

## Childhood Bereavement Network response to the QCA Secondary Curriculum Review

The Childhood Bereavement Network welcomes the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's review of the secondary curriculum. This response focuses largely on PSHE and the proposed programmes for PSHEE.

We are pleased to see the links within the curriculum revisions to the Every Child Matters outcomes. However, the PSHE curriculum alone cannot ensure that schools promote the well-being of their pupils and that pupils are supported in achieving the five outcomes. For this, a whole school approach is needed. In the case of bereavement, this involves proactive and flexible pastoral support, a system for managing and communicating important information about bereavements, staff training and support, and policy development. Wherever possible, explicit links should be made between the PSHE curriculum and the National Healthy School Standard and other initiatives impacting on pupils' well-being.

Because of the anxieties and sensitivities around including death and bereavement in the curriculum, many schools do not address it (see Ribbens McCarthy, J (2005) *Young People, Bereavement and Loss: disruptive transitions?* London: NCB). Making PSHE statutory would help schools to prioritise this work and seek the training and support which will help to increase staff confidence in tackling difficult subjects.

Including death and bereavement in the curriculum is an opportunity to dispel some of the myths and taboos around the subject, and therefore its treatment should not be limited solely to the PSHE curriculum, but considered in other subjects (see Job, N and Frances, G (2004) *Childhood Bereavement: developing the curriculum and pastoral support* London: NCB)

Young people took part in a video talkshop project supported by St Christophers' Candle Project. They discussed including death and bereavement in the curriculum:

*They brought in this new curriculum thing called 'Citizenship' and it doesn't really cover things about bereavement. It's more like career-based, doing your CV, student statements when you leave school, what makes a good citizen, things like that, how you should act towards each other, respect, things like that, but it doesn't cover anything like death or anything like that....It's more to do with careers and how you're going to get on with life and you had a situation where you had to have a job. It wasn't like coping to do with death or if anything bad happens to you.*

*'Teaching you about death makes you into a citizen because then you've got a value for life.'*

*'They could talk to you about death and what aspects of it and you could have like a discussion with your class about it. That would prepare you for*

*it in a way because then you'll have a greater understanding of what's happened and why it's happened.'*

While both personal and economic well-being should be included in the curriculum, structuring them as separate strands may create extra timetabling pressures and give disproportionate weight to economic well-being. Some topics, including bereavement, will straddle the personal, social, health and economic strands, (as they also straddle the five outcomes), and would fit better with a single programme of study.

### **Personal well-being**

We welcome the references to bereavement in the context of learning about the positive and stable relationships (KS3) and understanding the need to adapt to changing circumstances in families (KS4). We also welcome the inclusion of learning about sources of support at KS4 and feel that this should be started at KS3. This should include an understanding of the sorts of support that are available in particular circumstances: how they can be accessed, what will happen and what the intended outcomes are. This will help young people to make informed decisions about accessing support for themselves now or in the future. Curriculum opportunities at both key stages should include opportunities to explore these issues.

We welcome mention of diversity as a key concept and part of the content of study. However, this must be supported by an appreciation of diversity running through all areas of study, for example, different attitudes to death and bereavement across cultures.

Curriculum opportunities should include more emphasis on using creative expression to explore sensitive topics such as bereavement.

### **Economic well-being**

This subject area rightly includes support for helping young people to take control of their future economic well-being through planning their career and developing enterprising behaviour. However, many circumstances which affect economic well-being are beyond the control of an individual - such as the death of someone significant in their lives - and this curriculum area should include more emphasis on managing changing circumstances.

Poverty and unemployment are realities for many families, and financial circumstances often change after the death of a significant person. These realities should be included in the curriculum, which seems to take a very positive view of the circumstances which pupils will face, both during their childhood and in their future.

Alison Penny  
Policy and Communications Coordinator  
Childhood Bereavement Network

[apenny@ncb.org.uk](mailto:apenny@ncb.org.uk)

[www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk)