



Supporting bereaved children

## Mosaic School Information Pack



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## Introduction

Every school will face bereavement at some point, and how you respond matters. When a pupil, member of staff or family experiences the death of someone important, the impact is felt across the whole school community. Staff are often looked to for stability and care, yet many feel unsure about what to say or do.

We know that death is a subject many people find difficult to talk about, but open, honest, and compassionate conversations can make all the difference. Schools play a vital role in creating a safe place where children and young people feel acknowledged, supported, and understood. Consistent care from trusted adults often matters more than specialist intervention.

## Working Together

Together we can ensure that schools, families, and professionals have the resources they need to provide the right support at the right time. This guide has been created for school staff and offers clear and practical ideas to help you respond immediately after a death, and to provide ongoing support throughout a pupil's time at your school. It includes both an individual and whole-school approach, with:

- Immediate response guidance
- Longer-term support strategies
- Sample letters and policies
- How children understand grief
- Creative memory activities
- Cultural and faith considerations

By preparing and working together with Mosaic, schools can help children and young people to discover healthy ways to live with grief, carrying forward love and memories as part of their story.

*"Sharing the weight of loss can make it just a little easier to carry."*



## Looking ahead: Grief Education in the curriculum

From 2026, new Government guidance will see grief and bereavement education introduced into the UK curriculum. This is a major step towards ensuring that children and young people can learn about loss, develop emotional resilience, and feel better equipped to support themselves and others.

At Mosaic, we welcome this positive change and look forward to developing this important work with schools. We will be keeping abreast of developments so that we can share information and ideas as they emerge.

We believe that supporting young people around grief works best when schools take a holistic approach. Alongside curriculum learning, many schools choose to offer informal opportunities for reflection and conversation.

A Bereavement Café can provide a safe space where pupils and staff come together, ask questions, and share experiences. These spaces help to normalise grief, reduce isolation, and remind young people that they are not alone.

Together, we can help create a school environment where talking about grief is normal, safe, and supported, both in the classroom and beyond.

### Key Takeaways

- New grief education guidance will be introduced into the 2026 UK curriculum.
- Mosaic will collaborate with schools to share updates, resources, and ideas.
- Bereavement Cafés can complement classroom learning by creating informal, supportive spaces.
- Contact Mosaic to start developing grief education in your school community together.



## Responding to a death in the school community

Schools that have prepared by developing a clear strategy are best placed to respond appropriately and supportively. This preparation may reduce the immediate impact on the bereaved student, their family and on the wider school.

A School Bereavement Policy provides staff with a framework, helping them feel confident in how to act and respond, and ensuring that the welfare of the bereaved child is always the priority.

### The objectives of a School Bereavement Policy include:

- Supporting pupils and staff before, during and after a bereavement
- Enhancing communication and pathways of support between the school, family, and community
- Identifying key staff roles and responsibilities in implementing the policy
- Linking to local authority and specialist support services
- Setting out responses for various kinds of deaths and for news of a terminal illness
- Ensuring compliance with the Children's Act 2004 & 2017

### Available on Request:

- A sample School Bereavement Policy
- Template letters for communicating with parents, carers, and school community.

### Key Takeaways

Bereavement can affect the entire school community. A prepared policy ensures a calm, clear and supportive response. The policy should:

- Guide staff in supporting pupils and colleagues after a bereavement or terminal illness.
- Outline communication pathways between school, family, and community.
- Identify staff responsible for leading and co-ordinating support.
- Link to relevant support services.
- Consider different responses for various kinds of deaths.
- Keep the bereaved child's welfare at the centre of all decisions.



# Supporting a bereaved student

## Immediate response

Schools are often the first point of contact for a family following a death, so having clear procedures, resources, and reassurance in place is essential. The child or young person's wishes should always guide the response. Not every pupil will want others to know about their bereavement, and confidentiality must be respected.

### When the school is informed of a death:

- **Gather accurate information** from the parent or family member, including whether the child has been told.
- **Agree what to share** and with whom, based on the child's and family's wishes.
- **Inform staff sensitively**, providing support for their own emotional responses and preparing them to respond appropriately to the child.
- **Plan communication carefully**; if the child is happy for peers to know, agree how this is to be shared. If they prefer privacy, ensure that all staff protect that choice.
- **Offer direct support**, such as a phone call or visit, to help prepare the child for their return to school.
- **Offer meaningful connection**, if welcomed, for example, a short personal note from trusted staff.
- **Support friendships thoughtfully**; some children may want contact from classmates, whilst others may prefer to wait. Follow their lead.
- **Communicate with parents/carers** in the wider school community (but only if agreed by the family), sharing information in a way that supports understanding whilst protecting privacy.



