

Swalwell Bereavement Policy



Academic year	Head teacher	DHT & Assistant Heads	Chair of Governors
2022/23	Mrs R Hocking	Mr R Warren, Mrs S Leaver & Mrs K McCall	Mrs L Gray

Review Date	Changes made	By whom	Date Shared
April 2020	Yes	AHT KM	April 2020
Sep 22	No	EE	Sep 22

Introduction

'Every 22 minutes a parent of a child dies that's around 23,600 bereaved children each year. Almost one in every class. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend, teacher or other significant person in their life'. (Child Bereavement UK, 2017 statistics)

A death can affect the school community in many differing ways. Adults and pupils benefit from being kept informed of a death. Rumour and gossip can be very damaging and can lead to both young and old developing the attitude that the death is not a topic to talk about. Children and young people have a healthy curiosity and if they are not informed of the circumstances or feel they are unable to ask questions, their normal grief process can be obstructed.

Rationale

At Swalwell Primary we believe that bereavement and loss are an inevitable part of living and growing. We provide opportunities within our setting for children to develop their own appropriate range of emotional, spiritual and intellectual responses to manage these experiences. We believe that the ethos of the school based on openness and mutual support, provides a framework in which these experiences can be realised in a supportive manner. Bereavement affects everyone in different ways and for different periods of time. Whatever the level of understanding about bereavement, we have a duty to help support anyone when they could be feeling their most vulnerable, in the way that best meets their needs. By adopting a planned and considered approach the school can support the emotional well-being of the child, family and staff.

Aims

- To provide a framework for all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with difficult and upsetting circumstances.
- To meet the needs of all its children and staff and to be a place that both child and family can rely on and gain much needed support.
- For the whole school community to work together, with outside agencies as appropriate, to support each other.
- For staff to have time and space to work through their own feelings and become aware of the needs of the children.

- For children to have the opportunity to tell their story, express their feelings, share their memories and develop coping strategies through support by sensitive staff.
- To have clear expectations about the way school will respond to the death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.
- The family will feel supported and be given an opportunity to express their feelings of loss.

Guidelines

The following guidelines will provide a framework for informing staff, governor and pupils following a death.

A death can affect the school community in different ways and often depends on:

- The role the deceased person had within school
- How well known they were in the local community
- Circumstances surrounding the death, particularly suicide or violent deaths

Informing staff and governors of a death in the school community

- A nominated staff member will liaise with the family and their wishes taken into account before decisions are taken on how and what to tell the staff in school.
- All staff should be informed of a bereavement as soon as possible, with factual information including all part time staff and SMSAs. A staff meeting will be arranged as soon as practicable and absent staff will be identified. Arrangements will be made to inform absent staff over the telephone.
- Senior leadership team will be prepared for reactions to this news including visible upset and feeling 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. This is perfectly natural response.
- Senior Leadership team will be available to talk things through with a member of staff, parent or child if they are finding the situation particularly hard. Advice for families will also be provided of support services available to them.
- **Any cultural or religious implications will be considered and advice sought if necessary.**
- Bereavement support or counselling should be available to all as necessary.

- Where possible all staff that have requested to attend the funeral or memorial service will be released from class. Senior Leadership Team and Governors are aware that this may mean supply costs to the school

Informing pupils of a death in the school community

- Pupils of all ages can experience grief and loss.
- Pupils in the same class should be told, in small groups with adults they know.
- A letter should go to families within school the same day if possible (Appendix 2).
- Staff will be provided with guidelines of how to inform pupils (Appendix 3).
- Time and space will be provided
- Staff will be as honest as possible about their own feelings and experiences and talk about their relationship with the person.
- A bereavement support pack will be available for classes to access.

Ongoing support

- The family and staff will be given an opportunity to celebrate the life of the adult/child with a special assembly held in school at an appropriate time.
- The timetable will be kept in place to try and keep normality and routine in place however this will be flexible.
- School will provide ongoing support children to explore their feelings and memories through identified activities. Some opportunities may include storytelling, remembering activities, and expressing feelings activities

Supporting pupils of a death outside of the school community

- When school is informed of a bereavement that is linked to a school pupil eg. family member, close family friend, pet
- The family should be asked how the school can be involved to support the child and family.
- It should be explained to the family how school can provide resources to support the pupil.

- Both parties will monitor any changes in child's behaviour and share any information.

Supporting pupils on return to school

When the child or young person returns to the setting they may want to get straight back into friends, work and routine. They will have been surrounded by grieving family members and often a chaotic household of visitors. School maybe their break from that.

