



Waterton Pre-Schools

Loss and Separation Policy

Waterton Pre-Schools recognise the part we play in supporting bereaved children.

Introduction

When children experience bereavement, the pre-school often becomes a source of care and support during this difficult time. We also acknowledge that grief impacts on almost every aspect of a person's life and we are committed to supporting staff in practical and reasonable ways should they suffer a bereavement.

Within our community there will almost always be some recently bereaved children who are struggling with their own situation – or sometimes the entire setting is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a child. We would hope to not encounter such circumstances, but the statistical inevitability of such an occurrence implies the necessity of having a Loss and Separation Policy in place in order that we might be proactive, rather than reactive, when responding to these sensitive situations. Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of the setting may be all the bereavement support some children – or staff – require, though referral to more specialist support should be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex.

Aims

- The main aim of the policy is to ensure that all children and all members of staff faced with bereavement are provided with support.

As we understand that every bereavement and reaction is different, this policy sets out our procedures to support families and children should they be bereaved. The policy also aims to outline procedures in our pre-schools should a member of staff be bereaved. Our pre-schools aim to counter any adverse effects of bereavement and to support children's or staff's emotional wellbeing. It is recognised that the situation for the child, young person and/or family will be monitored over time.

Waterton Pre-Schools will support those experiencing bereavement, providing opportunity to:

- express their feelings in a safe environment,
- be given space and time to come to terms with their loss
- access to specialist advice if necessary.

It is our hope that anyone faced with bereavement will regard our community as a place where children and young people can grow and face the challenges that lie ahead. This, in turn, will contribute to our learning community.

The Pre-School Manager, with support from the Executive Headteacher can provide support for children, families and staff in the event of bereavement. They will share resources and information available and can work with staff and families to support them where needed. More information on supporting children through bereavement can be found on the *Child Bereavement UK* website; <https://childbereavementuk.org/>

Children's Understanding and Reactions to Bereavement

One of the most painful stresses with which a child has to cope is the loss of a parent, a close family member or a friend. Children grieve, they experience pain and sadness but they eventually need to detach their feelings from the deceased just as adults do. Research shows that children do understand

death from an early age. This develops from a belief in the reversibility of death in the pre-school years, to a gradual understanding of death's finality and irreversibility. Children's understanding of death develops alongside their cognitive development; it may occur at different speeds, but the sequence appears to be the same in the majority of children.

Reactions to grief can include:

- Open distress
- Tears
- Panic
- Withdrawal
- Aggression
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Refusal to co-operate
- Any other signs of stress/change of mood, which may be expressed in unexpected ways e.g. nervous giggling, stoical bravery, untypical aggression, becoming the class clown, or even total denial.

How we can help the child/children with death and grief

Staff should ensure the below are adhered to during all cases of bereavement; there is also advice for more specific bereavements.

Death of a child

Waterton Pre-Schools understand:

- That being realistic and honest is the best way for our adults to be with children.
- No child is taken in by pretend cheerfulness.
- The need to be aware of and respect the wishes and beliefs of the family.
- The need to encourage children to express their feelings.
- To not tell a child how to feel.
- The need to support children use up their feelings in a positive way.
- Children learn to mourn by observing others. They need to be warned about different adult reactions and receiving mixed messages.
- Emotional pain is catching – be prepared.
- To not to single out a grieving child for special attention. They need to feel part of their group as usual but accept that their engagement might be at a different level for a while.
- The need to monitor children's reactions to grief.
- Those who had a close relationship with the deceased will need extra care.
- The effects of grief will last for different lengths of time for different people.

Death of a member of staff

Children generally believe that staff leave a setting for other posts or to retire. For most, it is quite inconceivable that they might die whilst still being employed by the pre-school. We as adults have an

inbuilt resistance to accepting death, especially if it is someone of our own age or younger. When such an event occurs it is usually extremely traumatic, especially for members of staff forced to deal with their own grief as well as comforting the children.

Multiple loss

Where several children and/or staff die in one incident, staff, children, parents, committee members, trustees, outside agencies and the press, all become entwined. Areas of responsibility need to be very clear, refer to page 4 'The role of the Pre- School Executive Headteacher'. It is essential to gather together all of the facts and details of the incident, and then determine the likely impact on the whole setting. In the case of multiple deaths, additional support and resources may well be required. Additional staff may also be needed. In such instances, effective communication channels are essential.

Preparing for a child to return to Pre-School

For the bereaved child or member of staff, returning to Pre-School may be traumatic. It is essential to pave the way for their return. It is important that everyone in the setting are aware of what has happened. If everybody knows, and the bereaved person is aware of this, then it should make the situation more bearable. It is also important for everyone to be aware so they can appreciate and make allowances for uncharacteristic behaviour. If staff find a child in a distressed state, they will at least be prepared in their own minds as how best to deal with it.

Pre-School as a safe haven

Whilst it is only natural to show compassion and allow expression to those suffering grief, it is important not to forget that for the bereaved, Pre-School, with its routines and structure, can provide a respite. Death brings unpredictability, fear and uncertainty. For the bereaved, family life at this traumatic time can be particularly distressing, routines upset, relationships strained, and the future uncertain.

Ongoing Remembrance

It is important to remember that anniversaries often spark a revival of feelings associated with the initial bereavement. The family and close friends will remember the deceased person's birthday, as they will the anniversary of the death. Siblings will be particularly vulnerable at these difficult times. Staff should be made aware of such dates in order that they may react with the necessary sensitivity and respect.

Procedure to be followed in the event of the death of a member of staff

- Executive Headteacher to arrange an immediate staff meeting for all members of staff - it is vital that everyone is present at this meeting.
- The facts must be made clear and it should be decided at this meeting exactly what the children and families are to be told, and when.
- Some members of staff will be more distressed than others and some may not be able to return to work immediately, it will be the responsibility of the Executive Headteacher to make any arrangements to allow the staff some time to themselves, should they need it.

The role of the Executive Headteacher in the event of the bereavement of children, family members or staff

- Inform all members of staff. If it is felt necessary (possibly because it is the weekend or holiday time) this should be by telephone. Otherwise an immediate staff meeting at the earliest possible time, perhaps with the support of the trust Central Team.
- Arrange a set time, agreed by all staff to inform the children what has happened. It is very important to agree on exactly what is to be said. If necessary draft a script.
- Consider whether absent staff/ families need to be informed.
- Inform Committee Members and Trustees.
- Write a letter to parents – should be on the first day. Give the basic facts, as would have been given to the children and alert parents to the possible distress their children will be feeling.
- Deal with the media, if necessary. It is imperative that only the Executive Headteacher performs this role, providing a standardised response for staff.
- Remain in discreet contact with the deceased family, to ensure their wishes are respected.
- Keep all staff and anyone else closely involved with the school/centre, fully informed of any funeral arrangements /memorial service.
- Keep all staff up to date with any further information – regular, or if necessary even daily staff meetings may be held.
- Arrange for extra pastoral care / counselling if it is felt necessary.
- Be responsible for arranging a memorial service or setting up of a permanent memorial – planting a tree, special award, seat/bench if desired. This will encourage forward thinking.

Key Points for Supporting the Bereaved

- Be honest at all times.
- Allow discussion and expression.
- Talk openly but honestly about the person who has died.
- Be aware of other people's beliefs and values.
- Reassure those who feel that they are in some way to blame.
- Be honest with explanations.
- Be compassionate but firm.
- Expect regression.
- Never avoid the bereaved.
- Never pretend life will be the same.
- Never put a time limit on how long you expect the grieving period to last.

Policy Review

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