## Returning to School

School can offer stability, familiarity, and normality at a time when the bereaved child's life may feel chaotic and uncertain, and returning to school can be daunting. The pace and approach should match the child's readiness.

### Before the student returns:

- Discuss with them (and their family) what they would like their peers to know, if anything.
- If peers are to be informed, prepare them sensitively, explaining how they can be supportive.
- If they would prefer privacy, remind staff and pupils to respect this and to respond with kindness if the student chooses to share at any time.

### Encourage pupils to understand that:

- Feelings after a bereavement can include sadness, anger, fear, confusion, or moments of happiness – all of which are normal.
- It is okay to enjoy time together and take part in everyday activities.

## Talking about the bereavement

The key is to follow the child's lead and show your willingness to listen. Avoiding the subject can make them feel unsupported.

### Guiding principles:

- Acknowledge the loss if the young person is comfortable with it.
- Respect their boundaries if they don't want to talk.
- Be honest and authentic; it's okay to admit you're unsure of what to say.

### Example:

"I'm so sorry to hear about your [relation]. I'm here if you ever want to talk, but that's entirely up to you."

### Avoid:

- Euphemisms like "gone to a better place" or "gone to sleep," which can confuse younger children and frustrate older ones.
- Pressuring the student to talk before they are ready.



## Longer-term support

Bereavement is lifelong, and there is no set timeline for how long a child will need support; its effects can resurface at various times.

### **Grief responses vary:**

- Some children may seem to cope well for extended periods of time but then experience sudden difficulties.
- Significant dates (birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas) and new losses can trigger strong emotions.
- Behavioural changes may be a way of expressing grief rather than deliberate misbehaviour.

### **Schools play a key role by:**

- Providing a stable routine.
- Offering trusted relationships where feelings can be shared safely.
- Linking families to specialist services if needed.



## “What I (the child) need from you”

- **Please know about my loss.** Make sure that key staff understand I am grieving, even if I don't talk about it.
- **Acknowledge what happened.** Don't pretend it hasn't happened. A kind word helps more than silence.
- **Check in with me gently.** It's not always obvious that I'm struggling.
- **Give me guidance.** Let me know that I can ask questions about grief and loss, even if I don't feel ready yet.
- **Understand my concentration.** I may fall behind in my work. Please reassure me that this is okay.
- **Don't put me on the spot.** Please don't make me answer questions in front of the class unless I volunteer.
- **Provide an exit plan.** Sometimes feelings are overwhelming. Let me step out to a safe, quiet space if I need to.
- **Remember, grief is lifelong.** I won't “get over it.” I may need support months or years later, especially around anniversaries or special dates.
- **Celebrate my small wins.** Please encourage me, even when I achieve little things. They can feel like big steps.
- **Be patient with me.** I might not want to talk yet. Please give me time.
- **See the whole child.** I am still me. Please remind me it's okay to laugh, play and enjoy life as well as grieve.
- **Understand changes at home and school.** I might need more time off or have new responsibilities at home. My family may also be struggling.



## How children react to a death

Every child is different and their reaction to a death will depend on their age, relationship to the person who died, and the support around them. In school, some children may cry a lot, while others may continue as though nothing has changed. All of these are normal reactions.

Children may not always have the words to express their grief. Instead, you might notice changes in their behaviour, concentration, or routine.

### Emotional responses

- Children may feel overwhelmed or scared by their emotions. Naming this as grief and reassuring them that it is normal can help.
- Do not assume how they feel. Ask gently, listen, and give them space to ask questions.
- Children often “puddle jump,” showing strong feelings one moment and joining in with play the next. This is a normal coping mechanism.
- Some children will want to talk openly, others may not. Both are okay.

### Behavioural changes

- You may notice clinginess, anger, withdrawal, or regression to younger behaviours.
- These are all normal grief responses, not bad behaviour.
- Patience and consistency are key.

### Supporting them to talk

- Gently encourage conversation, but do not force it.
- Make sure pupils know there are safe adults in school they can approach.
- Practical ideas include time-out cards, a worry box, or creative outlets such as drawing, writing or movement.

### Sleep difficulties

Grief can affect sleep, leaving children tired and irritable in class.

- What staff may notice: difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, fatigue.



- What helps: understanding that tiredness affects learning, offering short breaks or quieter tasks, and consulting with parents if problems persist.

### Separation anxiety

After a death, children may fear losing another person they love.

