

# Journeying with and alongside those who are grieving: A support pack for schools



## **A Time for Everything**

There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under heaven:

A time to be born and a time to die

A time to plant and a time to uproot

A time to kill and a time to heal

A time to tear down and a time to build

A time to weep and a time to laugh

A time to mourn and a time to dance

Ecclesiastes 3: 1-4



**Diocese of Canterbury**  
**CHANGED LIVES ➔ CHANGING LIVES**

# Foreword

## by Rt Revd Bishop Rose Hudson-Wilkin

Many of you will know by now that I was born and brought up in Montego Bay, Jamaica. I wanted to begin this introduction by sharing this with you because all that I want to say, is really influenced in part by my faith and my upbringing back in Montego Bay. Dipping into my childhood memories, I recall the whole family driving to Cave in Westmoreland - a deeply rural community. My uncle's mother who had lived to a ripe age of 90 years had died. We arrived to find the men from the community already busy: some making a coffin and others preparing the grave. The women were cooking for everyone in large kerosene tins on wood fire outdoors and the children (there were about 8 of us ranging from 4 to 11 years), we were busily playing games, occasionally running into the room where 'Tata' laid surrounded by ice to keep her cool.

Later, in the same day, we were dressed, a minister of religion came by, Tata was laid in the coffin and we all joined in the service where we said goodbye to her. We sang hymns, read from the Bible, 2 of the children recited a poem, and then she was 'laid to rest'. Afterwards, there was much music, eating and drinking. As children, it felt like a celebration!

Years later, as I served in ministry here in the UK, I found myself regularly encouraging families to allow the children in the family to attend the services of loved ones. I reassured them that I was happy to have them there and further reassured them that it was ok for the children to see them tearful. I really wanted the children to begin to see and learn that death was part of the cycle of life and that one can be distressed and sad at the loss but that this was not the end.

This bereavement pack is a real gift for us to be used in our schools and communities. This will help us who may be worried about not knowing the right language to use or even how to help the children share their thoughts and their feelings. This pack helps us as well as the children to begin to embrace the cycle of life - the coin with life and death on either side - thus the sense that our loved ones are never far away as we remember them always in our hearts and give them back to God.

I trust that as we engage the children with the contents of this pack, the light of Christ will touch their hearts, filling them with hope of never really losing their loved ones.

May the peace of the risen Lord be with you.

### **The Rt Revd Rose Hudson-Wilkin**

Bishop of Dover and Bishop in Canterbury



# Introduction

Dealing with the loss of a member of your school community must be one of the hardest things schools have to deal with. Managing the range of emotions, differing opinions and official protocols can be incredibly challenging for any school leader.

Remember you are not alone in this. Journeying together through difficult times can make us stronger and more understanding of each other.

The hope of this pack is to give some guidance to leaders, an understanding of what grief might look like and practical support for those journeying alongside and journeying in grief.

Please be assured of the support of the Canterbury Diocesan Education team and wider Diocesan family.

This pack has been created by a team of people to capture wisdom and expertise in this area from across the Diocese of Canterbury. I am really grateful for all their input, thoughts and support.

Reverend Lorraine Apps-Huggins  
Hilary Hills  
Lyndall Bywater  
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Captain Luke Johnson (Salvation Army)  
Sarah Hindle  
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*May 2020*

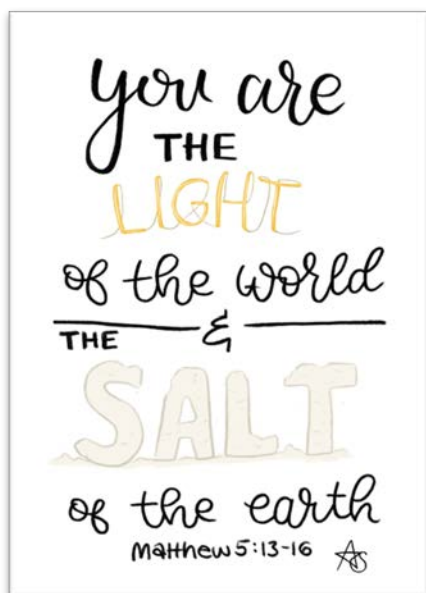
**Please note:** This bereavement pack has been created in response to the calls of support from our Diocesan schools in dealing with the Covid 19 pandemic. There are not many specific references to Coronavirus, as dealing with loss, grief and bereavement will follow the same process regardless of the situation in which the bereavement occurred.

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## A personal reflection - dealing with community loss, grief and bereavement.

- Just be you. Sit quietly and faithfully alongside those who are grieving, be steadfast and listen. Our humanity is a signpost towards God and hope. Your compassionate presence will speak *abstractly* of God and His love. No words required.



Salt and light are rarely commented on unless they are missing. Jesus calls people to be his salt and light on the earth now.

### **Matthew 5: 14**

*'You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world.'*

I wonder how you can be God's salt and light through your actions and responses to those who are grieving?

- Be real and honest yourself. You do not need to exude omnipotence (the quality of having unlimited or very great power) or have all the answers.
- It is ok for you to find this tough and emotionally draining. Carrying the grief and sadness of others is emotionally and physically exhausting. Make sure you take time to pause, rebuild and care for yourself.



## **Luke 5:15-16**

*'Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.'*

Even Jesus took himself off after busy and emotionally draining times to take care of himself.

I wonder what you do?

Do you need to find somewhere to withdraw to? Is there someone else you can talk to who can listen to you?

- Allow others to walk with you as you journey through and alongside grief. Don't walk alone. We walk wounded, but better, together.
- I wonder how your local church community and incumbent can support you during this time?

## **Support from the Psalms**

Found approximately in the middle of the Bible are the Psalms, they are songs of both celebration and lament (mourning), faithfulness and faithlessness.

They display orientation, dis-orientation and re-orientation towards God. For example, look at Psalm 13.

### **Psalm 13**

*A psalm of David.*

*How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts  
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?  
How long will my enemy triumph over me?  
Look on me and answer, Lord my God.  
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,  
and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him,"  
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.  
But I trust in your unfailing love;  
my heart rejoices in your salvation.  
I will sing the Lord's praise,  
for he has been good to me.*

The writer first directs and orientates a plea towards God: How long O Lord? Then the writer seems desperate and confused, dis-orientated by the circumstances they are in: Give light to my eyes or I will sleep the sleep of death....and lastly the writer re-orientates those very real fears and worries back to God: I trust in your steadfast love, my heart shall rejoice in your salvation (healing)!

It may not be the language we would normally use today but the recognition that **it is OK for us to be real with God**, to be confused, to offer all of our chaotic emotions to God, we don't have to be super spiritual or have prayerful language - God receives all of it and helps us throughout.

The Psalms may be a place of solace and reflection for you in times of need and of plenty. Psalm 23, The Lord is my Shepherd, a Psalm of great comfort; Psalm 19, a Psalm of great praise and wonderment; Psalm 139, a psalm of intense intimacy with God as creator.

**The reflections above have been written by Reverend Lorraine Apps-Huggins and Hilary Hills, who are Chaplains at The Living Well.**

The Living Well is the Canterbury Diocese centre for healing and wholeness. If you need pastoral support in dealing with grief or bereavement in school, then please do contact The Living Well team, who will do their best to offer support either 1:1 or in school teams. They are here to listen and share your journey with you.

<https://the-living-well.org.uk/contact-us/>

<https://the-living-well.org.uk/prayer/> - The Living Well operates a confidential prayer line, if you are in need of prayer, please contact them via this link.



The Living Well

Canterbury Diocesan Centre  
for Healing and Wholeness



*Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your disciples,  
'I am with you always'.  
Be with me today, as I offer myself to you.  
Hear my prayers for others and for myself,  
and keep me in your care.*

*Christ be with me, Christ within me,  
Christ behind me, Christ before me,  
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,  
Christ to comfort and restore me.  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,  
Christ in hearts of all that love me,  
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.  
Amen*

## Engaging with your local church and Incumbent

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Most of your school community will recognise and have a relationship with your Incumbent and local church community. They can be a constant source of support, encouragement and source of wisdom in times of bereavement, as they are likely to have dealt with many situations of death during their ministry. So call on them to support you through a bereavement.

### How can they help?

- Pastoral support for leaders, staff, parents, children
- Pastoral support for the bereaved family
- Prayerful support
- Support with words when having to deliver news of a death
- A companion to support you as you lead the school through a bereavement
- Support in arranging a memorial service in school
- Provide a space and forum for those who want to question, challenge, cry and grieve.





## Processes - Practical guidance on dealing with a bereavement in school.

- It is vital that people are informed as quickly as possible to prevent incorrect information leaking out or gossip forming. Due to instant messaging, many people may already be aware of the news you will be sharing, therefore addressing the facts and worries of those effected as quickly as possible is even more crucial.
- Ensure that the bereaved family has given you permission to share the news and guided you through the information they would like shared with the school community.
- Before delivering this kind of devastating news, give yourself time to pause and reflect, then think carefully through what you will and won't say.
- Whenever news of a death is delivered, ensure it is not done alone and that key factual information is shared alongside the offer of support for those who might need it.