Action plans will be in place to help the child and young people return by:

- Identifying a member of the team who will be the main contact point for them and their family.
- Ensure **regular** contact, this may be daily or weekly depending on needs and wishes of the family. This helps you understand how they are coping, what support they may need now and in the future, to discuss concerns and worries and plan strategies to cope.
- If they stay at home, remember them. Have cards and messages sent to them from appropriate people (peer group and staff they have good relationships with) Activities such as these will give the other children the opportunity to discuss their own concerns or experiences with the family and help them to feel they are doing something positive to support them, you may want to collate them into a book. This death may remind others of their own experiences and so staff will be prepared to support them. Information about a child in the class may come to light that school weren't previously aware of. Staff will be ready to listen to all pupils and staff members.
- All staff will be made aware of the bereavement and the possible effects on them, their behaviour and their learning, so that appropriate care and support can be given throughout the setting. Any unusual behaviours will be recorded. Bereaved children and young people can on occasions have 'physical' illness, such as headaches, tummy aches and feeling sick, as well as mental sadness including lack of concentration, feeling tired, disorganised anger and frustration. These will have an impact on workload and learning.
- Normal rules and expectations of behaviour will be maintained. This is important for the children and young people within the setting and the child or young person who have been bereaved. The rules and expectations are all part of the 'normal' routine and will help to make them feel secure.

- 'Time out' strategies that suit the child or young person and the setting will be considered. Time out cards, signals or signs can help them to exit the room quickly if they are feeling vulnerable or emotional. A safe, quiet place will be arranged between staff/pupils/family members.
- Staff at Swalwell are aware that there is no set pattern or time limit to grief – It is a unique experience and the process is a lifelong one. At different ages and during new or transitional times pupils will have new questions requiring answers and questions requiring a re-visit of what happened; to develop a better understanding and acceptance.
- If the pupil thinks it would be helpful and friends agree, a peer support network could be established ensuring that those helping are given appropriate support themselves.
- Significant dates which might affect the pupil, e.g. date of death, birthdays, Christmas, anniversaries will be recorded and relevant staff members will be made aware of them and the impact they may have on the pupil. Nominated staff members will acknowledge potentially difficult times with them.
- Possible reactions to class/assembly topics will be considered. These will be discussed as a staff team and possibly with family members if though relevant. The pupil will then be asked if they want to take part in the activity.
- Staff will be alert for changes in behaviour, for signs of isolation, bullying or difficulties in the playground any concerns will be recorded using CPOMs.
- Books/activities to help explore feelings and ideas about death can be considered as an intervention or as part of the PSHE curriculum
- Any absences will be followed up as part of usual school procedure, concerns will be recorded as possible associated problems at home or school.
- At transition time the new class teacher and/or school will be made aware of the bereavement and support in situ.

Bereaved pupils may need to take some time off school during the early stages of their bereavement. For some, the need to be with their families will be strong, and indeed they may suffer from separation anxiety when the time comes for a return to school. For others the familiarity, stability and routines of school life may prompt an early return. The time away from school will vary from pupil to pupil but when they do return, they may have a number of concerns – you will only know what these are and how they might be resolved if you ask. Some of the more common concerns might be:

How will staff and peers react: who has been told, what do they know, what will be said, how much will I have to say to people?

Meeting with the pupil to welcome them back, acknowledge the death and talk through their concerns can assist with this. Saying something simple like *"I am sorry to hear that your dad died – sometimes it helps to talk about it and if so, who would you like to be there for you?"* is usually much appreciated by them. Choices about how things should be handled and what support they can have will be shared. Staff and classmates will then be informed about how the pupil wants to be received and supported.

Fear of sudden emotional outbursts – anger, distress, panic...

The nominated member of staff will explain about grief reactions and giving the pupil choices about what strategies will help them to cope in the classroom e.g. able to leave lessons without fuss – "exit card" system, where they can go, who they can talk to.

Fear when they realise they may not remember what the deceased person looks like

A laminated photo of the deceased person may give enormous comfort when the visual image begins to disappear. A special teddy or other memento will often give great comfort in times of distress and upset. They may also want to show this when talking about the person who died. It should be stressed that whatever helps the pupil within reason should be encouraged.

Fear of being behind with work and unable to catch up

SLT will clarify with other staff what is essential to accomplish and what can be left and offer appropriate help to achieve what needs to be done.