- **Signs in school:** struggling at drop-off, needing frequent reassurance, worrying if a parent is late.
- **What helps:** acknowledging fears, offering small comfort strategies (transitional objects, brief check-ins), and reassuring them about home time.

### Building confidence

Grief can affect self-esteem and make a child anxious about everyday tasks.

- **Signs in school:** reluctance to join in, fear of mistakes, self-doubt.
- **What helps:** praising effort, reminding them of previous coping, and giving achievable steps to rebuild confidence.

### In the classroom

- The child may fall behind in work. Reassure them this is okay.
- Avoid putting them on the spot, for example by “cold calling” for answers.
- Consider seating arrangements, peer support, and access to quiet spaces.

### Key takeaways for staff

- Every child grieves in their own way; there is no single “right” reaction.
- Grief may show through emotions, behaviour, tiredness, or changes in learning.
- Children may switch quickly between sadness, anger, and playfulness. This is normal.
- Offer routine, reassurance, and safe opportunities to talk or express feelings.
- Work with families so school and home provide consistent support.
- Be aware that grief may resurface around anniversaries or significant events.



## How children understand and react to a death

Children respond to death in very different ways depending on their age, stage of development, and life experience. A pupil's understanding of death and their ability to express how they feel will change as they grow.

### Early Years (Under 2 years)

- Babies and toddlers will not understand death as adults do, but they will feel the absence of someone close.
- They are highly sensitive to the emotions of adults around them.
- Reactions may show as crying, clinginess, sleep disruption, or anger.
- Security comes from physical closeness, calm voices, and familiar routines.

### Ages 2–5

- Children at this age often believe death is reversible or temporary. Some may worry that their own words or actions caused the death.
- Use simple, clear language such as “died” rather than phrases like “gone to sleep” or “lost.”
- Expect repeated questions as they try to make sense of what has happened.
- Regressions (tantrums, clinginess, toileting difficulties) are common and normal.
- Support through reassurance, repetition, and creative outlets such as drawing or play.

### Ages 6–9

- At this stage, children begin to grasp that death is permanent and universal.
- They may still hold misconceptions from media or peers and may find death frightening.
- Expect curiosity and direct questions, sometimes quite graphic.
- Physical complaints (tummy aches, headaches) can signal distress when emotions are hard to put into words.
- Honest answers, reassurance, and safe spaces to talk are important.



## Ages 9–13

- Understanding of death is clearer, but emotions may feel overwhelming.
- Pupils may feel isolated from peers and struggle with mood swings, irritability, or withdrawal.
- Friendships are increasingly important, and bereavement may affect their sense of belonging.
- Support them by being available, encouraging healthy routines, and praising strengths.

## Teenagers (13+)

- Teenagers often appear mature but may still struggle to fully process death.
- Questions of identity, independence and future plans can be disrupted by loss.
- Grief may show as anger, withdrawal, risk-taking, or appearing detached.
- Some may avoid talking about the death to protect themselves or others.
- Support them by offering choices in how they may express themselves (creative outlets, sport, peer groups, counselling) and maintaining clear boundaries and routines.

## Key takeaways

- A pupil's understanding of death depends on age and development. Adjust language and support accordingly.
- Babies and very young children respond to absence and the emotions of people around them.
- Young children may believe death is reversible, or their fault. Use simple, honest words and repeat explanations as needed.
- Older pupils may show grief through mood swings, withdrawal, or physical complaints.
- Teenagers may look independent but still need emotional support, structure, and reassurance.
- Creative outlets, books, and safe conversations help pupils process their feelings across all ages.
- Keeping routines consistent helps pupils feel safe and supported.



## Looking after yourself as a member of school staff

Supporting a bereaved child can be rewarding, but it can also be emotionally draining. **Your wellbeing matters**, for you and for the pupils who depend on your care.

### Why it matters

- You bring empathy, stability, and kindness into a child's life.
- To do that well, you need to recognise and respect your own needs.
- Looking after yourself helps you stay calm, patient, and supportive.

### Common reactions you might notice in yourself

- Emotional waves: sadness, frustration, guilt or numbness at unexpected times.
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions after intense conversations.
- Sleep changes: trouble settling, restless nights or waking unrefreshed.
- Irritability or low tolerance when stressed or tired.
- Avoidance of situations that feel too close to your own experiences.
- Self-doubt: wondering if you have said or done the right thing.

These are normal reactions - they do not mean you are doing a poor job.

### Things that can help

- Talk and share with a trusted colleague, mentor or friend.
- Make time for rest - even short breaks - and moments of calm.
- Set boundaries and allow yourself to step back when you need to.
- Keep perspective, remember you are part of a team.
- Notice the positives and the difference that your support makes.

