



# Bereavement in Primary Schools

## Children Aged 5-8

### *Understanding:*

- ***At the younger end of this stage most children will recognise that being dead is different to being alive, whilst at the older end most children will recognise the permanence of death. At the older end children will usually recognise that death can happen to anyone.***
- Children may begin to fear that others they love will also die.
- A child may engage in 'magical thinking', and also may feel guilt for their feelings, or blame themselves in some way.
- Children may wish to gain a greater understanding by asking concrete questions, possibly of an intricate nature regarding what happens to the body etc.
- A child may have misconceptions received from wider peer group.
- A child may begin to show greater understanding of the feelings of others.

### *Possible Reactions:*

- ***Many of the reactions seen in younger children may still be evident.***
- A child may disguise their own grief or copy coping mechanisms seen in adults who are grieving.
- A child may exhibit separation anxiety and clinginess, possibly leading to school phobia and loss of confidence.
- A child may experience mood swings, and the grief may appear to come and go.
- A child may find forming relationships harder.
- Some children show increased aggression or angry outbursts.
- There may be illnesses such as headaches, stomach aches, nausea etc. caused by anxiety (psychosomatic.)

### *Providing Support:*

- ***Much of the support from younger stages still applies.***
- Be tolerant of erratic behaviour whilst still providing secure boundaries.
- Provide factual and age appropriate information.
- Ensure the child is able to ask questions and grieve openly. Avoid encouragement to 'be strong', as suppressing the natural responses may cause problems later.
- Share age appropriate books that tackle the subject of death and bereavement.
- With parental consent, consider group discussion/circle time etc.
- Appoint a member of staff close to the pupil to listen to them, provide help and keep a watchful eye for incidents such as bullying.
- Offer opportunities for acts of remembrance in both the short and long term.
- Provide a safe-place to which the child can retreat for time alone or one to one care.