

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence

**PUBLIC HEALTH INTERVENTIONS – MENTAL WELLBEING of CHILDREN in
PRIMARY EDUCATION (TARGETED APPROACH)**

**Consultation on the draft Scope from 27th October – 4th December 2006
Comments on the Draft Scope by 4th December 2006**

Stakeholder Comments

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1. Please put each new comment in a new row.
2. Please insert the **section number** in the 1st column. If your comment relates to the document as a whole, please put '**general**' in this column

Name:	Alison Penny
Organisation:	Childhood Bereavement Network, National Children's Bureau
Section number	Comments Please insert each new comment in a new row.
General	<p>The Childhood Bereavement Network (CBN) welcomes this draft scope. CBN is a network of over 300 organisations and individuals working with bereaved children and their families in the UK. We are hosted by the National Children's Bureau.</p> <p>Last week we launched <i>Grief Matters for Children</i>: a three year campaign for appropriate information and support for all bereaved children and their families, wherever they live and however they have been bereaved. As part of the campaign, we want all schools to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• promote the well-being of bereaved children and young people through a whole school approach including proactive, flexible pastoral support and the curriculum• have a system for managing and communicating important information about children and young people's bereavements• ensure that staff have training to give them the confidence and skills to respond appropriately to the diverse needs of bereaved children and their families, including making referrals to child bereavement services• support these measures by incorporating them into relevant policies <p>For more information, please visit http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/griefMatters.htm</p>

Please return to: mentalhealthandyoungpeople@nice.org.uk

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2 (b)	<p>The draft scope indicates that the guidance will support policy documents which include the <i>Children Act 2004</i>. It is important that the guidance looks at the impact of mental well-being on all five outcomes for children, not just ‘be healthy’ and ‘enjoy and achieve’.</p> <p>For example, under ‘make a positive contribution’ the aim for children to ‘deal successfully with life changes and challenges’ will be of particular relevance to promoting children’s resilience in primary school.</p>
2 (c)	<p>The important role of support staff in promoting children’s well-being in schools should not be overlooked. As well as teachers and governors, the guidance should be aimed at all school staff who might be involved this work, such as learning mentors, office staff, learning support assistants.</p> <p>A study found that, when asked who in a school would be best targeted to receive information about the impact of bereavement, Special Needs Coordinators were almost as likely to suggest learning support assistants as teachers. Several recommended that <u>all</u> school staff needed this information.¹</p>
4.1.1	<p>We would suggest that the needs of bereaved children should be considered as part of the guidance. The death of a significant person can have a devastating impact on children’s lives, affecting their physical and emotional health, schooling and relationships. Yet with appropriate information and support, children can learn to manage the impact of death on their lives.</p> <p><i>Prevalence</i> 4% 5-16 year olds (approximately 358,000) have been bereaved of a parent or sibling. 6% 5-16 year olds (approximately 537,000) have been bereaved of a close friend². Data does not show what proportions of these children are bereaved while at primary school, but a study found that at any one time, up to 70% primary schools have a recently bereaved pupil on roll³.</p>
	<p><i>Impact – mental wellbeing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between 50 and 66% children and young people bereaved of a parent show distress and depressive symptoms, and these may persist over time.⁴ • A study found that 2 years after the death, parentally bereaved children felt less able to effect change and had lower self-esteem than their peers.⁵ • A study found that a range of mental health difficulties were more frequent among children bereaved of a parent, sibling or close friend than those not bereaved.⁶ • Some studies suggest adults who were bereaved in childhood (possibly in conjunction with other factors) may be more vulnerable than the general population to psychiatric disorders, particularly depression and anxiety, which may be precipitated by further losses.⁷

¹ Tollast, S (2006) *Exploring special educational needs coordinators’ views regarding bereavement support in schools Unpublished BSc dissertation*. University of Portsmouth School of Health Sciences and Social Work

² Statistics compiled from Green, H et al (2004) *Mental health of children and adolescents in Great Britain* London: HMSO and *Mid-2005 Population Estimates* London: HMSO

³ Holland, J (1993) ‘Child Bereavement in Humberside Primary Schools’ *Educational Research* 35,3, 289-297

⁴ Ribbens McCarthy, J (2006) *Young People’s Experiences of Loss and Bereavement: towards an interdisciplinary approach* Maidenhead: OUP

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<p><i>Impact – schooling</i></p> <p>Families and schools report bereaved children and young people experiencing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• poor concentration• lack of interest• missing school• further losses through having to move home and school <p>William Worden's study⁸ of 125 parentally bereaved children over the two years following a parent's death found that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1/5 children experienced learning difficulties at school in the early months• 1/5 experienced problems concentrating• Children with fewer friends and those whose grief manifested in sleep disturbance, headaches and frequent crying were more likely to find it difficult to concentrate• Both learning difficulties and concentration improved over the first year since the death, but by the end of the first year, 16% children still had problems concentrating compared to 6% non-bereaved children.• Anxiety, headaches, sleep difficulties, lower self esteem, higher levels of aggressive behaviour and higher number of changes in daily life following bereavement were correlates of learning difficulties <p>Looking at the longer term impact on schooling of a significant bereavement, a study found that the average GCSE score of parentally bereaved children was an average of half a grade lower than their non-bereaved peers, and that of sibling bereaved girls was nearly a grade lower than their non-bereaved peers.⁹</p> <p>However, the impact of bereavement on educational performance and age of completion of education will vary between individual children and according to their particular circumstances. Worden found that a group of children felt that their school work had improved after the bereavement. This reflects the findings of other studies which suggest that opposite effects may emerge for different children <i>'in some cases the young person will want to try harder for the sake of their dead parent, while in others it will have a negative impact'</i>¹⁰</p>