### Key Takeaway

Looking after yourself is not selfish. It is essential. When you care for your own wellbeing, you are better able to support the children who need you.



## Supporting children with Additional Needs

As school staff, you may be one of the most consistent adults in a child's day. Children with additional needs, or neurodiversity, may not express their grief in typical ways, but they still experience loss and benefit from sensitive, tailored support.

With the right communication and approach, they can begin to understand what has happened and feel safe and supported as they grieve. The most important thing is not to avoid the topic: children with additional needs need honest, clear explanations, just like anyone else.

Supporting a child may also involve collaborating closely with parents, carers, and your school's SEN staff so that the approach at home and in school feels consistent.

### Helping them understand what has happened

Children with additional needs, or neurodiversity, may find it harder to understand abstract ideas like death. To support their understanding:

- Check what they already know; their understanding may differ from their peers or chronological age.
- Use simple, plain language. Words like "died" and "dead" are easier to understand than phrases like "gone to sleep" or "passed away," which can confuse or scare them.
- Use concrete, factual explanations, e.g. "When someone dies, their heart stops beating and their body stops working."
- Relate to real-life examples, such as a pet that has died or flowers that have wilted.
- Stick to routines where possible; predictability and structure can help children feel safe when everything else feels uncertain. These routines can help children trying to understand what death means, and what changes they can expect.



## Using visual and creative approaches

Many children with additional needs, or neurodiversity, respond well to visual and hands-on activities to help them process information and feelings. You might try the following:

- Use photos, symbols, drawings, picture books or short videos to support conversations.
- Link explanations to their interests (e.g. favourite characters, vehicles, animals).
- Make a visual scrapbook or timeline showing life before and after the death (e.g. blooming flower → wilting flower).
- Create a social story or comic strip conversation to explain changes and expected events.

## Explaining the body and death

Some children find it helpful to understand that the person is no longer alive in a physical, visible way. You might say: "Their body has stopped working. That means they can't feel anything and don't eat, sleep, or talk anymore."

If the child wants to see the body, this can support their understanding, but they will need careful preparation. A trusted adult and the funeral director can help guide this.

## Supporting emotional understanding

Children with additional needs, or neurodiversity, may struggle to express feelings verbally. Grief might show up as:

- Changes in behaviour
- Withdrawal or clinginess
- Anxiety or agitation
- Physical symptoms (e.g. tummy aches)

You can support them by:

- Naming the feeling: "This feeling is called grief. It's what happens when someone we care about dies." "You might feel sad or angry or not sure how you feel and that's okay."
- Offering regular check-ins without pressure to talk.



- Using creative or sensory activities to help them express themselves.
- Let them know that however they feel is okay. Some children may not show much emotion at first; it can come later, and that's normal too.

### Key Takeaways

- Children with additional needs, or neurodiversity, can understand death with the right support.
- Acknowledge the death; don't assume they don't notice or feel it.
- Use clear, direct language and avoid euphemisms.
- Offer visual tools, repetition, and real-life examples to aid understanding.
- Give time, space for expression, and let their responses guide the pace.



## Diverse cultures & beliefs

How families grieve is shaped by culture, faith, or non-religious beliefs. Schools work with diverse communities, therefore sensitivity and respect are fundamental. The most important thing is not to assume. Ask families about their traditions, and how the school can support them. The following are broad guidelines.

### Romani and Traveller families

- Funerals are significant, often arranged quickly with large gatherings.
- The deceased's possessions may be removed or sold, which can make memory-keeping harder for children.
- Talking openly about death may be less common.
- Be prepared for absence at short notice and support children with memory-making.

### Christian families

- Funerals usually held in a church or crematorium with hymns, prayers, and readings.
- Burial and cremation are both common.
- Beliefs about the afterlife vary across denominations.
- Church services, anniversaries or festivals can intensify grief.

### Muslim families

- Burial usually within 24 hours; cremation is not permitted.
- Body washed, shrouded, and buried facing Mecca.
- Mourning often observed at home for three days.
- Children may need absence from school quickly and for several days, and prayer needs may be important.

### Jewish families

- Burial usually within 24 hours; cremation not usually permitted.
- Mourning period (Shiva) lasts seven days at home.
- Anniversaries (Yahrzeit) are marked each year.
- Allow absence for Shiva and be aware that anniversaries may be difficult.



### Buddhist families

- Funerals often calm and reflective, with chanting and meditation.
- Cremation is most common, though burial may also take place.
- Focus is on supporting rebirth.
- Children may talk about rebirth or karma; respect their beliefs.

