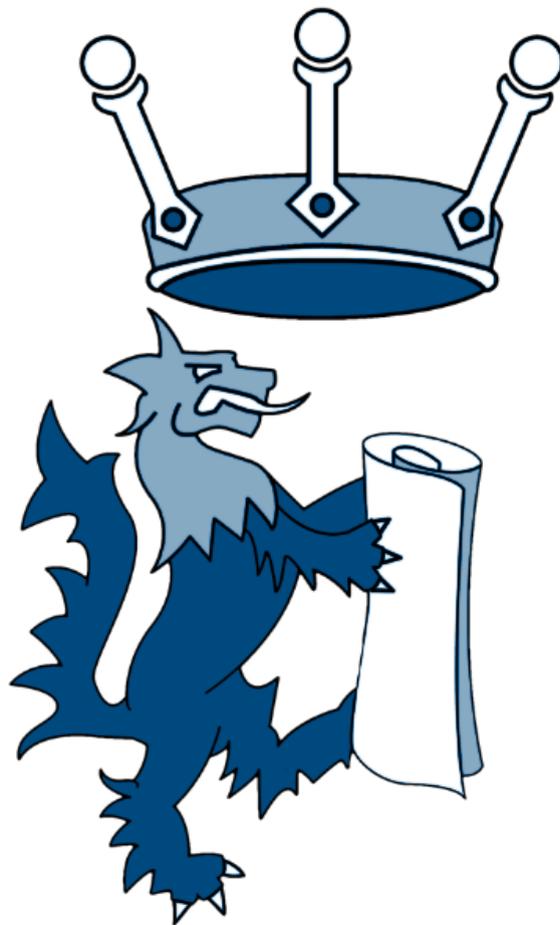


Bereavement Policy

The Sittingbourne School



Approved by: Lynn Lawrence

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1. Introduction

Here at The Sittingbourne School, the wellbeing of our school community is of the utmost importance, and we are constantly striving to ensure that the emotional health of students and staff is supported in the best possible way. We are lucky to have a large and highly experienced pastoral team, including well-trained individuals who focus on mental health (Please refer to our Mental Health Policy for more information on how we support mental health in school).

Sadly, there are occasions where members of our school community lose someone close to them. This loss can impact a wide circle of individuals who can be outside of the immediate family, and sometimes the entire school community will be affected. Our bereavement policy is guided by Winston's Wish and Child Bereavement UK, following a holistic model for the wellbeing of all concerned.

We understand the difficulty the death of a loved one, or someone close, brings. Please contact our school to speak with a member of the Communities or leadership team if you are experiencing a bereavement and are concerned for your child.

2. Vision

In the event of a death of a staff member or student, The Sittingbourne School strives to ensure all students, parents and staff, are informed, feel supported and are given space and time to grieve. The school endeavours to allow people to grieve normally and in their own way by providing all staff and students with the necessary facts and information. The Sittingbourne School will provide support to students and staff during their grief, ensuring that students encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement. The Sittingbourne School will provide support to students from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate – and if possible, of their own choice.

3. Rationale

We understand that bereavement is faced by members of our school community at different times and that when the loss is of a member of our school community – such as a young person or staff member – it can be particularly difficult. Students need to be supported when they experience family bereavements and other significant losses during their lives while they are at school. The emotional health and well-being of all members of The Sittingbourne School is fundamental to our school ethos, so our collective support will be vital in the face of bereavement.

This policy will provide guidelines to be followed after bereavement. The aim is to be supportive to both students and adults, and for staff to have greater confidence and be better equipped to cope when bereavement happens. Every death and the circumstances in which it occurs is different and this policy has been constructed to guide us on how to deal professionally, sensitively and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances.

4. Objectives

The core intentions of this policy are:

- To support students and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and community.
- To identify key staff within school and the Local Authority and clarify the pathway of support.
- To work in partnership with parents to protect students from harm.
- To endeavour to counter any adverse effects of bereavement and maintain students' emotional well-being.

The Role of the Governing Body

- To approve policy and ensure its implementation as an active document. To be reviewed every three years.