Inability to concentrate and feel motivated or sit still

The nominated staff member can reassure the pupil that this lack of motivation and concentration is normal and will pass. Shorter more manageable tasks, tasks written down, encouragement for achievements and minimising difficulties can often help.

Family grief impacting on normal family functioning

SLT can offer the family support about where areas of difficulty lie and try and work out strategies with them and their family to help keep things on an even keel in school. Identify their strengths and help them build on them.

Monitoring

The policy will be monitored and updated every two years.

The guidance and resources will be reviewed at regular intervals to enable any new resources or information to be included.

Related policies and procedures

This policy statement should be read alongside our organisational policies and procedures, including:

- Critical incident policy
- Wellbeing Policy
- **Mental Health Policy**
- Procedures for responding to concerns about a child or young person's wellbeing

BEREAVEMENT FLOWCHART

This flowchart supports the school in their response to a bereavement:

You are informed of a bereavement
Identify the relevant communication pathway (see Appendix 3) and as a team the tasks required and who is best to complete them.



Senior member of the team to contact family – phone call/send card/letter of condolence.



Appointed person from the setting to discuss with the family and child or young person who they want their story shared with and support available to them.



Inform others – staff, families, children and young people of the setting as agreed with the bereaved family, child and young person.



Appointed person to be point of contact for family – discuss funeral arrangements/return to school.



Appointed person arrange to see child or young person at home or in the setting to assess their needs and level of support required at this time.



Appointed person liaise with child or young person and support their return to the setting.



Appointed person ensure significant dates and events for the child or young person are recorded and shared with all staff for future reference (birthdays, anniversaries).



Appointed person continues to assess the needs of the child or young person.
Observation, discussion with significant people, including the child or young person
regarding their concerns or worries, and outside agencies if required.



Ensure friendships are secure as peer support can be very important



Continue regular contact with the family – show you still care about them and their child
or young person.



Sign post to outside agencies if deemed appropriate.

Appendix 2

GUIDELINES ON HOW TO INFORM CHILDREN

Remember it is ok to show your emotions in moderation. It is important we model to children and young people healthy responses to sad news and a natural response to hearing about a death is to shed a tear.

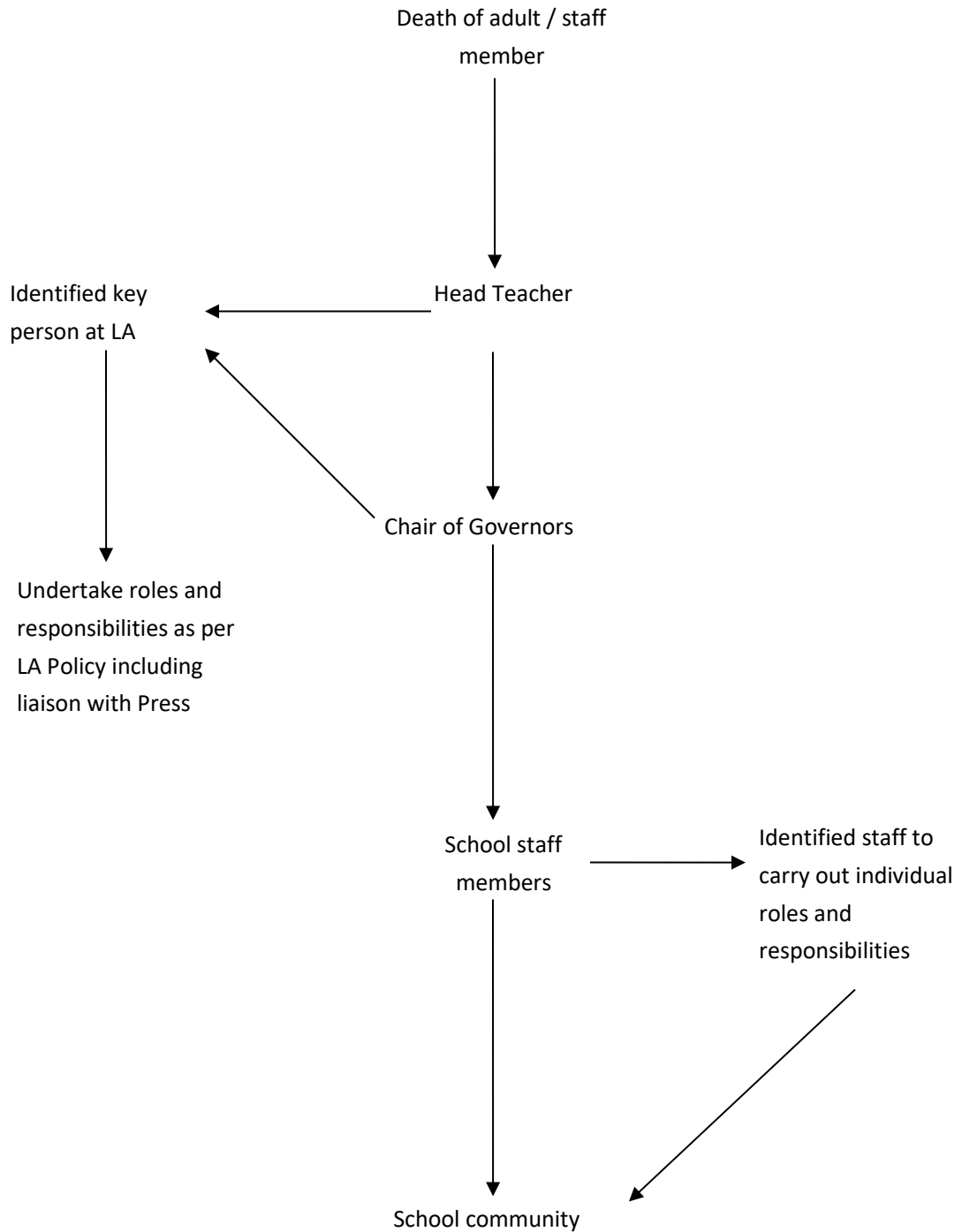
- * Be honest and factual.
- * Use clear language – use the person’s name, do not use euphemisms like ‘passed away’ or ‘lost’ use the words dead, died and death to avoid confusion.
- * Allow the children/young people to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms they will understand.
- * Allow the children/young people to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.
- * Allow the children/young people to verbalise their feelings.
- * Allow the children/young people to discuss the situation and share their experiences of death (even if that is the death of a pet).
- * Ensure the children/young people understand that the death is nothing to do with anything they have said or done. It is in no way their fault.
- * Reassure them that not all people who are ill or have had an accident will die and that many people get better.
- * Acknowledge some days will be harder than others
- * Do not expect to go straight into maths, allow for a time of restoration preferably with a physical outlet.
- * Put an appropriate time limit on the discussion. It is preferable to resume normal school activities as soon as possible thus ensuring minimal disruption within the school day which also offers a sense of security and familiarity.

