
Report To:	Education & Communities Committee	Date:	21 January 2020
Report By:	Corporate Director Education, Communities & Organisational Development	Report No:	EDUCOM/09/20/KW
Contact Officer:	Kate Watson Principal Educational Psychologist	Contact No:	01475 715430
Subject:	Bereavement, Loss and Change Policy		

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Education and Communities Committee with an overview of the Bereavement, Loss and Change Policy in the Appendix and to seek the Committee's approval of this Policy.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 Data from a cross section of staff indicated that there is a great deal of change/loss and bereavement within the authority.
- 2.2 Data from this cross section of staff indicated that there was room to develop teachers' confidence in supporting children who were affected by bereavement, change and loss at a universal and targeted intervention level.
- 2.3 Clarity around support for children who were affected by bereavement, change and loss had been identified as an area for development within the senior management teams.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Education and Communities Committee approves the Bereavement, Loss and Change Policy.

**Ruth Binks
Corporate Director
Education, Communities & Organisational Development**

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Within Scotland, the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009, acknowledges the additional support needs of children suffering loss. Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) identifies health and wellbeing as one of 8 curricular areas, central to effective learning and preparation for successful independent living. Of the many CfE experiences and outcomes detailed, it is the responsibility of all to ensure children are learning skills and strategies which will support them in challenging times, particularly in relation to change and loss.
- 4.2 NICE guidelines on primary school age children's social and emotional wellbeing, highlight a need to normalise mental health issues. Perhaps in response to the NICE directive, recent CfE guidance suggests teachers and early years staff establish positive and supportive relationships across the school community where children and young people feel secure in their ability to discuss sensitive aspects of their lives. In HGIOS4 quality indicator (QI) 3.1, the features of an inclusive and equal school are well set out. In line with our authority Positive Relationships Policy the whole learning community has a shared understanding of wellbeing and all stakeholders promote a climate where children and young people feel safe and secure.
- 4.3 The Policy is designed to ensure that the needs of children, young people, staff and the wider school community, who have experienced bereavement, change and loss, are identified. Within caring educational environments our staff will work together in partnership to support children and young people, their families and staff through periods of loss and change.
- 4.4 Our communication is open and honest with children, young people and their families and we use age appropriate language. Appropriate strategies are identified and implemented to support bereaved children and young people for as long as they need. We understand that change and loss is pervasive and therefore we take a proactive approach to support the development of resilience in our children. We are aware of staff support needs before, during and after periods of bereavement, change and loss.

5.0 PROPOSALS

- 5.1 The Policy acknowledges the role for all in supporting each other in times of bereavement, loss and change. It acknowledges and defines change in its widest sense and acknowledges how loss and change is ubiquitous. Therefore, it is necessary to be proactive in developing resilience for change while also providing appropriate support where bereavement, loss and change has occurred.
- 5.2 The significance of the loss to the child is key to grief reactions. This will be different for different children and different situations.
- 5.3 The Policy provides guidance on the use of unambiguous language when speaking to children who have experienced bereavement, change and loss.
- 5.4 The Policy defines and highlights the impact of anticipatory loss. Anticipatory Grief refers to the emotions and feelings experienced when a loss is imminent or anticipated.
- 5.5 The Policy outlines how to support children who have experienced bereavement, change and loss. This is in line with Inverclyde's GIRFEC pathways.
- 5.6 The importance of linking with pupils' families is highlighted throughout the Policy.
- 5.7 Further signposting and details of relevant online resources are given.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Finance

Financial Implications:

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
N/A					

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
N/A					

6.2 Legal

N/A.

6.3 Human Resources

N/A.

6.4 Equalities

Equalities

(a) Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out?

<input type="checkbox"/>	YES
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO – This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, no Equality Impact Assessment is required

(b) Fairer Scotland Duty

If this report affects or proposes any major strategic decision:-

Has there been active consideration of how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome?

<input type="checkbox"/>	YES – A written statement showing how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage has been completed.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO

(c) Data Protection

Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES – This report involves data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.
✓	NO

6.5 Repopulation

N/A.

7.0 CONSULTATIONS

7.1 Partners' consultation took place on 12 August 2019 with representatives from: Cruse-SFAD-Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol & Drugs, Children & Families, Area Teams & Quality & Improvement Team, Area Teams & Children with Additional Support Needs, Care Experienced Children & Young People, Through Care Young People & Youth Justice, Child & Family Support, Ardgowan Hospice, Breathing Space and Child Bereavement being invited. The need and usefulness of the Policy was agreed. All agreed that in general teachers have the skills but lack the confidence when dealing with bereavement, loss and change. Within the policy positive recognition was given to:

- The planning section as it was deemed as especially helpful
- The fact that all change was recognised
- The section on what language should be used
- The recognition of individual differences
- The universal resilience building approach
- The measured approach so that supports are implemented as required and not going from one extreme (e.g. of no supports) to very targeted supports (e.g. counselling or Seasons for Growth groups) with nothing in between
- It was considered useful to have a section on anticipatory grief
- It was good to articulate the need people have to recognise their loss
- Recognition that while the child may need support from the teacher, the teacher may need support from the Head Teacher, who in turn may need support from their line manager.

7.2 Teachers consultation took place in two establishments. Both were positive regarding the Policy and felt that the document was reassuring. Some wording has been altered based upon this feedback.

7.3 All school pupil council representatives were approached to ask them to facilitate pupil consultations. Six schools undertook pupil consultation and feedback has been positive. Some wording has been altered based upon this feedback.

7.4 The Policy has been circulated amongst Head Teachers to offer comment. They have been offered further opportunities to have more staff or pupil consultations to help the development of the Policy.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 N/A.

Inverclyde council

Bereavement, change and loss authority policy:

Supporting our children, young people, staff and the wider school community



This resource was created in 2019 to develop staffs knowledge and understanding of bereavement, change and loss and how they can effectively support children when managing these difficult transition times. The critical incidents policy (under review) should be used alongside it where necessary.

Authority Guidance on bereavement, change and loss

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DRAFT

Foreword

Corporate Director of Education, Communities and Organisational
Development

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Introduction

Within Scotland, the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009, acknowledges the additional support needs of children suffering loss. A Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) identifies health and wellbeing as one of 8 curricular areas, central to effective learning and preparation for successful independent living. Of the many CfE experiences and outcomes detailed, it is the responsibility of all to ensure children are learning skills and strategies which will support them in challenging times, particularly in relation to change and loss. Where appropriate the authority's Critical Incidents Policy, which is currently being reviewed, should be used alongside this policy.

NICE guidelines¹ on primary school age children's social and emotional well-being, highlight a need to normalise mental health issues. Perhaps in response to the NICE directive, recent CfE guidance² suggests teachers and early years staff establish positive and supportive relationships across the school community where children and young people feel secure in their ability to discuss sensitive aspects of their lives. In HGIOS4 quality indicator (QI) 3.1, the features of an inclusive and equal school are well set out. In line with our authority Positive Relationships, Positive Behaviour (PRPB) Policy the whole learning community has a shared understanding of wellbeing and all stakeholders promote a climate where children and young people feel safe and secure.

The extent of loss is great with it being estimated that there are around 26,000 school age children in Scotland who have been bereaved of a parent or sibling at some point in their childhood. In 2014, around 2,390 parents died in Scotland, leaving around 3,920 dependent children³. Change and loss is not unique to bereavement but can come in a variety of forms both within the school and home settings. For example, within school all children experience a variety of teacher changes while at home, most UK marriages end within the first ten years and half involve children⁴. When parents' divorce, research suggests that most children have difficulty adjusting during the following two years⁵. The significance of the loss to the child is key to grief reactions – a young child whose pet

¹ National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. (2008). Promoting children's social and emotional wellbeing in primary education, NICE public health guidance, 12.

² SEED. (2009). Health and Wellbeing Principals and Practice. Retrieved October 13 2010, from <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk>

³ NHS Education for Scotland

⁴ Greene, S., Anderson, E., Hetherington, E., Forgatan, M. & De Garnio, D.(2003). Risk and Resilience after divorce. In F.Walsh (Ed.)*Normal Family Processes*. Third Edition. (pp 96-120). New York : Guilford

⁵ Amato, P. (2000). The consequences of divorce for adults and children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 6, 1269 – 1287.

rabbit dies will grieve just as they would if their grand-parent dies but the level and intensity of grief may be different.

Whilst bereavement and family breakdown affect some children, many more children experience changes that accompany loss in its widest sense. Children may have to change their home, school, and lose contact with friends and other family members. Some children lose parents or carers due to substance misuse, mental illness, imprisonment. It is also possible for children to experience a change of family dynamic e.g. becoming a young carer.

Change and loss are ubiquitous, parents may be absent, all children lose teachers as they make transitions through school and whilst there is great variability in the changes that children face, their immediate reactions to loss and the changes that follow, can impact upon their ability to cope socially, emotionally and academically. A large percentage of children who experience loss also experience a decrease in their academic performance⁶. The more knowledge adults have of children's developmental concepts and potential reactions to loss, the more empowered they are to better support the child. ⁷ See Appendix 1 for more information on responses to grief, stages of grief, signs of distress and the adult role.

When adults provide a caring and empathetic relationship, insight and understanding children cope better with loss. Emotional coping can be stimulated by teachers or early years staff who make themselves available for children to talk about a loss and enable them to express their vulnerability and grief-related emotions⁸.

Our Vision

This policy is designed to ensure that the needs of children, young people, staff and the wider school community, who have experienced bereavement, change and loss are identified. Within caring educational environments our staff will work together in partnership to support children and young people, their families and staff through periods of loss and change.

Our communication is open and honest with children, young people and their families and we use age appropriate language. Appropriate strategies are identified and implemented to support bereaved children and young people for as long as they need. We understand that change and loss is pervasive and therefore we take a proactive approach to support the development of resilience in our children. We are aware of staff support needs before, during and after periods of bereavement, change and loss.