This includes:

- Reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
- The Role of the Headteacher

- The Headteacher has overall responsibility for the policy and its implementation, for liaison with the governing body, parents/carers, the Local Authority and other relevant outside agencies.

The Headteacher will:

- Monitor progress and liaise with external agencies where necessary.
- Respond to media enquiries.
- Keep the Trust and governing body fully informed as necessary.
- Assist with any statutory investigations relating to a death.

The role of pastoral staff (including Community leaders, The Community teams, Mental Health and Wellbeing Lead, mentors, school counsellors):

- To have bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff. It is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for students, supporting each other and implementing this policy. To this end, it is desirable that the whole school staff have some awareness of bereavement through a whole school training where possible.
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies.
- Cross-phase liaison with other schools, primary or secondary.

5. Procedures

1. Where parents let the school know directly, the person answering the phone will put them through to the most senior member of staff on site.
2. Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher or Community Principal and the family's wishes respected in communicating with others. Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion, whilst being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations. We need to be mindful of the use of social media sites and their impact throughout this time as rumour and gossip spread quickly.
3. Staff should be informed before students and be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.
4. Where appropriate for students to be informed, this should happen preferably in small groups, by someone known to them. A decision should be made as to whether this information should be given as part of a whole school approach or if only certain groups of students need to be informed.
5. A letter to all school families affected should be composed at the earliest opportunity and a decision made as to whom, and how, it should be distributed.
6. The school should be aware that the school timetable may need a degree of flexibility to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of students affected by the situation. However, minimal disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security and familiarity.
7. Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate.

8. In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance may be clarified, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances.
9. Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Headteacher. All members of staff are advised not to respond to journalists and to refer all enquiries to the Headteacher, who will make a considered response after seeking assistance from the Trust and Local Authority Press Office.
10. The School should be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a young person throughout their school life so information should be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points. The school should be aware of any ongoing bereavement issues for new students. To this end it is important to have effective communication with 'feeder' schools.

6. Informing staff, Governors and other parties

The following people should be considered especially those who may have had a close relationship with the deceased:

- Current school staff not in school that day – including therapy staff
- Previous school staff who worked closely with the student
- Social Work team if applicable
- SEND team
- Medical/First Aid team
- Taxi driver and escort
- Chair of Governors
- Respite centres if applicable
- Other professionals who work with the student – Ed Psych, counsellors
- Some parents may need to be telephoned if their relationship is closer but who may not have been informed by the family.
- Arrange a staff meeting as soon as practicable. Identify absent staff.
- Tell the story of what happened leading up to the death.
- Give a factual explanation of how the death occurred.
- Be prepared for obvious upset and feelings of anger/guilt. People may connect the incident to their own personal experience of bereavement, so feelings about past bereavements may need to be discussed.
- To enable absent staff to feel part of a caring team, arrangements should be made to inform them over the telephone if a personal visit is impractical. Consider the relationship between the absent colleague and deceased.
- For a death that may attract media coverage (e.g. if the member of staff was a well-known personality or died tragically), identify a nominated spokesperson (e.g. CEO SWAT, Chair of Governors, LA, etc.) to provide a 'news statement' at an agreed time, as a way of dealing with media intrusion. Liaison with the individual's family is essential.
- Try to establish a 'protected' telephone line to ensure free flow of accurate information to and from the school/hospital if this is appropriate. (Consider the use of one school mobile telephone).
- With death in traumatic circumstances such as suicide or murder, consider requesting bereavement support services - Winston's Wish, Cruse and the Educational Psychology Service (if psychological de-briefing is thought necessary).

- Arrange staff condolences with collaborative agreement if felt appropriate.
- Provide details of someone who can be available to talk things through with a member of staff, parent or student if they are finding the situation particularly hard. This person could advise the family of support services available if required.
- Nominate staff to prepare a newsletter to parents and carers (to be given after school).
- Arrange a staff meeting for the end of the working day and invite each person to recount his or her feelings and to describe what was good and bad about the day. Staff who will be alone that night could be identified, and arrangements made for colleagues to contact them by phone if appropriate.
- Trained and experienced practitioners are always available on the Winston's Wish helpline should you want to check out ideas throughout the day.
- A specific room could be allocated – e.g. the Vision Room – for the duration of a lunchtime to enable staff to meet and share their thoughts over a coffee or tea. It should be emphasised that anything shared on such occasions should be held as confidential and not for public airing.
- Provide access to one to one time with a member of staff who is trained in bereavement support.
- Share information about accessing bereavement support outside of school.