*(With grateful thanks to Southwark Diocese Board of Education for support with the pathway diagrams.)*

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## Guidance on creating a school bereavement policy

The purpose of the Bereavement Policy is to provide guidance to everyone involved at a time when there may be shock, upset and confusion. It will ensure that there are clear processes in place, creating as little disruption as possible, that effective communication enables difficult messages to be delivered sensitively and quickly, and that each member of the school community is supported to help them through a very difficult time.

The creation of such a policy will require input from all members of the school staff team and you may wish to seek advice from outside agencies or charities in order to best support bereaved children, young people and their families.

During the staff consultation stage, you may want to include the following questions in order to shape your policy.

- How is this policy and the response to a bereavement a reflection of your distinctive Christian vision?
- Who are the designated, named members of the school staff who will provide support to bereaved children and young people in the event of a death?
- How will you inform pupils and colleagues about a death and what to do when you are required to tell a student that someone close to them has died? *See pathways below for support with this.*
- How will staff and pupils be supported if they have been bereaved or are journeying alongside someone who has been bereaved?
- How would we deal with a crisis or disaster situation on school premises or on a school trip?
- What are the common symptoms and behaviours associated with grief?
- Which local and national support agencies specialising in bereavement would we contact to support us and those who have been bereaved?
- How would we deal with any media interest surrounding a death? Which members of staff would act as media coordinators?

You may wish to include additional information about grief. For example:

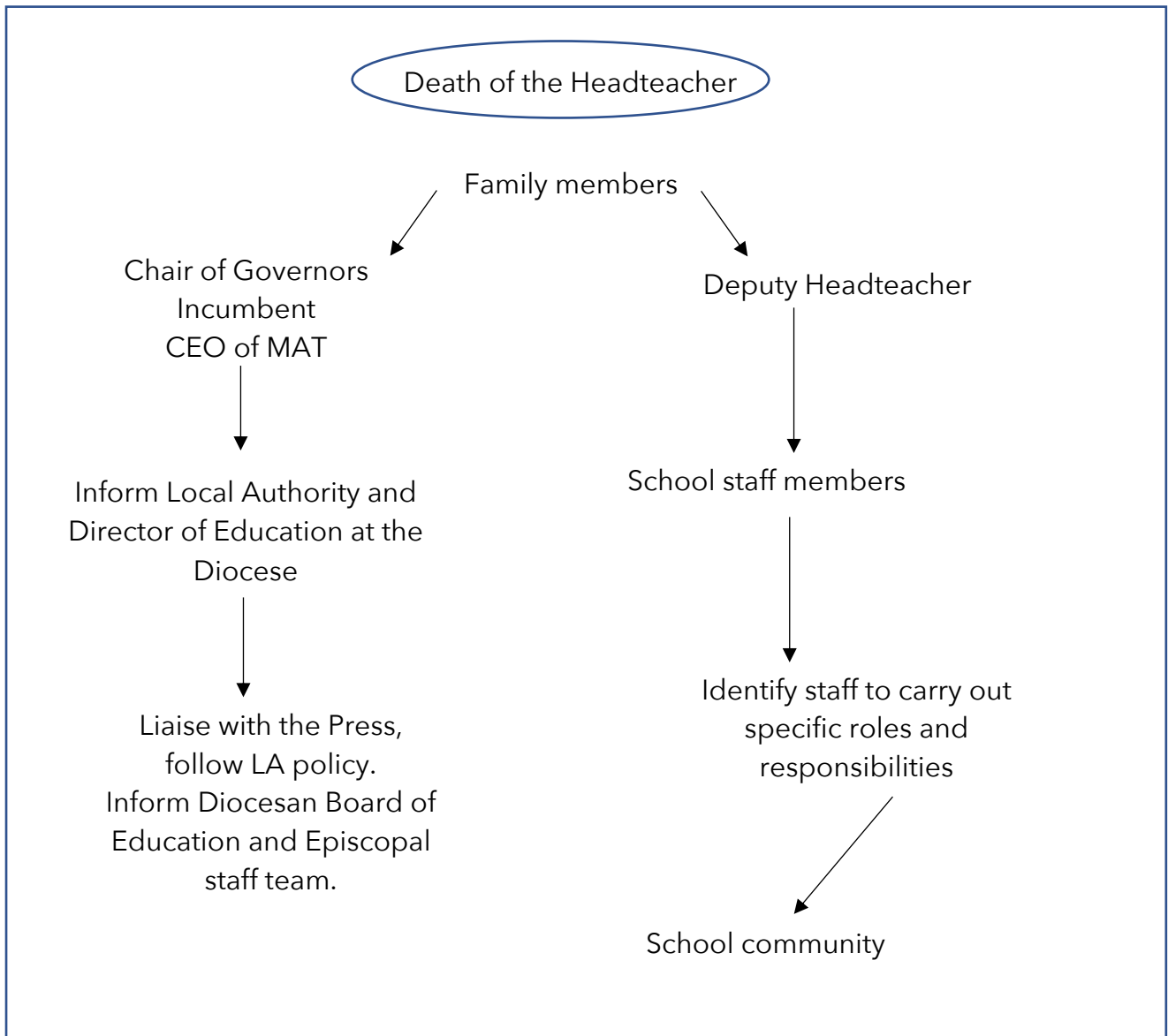
- o Stages of grief - <https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/bereaved-family-friends/supporting-grieving-child/grief-affect-child>
- o How children of different ages respond to a bereavement - <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-parents/childrens-understanding-of-death>
- o How bereavement may affect the behaviour of a young person - <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-schools/recognising-changes-in-behaviour>
- o Lessons on grief - [see 'What is grief?' section below](#)

It is important that the staff members appointed to provide support to bereaved children and young people have received the appropriate training beforehand and are supported by senior colleagues when offering such support.

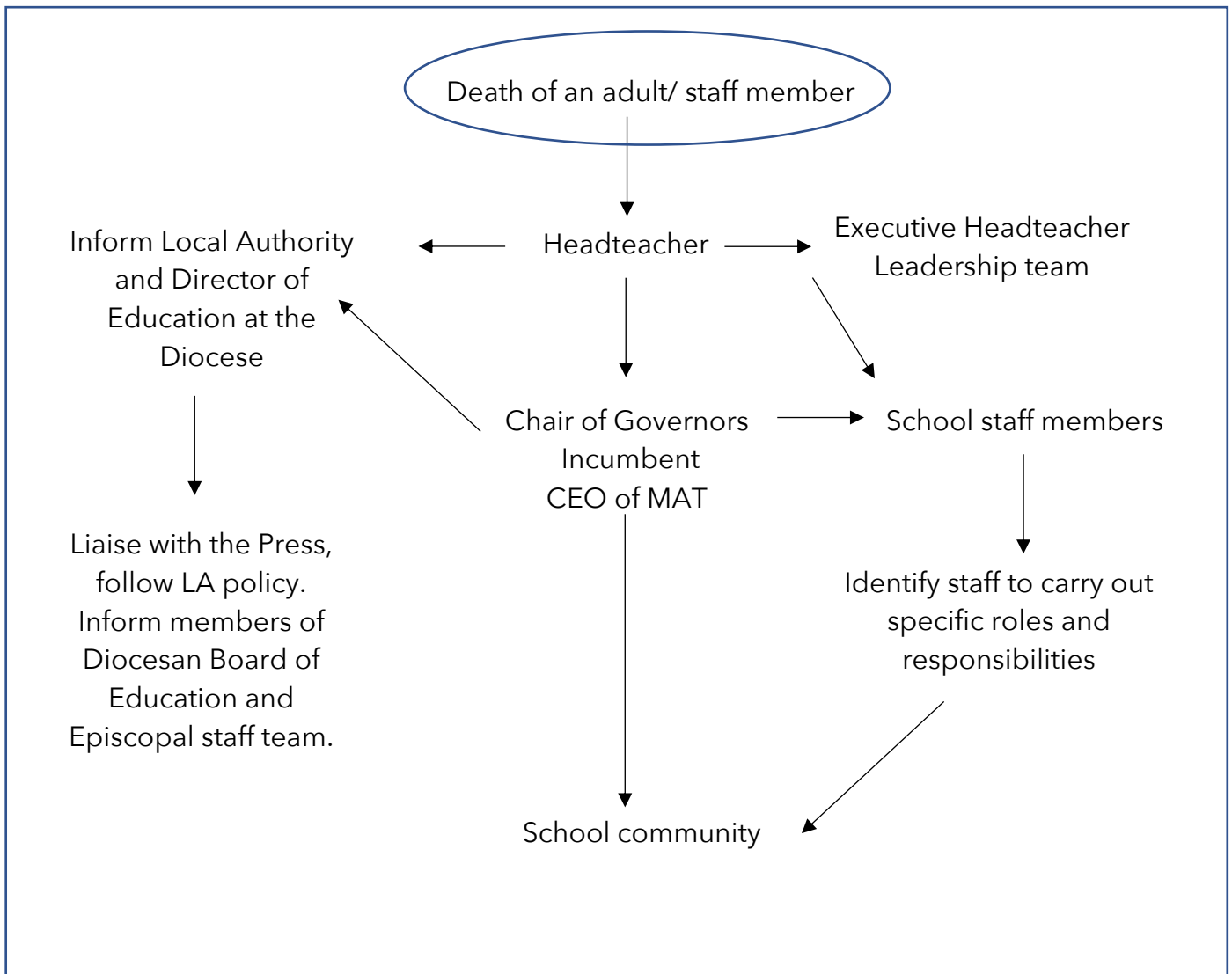
The response to a bereavement in school should be thought about in stages over time. Healing and processing time needs to be built into school life.