⁶ Worden, W.(1996). *Children and grief: When a parent dies*. London: Guilford Press

⁷ Long, R. & Fogell, J. (1999). *Supporting Pupils with Emotional Difficulties – Creating a Caring Environment for All*. London : David Fulton Publishers

⁸ Dyregrov, A.(1990). *Grief in Children : A handbook for Adults*. London : Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Our Children's Rights

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child places duties on adults to help children to realise their rights. This guidance on Bereavement, Loss and Change will ensure children's rights are at the centre of our approach and in particular around the following articles:

Article 3: Adults must do what's best for me. Adults should think about the best interests of children and young people when making choices that affect them.

Article 12: I have the right to be listened to, and taken seriously. The opinions of children and young people should be considered when people make decisions about things that involve them and young people should be given the information they need to make good decisions.

Article 13: I have the right to find out and share information. As part of the right to freedom of expression, this involves being able to find out information for yourself so you're able to share it in the way you want.

Article 16: I have the right to keep some things private. Children and young people have the right to privacy, just like adults do.

Article 39: I have the right to get help if I have been hurt, neglected or badly treated. Children and young people have the right to recover from difficult things that happen to them, and that they can expect to receive the help that allows them to do so.

Bereavement, change and loss and the role of all

In the recent consultation draft of the Supporting Children's Learning Draft Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017 the Scottish Government state:

"Generally, children and young people are keen to be seen as being no different to their peers. Throughout, the requirement should be to view children and young people as individuals and to tailor support, positively and sensitively, to their individual needs and circumstances, considering all aspects of wellbeing."

The CfE highlights the need for children to learn skills and strategies which will support them in challenging times, particularly in relation to change and loss (HWB 0-07a, HWB 1-07a, HWB 2-07a, HWB 3-07a, HWB 4-07a). Preventative interventions are required to give children psychosocial competence and reactive interventions are required to enable schools to support grieving children.

Anticipatory Grief

In some cases grief can be felt before the loss has even occurred. Anticipatory Grief refers to the emotions and feelings experienced when a loss is imminent or anticipated. Anticipatory Grief can begin as soon as loss becomes a likelihood such as in the case of a

terminal illness or a friend moving house. It shares many symptoms of regular grief - sadness, anger, isolation⁹. But the awareness of the looming death may also bring anxiety, restlessness and hopelessness.

The child or young person may not be directly experiencing the loss of the person at this time but there may be resulting loss and change with regards to their lifestyle, care arrangements, everyday activities and connectedness with others. They may also be observing deteriorating health, and be directly involved in the increased care needs of a loved one which can be exhausting both emotionally and physically. Other feelings such as resentment or relief when a loss eventually occurs are common and completely normal but are confusing for a child or young person and can lead to feelings of guilt and shame¹⁰.

Helping those who are hurting from bereavement change and loss or anticipating grief

Given the complex and varied needs of children and young people, it is difficult to gauge how the loss will affect them as individuals. However, the developmental age of a child does have a direct impact on their level of understanding, see Appendix 1 for details. Their response is also influenced by the behaviour and support of the adults around them. Teachers can help a child cope with the loss by having several simple, direct conversations and supporting the child or young person to express his or her feelings in a healthy way. Please see Appendix 1 for more information regarding responses to grief, stages of grief, signs of distress and the adults role.

We all grieve differently. Children may show their sadness only occasionally and for brief periods, or may complain of physical discomfort, such as having a sore tummy or head, rather than expressing sadness¹¹. A child's grief comes and goes, and a child may experience it in a new way as he or she grows older or passes a developmental milestone, such as starting school. Even into adulthood, events such as graduating from university may trigger renewed grief¹².

A child's school often provides a safe place to discuss, grieve and explore feelings of loss but staff may be reluctant to engage in these conversations due to a lack of confidence. They may be concerned about making the situation worse or saying the wrong thing.

Child Bereavement UK suggest the following principles should be embedded to aid the thinking of staff when supporting bereaved pupils:

Normality

For the majority of children or young people suffering a significant change in their life, the routines of school life can give a sense of normality. The familiarity of attending school

⁹ Goldsworthy, K.K. (2005). Grief and loss theory in social work practice: All changes involve loss, just as all losses require change, *Australian Social Work*. 58(2) 167-178

¹⁰ Dyregrov, A. & Dyregrov, K. (2013). Complicated Grief in Children—The Perspectives of Experienced Professionals." *OMEGA — Journal of Death and Dying* 67(3) 291-303.

¹¹ Dyregrov, A. (2008). *Grief in Children : A Handbook for Adults* Second Edition. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2nd ed p.39

¹² Schmidt, M., Naylor, P.E., Cohen, D., Gomez, R., Moses, J.A., Rappoport, M. & Packman, W. (2018). Pet loss and continuing bonds in children and adolescents, *Death Studies*, 5 (4) 361-395,

or nursery with trusted individuals offers a sense of security and continuity. Maintain routines and timetable but allow for flexibility.

Relief from Grief

For children and young people, school or nursery can provide relief from a tense and emotionally charged atmosphere at home. There may be a constant stream of visitors expressing their own grief. Children and young people can find this difficult to deal with.