7. Informing students

- Identify those students who had a long-term and/or close relationship with the deceased to be told together as a separate group. Where possible inform all the students in the smallest group practicable. Class or tutor groups are ideal.
- Experience has shown that it is more beneficial if all students are informed. It is always a shock when a death occurs in a school even if it may have been anticipated. In the eyes of the students, teachers are part of the fittings and fixtures in school and are not expected to die. Young people expect to live forever, and so a fellow student dying whilst still young enough to attend school can also feel quite shocking.
- Provide staff with guidelines on how to inform students, including the following:
 - Try to identify any key answers that you may need to prepare, e.g. the facts about an illness, or dates which may be relevant to the death and preparing for the end of the school year.
 - Young people will appreciate time to verbalise their feelings and fears. Allow space for “If only-s...” to be acknowledged.
 - Discussion: allow students to share their own experiences of death, e.g. “When my Gran died...”, etc.
 - Be honest about your own feelings and experiences and talk honestly about the relationship that you had with the person.
 - Answer students' questions factually.
 - Be prepared for students' apparent lack of response which may be upsetting for adults. No apparent response does not mean that a young person does not care.
 - End discussion on a positive note – not all people who are ill or have accidents die – many get better.

- Do students want to arrange for representatives to attend the funeral? How will this be managed in consultation with the family?
- Students should be told that, while they may feel sad, they do not have to feel guilty if they go on to have fun or pleasure in their day ahead. They must not feel obliged to assume a burden of grief.
- Students must be allowed to ask questions at this time or at any point in the following days or weeks. Staff must answer honestly and to the best of their knowledge.
- Suitable books and other materials to help students discuss death and come to terms with loss will be offered/discussed in PSHE.

8. If a student dies in school

- If any member of staff has concerns regarding a student's health they will contact a first aider and a community leader or deputy if there is serious concern.
- In the case of serious concern, the school will call for an ambulance. Due to the seriousness of the situation, this decision can be taken by the first aider or a member of the SLT.
- Immediately inform the Headteacher or, in her absence, the most senior member of staff on site.
- The Community Principal will then ensure that the parents are contacted and seek their agreement to meet the ambulance at the hospital.
- If the young person stops breathing a trained school staff member will administer CPR. In some cases, parents may have given the school a protocol to be followed in the event of a serious health incidence. In rare cases, this may include a request that mechanical resuscitation is not administered. However, whilst the school respects the parents' preference in this matter, due to the statutory responsibility imposed on the school regarding "duty of care", the need for school staff to administer manual CPR overrides such preference. (Note: the school has a defibrillator on site held in the main reception. No training is needed to use this as it talks you through what to do when activated. It should not be used on any children in the Nursery.)
- Once the ambulance has arrived at school, the student is given over to their care and it is the ambulance team's decision as to where the student is taken, or which form of treatment is administered.
- Where the parents have given the school a protocol to be followed in the event of an emergency medical issue occurring – e.g. no resuscitation – this protocol will be handed to the paramedics.
- Any change in circumstance following the first call to parents should be reported to them as soon as possible. Note: staff must not impart shocking or worrying news to a parent if they are travelling in a car alone.
- Once the student is placed in the ambulance, a member of staff will be appointed to travel to the hospital either in the ambulance or in their own transport in the instance that a family member is not able to do so. This person will remain in regular contact with the school.
- The school will notify the LA if there is a death in school at the earliest opportunity. All press enquiries are to be directed to the Headteacher.

9. If a student dies on a school trip

If a crisis situation occurs whilst a student is out on an educational trip, then the adult with the student - or the teacher in charge - should telephone for an ambulance first and then contact the school to inform the Headteacher. The school will then take the responsibility of contacting the parents. Once the ambulance team reaches the student, the student becomes the responsibility of the ambulance team and they will direct any subsequent actions. The school will notify the LA, at the earliest opportunity.