Suggested scripts to use when someone dies

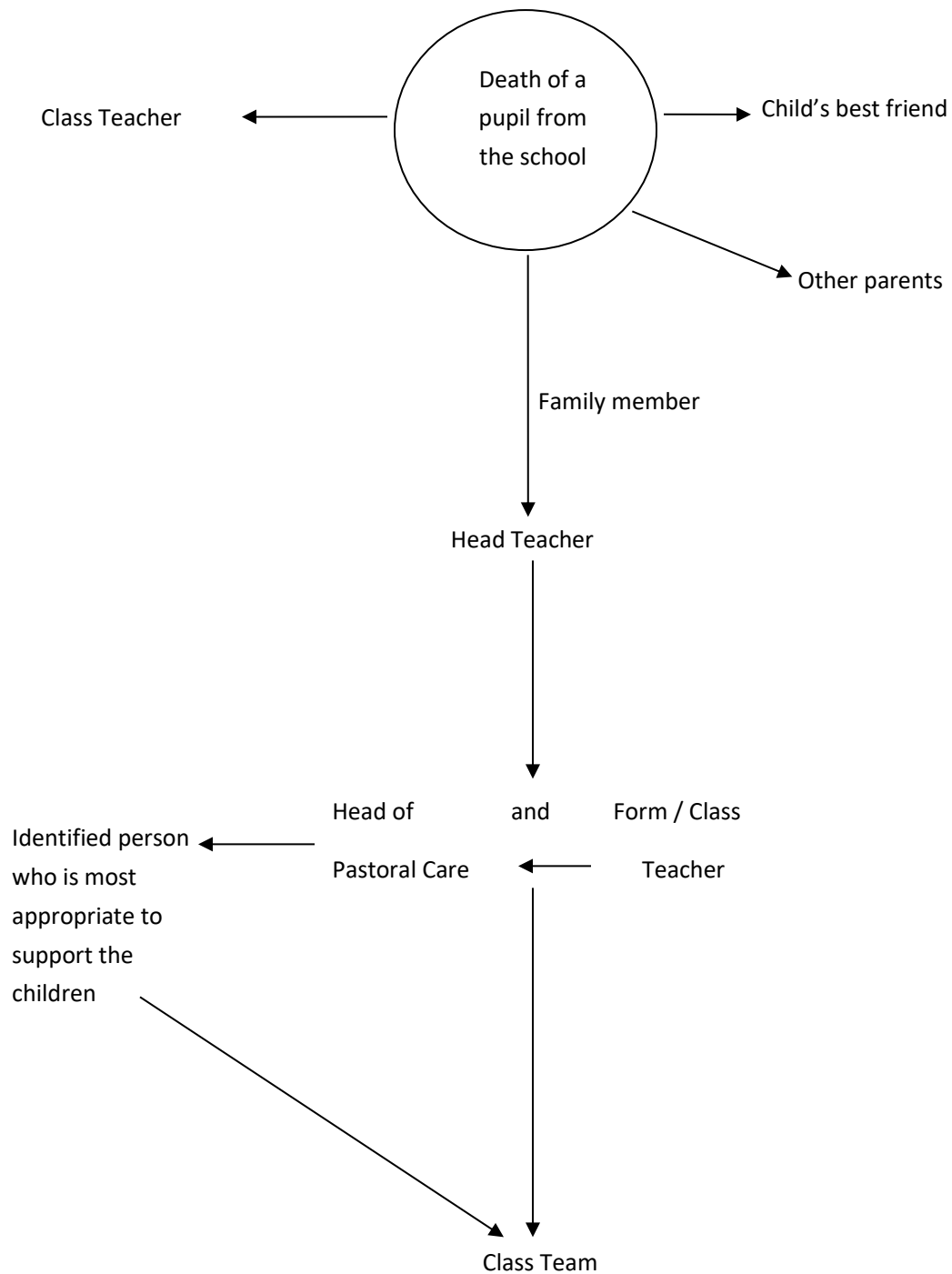
“I’ve got some really sad news to tell you today that might upset you. I know most of you will have heard of cancer, and know that sometimes people with cancer get better, but other times people die from it. _____, the <Year X teacher>, has been ill with <cancer> for a long time. I have to tell you that _____ died yesterday in hospital”.