| <b>Short term</b>   | <b>Medium term</b>  | <b>Long term</b>   |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o How and when will the information be shared with the school community? Consider who will do this and how it might be delivered for different groups within school, e.g. child's class, close friends. <i>See below for guidance on this.</i></li> <li>o Share facts as soon as possible in a way that has been agreed with the bereaved family.</li> <li>o Consider any special circumstances, or cultural and religious dimensions that this situation may impact on or be impacted by.</li> <li>o What will be the immediate response as a school to the bereaved family?</li> <li>o Are there any practical implications for the day to day running of the school?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o How are the emotional needs of staff and children to be monitored, including behavioural and emotional change?</li> <li>o What support for discussion, listening, answering questions, and space will be available for those who need it?</li> <li>o Do all staff have a consistent set of responses that are in line with the policy of the school?</li> <li>o How do children/staff/school want to celebrate the person who has died life? Is this consistent with the family's wishes?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o What curriculum approaches will be put into place to consider bereavement, loss and grief across the school over time?</li> <li>o How will we continue to remember the person who has died and their family?</li> <li>o How can we be aware of anniversaries, particularly for siblings or close friends?</li> <li>o How will information be shared with future teachers and education settings about the bereavement?</li> </ul> |

## Information-sharing pathway following the Death of the Headteacher



## Information-sharing pathway following the Death of a Staff member



## Guidelines for Breaking News of the Death to Staff and Governors

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- Arrange a staff meeting, which should take place as soon as possible.
- Discuss this with the clergy and invite them to be present when the news is broken.
- You might like to open or close your time together with a prayer – see resources.
- Impart factual information. Never make assumptions or repeat what has been said by rumour.
- Give news sensitively and empathetically, being aware that people may react in different ways.
- Be conscious of the relationships staff may have had with the person who has died.
- Ensure that there is someone responsible for telling people who are unable to attend the staff meeting i.e. part time staff, peripatetic staff and lunch time supervisors.

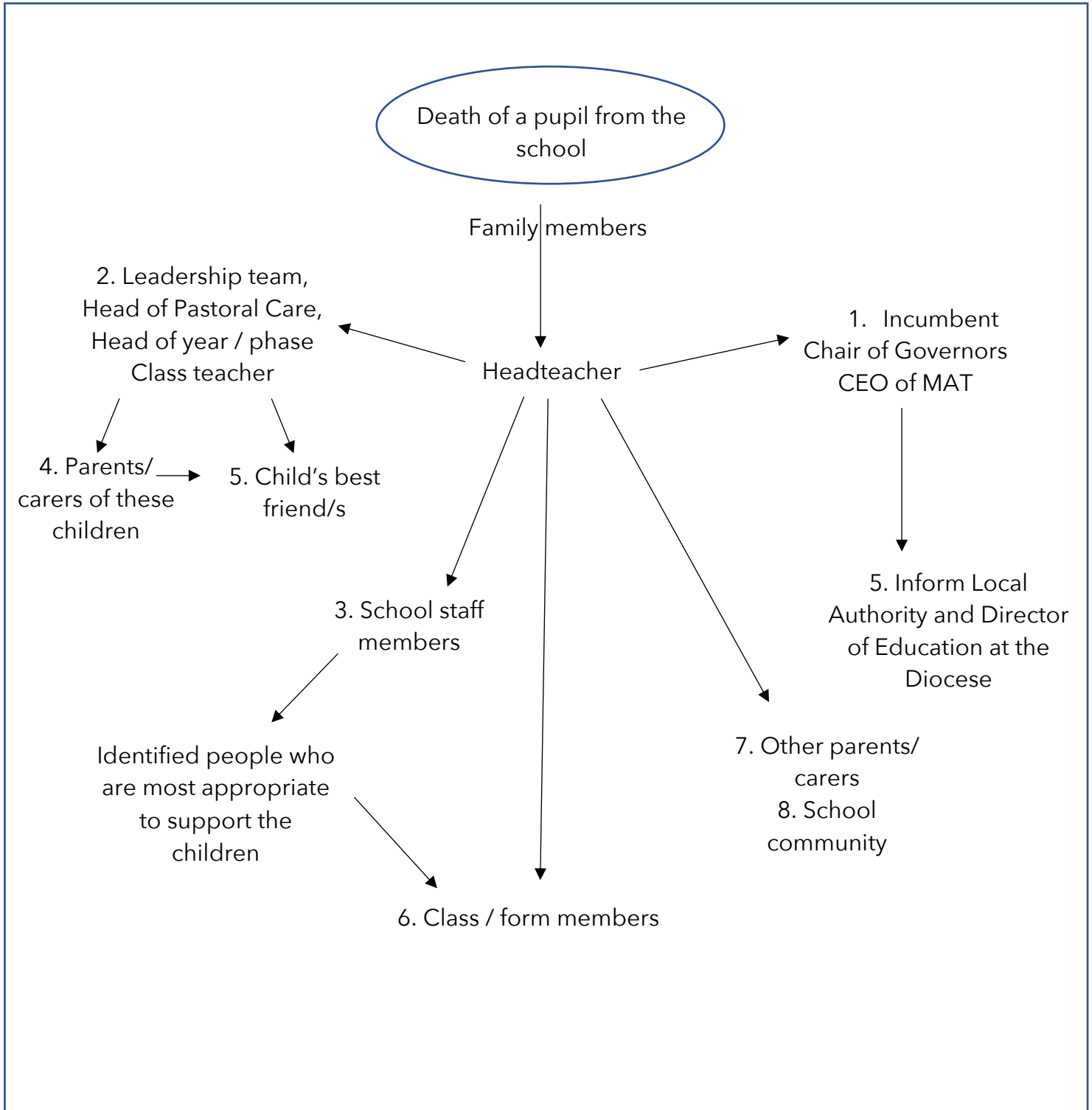
Consider the best way of imparting the information to those absent i.e. by making a home visit, by telephone, text or email, etc.

- Identify individual members of staff who feel able to:
  - a) support other members of staff;
  - b) support groups of pupils.

The most appropriate person to support the pupils should be well known to them and trusted.

- Identify a member of staff who will liaise with the individual's family, to deal with staff condolences and any funeral arrangements, if necessary.
- Identify an appropriate member of staff who will take phone calls and/or direct them as appropriate. Try to establish a "protected" telephone line to ensure free flow of accurate information.
- Identify a member of staff who will provide a newsletter for parents (see examples of letter templates) which should be sent the same day.
- Arrange a staff meeting at the end of the day to ensure staff are coping with the situation.
- Ensure that those staff who live alone have contact numbers of friends in case of need.
- Identify sources of advice and support to access for help in coming to terms with the bereavement.

## Information -sharing pathway following the Death of a Pupil



## Guidelines for Breaking News of the Death to the Pupils

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When breaking any distressing news to young people it is best to concentrate on these three areas:

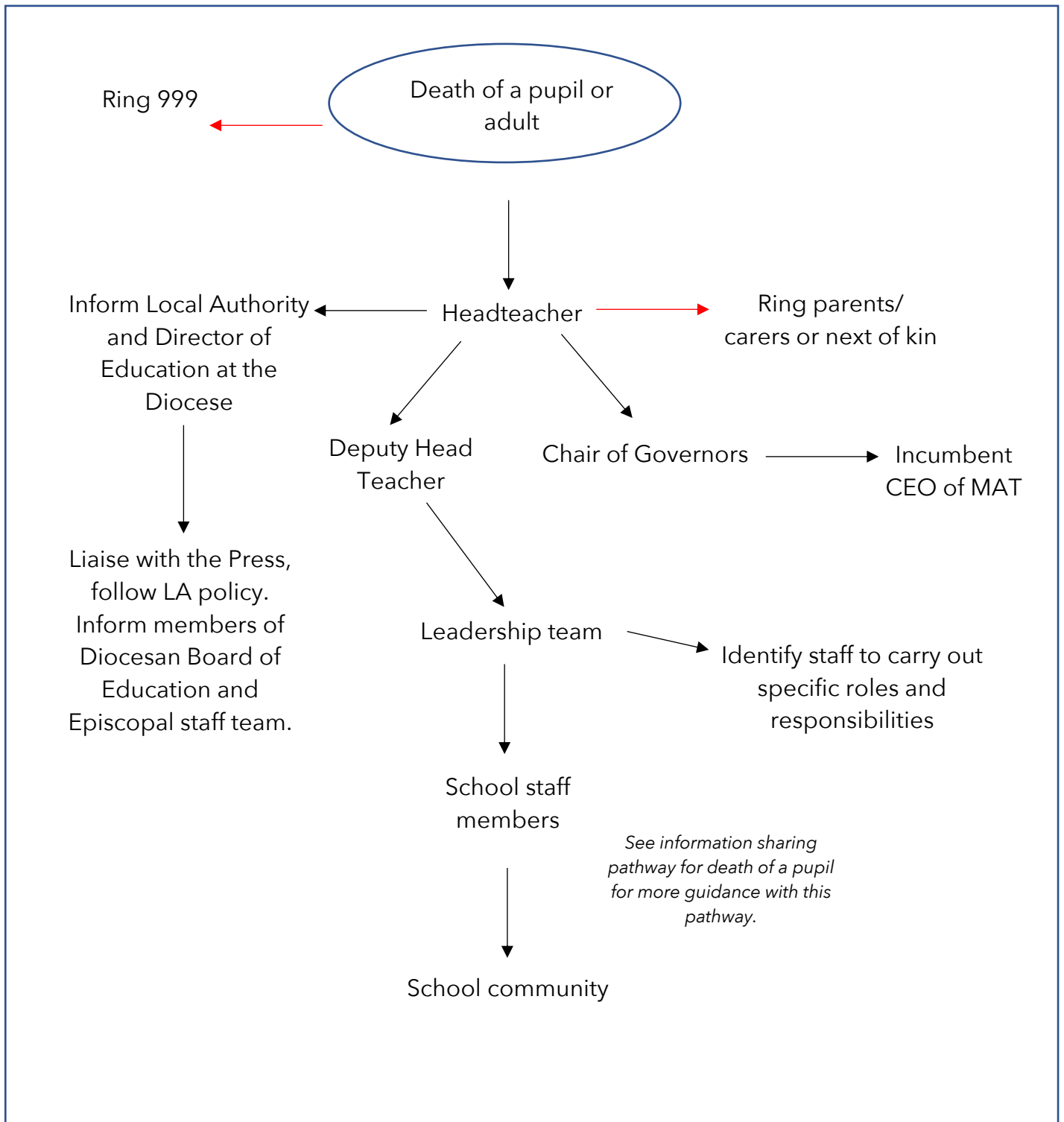
- **FACTS**, what do we know? Dismiss any rumours or gossip.
  - Their **FEARS**, what are you worried about, what questions do you have?
  - The **FUTURE**, what happens now, will I always feel like this, what might the future look like?
- 
- Inform the pupils as soon as possible about the death. Consider carefully how and when this will be done.
  - Discuss this with the clergy and invite them to be present when the news is broken.
  - Where possible, the pupils should be informed in small groups i.e. class or tutor groups.
  - Identify those pupils who had a long term and/or close relationship with the person who has died, so they can be told separately.
  - If appropriate, a special assembly could be held at a later time in the day to remember the person who has died.
  - Those pupils who have had more involvement with the person who has died should be given the opportunity to share their feelings and experiences either within the group or in a one-to-one situation.
  - Allow the pupils to verbalise their feelings.
  - Allow the pupils to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.
  - Allow the pupils to discuss the situation and share their experiences of death.
  - Be honest about your own feelings and talk about your relationship with the person.
  - Avoid using euphemisms.
  - Ensure the pupils understand that the death is nothing to do with anything they have said or done. It is in no way their fault.
  - Reassure them that not all people who are ill or have had an accident will die and that many people get better.
  - Conclude the discussion with a prayer or special poem to remember the person who has died and their family.
  - Ensure that there are people available for any pupil who needs additional help and support.

Delivering 'sad news' to children following a death

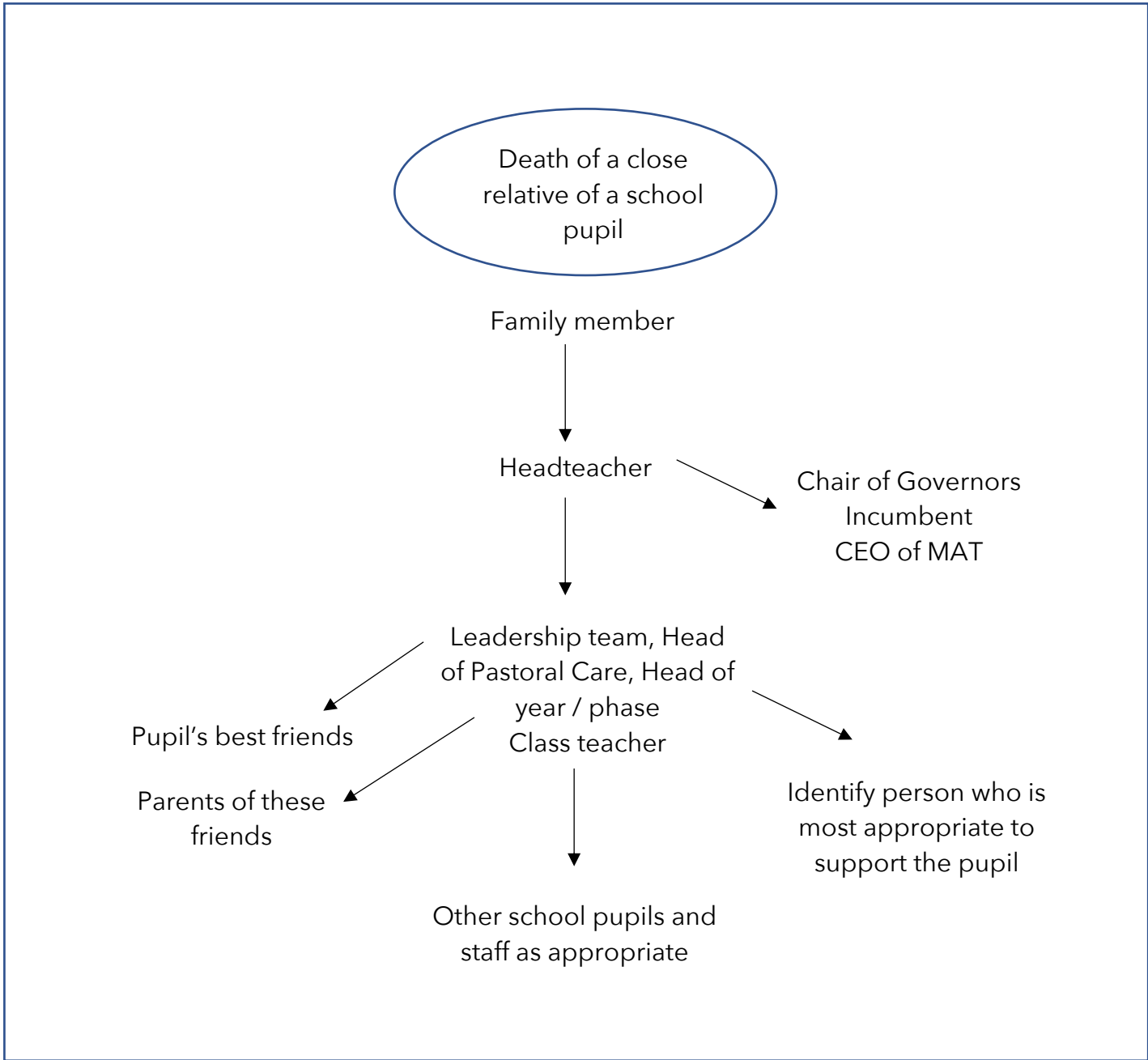
<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=10c46aa5-24b0-40db-854b-4bd7eb04e665>