### Hindu families

- Funerals usually a cremation; mourners often wear white.
- Ashes often scattered in water or a place of significance.
- Mourning may last around 13 days.
- Allow time off for rituals; anniversaries may also be observed.

### Sikh families

- Cremation is usual, though burial is also possible.
- Ceremonies include prayers, hymns, and readings from the Guru Granth Sahib.
- Mourning often lasts 10 days, with daily prayers.
- Children may need time off for gatherings; grief may be supported within the community.

### Humanist and non-religious families

- Funerals focus on celebrating life with stories, music, and readings.
- Some non-religious families have no belief in an afterlife.
- Families may prefer informal memory-sharing over rituals.

### Key Takeaways

- Ask and listen to the family's wishes.
- Avoid assumptions, as customs vary across faiths.
- Be flexible with absence, as funerals often happen quickly.
- Respect the fact that some families may not talk openly about death.
- Support children with memory-making when possessions are lost.
- Be mindful that anniversaries can be significant and emotional.



## Supporting children following a traumatic death

Some deaths come suddenly and without warning. When a loved one dies in a traumatic way, such as through a road traffic accident, suicide, or violent death, it can bring added shock, confusion, and distress for a child.

In these situations, children and young people sometimes believe they caused the death, especially if there was an argument or tense moment beforehand. For some, it can feel easier to blame themselves than to accept that it was an accident or out of anyone's control. These feelings of guilt can be powerful, even if they do not reflect the truth.

Children need time, honesty, and a calm, caring approach to help them feel safe, reassured, and supported.

### Suicide

When someone dies by suicide, the impact can be especially complex. Children may feel a mixture of sadness, anger, fear, confusion, or even rejection. They may also feel shame or worry about what others will think.

### Key points for schools:

- Use clear, simple language. Avoid phrases such as "*gone to sleep*" or "*passed away*." It is okay to say the person has died and explain, in an age-appropriate way, that they ended their own life.
- Be honest. Children often sense when something is being hidden, and secrecy can increase confusion and create mistrust.
- Acknowledge feelings. Let the child know that any feelings they have are understandable and valid.
- Reassure them. Remind them that it was not their fault. Children may wrongly believe that something they did or said caused the death.
- Be mindful of stigma. Suicide can bring fear of judgement from others. Protect the child's privacy and dignity and give them safe spaces to talk.
- Signpost. Families and staff can be supported by organisations such as **Winston's Wish**, **Papyrus**, or **Child Bereavement UK**, which provide guidance after suicide.



## Sudden deaths and road traffic accidents (RTAs)

When a person dies suddenly, in a road accident or through an unexpected medical event, it can be extremely difficult for a child to understand. There is often no chance to say goodbye, and children may feel shocked or frightened.

### Ways in which schools can help:

- Offer consistent reassurance and stability through normal routines.
- Provide space to talk but also respect if the child does not want to share right away.
- Prepare classmates sensitively if the death is known in the wider community.
- Recognise that reminders, such as road safety lessons or seeing ambulances, can trigger strong reactions.
- Support the family by staying in touch and signposting them to organisations such as **Brake**, **Winston's Wish**, or **Child Bereavement UK**.



## Children's responses following a traumatic death

Children may show a wide range of reactions as they try to process what has happened. These responses are normal and may include:

- Trouble sleeping or nightmares
- Difficulty concentrating
- Clinginess or a need for constant reassurance
- Distressing memories or images appearing unexpectedly
- Anxiety that it could happen again
- Repetitive play, drawings, or stories about the event
- Avoiding talking about it or avoiding reminders
- Difficulty managing strong feelings such as anger or distress
- Being easily startled or more impulsive
- Regression to earlier behaviours such as toileting accidents, baby talk, or very young play
- Physical symptoms such as tummy aches or headaches

Children can feel frightened by the strength of their emotions. Reassure them that it is okay to feel sad, angry, or worried, and it is equally okay to feel happy, laugh, and play.

### Helping children understand what has happened

- Give honest explanations that fit the child's age and understanding.
- Keep information short and manageable to avoid overwhelming them.
- Be patient if they ask the same question many times; repetition helps them process.
- If a death has occurred, use clear words such as *dead* or *died* rather than confusing terms like *gone to sleep* or *gone away*.
- Maintain normal routines where possible to provide stability and security.
- Provide chances for non-verbal expression through play, drawing, or creative activities.
- Allow them to talk when they feel ready, without forcing conversations.



## Key Takeaway Points

- Most children are resilient and will gradually begin to feel more settled.
- Clear, honest communication prevents misunderstandings and reduces worry.
- Keeping normal routines helps restore a sense of safety.
- Creative activities can give children safe ways to explore and express feelings.
- If difficulties continue for several weeks, encourage families to seek advice from a GP so that the child's wellbeing can be assessed and, if needed, specialist support offered.



## Supporting children with a life-threatening illness

When a child is living with a life-threatening illness, school can be a place of stability, belonging, and hope. Schools play a significant role in helping the child feel included, supporting classmates, and keeping communication clear and sensitive for everyone involved.

### Maintaining routines and normality

- Schools help to keep daily routines and activities going where possible.
- The focus is not only on their illness, but on supporting the child to live their life and take part in school.
- Small achievements in attendance, learning, and participation are recognised and celebrated.

### Communication with pupils

- Information is shared carefully and only with the family's consent.
- Staff provide honest, age-appropriate explanations. Fellow pupils usually sense when something serious is happening, and openness helps them to feel safe.
- Classmates are prepared for changes such as absences, hospital visits, reduced energy, or changes in appearance.
- Children's natural wish to help is encouraged in safe, practical ways, such as offering support at breaktimes.

### Involving the child

- Schools allow the child to share their experiences if they want to, but respect their privacy if they prefer not to.
- Health professionals such as nurses or hospice workers may be invited to explain treatments or equipment in a way children can understand.

### Staff support and key roles

- A key worker is identified, through the Pre-Bereavement Policy, to coordinate support for the child and family.
- All relevant staff are kept up to date with the child's needs and any changes in condition.
- Advice from medical professionals is sought whenever new needs arise.



## Building a support network

- Strong links are maintained between the child's family, school staff, healthcare teams, and parents of classmates.
- Open communication is established early so that the school can respond effectively to changes.
- Classmates are prepared for the possibility of loss in a supportive way, with extra emotional help available if needed.

## Behaviour and boundaries

- Schools keep behavioural expectations consistent for all pupils.
- Lowering standards is avoided, as this can feel unfair to other children.
- Staff balance empathy with fairness, so that the child feels included and classmates feel secure.

## Supporting other parents

- Schools acknowledge that some parents may feel anxious about their child's emotional wellbeing.
- Clear, honest information is given about what pupils will be told.
- Parents are reassured that children usually cope better with openness than secrecy.



## Pre-Bereavement support when a family member has a limited life-expectancy

Children's responses to the news that a parent or close family member is dying will vary greatly. Schools can play a vital role in helping pupils develop resilience and positive coping strategies that will support them now and in the future.

Accurate information about what is happening, and how best to help, is not always easy to obtain. Every family manages a terminal prognosis differently, so it is important to approach each situation with sensitivity and without assumptions.

Although Mosaic no longer provides direct pre-bereavement support, there are excellent national organisations that offer resources and guidance for families and school staff.

- Supporting a child with a terminally ill family member.
- Keep in close contact with the family to understand what the child already knows and how the school can help.
- Use honest, age-appropriate communication to prevent confusion and support emotional wellbeing.
- Signpost to national organisations such as Winston's Wish, Child Bereavement UK, CRUSE, or Marie Curie.
- Agree with the family on the best way to stay updated, whether through email, text, or regular check-ins.
- If a hospice worker is involved, ask the family if they are happy for the school to make contact for advice.
- Offer staff guidance on handling difficult questions like "is my dad going to die?" – it can help to ask the child what they already know and then consult with the family.
- Expect changes in concentration, attendance, and behaviour. Illness may be prolonged, with times of stability and sudden changes.
- Recognise that some families will take time away to make memories or trips together. These absences can be deeply important to the child's long-term wellbeing.
- Maintain daily routines where possible to provide stability, while ensuring the child knows how to access emotional support, such as a key staff member, ELSA sessions, or a time-out card.



## Bereavement support for schools

With the support of their family and school, many children will not need additional professional help. However, for some, extra support can be valuable in helping them understand and express their feelings, particularly after a traumatic or complicated bereavement.

### EARLY BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT (EBS)

EBS offers short-term emotional support; usually 1–3 sessions with a qualified counsellor. It is not bereavement counselling, but it can help a child begin to process their feelings and start talking about their loss.

- Sessions can take place at home or at school.
- They may involve just the child or the whole family.
- Sessions are spaced out rather than weekly.
- Usually offered after the funeral, except in rare circumstances.
- No referral is required – parents or carers just need to call Mosaic to arrange support.