“Sometimes people have accidents at work, at home, at school or on the road. People may be hurt or injured in the accident and they may have to go to hospital for treatment. Sadly, there are some accidents that cause people to die. I have some really sad news to tell you that might upset you. Yesterday _____, who is in <Year X>, was in an accident and he was so badly injured that he died”.

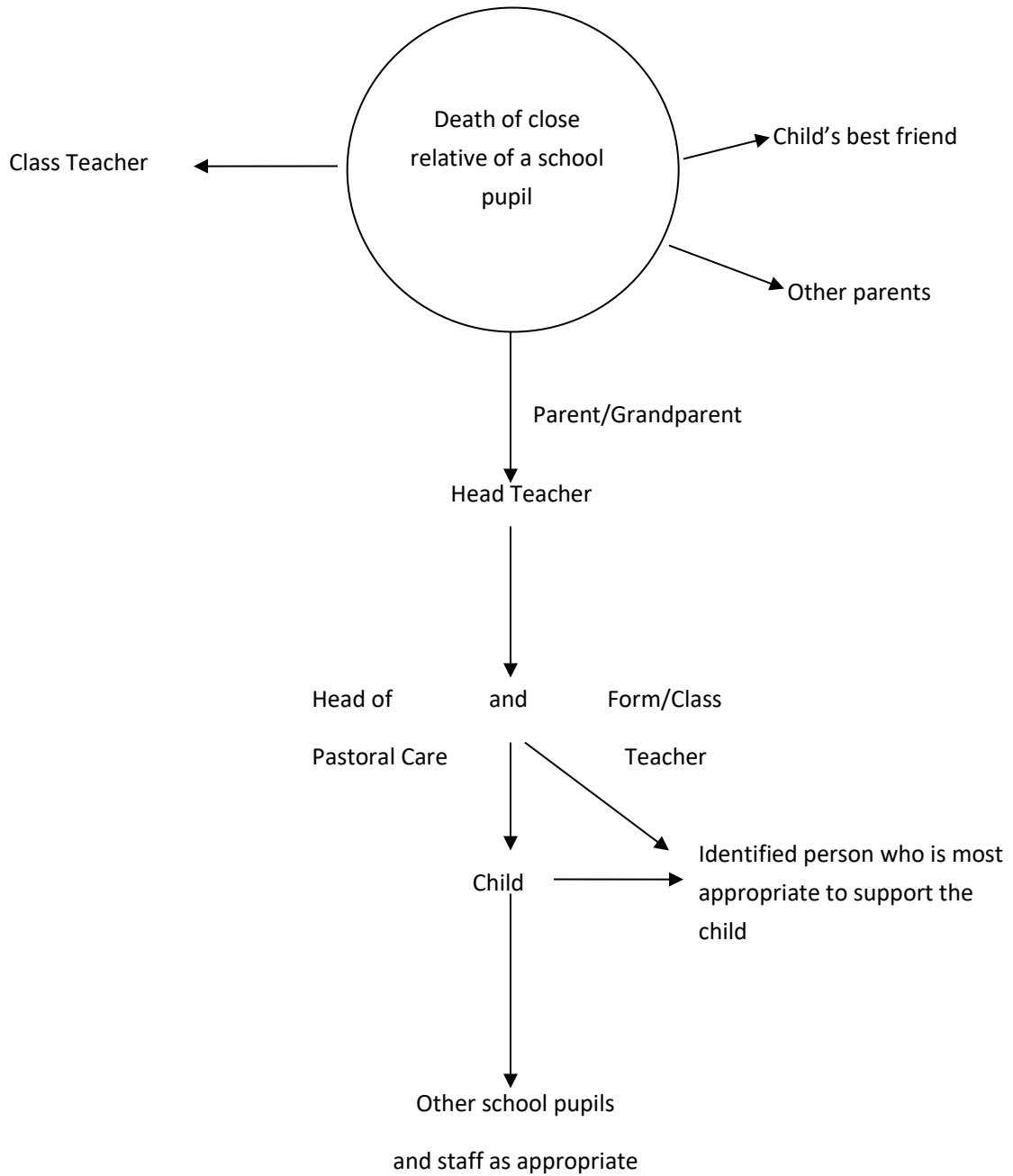
Information Sharing Pathway following Death of a Staff Member



