example that appropriate clothing is worn.

The following descriptions give an overview of the major religions and belief systems that may be observed by families in the UK.

### **Christianity**

Christians believe that there is just one God and that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. They believe that Jesus died on the cross (The Crucifixion), and that three days later, God raised him from the dead (The Resurrection).

Christians believe in an afterlife and also the idea of resurrection but the details around what actually happens at the time of death and afterwards, varies within the different denominations.

Within the different Christian denominations, there are many variations on what happens at a funeral. When someone dies, the body is taken to an undertaker who will carry out the necessary preparations for the body to be laid out. This is to enable those who wish to view it to do so before it is placed in a coffin. The funeral, organised by an undertaker, is about one week after the death. This usually takes place in a church, but sometimes a crematorium, or a combination of the two. The coffin will remain closed. Wreaths or bunches of flowers may be placed on the coffin. It is traditional to wear black but this custom varies. If held in a church, the funeral service may include a Holy Communion, Eucharist or Mass. The body will

either be buried or cremated, dependent on the wishes of the deceased and the family. A churchyard grave is often marked by a headstone but for a cremation, the family may choose a more informal way to mark where the ashes are buried or have been scattered.

## **Islam**

Muslims believe in life after death when, on the Last Day, the dead will come back to life to be judged by Allah. The good will reside in Paradise, the damned in Hell.

Muhammad teaches that all men and women are to serve Allah and that they should try to live perfectly, following the Qur`an. Devout Muslims believe that death is a part of Allah's plan and open expressions of grief may be viewed as disrespectful to this belief.

As cremation is forbidden, Muslims are always buried, ideally within 24 hours of the death. Ritual washing is usually performed by the family or close friends at the undertakers or mortuary. They will wrap the body in a clean cloth or shroud. The coffin is often very plain as traditionally one would not be used. The grave is aligned to enable the head of the deceased to be placed facing the holy city of Mecca. Muslim graves are unmarked but to meet UK requirements, a simple headstone is used as a compromise.

There is an official mourning period of three days when the family will remain at home and be brought food by friends and relatives. For forty days after the funeral relatives may wish to make regular visits to the grave on Fridays.

## **Hindu**

Hindus believe in reincarnation and a cycle of rebirths. When a person dies, the soul is reborn in a new body, returning to earth in either a better or worse form. What a person does in this life will influence what happens to them in the next, the law of Karma.

A Hindu funeral is as much a celebration as a remembrance service. Hindus cremate their dead as it is the soul that has importance, not the body which is no longer needed. White is the traditional colour and mourners usually wear traditional Indian garments. During the service, offerings such as flowers or sweetmeats may be passed around and bells rung so noise is a part of the ritual. The chief mourner, usually the eldest son, and other male members of the family, may shave their heads as a mark of respect. In India, the chief mourner would light the funeral pyre. Here, he will press the button to make the coffin disappear and in some instances, may be permitted to ignite the cremator. Ashes may be taken back to India to be scattered on the River Ganges. In the UK, some areas of water have been designated as acceptable substitutes. The mourning period lasts between two and five weeks.

## **Sikhs**

Sikhs believe the soul goes through a cycle of rebirths, with the ultimate objective being to reach perfection, to be reunited with God and, as a result, break the cycle. Thus death holds no fear and mourning is done discreetly. The present life is influenced by what happened in previous ones and the current life will set the scene for the next.

The deceased is cremated as soon as possible after death. The coffin is taken to the family home where it is left open for friends and family to pay their respects. It is then taken to the Gurdwara where hymns and prayers are sung. A short service follows at a crematorium, during which the eldest son presses the button for the coffin to move behind the curtain. In India, the eldest son would light the funeral pyre and no coffin would be used. After the funeral, a meal may be held at the Gurdwara. The ashes may be taken back to India to be scattered. Here they may be sprinkled in the sea or river. The family remain in mourning for several days after the funeral and may listen to readings from the Guru Granth Sahib (Holy Book).

## **Buddhist**

Buddhists believe that nothing that exists is permanent and everything will ultimately cease to be. There is a belief in rebirth but not of a soul passing from one body to another. The ultimate objective is to achieve a state of perfect peace and freedom. Buddhists try to approach death with great calmness, and an open minded attitude of acceptance. There are few formal traditions relating to funerals and they tend to be seen as nonreligious

events. Cremation is the generally accepted practice and the service is kept very simple. It may be conducted by a Buddhist monk or sometimes family members.