### BEREAVEMENT COUNSELLING

Some children and teenagers may need more in-depth, long-term support, particularly if the death was traumatic, complicated, or if they are revisiting grief as they grow.

Bereavement counselling is normally delivered as a package of seven sessions; one assessment session, followed by six counselling sessions - these are usually delivered in school. A referral from the school is required, and the first step is to pick up the phone and discuss the referral with Mosaic.

Mosaic's bereavement counsellors adapt their approach to suit the individual child, using creative and age-appropriate methods such as play, drawing, talking, or craft activities.



## Bereavement Cafés

Mosaic's Bereavement Cafés can be hosted in schools, creating a safe and informal space where young people and staff can talk openly about grief.

**Held once a term, these cafés give pupils the chance to:**

- Meet others who have been bereaved
- Share experiences
- Learn healthy coping strategies

They also show pupils that grief affects people of all ages, and that it is normal and healthy to talk about it.

**For staff, Bereavement Cafés provide an opportunity to:**

- Ask Mosaic practitioners questions
- Gain insight into how grief affects children and young people
- Share ideas and approaches for support

**School-based Bereavement Cafés are not essential, but they can make a real difference in:**

- Building empathy and understanding
- Reducing stigma around grief
- Strengthening the whole-school response to loss

From September 2026, the updated Relationships, Health and Sex Education (RHSE) curriculum in England will include teaching about change, loss, and grief. **Bereavement Cafés will complement this by encouraging open conversations and providing a safe space for pupils and staff.**

If you would like to organise a bereavement café in your school, please contact Mosaic for more information.



## How schools can help Mosaic counselling

A school setting is familiar and can often feel safer to a young person than attending counselling in an unfamiliar location. For counselling to be successful, it would be helpful if schools could:

- **Provide a suitable space:** offer a confidential, comfortable room, free from interruptions, noise, and other distractions, so that the young person can feel comfortable and focused during sessions.
- **Have a clear safeguarding process:** ensure that there is a named safeguarding lead or member of staff to whom counsellors can report any concerns promptly and confidentially.
- **Appoint a school liaison:** nominate a member of staff to act as a main point of contact for the counsellor, ensuring that communication is clear, progress can be reviewed, and any concerns addressed quickly.
- **Make reception aware:** ensure the school reception staff know when a counsellor is expected and at what time. This avoids unnecessary delays which can result in lost counselling time.
- **Avoid timetable clashes:** ensure that counsellors are informed in advance if a pupil will be absent or unavailable for their session, to prevent disruption and to support consistency.
- **Inform relevant teaching staff:** in secondary schools, make sure the pupil's subject teachers are aware of the counselling appointment. This is especially important if the young person needs to leave class discreetly or return afterwards.
- **Avoid distress when collecting pupils:** where possible, let the young person know in advance that they will be leaving class. Being called out without warning can cause unnecessary worry or distress.
- **Be aware of post-session vulnerability:** some pupils may feel a little "off" or emotionally wobbly after counselling. Ensure that the staff who see the pupil next are aware and respond with sensitivity, which avoids putting them on the spot and allows a brief settling-in period - a discreet check-in is often all that is needed.



- **Provide ongoing pastoral support:** offer continued pastoral care once counselling has finished, so that the young person still has a trusted adult who they can approach if they need to talk or seek help.
- **Respect confidentiality:** recognise the importance of the counselling relationship by ensuring that discussions between the counsellor and young person remain private, within safeguarding boundaries.
- **Support children with additional needs:** where possible, give the pupil advance notice of their counselling session. This can be done through a note in their diary, a reminder from their teacher at the start of the day, or a quiet word. Knowing what to expect can reduce anxiety, especially for those children who rely on routine.

By working in partnership, schools and Mosaic counsellors can create a consistent, safe, and compassionate framework of support, helping bereaved young people to process their grief and build resilience for the future.



## Fundraising ideas to support Mosaic

Mosaic provides support for children and young people in Dorset through their bereavement, and we rely on fundraising and donations to continue our work.

Fundraising events for Mosaic not only raise essential funds but also give pupils the opportunity to make a difference in their community. For example, a school might raise enough money to help run a **Bereavement Café – an informal space within the school for young people to talk about grief and ask questions, supported by Mosaic staff**. When pupils become involved and directly contribute to something like this, it can give them a sense of autonomy and pride, as well as creating a greater understanding of bereavement.