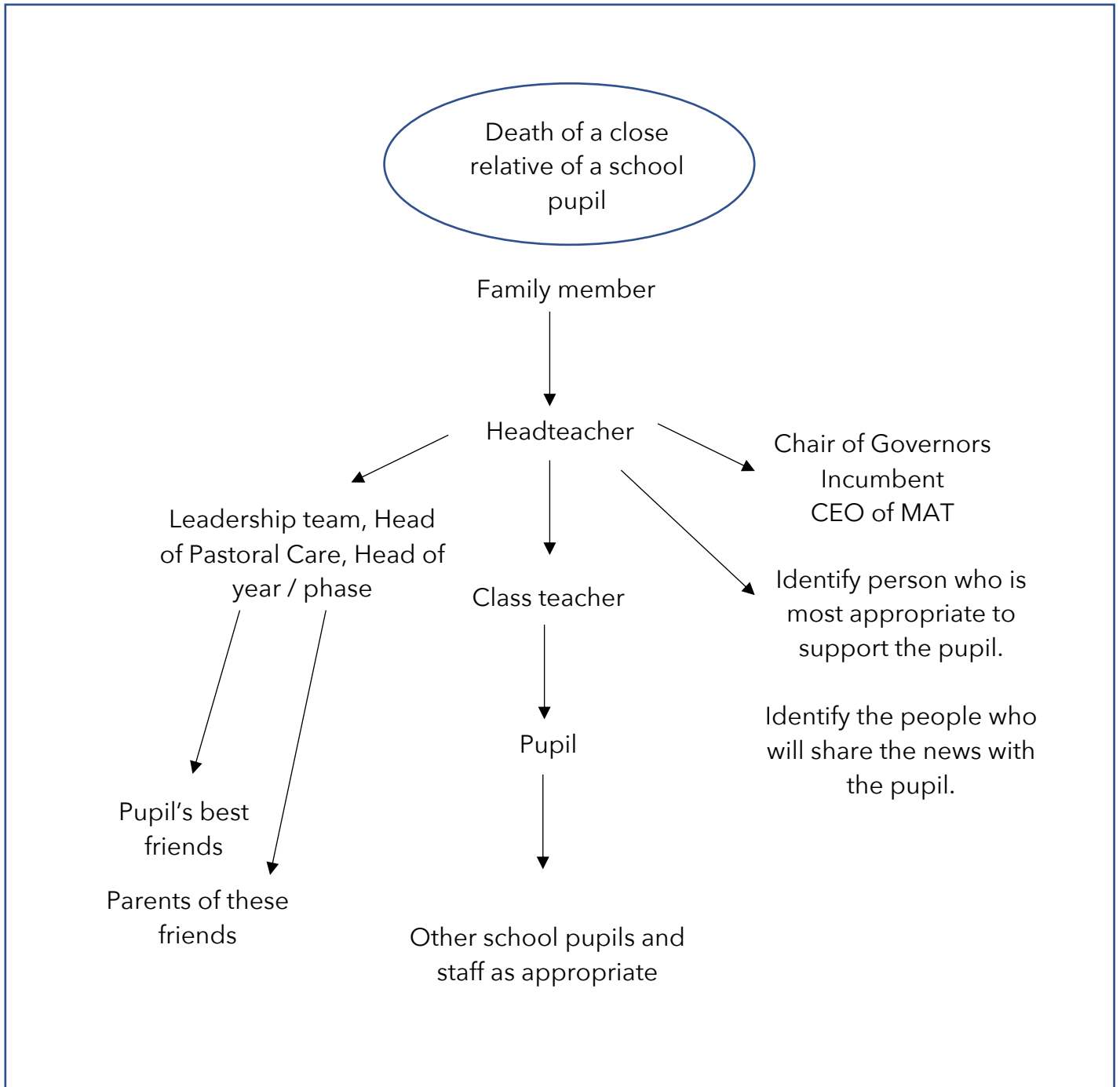
## Information-sharing pathway following the death of a pupil or adult in school



**Information-sharing pathway following the death of a close family member of a school pupil - Pupil is aware of the death.**



**Information-sharing pathway following the death of a close family member of a school pupil - Pupil is NOT aware of the death.**



## Example letter for schools following a death due to COVID 19.

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Dear parents/carers,

It is with great sadness that I share the news that <name> has died due to complications of the coronavirus.

It is with great sadness that I share the news that <name> died due to complications of the coronavirus.

Our thoughts are with the family and friends of <name> at this difficult time and we are providing what support we can to the family. We are letting you know about this sad event so you may inform your children. When someone dies, it is normal for children, indeed for all of us to feel sad and confused. Any death may make children anxious, as they become more aware of their own mortality and that of those around them. We know that children hearing about a death benefit from maintaining normal routines, being listened to, having their questions answered honestly (sticking to known facts rather than rumour) and having their feelings acknowledged and normalised. We do not yet know when the funeral will take place and attendance will not be possible. When children return to school, we will of course devise a suitable memorial activity.

In the meantime, you may find helpful information on this site:

<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus/>

We appreciate your understanding and support with this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact us via email if you have any questions or concerns.

Yours sincerely,

An alternate example letter can also be found in Winston's Wish: Strategy for Schools

<https://www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/support-for-schools/>

*(With thanks to Manchester Diocese for this letter template)*

## Template of a letter for schools informing parents of a death of a member of staff

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Dear Parents/ Carers,

Your child's class teacher/form tutor/head of year had the sad task of informing the children of the tragic death of <Name> who has been a teacher at this school for a number of years.

Our thoughts and prayers are with <Name .....>'s family at this time and in an effort to try to respond to his/her death in a positive way, all the children have been informed.

When someone dies, it is normal for family and friends to experience many different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion and children are likely to ask questions about the death which need to be answered honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.

The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school, but if there is anything else you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to contact us.

<Clergy Name> has been in school and will continue to offer spiritual support to children, families and staff.

We remember <Name> and all the bereaved in our thoughts and prayers.

Yours sincerely

<Name> Headteacher

*(With thanks to Southwark Diocese for this letter template)*

## Example letter for schools following the death of a pupil

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*Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from that pupil's parents.*

*The contents of the letter and the distribution list need to be agreed by the parents and school.*

Dear Parents / Carers,

Your child's class teacher/form tutor/had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>.

<Name> died from an illness called <name of illness.> As you may be aware, many children who have <name of illness> get better, but sadly <Name> had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday.

We will miss <name> very much and will especially remember his/her (personal remark e.g. cheeky grin / gentle smile/imagination/friendliness/determination....) with affection.

When someone dies, it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try to answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to contact us.

We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating <Name... 's> life.

<Clergy Name> has been in school and will continue to offer spiritual support to children, families and staff.

We remember <Name> and all the bereaved in our thoughts and prayers.

Yours sincerely

<Name> Headteacher

(With thanks to Southwark Diocese for guidance with this letter template)

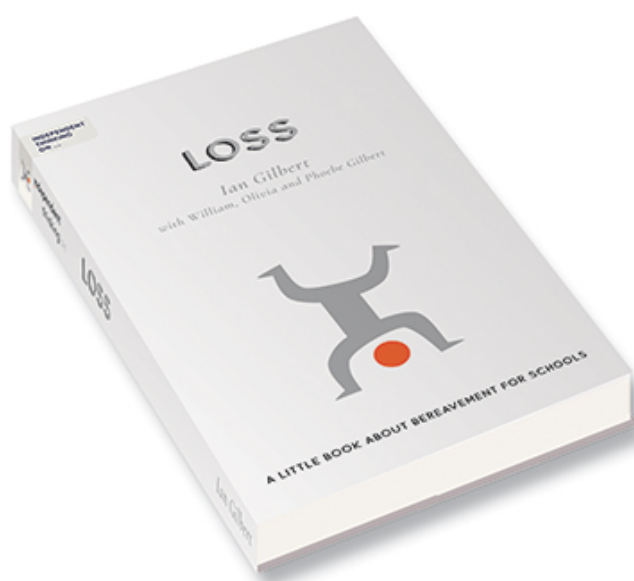
## Book recommendations

### Loss by Ian Gilbert - A little book of bereavement for schools.

This book has really shaped my thinking on dealing with loss in schools. I am grateful to Ian and his children for their honest view and insight into dealing with grief. Many of their thoughts have shaped this pack.

I thoroughly recommend this book, it is a must read for all those who work in education.  
*Rebecca Swansbury, Schools Officer*

<https://www.independentthinkingpress.com/books/teachingskills/independent-thinking-on-loss/>



*"The single most important message of the little book is the importance of giving your full attention to bereaved children in your school ... Each child will grieve in a unique way, but knowing about grief and bereavement will help you help them... You will need to find courage, some knowledge and the backing of your colleagues to support a bereaved child in your class and school, but most of all you will need your humanity, tempered by professional skill."*

*"Their world has just fallen apart ... the least you can do is read this."*

*Ian Gilbert*

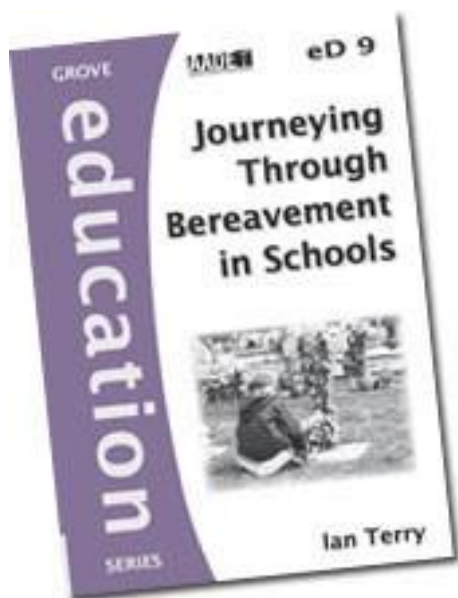
Ian has also released this blog about dealing with loss

<https://www.independentthinking.co.uk/blog/posts/2020/may/loss/>

## **Journeying Through Bereavement in Schools by Ian Terry**

<https://grovebooks.co.uk/search?q=ed9>

This short book sets out clear and helpful advice for dealing with bereavement in schools.



What to do when a pupil, parent, teacher or grandparent dies? Does everyone react in the same way to a death? What prayers could we use? What books could we refer to? What might the bereavement journey feel like?