⁵ Worden, J W (1996) *Children and Grief: when a parent dies* New York: Guilford

⁶ Meltzer et al (2000) *The Mental Health of Children and Adolescents* Office of National Statistics

⁷ Black, D (1998) Bereavement in childhood *British Medical Journal* 316 931-933

⁸ Worden, W (1996) *Children and Grief* New York: The Guilford Press

⁹ Abdelnoor, A and Hollins, S (2004) 'The effect of childhood bereavement on secondary school performance' *Educational Psychology in Practice* 20,1, 42-54

¹⁰ Ribbens McCarthy, J with Jessop, J (2005) *Young people, bereavement and loss: disruptive transitions* London: NCB

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	<p>Primary school children are clear about the significance of the school as a supportive environment following the death of a parent¹¹:</p> <p><i>'Friends could be more supportive because I got teased when my dad died. They shouldn't tease you'</i></p> <p><i>'My teacher was very nice because her parents had died so she knew all about us'</i></p> <p><i>'My head teacher was really nice and explained it all to everyone because people weren't asking me loads of questions'</i></p> <p><i>'It's important that teachers listen to children because they might be really upset and they can't tell anybody because no-one wants to listen'</i></p> <p><i>'I had to go home because I couldn't even eat one bit of my food because I kept on crying.'</i></p>
4.1.1	<p>While the guidance covers children aged 4-11, links should be made with any similar or future guidance covering younger and older children, and recommendations around transitions should be included. For bereaved children, transitions such as moving schools may cause them to 'revisit' their bereavement and this can affect their mental well-being.</p>

¹¹ Quotes taken from CBN Video 'You'll always remember them, even when you're old' made with the help of children and staff from Jigsaw4u

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4.2.1	<p><u>Links between targeted and whole school approaches</u></p> <p>We see the relevance of dividing the scope into whole school and targeted approaches, but feel that the resulting guidance will be strengthened if the two are very clearly linked.</p> <p>It will be appropriate to offer targeted support to individual pupils when they are bereaved. But the majority of young people will experience a bereavement at some point in their childhood, (78% 11-16 year olds in one study had been bereaved of a close relative or friend¹²) and so the general provision of education about loss and bereavement will be of wider relevance, helping to dispel myths and taboos.¹³ Evidence suggests that the majority of children think about death and dying and that <i>'children have a greater awareness of death than most adults would believe'</i>¹⁴ For schools not to tackle this topic can suggest to children that it is something not to be discussed, which could prevent them from seeking support if they or a friend were later bereaved.</p> <p>In addition, targeted interventions for individual pupils are more effective if located in a school which is generally supportive. For example</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff showing that they value targeted support can make children feel more comfortable about accessing it• Support for staff can help them to understand their role in supporting bereaved pupils and addressing bereavement in the curriculum, and reduce the anxiety around this difficult subject• Sharing strategies for targeted support (eg agreeing with a child and family how the rest of the class should be informed about a bereavement) can ensure consistency of care• Promoting peer support, educating about loss and tackling bullying can reduce the bullying and isolation which bereaved children may experience
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¹² Harrison, L and Harrington, Z (2001) 'Adolescents' bereavement experiences. Prevalence, association with depressive symptoms, and use of services', *Journal of Adolescence* 24, 2, 159-69

¹³ Rowling, L (2003) *Grief in School Communities* Buckingham: OUP

¹⁴ Bowie 2000: 24 in Ribbens McCarthy, J (2005) *ibid*

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4.2.1	<p><u>Types of targeted approaches</u></p> <p>As explained, targeted support for bereaved children needs to be part of a whole school approach to dealing with loss and bereavement¹⁵. Targeted interventions can include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1:1 support• Peer support groups• Referrals to local childhood bereavement services• Books and resources in the library• A safe environment• Support for staff• Communication with parents <p>Targeted interventions need to be discussed and agreed with the child and the family. Some children will want extra support: others will want to be treated just like everyone else, and their needs are likely to change over time.</p> <p>For suggestions about targeted support for bereaved pupils, see http://www.winstonswish.org.uk/page.asp?section=0001000100030002&pagetitle=Schools</p> <p>For published evaluations of peer support as a targeted intervention, see Ross, D and Hayes B (2004) 'Interventions with groups of bereaved pupils' <i>Educational and Child Psychology</i> Vol 21 (3)</p> <p>For evaluations of Seasons for Growth, an Australian programme of peer support around loss and bereavement, visit http://www.goodgrief.org.au/seasonsforgrowth/sfgevaluations.htm</p>
4.5	<p>The question 'Is it better if a teacher or a specialist delivers the intervention' should be broadened to acknowledge the role of other staff in schools such as learning mentors.</p> <p>The question could also be rephrased to explore the effectiveness of relationships between school staff and specialists such as childhood bereavement services. Many of these services offer training and ongoing support to schools in their area, as well as a range of interventions for bereaved children and families. For details of services, see www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk</p>
4.6	See 2(c)

¹⁵ See Job, N and Frances, G (2004) *Childhood bereavement: developing the curriculum and pastoral support* London: NCB