An Outlet for Grief

When a parent or sibling has died, children and young people can try to protect their surviving parent by hiding their own grief and pretending to cope. School is often seen as somewhere safe to express this grief.

A Listening Ear

Family members struggling to deal with their own grief can find it difficult to support their child's grief. For a child who wishes to, school staff can provide an opportunity to talk about what has happened with a familiar and trusted adult in relative peace and calm.

The Opportunity to be a Child

Children often take on more adult responsibilities in the house so school offers the chance to play, laugh, sing and generally just be a child without feeling guilty. Evidence suggests that play allows a child to express, understand and process emotions and is, therefore, a vital activity for bereaved children to help them cope with loss¹³.

Home-School Communication

Processes should be in place to maintain regular contact with home as appropriate. Discuss plans for returning to school or nursery and keep in touch about progress and supports. Grieving children and young people can present differently across settings. Good communication will ensure a more realistic picture of how the child is coping.

Resources

It may be useful to have a selection of resources on the subject in the school or nursery. Books, poems, pictures and websites are an effective way to gently introduce the concept of death or use as a starter for discussions.

Developing Resilience

Create opportunities through the Health and Wellbeing curriculum or at more informal times to discuss issues surrounding bereavement, change and loss. It is not possible to fully prepare children and young people the impact that bereavement, change and loss. However, children can develop resilience and coping strategies through activities and discussions.

Taking Care of Yourself

Talking to a child or young person about the loss may be one of the hardest things an individual will ever have to do. Staff should do what they can to support the child, without expecting too much from themselves and should talk to someone if they need support. Someone within the school (e.g. HT or DHT) should take responsibility to ensure that

¹³ Saracho, O. N., & Spodek, B. (1995). Children's play and early childhood education: Insights from history and theory. *Journal of education*, 177(3), 129-148.

those individuals supporting children or young people receive the support they need. In addition HTs and DHTs can receive support from their line management and/or other supporting agencies.

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Supporting children returning

Preparing for a child returning to school:

A telephone discussion should take place between the child and/or their parent or main carer and the HT/DHT or responsible staff member prior to the date of the child's return to school. It is hoped that there would be a meeting convened to establish the child/parent/carers wishes and plan and confirm arrangements for a return to nursery/school. The template in Appendix 2 can be used to support this conversation. This meeting could take place either at the nursery/school or home wherever is most convenient and comfortable for the family. If a meeting is not possible, other communication (email or telephone) should be attempted. The meeting should consider:

- Which member of staff will meet the child/family member on their return to school/nursery in order to acknowledge what has happened and discuss confirm/adapt/amend the support plan in place for the child/YP. If the class teacher is identified cover should be arranged for their classroom in advance to facilitate this.
- If the child/YP wishes the school to explain to their peer or year group what has happened before they return to school.
- Emergency contact details should be updated as appropriate to establish who should be contacted in the event that the child/YP becomes overwhelmed during the school day and to avoid any accidental correspondence going forward.
- Normal routines should be established as quickly as possible however specific supports should be discussed and agreed within this plan. Appendix 2 will record the details and may include:
 - How the child will communicate that time out is required during class time, and who they would link with.
 - Access to a quiet space when time out is required.
 - Regular support arrangements/ check ins from an identified member of staff (see guidance for the key principles of active listening).
 - Adapting timetables on a temporary basis if necessary.

Other tasks to complete

- If appropriate a letter of condolence is sent to the family.
- Relevant staff are kept informed and expected to be mindful of the loss and act according to the child/YP's wishes. If appropriate the child/YP's class or group of friends might have an additional session focusing on feelings connected with loss. Staff can be given the "Tips" (Appendix 3).
- In line with this plan, if considered appropriate, a letter is produced for the class/everyone in the school to take home to their parents, outlining what has happened along with additional information on some possible reactions and responses that children may show. The tips sheet (Appendix 3) may help structure any conversations needed with parents/carers.

- Appendix 4 details some suggested answers for when children ask difficult questions when somebody dies and Appendix 5 details some suggested answers for when children ask difficult questions when there are changes at home and can be used as needed.

On the day of the child/YP's return

The adult who is to meet the child does so as arranged. Together they revisit the plan and make any necessary adjustments or amendments. The plan is implemented and is reviewed and evaluated as necessary.

As time passes...

A child's plan should be developed as supports are identified.

- Give the child/YP time. Remember that they will be grieving for life and the loss will always be with them.
- If appropriate offer tailor made support, for example, Seasons for Growth or by referring into a local service provider. However this should be child/YP led, and not forced.
- Be aware of important dates such as the anniversary of the event, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and so on.

Interventions

Interventions are in line with Inverclyde's GIRFEC pathways and can be described as being at universal, enhanced universal, collaborative or enhanced collaborative levels. Universal approaches include developing resilience through emotional literacy training and with reference to the Positive Relationships Policy and PAThS programme. Wellbeing assessments should be completed with reference to the SHANNARRI indicators and the National Practice Model. See <https://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/education-and-learning/girfec> for more information on GIRFEC in Inverclyde.

Children with already identified Additional Support Needs

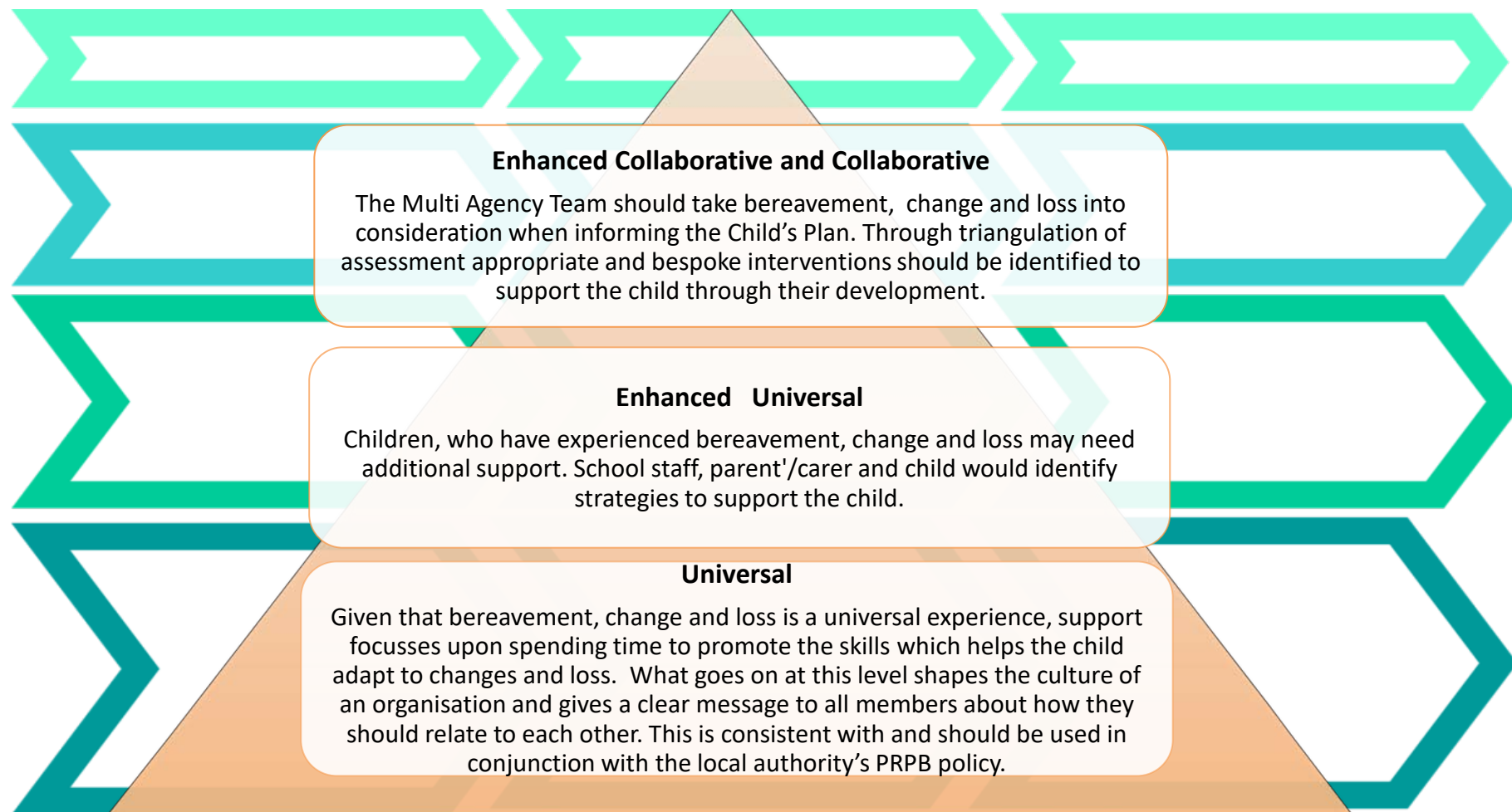
Children and young people with Additional Support Needs are sometimes assumed to need protection from loss more than most or not have the capacity to understand. It can be easy to underestimate their ability to cope with difficult situations. The challenge is finding creative ways to communicate when words are sometimes not appropriate.

Other support

Please see Appendix 6 for a case study/example of good practice and Appendix 7 for Online Bereavement & Loss Resources for Children & Young People.

Interventions and GIRFEC

Interventions are in line with Inverclyde's GIRFEC pathways and can be described as being at universal, enhanced universal, collaborative or enhanced collaborative levels.



Appendix 1 – How Might Grief Present?