**Any amount raised is gratefully received. If you would like some fundraising ideas or resources, please contact us – we can provide posters, sponsorship forms, and examples of what other schools have done.**

### Fundraising ideas for primary schools:

- **Miles for Mosaic** – a sponsored walk, run, or scoot around the school field or playground.
- **Non-uniform or themed dress-up day** – pupils donate to take part.
- **Cake sale** – children bake at home and sell at breaktime.
- **Read-a-thon** – pupils are sponsored for the number of books or pages read.

### Fundraising ideas for secondary schools:

- **Charity sports tournament** – football, netball, basketball, or mixed teams.
- **Battle of the Bands or talent show** – ticket sales donated to Mosaic.
- **Community car wash** – run by sixth formers or a school club.
- **Sponsored silence or digital detox** – pupils give up talking or using screens for a set time.

Combining fundraising with bereavement awareness activities, such as assemblies or PSHE sessions, can also help pupils develop empathy and understanding alongside their charitable efforts.



## Final Note

Every child's journey through grief is individual. What matters most is the presence of caring, consistent adults who **help them to feel heard** by listening, acknowledging their feelings, and giving them permission to grieve in their own way and time.

Supporting a bereaved child is a shared responsibility. Schools, families, and the wider community all play a part in helping children feel safe and supported.

This booklet offers practical guidance, examples and signposting to help school staff feel more confident in navigating the challenges of grief within an educational setting.

Mosaic is here to stand alongside schools, offering advice, counselling in schools and spaces such as the Bereavement Café so that children and young people know they are not alone.

**Remember: supporting a bereaved child is not about having all the answers, but about being there when it matters most.**

The following page signposts a range of organisations offering support for specific kinds of bereavement.



## Helpful organisations for bereavement support

### **AtaLoss**

UK bereavement signposting and information website.

[www.ataloss.org/bereavement-services](http://www.ataloss.org/bereavement-services)

### **Brake – The Road Safety Charity**

Help for Victims and those bereaved by road collisions.

[www.brake.org.uk](http://www.brake.org.uk)

### **Child Bereavement UK**

Supporting families with pre-bereavement (merging with Winston's Wish).

[www.childbereavement.org](http://www.childbereavement.org)

### **Childhood Bereavement Network**

Information and advice on bereavement services nationwide.

[www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk)

### **Dorset Open Door**

A partnership of local and national bereavement charities and healthcare organisations offering tailored advice and referrals — especially for traumatic or sudden losses. It is a great first-stop resource to explore your options.

Email - [dhc.dorsetopendoor@nhs.net](mailto:dhc.dorsetopendoor@nhs.net) Tel: 01305 361361

### **Family Lives (now incorporating Parentline Plus)**

A UK-wide website offering parenting advice and support following bereavement, including local support.

[www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)

### **Hope Support Services**

Hope provides support to young people when a family member is diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. We support young people aged 5-25 years.

[www.hopesupport.org.uk](http://www.hopesupport.org.uk)

### **PAPYRUS (Prevention of Young Suicide)**

Dedicated to preventing suicide in individuals aged under 35, PAPYRUS offers HOPELINE247, a free, confidential support for those in crisis or concerned about someone else.

Tel: 0800 068 4141

[www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)

### **SANDS (Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society)**

[www.sands.org.uk](http://www.sands.org.uk)

### **SPRING (Poole)**

Local support for parents and relatives following the loss of a baby.

[www.springsupport.co.uk](http://www.springsupport.co.uk)



**Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)**

Provides peer-led support groups (both in-person and virtual), a support line, email support, and an online community for adults bereaved by suicide. Perfect for parents or older family members seeking connection with others who have experienced similar loss.

[www.uksobs.org](http://www.uksobs.org)

**The Compassionate Friends (TCF)**

Peer-to-peer support for parents, adult siblings and grandparents affected by the loss of a child, sibling, or grandchild.

[www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk)

**The Mesothelioma Centre**

Mesothelioma cancer resource website.

[www.asbestos.com](http://www.asbestos.com)

**The WAY Foundation (Widowed and Young) Organisation** (partnered with Winston's Wish)

Supporting young widows and widowers aged 50 years or under.

[www.widowedandyoung.org.uk](http://www.widowedandyoung.org.uk)

**Winston's Wish (merged with Child Bereavement UK)**

UK Website offering information and support to anyone caring for a bereaved child, including family members and professionals.

[www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)

**Young Lives vs Cancer** (formerly CLICSargent)

UK children's cancer charity providing support and advice to children suffering from cancer and leukaemia and their families.

[www.younglivesvscancer.org.uk](http://www.younglivesvscancer.org.uk)

**Young Minds**

A guide to supporting a child or young person with grief, bereavement, or loss.

[www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/grief-and-loss/](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/grief-and-loss/)

