

Top Tips on Supporting Young People through Bereavement

Be prepared – have a good bereavement policy with a set of procedures in place to outline what the school will do in the event of a death.

Have a few well-trained staff members who understand what grief is, what the process of grief is and what can be done to support young people.

Give the young person two points of contact in school. This is for two reasons. Firstly, if one adult is busy and unable to support the young person, the young person can be supported by the other adult. Secondly, as an adult, it can be emotionally exhausting supporting a young person who is grieving. Having a colleague to share the support with will help to keep a healthy, emotional balance.

Ensure all adults who are supporting a young person understand the behaviours associated with bereavement and grief. These behaviours may not always be obvious and will require consistent monitoring and communication.

Some of the behaviours can include:

- Aggressive outbursts
- Regressive behaviour, such as baby talk or seeking physical contact
- Increased tiredness and lack of concentration
- Low mood
- Denial or avoidance of the situation
- Changes in how they react to situations (these are changes specific to that young person)
- Increased levels of anxiety and worry

Take the time to observe and talk to the young person to understand what is happening and what support can be put in place.

Be consistent in responding to behavioural issues, such as aggressive and violent outbursts. Allowances cannot be made for this behaviour, as it will set a poor example for other young people. The behaviour needs to be followed up with a sensitive conversation to understand what happened and how it could have been dealt with in a calmer manner.

Liaise with the young person's family so any key dates or difficult days can be planned for as much as possible. This allows any issues to be dealt with sensitively and consistently.

When the time is right for the young person, consider setting up a peer support group with young people who have suffered bereavement. It will help to discuss what has happened and how they feel. Always give a young person the option to join these groups, as they may not want to, and sharing their emotions in a group setting may cause them more distress.

Be aware of other young people's reactions. If a young person starts to use regressive behaviours, such as baby talk, they may be open to bullying and teasing. Be vigilant and deal with it appropriately.

Ensure there are appropriate levels of supervision or emotional support for the adults who are the points of contact in school, so they do not become emotionally exhausted.

Signpost young people to support groups when needed.