10. The funeral

It is essential to sound out the family's wishes. The family may welcome involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to keep things private.

If the family wish to have school involvement the Headteacher and/or the Deputy Headteacher will make arrangements for the school to be represented at the funeral and identify which staff and students may want to attend, together with the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport. A decision about whether the school closes in whole or in part will be taken by the Headteacher.

In all cases, a card should be sent on behalf of the school to the family. The MOS directly liaising with the family will decide if any other arrangements will need to be put in place. eg hamper for DA family, flowers, attendance at funerals. Families should be involved at all levels.

If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed as this can be helpful in their grieving.

11. An individual bereavement

Many of the guidelines in this policy are only appropriate when the school community as a whole has experienced a death, for example a teacher, a student or another staff member. Perhaps a more common experience for teachers and support staff is that of a student experiencing the death of a parent, close family member or friend. Whole school or class activities will not normally be appropriate in this situation, but the needs of that individual student should still be given careful consideration. If a young person has been bereaved, it is important to:

Involve them in decisions about how the school manages issues relating to their loss.

Talk to the young person about their preferred way of informing their peers about what has happened and about the support they need.

It is vitally important to ensure that if a young person has experienced bereavement that this information is passed on to the relevant persons when they move on to a new class or school.

Staff supporting the individual should have bereavement training, or they should be supported by those with bereavement training. All staff working with a bereaved student should be recently familiar with Child Bereavement and Winston's Wish guidance.

ADDENDUM 1 EXTERNAL SUPPORT AGENCIES

Additional information and resources can be accessed at:

www.winstonswish.org

www.childbereavement.org.uk

www.cruse.org.uk

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-schools>

Resources for parents

The NHS

[Children and bereavement](#) – includes lots of resources for parents and children, including helplines and tips for creating a memory box

Child Bereavement UK

- [Telling a child that someone has died](#)
- [Parenting bereaved children - a video](#)

Cruse Bereavement Care

- [Children and young people's physical responses to grief](#)
- [Children and young people's emotional responses to grief](#)

Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families

- [On My Mind](#) is a resource for children to learn how to support their own mental health and wellbeing. It stresses the important of [self-care](#)

ADDENDUM 2 – QUICK GUIDE

Guidelines for breaking news of the death to children/young people:

- Inform the children/young people as soon as possible about the death
- Where possible inform in small groups i.e. class or tutor groups
- Identify those children who have had long-term or close relationships, so they can be told separately. Group and/or one to one sharing should be available
- Allow children/young people to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms they will understand
- Allow feelings to be verbalised
- Allow the situation to be discussed and experiences of death to be shared
- Be honest about your own feelings and talk about your relationship with the person
- Avoid euphemisms
- Ensure children/young people understand that the death is nothing to do with anything they have said or done. It is not their fault.
- Reassure that not all people who are ill or have accidents will die and that many people get better
- Put a time limit on discussion. It is preferable to resume normal activities as soon as possible to ensure minimal disruption
- Conclude the discussion with a prayer or special poem to remember the person who has died and their family
- Be available to any child/young person who needs additional help and support

Guidelines for breaking news about a death to staff and Governors:

- Arrange a staff meeting as soon as possible
- Impart factual information. Never make assumptions or repeat rumour
- Give news sensitively and empathetically; be aware that people react in different ways, be aware of staff relationships with the person
- Ensure that someone is responsible for telling people who are unable to attend the meeting i.e. part time, peripatetic, counsellors, etc. What is the best way? Home visit, telephone, text or email, etc.
- Identify suitable individual members of staff who feel able to: a) Support members of staff b) Support groups of children
- Identify a member of staff to liaise with the individual's family, to deal with staff condolences and any funeral arrangements
- Identify a member of staff to take/direct phone calls as appropriate. Note telephone line providers may provide an additional line if the situation requires one
- Identify a member of staff who will provide a letter for parents which should be sent the same day (see exemplars).
- Arrange a staff meeting at the end of the day to ensure staff are coping
- Identify any unresolved problems or issues
- Ensure staff living alone have contact numbers of friends in case of need
- Identify sources of advice and support

