



Grief matters for children: what is needed?

The death of someone close brings change and challenge into the life of a young person, and can be devastating. Around 1 in 25 children and young people currently of school age have experienced the death of a parent, brother or sister, and many more are affected by the death of someone else close. Some receive excellent support, but others struggle to find the help they want and need.

We want all bereaved children, young people and their families to have access to support - wherever they live and however they've been bereaved. To help this happen, we want the Government to commit to and fund five simple measures in England:

- **a duty** to be placed on all children's services authorities to demonstrate how they meet bereaved children's needs
- **training** on bereavement in childhood to become part of standard training for teachers, with courses made available to existing school staff
- **responsibility** for bereavement issues to be taken by a senior manager in every school and early years setting
- **information** on bereavement and sources of support to be available to parents, carers, professionals, children and young people
- **data** on the number and ethnicity of children and young people bereaved of a parent or sibling to be collected and reported upon each year.

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to be placed on all children's services authorities to demonstrate how they meet bereaved children's needs.

The Children Act 2004 requires children's services authorities and other key partners to cooperate to improve the well-being of children and young people in the local area. Inevitably, some children and young people's well-being is affected by bereavement, and local authorities should be addressing their support needs.

To ensure that this happens in every area, frameworks for inspecting local children's trust partnerships should require children's services authorities to demonstrate specifically how they meet children and young people's bereavement support needs in cooperation with local partners, including specialist childhood bereavement services.

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The majority of children and young people will experience

the death of someone close to them by the time they are sixteen. This means that anyone in the children's workforce - including teachers, early years practitioners, foster carers, social workers and others - is likely to be in contact with bereaved children in the course of their work.

Revised professional standards for teachers take effect in September 2007 and state that all qualified teachers should know how to identify and support children and young people whose progress, development or well-being is affected by changes or difficulties in their personal circumstances, and when to refer them to colleagues for specialist support.

However, adults are often anxious and uncertain about how to respond to bereaved children and may be worried about making things worse. Lack of knowledge about how children express their grief can mean that adults don't link behaviours such as regression, withdrawal or aggression with a bereavement, and so children miss out on the support they want and need. One boy explained that his teachers didn't understand how the death of his father continued to affect him

'They think that after a month or so it's happened, it's gone, it's all ok, you're all happy again, you know, just like it was before, and you have to explain to them that it's not ok, you're still upset, it doesn't just go away after a month or a couple of weeks or something'.

How can training help?

An increased awareness of bereavement in childhood and ideas about practical ways of offering support particular settings can complement practitioners' existing skills. This can increase their confidence and help them to respond appropriately to the diverse needs of bereaved children and families, including making referrals to child bereavement services. 95% respondents to a recent Childhood Bereavement Network survey thought that teachers should have training to be able to support children if someone close has died.

How can training be accessed?

Good examples of training are available from statutory providers and the third sector. Many childhood bereavement services provide professional development opportunities and support to the children's workforce. These services can be accessed directly or through the Childhood Bereavement Network.

What needs to happen?

Training in awareness of bereavement needs to be incorporated into initial and ongoing training for the children's workforce. A day's training should be incorporated into all initial teacher training programmes, and INSET training should be available in all local education authority areas.

Responsibility

for bereavement issues to be taken by a senior manager in every school and early years setting.

Up to 70% of primary schools have at least one recently bereaved pupil on roll. For the well-being of bereaved children and young people to be promoted effectively in school and early years settings, this issue needs to be championed by an appropriate senior member of staff. The right person will vary: this could form part of an existing responsibility for pastoral care or pupil well-being.

What would this responsibility entail?

The member of staff should ensure that a whole school approach is taken in addressing death and bereavement. Good provision includes

- proactive, flexible pastoral support which could include one to one provision, peer support, books and resources in the library
- curriculum development to ensure that death and bereavement are included in the PSHE curriculum and other relevant subject areas
- a system for managing and communicating important information about bereavement
- staff training and support
- referrals and partnerships with childhood bereavement services
- inclusion of bereavement in relevant plans and policies such as the critical incident plan, confidentiality policy, pastoral support policy and PSHE policy.

Children and young people describe how helpful it was to have someone to coordinate support for them in school. There are examples of schools with good practice that could be emulated elsewhere. One girl said that after her father's death

I went to school and my teacher hadn't told my class...and when my friends asked me how he was then that was kind of upsetting...But then my head teacher was really nice and explained it all to everyone...so it was like easier.'

Information

on bereavement and sources of support to be available to parents, carers, professionals, children and young people.

Information about how children grieve can help parents and carers to feel less anxious about how children are responding. For children and young people, knowing that other people have felt like this can be reassuring:

'It's helped me like learn that other people also feel upset in the way that I did'

Parents, carers and children need to know about the childhood bereavement services available to them locally and nationally, and how they can be accessed.

How should information be provided?

The Childcare Act (2006) requires local authorities to provide information to parents which they might need for their children right through to their 20th birthday. Local authorities must be proactive in reaching parents.

Local Children's Information Services should hold information about bereavement and about local and national sources of support. This information should be easy to access through libraries, council offices, schools and extended services, children's centres, funeral directors, GP surgeries, registrars' offices and the internet.

Data

on the number and ethnicity of children and young people bereaved of a parent or sibling to be collected and reported upon annually.

Planning services for bereaved children, young people and their families is hampered by a lack of statistical information about the numbers affected. Community studies give some idea, but there is no central collection of data. The Government collects data on the number of children affected each year by the divorce of their parents, but not on the number affected by the death of a parent.

How could data be collected?

Registry offices could collect data when a death is registered, by asking whether the deceased person had any dependent children or siblings of 16 or under. Data on some parental deaths could also be collected through changes in payments of child benefit or working families tax credit.

The data collected should be mapped against data on ethnicity to inform the development and accessibility of services.

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CBN is a national, multi-professional network of organisations and individuals working in the field of childhood bereavement. It promotes the interests of bereaved children, young people and their families, and encourages the development of quality support for them.

For more information, contact Alison Penny, Policy and Communications Coordinator at cbn@ncb.org.uk

Quotes from children and young people in this paper are taken from the CBN videos 'A death in the lives of...', 'You'll always remember them, even when you're old' and 'It will be ok'.

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8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE
Telephone: 020 7843 6309 Fax: 020 7837 1439
Email: cbn@ncb.org.uk
Website: www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