**** It is important to note that any/all/none of these indicators may be present at any time in any individual regardless of age ****

Birth – 2 years	2-4 years	4 – 7 years	7 years to adolescence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not understand death or appreciate significance of the loss • May sense changes in the home • May display separation distress – persistent crying • May become detached/withdrawn • Detachment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May see death as abandonment/punishment • May see death as reversible or not permanent • May connect unrelated events to death • May look for who is no longer there 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May display conflicted emotions • May feel responsible for the death • May see death as contagious • ‘Magical thinking’ – may believe their actions can make the dead person come alive again • Can understand symbolic acts like laying flowers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starting to understand the permanence of loss • May be able to verbalise emotions • May recognise others’ pain and loss • May see death as a punishment • Fear of bodily harm for themselves and others

Indicators of Grief	Responses to Grief	Potential Behaviours	Adult Role
Shock	Irritability	Regression – immature behaviour	Re-establish routines
Denial/Belief	Responds/reacts to emotions of adults	Change in sleeping or eating pattern	Comfort
Yearning/searching	Very present oriented	Bedwetting/insecurity	Drawing/playing
Sadness	Aware of change	Separation anxiety	Acknowledge grief as normal
Anger	Repetitive questioning	Nightmares	Allow/encourage expression of feelings
Anxiety	Irrational feelings of guilt	Violent play	Answer questions openly when asked
Guilt/Bargaining	May re-enact death/funeral during play	Problems in school	Demonstrate care and concern
Acceptance	Asks about loved one’s return	Tiredness	Allow alone time but be available
	Questions about specific details	Poor concentration	
	Concerns about normality of the grieving process	Less social interaction	
	Some understanding of mourning		
	Fear loss of other loved ones		

Appendix 2 – Bereavement, change and loss support action plan for a Children and Young Person.

Under no circumstances would a child be given this document to complete individually. This document is intended to guide discussion to facilitate the creation of a plan. The document is optional and can be used by the identified school staff member to plan with families and outline the steps the school will take to support the child's return to school. Relevant information in the plan will be shared with key school staff members to ensure that they are aware of the arrangements that will support the child or address any difficulties that the child may experience.

Name:	
<p>What would help the child feel supported with their return to school? What can the child do to stay emotionally healthy? What can the school do to support the child? <i>For example the child asking for help when they need it, who could be available for the child to check in with, what can we communicate to your peers regarding what will help the child, how will the child communicate that they need timeout from class, can the school provide a quiet space for the child if needed, how will the child manage break times etc.</i></p>	
<p>Is there anything that the school should avoid doing? Is there anything that the child's friends/peers should avoid doing? <i>For example asking if the child is ok</i></p>	
<p>What temporary adjustments could we put in place to support the child? <i>For example timetable adjustments</i></p>	

If the child becomes distressed what should the school staff do? *For example give the child space and time or stay with them?*

Who should school staff contact if needed? Do emergency contacts need updated?

What information does the child want school staff to share with the child's friends or peers?

When will we discuss this plan again?

Date:

Signature of staff member :

Appendix 3 – Tips for supporting children experiencing bereavement, change & loss.

For all

Ask how they are feeling and give them permission to express how they feel. Listen:

A caring empathic relationship is key for the child. Make eye contact with the child, sit near to them at their level, allow them to talk, nod in response to their words and acknowledge the situation "I can see that you are sad." Sometimes, rather than asking direct questions, children will try and gauge your views via statements like 'Can I tell you something?' or 'Did you know that?' It is important at this time to recognise subtle changes in their tone of voice or body language can be a clue that they want to talk with you

Let them know they don't have to react like an adult and try to accept whatever they are feeling:

Accept children's play, it is normal for children to act out at times. Allow questions and conversations. Look at photographs. Your child is more likely to share his/her thoughts and feelings if he/she feels safe and accepted. "It's OK not to be sad all the time; it's OK to have fun".

Be patient:

Be prepared to answer the same questions over and over, this can be your child's way of making sense of the situation.

Normalise their reaction:

The way that you are feeling is normal, this has happened to other people too and this feeling will change."

Use clear language:

"I am sorry that your granny died."

"I miss your mum."

Avoid evasive terms like "she went to sleep," "she's in the sky," "we lost your granny" or "she left us."

If asked "Where have they gone?" or "Where are they now?" take account or consider the child's religion/cultural background when responding.

Do not be afraid to use the words dead or death "I was very sorry to hear of the death of your..."

Children and young people need honesty. Although sometimes difficult, it is better to answer awkward questions truthfully.

Recognise the full tragedy for the child. Do not try to comfort with comments such as "at least it is not as bad as..." You might think this is helpful, it is not.

Reassure them that they are not responsible. If this is an issue (it may not be for all children and young people), reassure them that what has happened is not their fault.

Remind them that things will get better:

Acknowledge that the event was distressing but balance with re-assurance that the world is usually reliable, predictable and dependable

Acknowledge your own feelings about change and loss and take care of yourself:

Do not hide your feelings. It is OK that we are not always calm and consistent in everything we do. Take time to yourself. Pay attention to what you need and then do what you have the energy and resources to do. The most important thing is taking care of yourself and your children.

Acknowledge that a child's behaviour may change:

Be understanding and accept the child's reactions to the circumstances

Answer questions honestly at the time when asked (where possible):

Your child may have lots of questions. If they ask a question to which you are not sure how to respond, ask them to think about the issue. Don't be afraid to say you don't know but you will try to find out for them. "That's an interesting question, let me think about that and get back to you" - gives you thinking time. See appendix 6 for information on how to answer difficult questions when someone dies and appendix 7 information on how to answer difficult questions when there are changes.