This study explores these questions and much more. There is a wealth of resources contained here for helping schools provide appropriate support for those who are grieving.

- Chapter 1 - Bereavement
- Chapter 2 - Stages of grieving
- Chapter 3 - Helping Children cope with grief
- Chapter 4 - Grieving and hoping as school values  
Celebrating life



## Bereavement websites

There are many resources online which can support you, your school and community in dealing with bereavement and grief. Many of these websites contain specific resources for schools including policy guidance and practical support on what to do if a member of your community dies.

### Child bereavement UK

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/supporting-bereaved-children-and-young-people>  
<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/education-sector>



### Winston's Wish

<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus/>  
<https://www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/support-for-schools/>



### NHS advice

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/children-and-bereavement/>

### Cruse Bereavement Care

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-schools>



**Hope Again** (The specialist youth section for Cruse Bereavement Care)

<https://www.hopeagain.org.uk>



**Grief Encounter** - supporting bereaved young people and children.

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/young-people/>



**Sudden Death** - Supporting people after sudden death including COVID-19

<http://suddendeath.org/guides-for-suddenly-bereaved-people/help-for-children>



**Lost for Words:** Advice for Children About How to Deal with Grief - aims to help young people through grief.

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/media/97729/Lost-For-Words-Benjamin-Brooks-Dutton.pdf>



**Care for the Family** - Bereavement support

<https://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/family-life/bereavement-support>



**Young Minds** - supporting young people deal with grief

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/grief-and-loss/>

**The Good Grief Trust** - a supportive and informative website for those who have been bereaved.

<https://www.thegoodgrieftrust.org>



## Personal Support

- **Winston's Wish** have a freephone National Helpline on 08088 020 021 for therapeutic advice on supporting a grieving child or young person after the death of a loved one.
- **Education Support** offer a free, confidential helpline for staff: 08000 562 561
- **Child bereavement UK** offer a national helpline 0800 02 888 40 (Freephone Monday Friday, 9am 5pm) Email for bereavement support: [support@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:support@childbereavementuk.org)  
Live Chat (Monday Friday, 9am 5pm)
- **Cruse bereavement care** offer support and a helpline. helpline is open - call 0808 808 1677. They also have a dedicated set of resources for schools. Their sister company **Hope Again** supports children and young people who have lost a parent.

**Funeral support** - The Church of England have produced a simple reflection for those who can't attend a funeral due to Covid 19.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/Funerals%20liturgy%20at%20home%20public.pdf>



# What is grief?

## Lessons on grief (Inspired by Ian Gilbert and Luke Johnson)

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- Grief is a very personal journey. **It is unique to each individual.** People will grieve in different ways and at different times.
- Adults may describe their grief like a river, it just pours out of them as they are fully immersed in the torrent of sadness and loss. This will continue for some time.



- Children tend to grieve in puddles, they tend to jump in and out of grief like a child jumping in puddles. Sometimes they are fine, sometimes they are overcome with sadness and grief.



<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/help-around-a-death/about-bereavement.aspx>

- Grief can be like a pebble you carry. Sometimes it is comforting and you want to stroke it and remember. At others times, it is heavy, it gets in the way and hurts when it digs in to you.
- Grief may look like anger, sorrow, crying, silence, confusion, frustration, laughter, disbelief, pacing, sleeping, disconnection with the world or busyness. The journey of grief is unique to each person.
- Grief is an incredibly tiring process, especially in the early weeks and months. Those who are grieving will be exhausted as their body clocks and routines will be out of sync.
- Grief can totally overwhelm the person, making day to day decisions seemingly impossible and irrelevant. They may struggle with any extra demands on their emotions, time or energy.

- Grief changes your world, it will never be the same again. This may leave the person with lots of questions that challenge their very core, including beliefs about life and faith.
- Grief doesn't go away. Once the initial few weeks have passed, don't forget that the person is still grieving. The world has to keep on turning, but grief will present itself in different ways at different times long into the future. Grief will always be part of their life.
- Grief is not a problem to be solved or fixed, but rather a story to be shared and acknowledged. People who are grieving want to be listened to, this is not time for them to listen to your grief story.



The weight of Grief by Celeste Roberge

## Grief

By Cardinal Basil Hume

Grief cannot be shared, for it is mine alone.  
Grief is a dying within me,  
a great emptiness,  
a frightening void.  
It is loneliness,  
a sickening sorrow at night,  
on awakening a terrible dread.  
Another's words do not help.  
A reasoned argument explains little  
for having tried too much.  
Silence is the best response to another's grief.  
Not the silence that is a pause in speech,  
awkward and unwanted,  
but one that unites heart to heart.  
Love, speaking in silence, is the way into  
the void of another's grief.  
The best of all loves come silently,  
and slowly too, to soften the pain of grief,  
and begin to dispel the sadness.  
It is the love of God, warm and true,  
which will touch the grieving heart and heal it.  
He looks at the grieving person and has pity,  
for grief is a great pain.  
He came among us to learn about grief,  
and much else too, this Man of Sorrows.  
He knows. He understands.  
Grief will yield to peace - in time.



## Supporting those who are grieving - A reflection

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Observe how Jesus responded when he heard that his friend Lazarus had died.

He went to those who were mourning. He was deeply moved at the emotions of those grieving. He wept with his friends and the family of Lazarus.

'Jesus wept'

Observe what Jesus didn't do.

I wonder how you might reflect on the response of Jesus in this situation?

### John 11: 33-36 (The Passion Translation)

<sup>33</sup>When Jesus looked at Mary and saw her weeping at his feet, and all her friends who were with her grieving, **he shuddered with emotion and was deeply moved with tenderness and compassion.** <sup>34</sup>He said to them, "Where did you bury him?"

"Lord, come with us and we'll show you," they replied.

<sup>35</sup>**Then tears streamed down Jesus' face.**

<sup>36</sup>Seeing Jesus weep caused many of the mourners to say, "Look how much he loved Lazarus."



Hanna Cheriyan Varghese, Jesus Wept, 2007

## Supporting those who are grieving

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- Make contact and offer support to the bereaved family, this is best done as soon as possible. This should include children and adults close to the bereaved person.
- Talk to the person who is grieving and their family. Ask the person who is grieving how they are, rather than asking others.
- Talk together about the person who has died.
- Talk, talk and talk. Share feelings, share memories and talk about the person who has died to those who loved and knew them.
- Be present, turn up, sit with and be with the bereaved person. When sitting with someone who is grieving, don't feel you have to fill the space with words. **Silence is ok** sometimes. Whilst you may wish to share some heartfelt words, be sensitive to the fact they might be unhelpful at that moment.
- Help people remember how the bereaved person might be feeling. Just because they may not be crying all the time, or might smile and laugh at something, doesn't mean they aren't still desperately sad on the inside.
- People who are grieving still want to have fun and may want to laugh together. They may need permission from others to do this.
- Show the person who is bereaved that you remember the person who has died and that you know they might still be feeling sad on the inside.
- Refrain from sharing your grief story or saying 'I know just how you feel'. This can be unhelpful, as it takes the focus away from the person who is grieving. Remember everyone's grief journey is personal to them.
- Those who are grieving find making the simplest of decisions challenging and exhausting. So if you want to visit or offer help, saying "I could come at 3 tomorrow, and bring you some food so you haven't got to cook." This is much better than a vague question like, "I'm free any day, so which day or time is better for you, is there anything I can bring you?"

- Pre-empt situations, lessons or activities that might be difficult for someone who is grieving. Talk to them before the event or lesson about how would they like to manage or deal with it. Remember everyone grieves differently.
- Be sensitive around days of celebration like Mother's Day, Christmas or Easter. How could the person who is grieving be guided through these days? Ask the bereaved person how they would like to navigate these days. This must continue into the future.
- Bereavement will always be part of that child or adult's life, so how can we make sure the message is passed on when they move to another school or job? It is important that each bereaved person is continually supported.
- If another bereavement happens in school, remember that for other bereaved children, adults and families, this event could bring back emotions and memories.
- Provide space for those who are grieving to ask why and to question what has happened. There often are no answers to these questions, so avoid filling the space with words or trite answers.
- Allow grief to be present, it is a necessary part of life, there is no shame in being sad.
- For some children, school is the place where they can escape their grief. Allow them the space to do this. Talk to the bereaved person about how they would like adults and children around them to treat them and behave around them.

*"Respond at all times with love and support. Notice when we are there. Notice when we are not there. Offer to sit with us. Maybe listen to a song that is just too hard for us to hear alone. Offer us a cuppa. Take time to learn about our pain, even if it just means listening. Take time to ask about our lost loved one. And, most importantly, allow us to find a reason for our pain and choose happiness again."*

**Ian Gilbert 'Loss' page 42**



## Resources for supporting those who are bereaved

The resources below come with some suggested ideas to illustrate how they could be used in schools. However, feel free to adapt the resources, strategies and questions to suit your context and community.

There are many 'I wonder' questions suggested within the resources; wondering and being curious does not always have to produce answers or give a 'right' response. Wondering is about 'being and allowing' musing, often this is where healing can occur as we allow others into our thought process and wonderings.