Things to consider in the days following the news of the death:

- It is important to consider any cultural or religious implications and seek advice if necessary
- Ensure nominated staff for supporting others are available to do so (temporary staff cover may be required)
- Identify a quiet/time out place where people can go if necessary
- Timetables may require a little flexibility
- Try to engender awareness of when people need help and support
- Ascertain, through nominated staff, any wishes about the school's involvement in the funeral, if any Practical considerations:
 - Obituary, flowers, making a collection
 - Who will attend the funeral
 - Cover for staff attending
 - Transport to and from the funeral
 - Informing parents of those involved
 - Possible closure of school (tell everyone if this is the case)

Bereavement Strategy – Covid-19

This strategy provides guidance for primary and secondary schools on supporting those bereaved during Covid-19. It is based on the best practice being developed nationally, with particular thanks to Salford and Tameside Educational Psychology Service and ASCL. It also takes into account the fact that all our schools already have effective systems and processes in place to support bereaved children.

The words child/children are used to reflect pupils of all ages attending schools in the Trust.

The coronavirus pandemic has had an impact on schools, families and communities. There was little time to prepare for the lockdown, and this, alongside the uncertainty of how Covid-19 may affect people, has led to increased levels of anxiety.

Staff, students and parents have had to adjust very quickly to school closures. This has meant that familiar structures and routines have stopped, and our daily lives have changed dramatically. There is an increased risk of unexpected bereavement, and the feelings of loss and insecurity which this can generate. In normal circumstances schools would come together physically to support anyone in the community who was bereaved. This is clearly impossible while schools are only open to a very few, and whilst social distancing needs to be observed.

The Trust recognises the role it has to play in developing the response by leaders at all levels. There is a network of support in place to ensure that no leader has to face any incident on their own. Our approach is to ensure that all headteachers are supported to act effectively in the best interest of staff, students and families. We aim to maintain a strong sense of safety across our school communities, combined with a sense of order, unity, and hope for the future.

This guidance takes into account that the effects of social distancing, isolating vulnerable individuals, and disruption to our day-to-day routines will require a different approach to how settings support their staff and students.

Things to consider following a bereavement during Covid-19

- Bereavements linked to Covid-19 are likely to be less expected and the family will have had little time to prepare.
- The people and routines that usually support people following a bereavement e.g. friends and the routine of school may not be accessible whilst social distancing measures are in place.
- Family members of the person who has died may have particularly strong emotions around feelings of guilt as well as feelings of loss. They might be wondering if they should have done anything differently, or if they need to change their behaviour now.

- They may have been socially isolated from the person who has died, and not had recent or usual levels of contact.
- The person may have died in hospital and the family may not have been able to say goodbye.
- There may have been restrictions on the funeral and so the bereaved may have had this healing ritual denied to them.
- There may also be other members of the family who have become ill and there may be fears about their health.
- The bereaved may feel anger and blame, e.g. towards others who may not have self-isolated quickly.
- It may be difficult to avoid reminders such as the news.
- If there are several deaths linked to Covid-19, the bereaved may struggle with the lack of specialness that their loved one receives.
- It is also important to be aware that staff themselves may have bereavement and loss of their own to process.

General Bereavement Guidance

Key points to support best practice following a bereavement:

- Remember that help and support for those are best provided by a trusted, familiar adult.
- Be as honest and open as you can with children, appropriate to their age and developmental level.
- Remember that children are all different and they will all react to the loss and bereavement in their own unique way. The differences in their levels of awareness, understanding, age, emotional maturity, security and not least, their relationship with the deceased, will also have significant effects.
- For further information on children's developmental understanding of death go to <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-parents/childrens-understanding-of-death#keypoints> .
- When someone dies, use the words dead or died, not euphemisms like "passed away".
- Be guided by what a bereaved child or adult is prepared to share.

Things to do to prepare for bereavements during Covid-19

- Identify the named lead(s) who can take responsibility for sharing key messages with staff about how to support children with loss and grief, and can coordinate responses to bereavements, e.g. supporting members of staff who are acting as key adults when contacting bereaved families. This means there will always be a nominated lead available to oversee bereavement support work for families and staff. A key adult should also be prepared to support the family to make decisions about how best to support their child, including how to talk to them about the loss and mourning processes.
- Encourage all school staff to familiarise themselves with the information, advice and guidance provided on the Winston's Wish website: (<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus/>).

