



The Irish Childhood
Bereavement Network

Teachers – You are an important resource

Teachers and school staffs are in a unique position to support children in their class or school community who have been bereaved.

School and its routine provide stability, security, continuity and above all a familiar structure and routine to a child whose world might be in turmoil and confusion due to significant change and loss in the family.



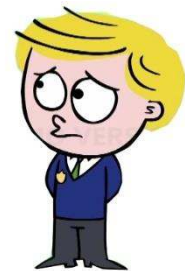
Most grieving pupils do not need a “bereavement expert” but simply need the support of people who care. Teachers can make a real difference to bereaved pupils, acknowledging their loss and by offering opportunities for them to talk about their experiences if they want to and by listening and responding to the spoken and unspoken messages they send.



Teachers – You - yourselves are the best and most effective resource to children and young people in this situation – doing what you do every day as part of your professional role as a teacher or school staff member.

- **Acknowledge what happened** – create a time to say ...“I am sorry thathas died “
- **Ask** – *What if anything would you like me to do?* Some children want to slip back into a class without any undue notice or attention being focussed on them. Others may be relieved by a public acknowledgement. Others may want to know what if anything has been said to the class
- **Explain** and acknowledge that you are there to help at this difficult time – that you understand that they may need additional help to catch up with work or to get school work completed etc. Watch out for those children who go to the other extreme and over work or over study
- **Maintain a flexibility and understanding** over the long term – life has changed for them – adapting to their loss will take considerable time- for many it is a lifelong process as a child grows and develops through the developmental stages
- **Establish and maintain the class routine** ,it is part of life that has not changed
- **Create a supportive class/school environment** – your supportive presence and understanding is fundamental – every child’s response will be different – draw on your understanding of the child- often it is through your observations that you will know when to be there

- **Be watchful, alert & sensitive** to changes in behaviour/emotions/ needs – children and young people often don't know or understand what is happening to them or why they are feeling the way that they do, often they do not have the language to express how they are feeling
- **Listen & be patient** – you don't always have to say anything – some children just need to tell and re tell their story over and over, they may ask the same questions over and over again – this is the way they try to make sense of what has happened
- **Be mindful** that some children may not want to speak about their bereavement and that is okay
- **Watch out for isolation at play/lunch time** – sometimes children can subconsciously exclude a child who has been bereaved as being different or can be fearful that the same thing may happen them. A bereaved child might also withdraw from interacting with their peers.
- **Give Reassurance** - bereaved children can lose their sense of trust and confidence in their world and may display heightened anxiety levels even in relation to very ordinary issues (break time, schoolwork, and friends). Self-esteem can be diminished. Be patient and reassuring.
- **Believe in and foster** a child's innate ability and resilience to cope and adapt – you are providing a key support structure in this process.
- **Remembering** – can be so important – be sensitive to allow and create opportunities to remember during different time of the school year and/or during the day-to-day classroom discussions /activities. Please see Information Sheet: Special Occasions ([click here](#))
- **Inform and empower yourself of key aspects of children's grief** – see information and guidelines sheets as part of the ICBN school information sheets
- **Plan and allow short period of time out if required** – Children and young people may need some space and relief for short periods particularly at times of high emotions /feelings that can occur – remember children dip in and out of grief and when they dip in it can be very intense and exhausting . Teachers at all times adhere to school policy.
- **Have fun and share laughs** – It is really important that children and young people know that they do not have to be sad all the time that it is okay to play, laugh and have fun.



Mind Yourself - Self Care

- Teachers have Grief and Loss too
- Childrens' issues can trigger issues for us as teachers on a personnel level
- Be kind and understanding to your own needs
- Treat yourself – walks, cinema, massage etc.
- Don't carry the emotions home – children and their issues can eat into the heart
- Don't let the dust settle
- If you are being overwhelmed – look for support
- **See also Information Sheet : Teachers and Self Care**