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| Page 34     | Prayers for EYFS and KS1                           |
| Page 35     | Prayers for KS2                                    |
| Page 36     | Prayers for KS3 and 4                              |
| Page 37     | Prayers for adults and staff                       |
| Pages 38-40 | Using prayers as poems to support those grieving   |
| Pages 41-48 | Using images to support our communities with grief |

## Prayers to support our school communities

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Sometimes we don't have the words to pray or think because the pain is too deep or all encompassing. This verse from the Bible reminds Christians that God knows this, sending the Holy Spirit to pray for us through our cries, sorrow, sighs and groans.

*Romans 8:26 The Passion Translation*

*And in a similar way, the Holy Spirit takes hold of us in our human frailty to empower us in our weakness. For example, **at times we don't even know how to pray, or know the best things to ask for. But the Holy Spirit rises up within us to super-intercede on our behalf, pleading to God with emotional sighs and groans too deep for words.***

### **A general prayer:**

God, our friend and companion, we thank you that you walk with us through dark times. We bring you our feelings, trusting that you accept us just as we are. We bring you our thoughts and questions, asking you to help us find peace of mind. We bring you our hurts and pains, knowing that you are a God who can heal. Give us the strength to keep walking forward until we step out into the sunlight again.

Below is a series of prayers that you could use in school to support those who are grieving.

With grateful thanks to Lyndall Bywater, Changing Lives Prayer Network Coordinator and Hilary Hills, Assistant Chaplain at the Living Well for writing these prayers.



## **For EYFS and KS1**

### *Personal grief:*

God, I'm thinking about (name) today, even though they're not here anymore.

Sometimes I feel sad.

I feel like there's a cold, rainy day inside me.

I miss (name).

Sometimes I feel angry.

I feel like there's a thunderstorm inside me.

I wish (name) was still here.

Sometimes I feel scared.

I feel like there's a dark path in front of me.

I want everything to be alright.

Sometimes I feel happy.

I feel like sunshine is making me warm again.

I say thank you for (name) and for the fun we had.

God, you're the best at loving people.

Help me to remember that you are looking after (name) and you are looking after me.

### *Accompanying others:*

God, I'm thinking about (name) today because someone they love isn't there anymore.

Maybe they feel cold or rainy or stormy on the inside today.

Help them feel safe even though they feel sad.

Help them know it's OK to feel angry.

Help them talk to you when they feel scared.

Help them know that you love them and that you're looking after the person they miss.

Please make it sunny for them again.

God, sometimes it's hard to be with people who are really sad.

I don't know what to say and it makes me feel sad too.

You're the best at being a friend, so please help me be a good friend to (name).

## **Prayer for Early years and KS1**

Loving God, help me as I feel sad and let me know your love. It's hard that I won't see (friends/family/name) again but thank you that you will look after them. Thank you for all the happy memories I have of them.

Keep me in your loving care, in Jesus' name, Amen.

## **For KS2**

### *Personal grief:*

God, I'm thinking about (name) today and how I feel about them not being around anymore.

Sometimes I'm sad. It's heavy and grey in me, like a freezing, rainy day.

I miss (name) and I can't stand the thought of not seeing them again.

Loving God, please help me feel warm again.

Sometimes I'm angry. It's like a raging storm in me. I feel like I might explode.

I don't understand why I had to lose (name), and I'm not OK with it.

Storm-calming God, please help me feel peaceful again.

Sometimes I feel scared. The path ahead looks so dark and I'm worried about the future.

I don't know what life will be like without (name) and that frightens me.

Rock-solid God, please help me feel safe again.

And then sometimes I feel happy - like the sun has just come out. It's great, but it confuses me.

I want to be happy, but I don't want to forget (name).

Gift-giving God, help me remember all the good times we had and help me be thankful.

And even though (name) and I are not walking together on the same path anymore, help me remember that you are always with me.

Help me trust you, because you love and care for (name) and you love and care for me.

### *Accompanying others:*

God, I'm thinking about (name) today because someone they love isn't around anymore.

Thank you that you know what they're feeling, and you can give them everything they need.

Help them feel safe with you, right in the middle of their sadness.

Help them feel your peace, right in the middle of the storms of anger and confusion.

Help them talk to you, right in the middle of worry and fear.

Loving God, help them know that you never let go of us or the ones we care about.

And God, I'm thinking about me today, because I want to help (name):

It's so hard to know the right words to say or the right thing to do.

Help me be a good friend; help us walk together towards the sunshine.

## **Prayer for KS2**

Creator God, all of life comes from you. Help me at this confusing time to know you love me. Draw close to (name) and me as we are sad because of (name's) death. Give us hope and help us to recall with joy all (name) brought to our lives. Comfort us all and enable us to be a comfort to each other. Be near us Lord Jesus and keep us in your care. Amen

## **For teenagers**

### *Personal grief:*

God, I'm thinking about (name) today and the fact that they've gone.  
Sometimes the sadness creeps in like a rainy winter's day.  
Sometimes I'm raging in anger like an unstoppable storm.  
Sometimes I'm scared of what's ahead, because the future is too dark to see.  
Sometimes I'm just sick of life; and sometimes I feel nothing.  
Thank you that you're with me, no matter what I'm feeling.  
Layer your love around me when the cold of sadness creeps in.  
Speak your words of peace when the storms of anger rage in my soul.  
Keep me safe when fear makes the darkness even darker.  
Help me keep walking till the sunshine of hope breaks through.  
Thank you for (name): for the good times and the happy memories.  
Help me remember that you hold us both in your love, even if we're not walking the same path anymore.

### *Accompanying others:*

God, I'm thinking about (name) today because they've lost someone they love.  
Thank you that you walk with them on the grief path, no matter how they're feeling.  
In their sadness, be close to them with your comfort.  
In their anger and confusion, calm the storm with your peace.  
In their fear and worry, be their strong, safe place.  
In their blankness and numbness, help them rest in your care.  
And help me too, God, because I want to support them through this tough time.  
Help me know when to speak and when to say nothing;  
When to do something helpful and when to just be there with them.  
As we walk together, help me be the friend they need.

## **Prayer for KS3&4**

Almighty God, help us to understand you in these confusing times. Enable us to look to you where we do not understand. In our sadness, bring us comfort and hope. Use us as a comfort to our family and friends and enable us to look back with thankfulness for all that (name) brought to the life of our community. As we look to the future, strengthen our trust in each other and especially in you, knowing that your love is the same yesterday, today and forever. In Jesus' name. Amen

## **For adults**

### *Personal grief:*

Loving God, you walk with us through all of life's landscapes;  
When the skies are dark with pain and sorrow,  
When the path ahead seems impossible and we're frightened of the future.  
When storms of anger rage in us because of life's injustices;  
And when the sun breaks through with sudden, joyful warmth.  
As we grieve for those we've lost, help us know your nearness today:  
Comfort us in our sadness;  
Reassure us in our uncertainty;  
Keep us company in our anger;  
And lead us into healing and hope.

### *Accompanying others:*

God of all compassion and healing, we pray today for those who have lost loved ones:  
May they know your loving presence as they walk through the varied landscapes of grief.  
In their pain and sadness, surround them with your comfort;  
In their anger and bewilderment, speak words of peace;  
In their anxiety and fear, help them feel safe again.  
We give you thanks that you hold all of us in your love, wherever we are on our journey  
through life.  
In these difficult days, help us walk together in friendship,  
Trusting that you will lead us to the sunshine of new hope.

## **Prayer for staff**

Father God, thank you for the community you have called us to be and to work in. As we walk through these dark days, may we see the light of your presence as a very real source of hope for the future. We give thanks for all that (name) brought to the life of this community and pray you will bring comfort and hope to their family (may want to add and class) and to us. Rebuild us as we move forward into a community that is stronger than before, as we look up to you in faith and out to each other in love, in Jesus' name.  
Amen

## Using prayers as poems to support those who are grieving

Many of these prayers could be used as poems to provide words or images for those who are struggling to articulate their grief or feelings. They give permission to know it is ok to express a range of positive and negative feelings when journeying with grief.

*Sometimes I feel sad.  
I feel like there's a cold, rainy day inside me.  
I miss (name).  
Sometimes I feel angry.  
I feel like there's a thunderstorm inside me.  
I wish (name) was still here.  
Sometimes I feel scared.  
I feel like there's a dark path in front of me.  
I want everything to be alright.  
Sometimes I feel happy.  
I feel like sunshine is making me warm again.*

How do these words make you feel?

I wonder why the person who wrote it used the weather to describe feelings?

Which line do you identify with the most?

Which weather describes how you are feeling?



I wonder if you can identify with one of these images?

I wonder how they might help you think about the words of this prayer poem?

I what this little girl is thinking about? What would you say to her if you could talk to her?