INFORMATION SHARING PATHWAY FOLLOWING DEATH OF PUPIL



**INFORMATION SHARING PATHWAY FOLLOWING DEATH OF CLOSE
FAMILY MEMBER OF SCHOOL PUPIL**



Appendix 4

These are two examples of a letter to parents.

<Name of School>

<Date>

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the tragic death of <Name>, who has been a <teacher, LSA, Lunch time supervisor...> 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, 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, but I have made available some information which may help you to answer your child's questions as they arise. You can obtain this from contacting <child bereavement support charity>. Their contact details are <telephone number>, <email> or visit their website <website>.

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 your child's teacher.

Yours sincerely

<Name>

Head Teacher

< Name of School >

<Date>

Dear Parents

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, but I have made available some information which may help you to answer your child's questions as they arise. You can obtain this from contacting <child bereavement support charity>. Their contact details are <telephone number>, <email> or visit their website <website>.

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 your child's teacher if this is the case.

Yours sincerely

<Name>

Head Teacher

Appendix 5

Useful online resources and information

- www.winstonswish.org.uk – a useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community.
- www.childbereavement.org.uk - a bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss
- bhf.org.uk/smallcreature British Heart Foundation site to help children come to term with loss using cartoon creatures
- autism.org.uk/about/family-life/bereavement.aspx – Advice when supporting someone with autism cope with a death.
- childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk - Childhood bereavement.
- childline.org.uk - Free national telephone helpline for children and young people.
- crusebereavementcare.org.uk - All aspects of bereavement.
- griefcounter.org.uk - Helps bereaved children & young people rebuild their lives.
- hopeagain.org.uk - Specifically for young people aged 12-18. supportline.org.uk - Confidential emotional support for children, young people & adults.
- papyrus-uk.org - Provides resources & support for those dealing with suicide, depression or distress – particularly teenagers & young adults.
- seesaw.org.uk - Grief support service for children and young people.
- sands.org.uk - Providing support for parents & families whose baby is stillborn or dies soon after birth.
- teenissues.co.uk – Discussing the issues teenagers face.
- theredlipstickfoundation.org – Support for families bereaved by suicide.
- uk-sobs.org.uk - Those who are left behind after a suicide can be helped by talking to others who have experienced a similar loss.
- Widowedandyoung.org.uk – peer-peer network for those widowed before their 51st birthday

Books on Bereavement

- Grandpa – John Burningham
- When Dinosaurs Die – L & M Brown
- Liplap's Wish – Jonathan London And Sylvia Long
- The Memory Tree – Britta Teckentrup