## **Humanist**

Humanists are non-religious. They follow the principle that this life is the only one we have and therefore when you are dead there is no moving on to another one. The focus of a Humanist funeral is on celebrating the life of their loved one. The person people knew is talked about, stories shared, and memories recalled. Their favourite music may be played. The service is organised by friends and family who are supported by an Officiant. The ceremony, usually a cremation, will be tailored to meet the family's wishes rather than following a set pattern.

## **Jewish Faith**

The Jewish religion places great emphasis on honouring the dead (kvod hamet in Hebrew). It is this honour that lies behind the Jewish tradition of burying the dead as soon as possible, as a mark of respect, often on the day they die. After the funeral, seven days of mourning, known as sitting Shiva, is held at the home of the mourners. Friends and community members bring prayers, condolences, and support.

## **Gypsy and Traveller Communities**

Whilst each family is individual and will have their own ways of doing things, certain traditions held amongst gypsies and Travellers may have an impact on the way each person grieves. Traditionally, the trailer (caravan) and all the possessions of the person who had died would have been burnt. Today they are more likely to be sold. This removing of memories and possessions means that any connection with the person whom has died has gone. Children and young people can find the absence of reminders of someone who they may have been close to very difficult. The practice of 'sitting up', of not leaving the deceased alone from the time of death until the funeral, is common and may impact on family members in different ways. For many families religion may be an important aspect of Traveller life and traditionally funerals in these communities take place quickly, particularly for Irish

Travellers who are Catholic. This may limit the amount of time available to discuss how different family members would like things to be done.

Gypsy and Traveller funerals may be extremely lavish and headstones ornate. These are seen as an expression of the very respected and valued place the individual held within both the family and the wider community. It is not unusual for people to travel a great distance across the country to attend a very elaborate event, with a perception that the larger the funeral, the greater the respect shown; the showing of such respect and the holding of extravagant services is seen as an illustration of the importance of the place that is held by the dead in the lives of the living. Children in Gypsy Traveller communities often take part in nearly all aspects of adult life, including all the rituals surrounding a death and the funeral. However, the protective nature of Traveller families may mean that the death of someone important to a child is often not openly talked about. Children often say that being involved and being given choices about participation in such rituals can be very helpful. It is known that families where there is more open communication about the death and about the person who has died, the child's longer-term adjustment is generally better. Whilst talking about someone who has died can be difficult for these families, it is important for children to feel able to ask questions and understand what has happened.

Children and young people may benefit from the opportunity to remember and share thoughts and feelings about the person who has died. However, such open discussion can often present a challenge to Gypsy and Traveller families. This can make it harder for these families to access external support agencies such as mental health or bereavement services. *(Source : Child Bereavement UK)*

## **Appendix G : List of Useful Books and Resources**

The following books are stories which can be shared with children which may provide a starting point for talking about death and grief.

- Badgers Parting Gifts by Susan Varley

- Water Bugs and Dragonflies: Explaining Death to Young Children by Doris Stickney
- The Memory Tree by Britta Teckentrup
- Michael Rosen's Sad Book by Michael Rosen and Quentin Blake

The following books are useful resources for those working with a child who may have experienced a bereavement. They provides activities which the child can work through with an adult or alone.

- 'Helping Children with Loss' and 'The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back: A Story for Children Who Have Lost Someone They Love' by Margot Sunderland
- Muddles Puzzles and Sunshine (Activity Book to Help When Someone Has Died) by Diana Crossley

Child Bereavement UK has a comprehensive list of books for different age ranges

Early Years

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/early-years-books-and-resources>

Primary

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/primary-schools-books-and-resources>

Secondary

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/secondary-schools-books-and-resources>

Pupils with SEND

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=973c9016-98f4-4f35-a189-124e1d66c116>

*The information for this document was gathered from:*

*Cruse Bereavement Care*

*Winston's Wish*

*Child Bereavement UK*

*The Jigsaw Project*

An overview of the support available in County Durham can be found on the local offer.