- Have a notice on your website to indicate to parents that the school has a bereavement protocol. This should include signposting to parents agencies which provide counselling and support. These are listed in the addendum. It should also offer to support the family to talk to their child about loss and mourning processes.
- Invite parents to let the school know if they are impacted by a loss; explain how they can do this.
- Let families know what you will then do; e.g. identify a key person to maintain contact with the family/ send the child a letter/ card. Check with the family first that it would be okay to send a letter to the child. An example of a letter is included in the addendum.
- Check-in with the family/child by phone.
- Be alert and sensitive to whether children have received any negative/abusive comments on social media.
- Make sure class teachers are made aware of children impacted by a loss so they can welcome them back to school appropriately when the time comes. Consider how, in the longer term, events such as assemblies can be used to help and support children.
- Leaders and nominated leads will be holding and containing levels of anxiety from across different parts of their community. The Trust is committed to maintaining its programme of meetings, including 1:1 meetings, by phone or google hangout, to monitor the wellbeing of leaders at all levels and provide or source support as required.

Addendum 1

Resources

Winston's Wish 08088 020 021

Child Bereavement UK 0800 02 888 40

Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership

<https://www.kscmp.org.uk/training/e-learning-courses>

Winston's Wish

<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-supporting-bereaved-children-and-young-people/>

Coronavirus: information and guidance for supporting bereaved children and young people.

<https://www.winstonswish.org/telling-a-child-someone-died-from-coronavirus/>

Information and scripts to use if someone the child knows has died from Covid-19.

<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-funerals-alternative-goodbyes/>

Saying goodbye when children cannot attend the funeral.

Grief Encounter

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/professionals-schools/>

Support for bereaved children and their families. Includes downloadable documents at the bottom of the webpage on the following:

- Children's concepts of death by age
- Supporting a grieving child in the classroom
- Informing the school community of a death
- Download grief talk posters
- Preparing students for the return of grieving classmate

Child Bereavement UK

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=bc9f3d7d-7b43-421a-8ed4-4335f9c23b35>

Downloadable information sheet with tips for supporting bereaved children through difficult times.

CRUSE

<https://www.cruse.org.uk>

Support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies. There's a section for schools <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-schools>

British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy

www.bcap.org.uk

A directory of registered counsellors and some advice on coping with the coronavirus epidemic.

Not Too Young to Grieve is a film created with Childhood Bereavement Network and explores how very young people respond to loss

<https://www.leedsanimation.org.uk/films/15>

Addendum 2

Model letter to a bereaved child

(personalise this based on the age of the child, and your knowledge of the family and context)

Dear (name),

I am so sorry that (name/relative) has died.

I am wondering how you are feeling. It might be a strange and confusing time for you. All feelings are normal and OK. There is no right way to feel when someone has died.

I am thinking about you. (In this paragraph, you may want to mention something special or memorable that the child has done in the past, and say that you look forward to seeing them do this again in the future).

I plan to phone you and your family, to find out more about how you are doing. You can choose whether you would like to speak to me.

I hope to speak to you soon.

Best wishes,

(Name)

Addendum 3

Supporting SEND / lower ability children

The organisations listed in addendum 1 will be able to provide advice and guidance. Winston's Wish is particularly recommended.

The SEND Gateway has helpful resources:

<https://www.sendgateway.org.uk/r/bereavement-plan.html>

Books which help children process loss and grief:

Duck, Death and the Tulip by Wolf Erlbruc - primary upwards

The Cat Mummy by Jacqueline Wilson - primary

The Heart and the Bottle by Oliver Jeffers - primary

Goodbye Mog by Judith Kerr - primary

The Goodbye Book by Todd Parr - primary

Sad Book by Michael Rosen - secondary

My Sister Lives on the Mantelpiece by Annabel Pitcher - KS3

Vicky Angel by Jacqueline Wilson - KS3

Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson - KS2/KS3

A Monster Calls by Patrick Ness - secondary