

# Helping a Child or Young Person with a Bereavement in the Family during the Covid-19 Period

During the Covid-19 period some of your students may experience bereavement with a loss of a family member. Bereavements can be challenging at any time, but during the Covid-19 period this could be even more difficult due to the lack of contact the student has with their friends and school community who normally provide emotional support.

These suggestions can help you to engage with an individual student in such an instance. Children and young people will respond differently to bereavements, so they may want to do all, some or none of these things. They may want to talk straight away, or not for several months. Knowing that you are available, honest, understanding and trustworthy, and that they are a valued member of their school community will be a great comfort to the student concerned.

## What can a school do?

During this time it is important to let the child and their family know that they are cared for and being thought about by their school community. Families are likely to be managing many practical and emotional tasks following a bereavement, so a supportive and sensitive way of contacting a student could be by sending a condolence card or letter. This could include:

- A sincere message of support for the child and their family;
- A named, key contact for the child to communicate with if they wish. Where possible this should be a member of staff who has a good relationship with the child, such as a tutor or favourite teacher.

## How much contact should the school offer?

It will be important that any contact offered to a student who has experienced a bereavement is manageable for both the child and the member of school staff. This could include:

- Asking the student who they would prefer to be in contact with;
- Ensuring that the student knows this is optional;
- Offering a range of methods of contact, such as via text or email rather than on the phone;

- Giving realistic days and times that someone would be available to communicate;
- And giving suggestions of professional support that is available, such as <https://www.cruse.org.uk/> counselling services; <https://www.winstonswish.org/> Winston's Wish; or <https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/> Grief Encounters.

The person providing contact to the student is likely to need support themselves, and it will therefore be important that Senior Managers set up methods of support for this member of staff. This could include supervision from the Educational Psychology Service, usually the school's link Educational Psychologist, where this is considered helpful.

### **Should others be told?**

It will be important to consider whether the wider community should be told about the bereavement. The Senior Leadership Team will need to discuss whether they should make contact with all parents to inform them of the bereavement in order to avoid unnecessary rumours and incorrect information from being shared. There are templates available to use or adapt for this purpose in this pack.

### **What to do when students are ready to return to school?**

When schools re-open it is helpful for senior leaders to have already planned when and how the student wishes to return. Prior to the start of term, or when schools re-open, liaison with the student and their family will be vital to addressing the following key points:

- Does the student wish to defer their return?
- Does the pupil wish to return at the same time as other students?
- Does the student wish to come in to school for some lessons, and have they identified which ones?
- Does the student prefer others to refer to the bereavement sensitively or not to mention it at all, unless they choose to raise the topic? Consider how you will share this information with staff and other students.

For further guidance on supporting a bereaved child, please contact Child Bereavement UK:

Helpline: 0800 02 888 40

Live Chat via [www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)

Email [support@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:support@childbereavementuk.org)

9am-5pm, Monday-Friday (except Bank Holidays)