

Supporting a Bereaved Child in Education

Children spend a large part of their day in school, which means educators often play an important role in supporting pupils who are experiencing bereavement. A supportive and understanding environment can help children feel safe while they process their feelings.

1. Use Clear and Honest Language

When discussing death with children, clarity helps prevent confusion.

- Use simple and direct language such as "died" rather than euphemisms.
- Answer questions honestly and at an age-appropriate level.
- Be prepared for children to repeat questions as they process the information.

2. Provide a Safe and Supportive Environment

Children benefit from knowing that school remains a safe place.

You can support this by:

- acknowledging the loss in a gentle and sensitive way
- maintaining normal classroom routines where possible
- allowing the child space if they become overwhelmed

3. Allow Different Emotional Responses

Grief can appear in many ways.

A bereaved pupil may:

- appear sad or withdrawn
- become angry or frustrated
- struggle with concentration
- move between sadness and normal play

4. Encourage Expression Through Activities

Some children find it easier to express emotions through optional creative activities rather than conversation.

Helpful approaches include:

- drawing or writing about memories
- quiet reflection activities
- storytelling or discussion
- wellbeing or PSHE exercises focused on emotions

5. Communicate With Parents or Guardians

Maintaining communication with the child's family can help provide consistent support.

Consider:

- sharing any concerns about the child's wellbeing
- understanding any cultural or family preferences around discussing loss
- ensuring the child receives consistent messages of support.

6. Seek Additional Support When Needed

If a child appears to be struggling significantly, additional pastoral or specialist support may be helpful.

Educators may wish to consult: school safeguarding or wellbeing leads, pastoral support staff, external bereavement organisations such as Winston's Wish, Child Bereavement UK or Cruse Bereavement Support.

Remember

Teachers do not need to have all the answers. Simply offering patience, understanding, and a safe environment can make a meaningful difference to a child navigating grief.