For Parents

Remember children cope best when they feel included:

If bereaved, experts suggest it is helpful and can support the grieving process if you let your child attend the funeral. Avoid unnecessary separation.

Consider how you are linking with the school:

Good communication with school stimulates emotional coping. Check out with the school if any areas of difficulty have arisen and try to work out strategies with your child and the school to make life easier.

Remember what you say can have a lasting effect on children.

Talk with your child about their worries; they can be worrying that something could happen to you or them. Talk with your child and explore what may be on their mind. Offer them reassurance.

For Teachers

Routines:

Sticking to routines as far as possible as they retain a sense of stability when things are changing. Sensitively maintain the usual boundaries and expectations of behaviour. Try to be consistent, clear and patient in what you say.

Consider how you are linking with parents:

Good communication with home stimulates emotional coping. Help parents give adequate information, check what the family has told the child, check out where areas of difficulty lie and try to work out strategies with the children and their family to make life easier

Remember what you say can have a lasting effect on children

When the time is right, consider how to address change with the whole class. Education about bereavement, change and loss supports an easier adjustment process.

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Appendix 4 – Difficult Questions children may ask when someone dies

Give responses which take account of poignancy of separation through death but remaining honest about what they can and cannot accept about the idea of being reunited, on some level, with the dead person.

Difficult Questions

It is essential to explain clearly to the child that the dead person is not cold, or in pain and does not need food anymore.

Young children are often curious about what happens to the body and it is quite acceptable to give information on different procedures for burial or cremation.

1. What's it like to be dead?

No-one is sure but we know it doesn't hurt, we don't feel cold or hungry.

2. Are they asleep?

Death is not sleep; the body has stopped working and cannot start up again.

3. Why didn't the hospital/doctor make them better?

Usually people get a little bit ill and then they can get better, like a skinned knee when the skin mends. Sometimes, usually when we are very old, our body gets ill and it can't be made better, no matter how hard the doctors try.

*Children whose sibling died in hospital need to be reassured that they were cared for; no one let them die.

4. Was it my fault? Did I say something to make them die?

It wasn't your fault - words don't kill people and death is never a punishment.

*Young children are not logical and often believe they can 'wish' something to happen.

5. It's not fair -why was it him/her?

We don't always understand why one person gets ill and dies and another doesn't.

*On one level, there is no answer to this.

6. Where have they gone? Where are they now?

No 'answers' - take account or consider the child's religion/cultural background when responding.

Sometimes, rather than asking direct questions, children will try and gauge your views via statements like 'Can I tell you something?' or 'Did you know that?' It is important at this time to recognise subtle changes in their tone of voice or body language can be a clue that they want to talk with you.

Appendix 5 – Questions children/YP may ask when relationships at home change

It is important to explain clearly to the child/YP that nothing they said, did or thought has caused the change. Give responses which take account of the difficulty of change but remain honest - if a child/YP asks a question you don't have the answers to, a possible response could be "That's a good question. Unfortunately, I can't answer that. I know it's hard to feel the way you are feeling but I know that you'll be OK."

Don't be caught up in the 'who, what, when...' you are there to support the child. If you have any concerns about the child's wellbeing, consult your Management Team or Child Protection Officer as necessary.

Difficult questions and possible responses.

- 1. Why did they fight?**
I don't know for sure, but it doesn't mean they don't love you.
- 2. Why can't they just get along?**
Give an answer that avoids speculation and try to reassure the child.
- 3. Why do I feel unhappy/sad?**
Lots of things might have changed...you might feel different and find things hard to talk about, like lots of other children you might not see one of your parents as much as you used to or want to, you might be worried mum and dad won't work things out.
- 4. Is it my fault?**
Definitely not. It's not your fault things change at home.
- 5. Whose side am I on?**
You don't have to be on anyone's side. There might be times when you are angry with one or both of them and that's normal. Remember that although adults may say things about each other that can upset you, they still love you very much.
- 6. How can I fix it?**
You can't but there's nothing you have done to make it happen. It's OK to ask them questions and tell them things that worry you. Remember I am here to listen if you want to talk.
- 7. Do I have to like their new friends?**
That's up to you. It's OK to like them. Decide how you feel about their new friends by what they do and say to you.

Appendix 6 – Case Study/Example of good practice

School Response: Katy's Story (adapted from Winston's Wish)

The following takes the hypothesis of a primary school setting, a sudden unexpected death of a parent (we'll make it her father) at the weekend, and a young person (we'll call her Katy) aged around 10. It raises some of the stages and issues that may prove helpful in managing the impact of the death on your school or community setting. It makes some assumptions, (for example, that Katy returns to school after a few days rather than the same morning) and may need some adaptation depending on who has died and the age of the child/children involved. This was one school's response, your journey will be your own but there will be some similarities and some useful things to consider.