*Sometimes I'm sad. It's heavy and grey in me, like a freezing, rainy day.  
Sometimes I'm angry. It's like a raging storm in me. I feel like I might explode.  
I don't understand why I had to lose (name), and I'm not OK with it.  
Storm-calming God, please help me feel peaceful again.  
Sometimes I feel scared. The path ahead looks so dark and I'm worried about the future.  
I don't know what life will be like without (name) and that frightens me.  
Rock-solid God, please help me feel safe again.  
And then sometimes I feel happy - like the sun has just come out. It's great, but it confuses me.  
I want to be happy, but I don't want to forget (name).  
Gift-giving God, help me remember all the good times we had and help me be thankful.*

Sometimes ... the person who wrote this, uses that word a lot, I wonder why?

How do these words make you feel?

What images do they 'paint' in your head?

Are these metaphors helpful to you?

I wonder which feeling or description you can identify with the most?

The author has used different images to describe God, I wonder which one might help you at the moment? Storm-calming, Rock-solid or gift giving?

*Sometimes the sadness creeps in like a rainy winter's day.  
Sometimes I'm raging in anger like an unstoppable storm.  
Sometimes I'm scared of what's ahead, because the future is too dark to see.  
Sometimes I'm just sick of life; and sometimes I feel nothing.*

Sometimes ... the person who wrote this, uses that word a lot, I wonder why?

How do these words make you feel?

What images do they 'paint' in your head?

Are these metaphors helpful to you?

I wonder which feeling or description you can identify with the most?

I wonder how you might describe your feelings?



Layer your love around me when the cold of sadness creeps in.  
Speak your words of peace when the storms of anger rage in my soul.  
Keep me safe when fear makes the darkness even darker.  
Help me keep walking till the sunshine of hope breaks through.

I wonder who you have in your life that can wrap you in love, speak words of peace and keep you safe?

'Sunshine of hope' I wonder what this looks like to you? I wonder how reading this makes you feel?

## Using images to support our communities with grief

### Journeying to Hope

This beautiful image has been painted by Primrose Northrop. It has been designed to allow individuals to speak into and alongside the image as they work through their journey of grief.

Storytelling and talking through metaphors can be a really helpful and therapeutic way for children to describe and talk about their grief and feelings.



From Primrose...

I have taken our general idea of a road, representing the journey of grief, and placed it into a subdued, end-of-day landscape. There is a trio of sheep to pick up the 23rd Psalm, a dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit, and two small puddles, as an analogy of grief.

The two figures in the immediate foreground could be an adult and a child, and the smaller person has put down a bag, which could be a metaphor for the things we carry - memories, responsibilities or pain. They are watching the (distant) figure walking away, as they comfort each other, remembering, waving goodbye.

In addition there are daisies, rabbits, a tree and a robin - to give the children something else to observe and maybe work into their own narrative of grief. Throughout I've tried to maintain a balance between the sombre and the beautiful; subdued sky and sunflowers - sadness and hope.

Many of the images in this picture are linked to the words in the prayers above.

## I wonder how you might use this image in your context?

### 1. Could it be used as a discussion tool or starter with a group dealing with grief or loss to support them in articulating their feelings?

Here are some example questions you could ask about it to stimulate a discussion.

- I wonder what you can see? I wonder what you notice?
- I wonder what it makes you think of?
- I wonder what you think the story of this picture is?
- Why might the artist have included a dove, sunflowers or rabbits in the picture?
- I wonder how this image makes you feel?
- How do you think the characters in the picture are feeling? What might they be feeling? What might they be saying to each other?
- If you were in this picture, where would you be, who might you be?
- I wonder which part of it you like the best?
- I wonder which part of the picture you don't like? Tell me more about this.
- I wonder if there is a part of the picture that represents how you are feeling now?
- I wonder what this picture says to you?

### 2. Could you use the picture or prayer poems with your class to stimulate a discussion about death and the feelings associated with it?

For many children, death isn't a subject that gets talked about until it occurs in their lives. The more you talk with children about dying, before a real-life death takes place, the better it is for those who are bereaved and those who will be supporting them. Teach the children to know what to say, do and how to handle things.

- Discuss what they notice in the image and the story behind the picture. What happened to the people in the picture before it was drawn?
- Talk through the feelings of the characters in the picture, explain that they are sad and grieving, but they might feel happy inside too as they remember the person that has died.
- Discuss the metaphors and how they might help us understand grief and how different people deal with it. The bag, the road, the sunflowers, the puddles, dark clouds etc. (*Refer back to page 8&9 - Lessons on grief*)

- Discuss with the children what they might do and say to those characters who are grieving. Share examples of suitable phrases and actions.
- Help the children to understand that sometimes their bereaved friend or family member might want to be on their own, might want to play, laugh and have fun or cry or shout or just be quiet. Make it clear that just because they are not crying doesn't mean they aren't sad or have forgotten about the person who has died. They need to be there for that person no matter how they react or act.

Here are some example questions you could ask about it to open a discussion about death and grief.

- I wonder what you notice?
- I wonder what this picture might represent?
- What do you think is happening in the picture?
- What do you think happened a day before this picture was drawn?
- How does this picture make you feel?
- How might the characters be feeling? How do you know this?
- What would you say to the people in the front of the picture?
- Why might there be a path in the picture?
- What might this picture teach us about people who are grieving?



### 3. Could you use this image in your school prayer space, as a focus for reflection and prayer?

Could it feature the picture, Psalm 23, some reflective questions, a couple of the prayers from above to provide words for those who don't know what to pray?

Maybe you could include the passage from John 11: 33-36 where Jesus weeps for his friend Lazarus who has died? (See page 10)

Provide a space in the prayer area for children to write their own prayers or offer the opportunity to write the name of a person who is grieving or the person that has died on a blank template to bring before God to ask for peace, healing, comfort or protection.

Sit and look at the image quietly.

I wonder what this image makes you think of?

I wonder if you have lost anyone like the people in the picture?

I wonder how you feeling today?

## Possible resources for your prayer space.

Psalm 23: 1-5

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters,  
he refreshes my soul.  
He guides me along the right paths  
for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk  
through the darkest valley,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.



### John 11: 33-36 (The Passion Translation)

<sup>33</sup>When Jesus looked at Mary and saw her weeping at his feet, and all her friends who were with her grieving, **he shuddered with emotion and was deeply moved with tenderness and compassion.** <sup>34</sup>He said to them, "Where did you bury him?"

"Lord, come with us and we'll show you," they replied.

<sup>35</sup>**Then tears streamed down Jesus' face.**

<sup>36</sup>Seeing Jesus weep caused many of the mourners to say, "Look how much he loved Lazarus."

I wonder how it makes you feel  
knowing that Jesus  
understands your sadness and  
grief?



I wonder who you would like to pray for?

Write the name of the person you would like to pray for on the  
person template.

God cares deeply for each person, so if you would like to, leave  
your person at the foot of the cross as a sign that you have asked  
God to take care of that person.

**Image: Journeying to Hope, Primrose Northrop, watercolour 2020**

Used with permission





## Journeying together

Primrose has created this image to reflect how we can journey together through grief. **It might be more suitable for an older audience than the 'Journeying in Hope' image.**

From Primrose...

I have included sheep to remind us that the Lord is our Shepherd - walking with us through good times and bad. The puddles remain in the foreground but the sunflowers have been replaced by a border of lilies, a flower that is often associated with times of sadness.

There is a dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit, along with the tree, which I have painted with various coloured leaves, maybe indicating the changing patterns of grief...or it could even be the Tree of Life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations, from St John's Revelation chapter 22.

**Revelation 22: 2** *'On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.'*

I've included two people walking together along the winding road, one is clothed in white, so this could be Jesus accompanying the grieving person, or it could be that kind friend who understands us, walks with us and is the person who we love and trust - the one we can talk to about how we feel. I wonder who else these people may represent for you?

**Many of the questions and suggestions from the 'Journeying in Hope' image can be used with and adapted for this image.**

**Journeying together, Primrose Northrop, Watercolour 2020**

Used with permission





## Additional images

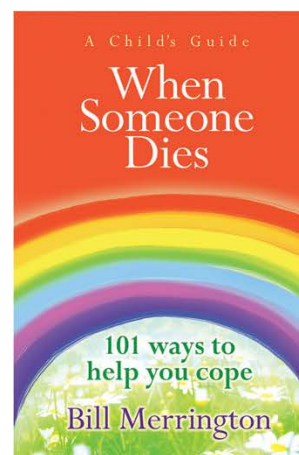
- These images may also help children or young people surrounding a bereaved person remember that grief always stays with them, but can manifest itself in different ways or extremes.
- These images may also help children or young people surrounding a bereaved person that grief always stays with them, but can manifest itself in different ways or extremes.
- They could be recreated by the bereaved child or adult to look like themselves or to include how they describe their personal grief.

I wonder how you might use them?



## Books to support those who are grieving

<https://www.eden.co.uk/shop/when-someone-dies-1902719.html>



These websites recommend and review a range of books to support children through bereavement and grief.

<https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/bereaved-family-friends/supporting-grieving-child/books-about-death>

<https://smithsmm.wordpress.com/2020/05/03/the-loss-picturebooksaboutloss/>