Short Term

- The school is informed of the death on Monday morning. The school liaise with Katy and her family to decide how the rest of the school will learn about the death.
- The head refers to **this document**. Katy's class teacher, Mr Sharples is informed.
- The family are invited to meet to plan Katy's return to school
- As per Katy and her families wishes the rest of the staff are informed.
- Informed by discussions with the family it is discussed whether each class teacher will tell their class or if the head teacher will visit all the classes to tell what has happened to Katy's family. This is determined by who actually knows Katy in the other classes or if she has relatives attending the school – it may not be appropriate for the whole school to know about Katy's situation, a decision like this should be made by the school's own Senior Management Team as informed by Katy and her families wishes.
- A quick reminder of any other child in the school who has been previously bereaved is given to teachers to prepare them to offer additional support if required.
- In this case it was not considered appropriate for a letter to be produced for the class/everyone in the school to take home to their parents. If this had been the case a letter would have been sent outlining what has happened along with additional information on some possible reactions and responses that children may show.
- A letter of condolence is sent to Katy's family.

Medium Term – before Katy's return to school

- The school stays in touch with the family to find out what Katy wants to happen on her return to school. It may be that Katy wants to tell the whole class what has happened or that she would prefer Mr Sharples to say something simple to acknowledge her return. Katy decides she wants to say something herself.
- In partnership with the family, it is agreed how the school will mark the funeral. It may be that some staff attend and some friends of Katy's. Other members of the school may wish to contribute memories of Katy's father.
- Staff are kept informed and encouraged to acknowledge the death to and with Katy.

- They are encouraged to talk with their class about how Katy and her family may be feeling and how they will support her on her return. A simple form of words such as 'I am really sorry to hear about your father's death, Katy' is suggested for those who are unsure of what to say.
- In this case Katy's own class and group of friends had an additional session focusing on feelings connected with loss and grief.
- A member of staff identified who will meet Katy and her family on her return to school. Katy requested that her class teacher Mr Sharples meet her, therefore cover is arranged for their classroom in advance to facilitate this.

Medium term – when Katy returns to school

- Mr Sharples is waiting when Katie arrives and they have some time together. During this time, he checks that Katy is still happy with their plans for her return to class.
- Katy and her teacher identify a classroom teacher Ms Jones who she can seek out if needed and Mr Sharples is not available.
- Katy and Mr Sharples go to her class for her to re-join it. Katy said that she wants to tell people what has happened. Therefore she is given this opportunity to do this. As per agreed if Katy gets upset her teacher gently finishes the account. This gives the class as much information as is known that Katy's family are comfortable with being shared about the death.
- Both Katy and Mr Sharples make the point that she wants people to talk to her about what has happened and to understand that she will cry sometimes.
- Time is set aside at the end of the day for Katy to spend a little time with Mr Sharples checking out how things have been during the day, any changes she would like to make to the next day (where possible) and agreeing a plan for the following morning. They agree that a group of Katy's friends could wait outside and walk in with her instead of Mr Sharples.

Longer term

- Mr Sharples, in agreement with the rest of the staff, arranges a system for Katy whenever the pressure of grief builds up. She may be allowed "time out" or to seek out her supporter.
- The school ensures that Katy's family knows about any local child bereavement service and also provides information on national services. This may involve making a referral/working in partnership with a service for example, Inverclyde Psychological Services or local Inverclyde based organisations.
- Mr Sharples compiles a 'calendar of memories' – noting any dates that will be especially sensitive for Katy – the anniversary of the death, her father's birthday, Father's Day, and so on. This calendar can follow her through the school and a note is made that this information will pass at transition to the secondary school next year.
- All those who teach Katy have a heightened sensitivity to issues that may affect her – for example, consider the circumstances around the death, and the nature of proposed learning contexts to ensure Katy is not unnecessarily upset.

Appendix 7: Online Bereavement & Loss Resources for Children & Young People

Topic	Online Resources: Pre 5	Online Resources: Primary	Online Resources: Secondary	Online Resources: SEN
School Bereavement Policy	childbereavementuk.org	childbereavementuk.org	childbereavementuk.org	childbereavementuk.org
Views of young people on how best to meet their needs in times of loss/ bereavement		childhoodbereavementuk.org cruse.org.uk	childhoodbereavementuk.org cruse.org.uk	childhoodbereavementuk.org
Good practice on child returning to school after a bereavement	winstonswish.org	winstonswish.org goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk cruse.org.uk seesaw.org.uk childbereavementuk.org	winstonswish.org goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk cruse.org.uk seesaw.org.uk childbereavementuk.org	winstonswish.org childbereavementuk.org
Suggestions for continuous support	childbereavementuk.org	childhoodbereavementuk.org winstonswish.org goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk https://www.ataloss.org/resources	childhoodbereavementuk.org winstonswish.org goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk https://www.ataloss.org/resources	childbereavementuk.org
Resources for children at times of loss	childbereavementuk.org	childbereavementuk.org goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk https://www.ataloss.org/resources	childbereavementuk.org cruse.org.uk https://www.ataloss.org/resources	childbereavementuk.org
Resources for parents	childbereavementuk.org	childbereavementuk.org cruse.org.uk seesaw.org.uk https://www.ataloss.org/resources	childbereavementuk.org cruse.org.uk seesaw.org.uk https://www.ataloss.org/resources	childbereavementuk.org seesaw.org.uk