

Policy for Supporting Children Experiencing Bereavement and Loss

Rationale

We believe that bereavement and loss are an inevitable part of living and growing. Early Years practitioners will provide opportunities within their settings for children to develop their own appropriate range of emotional, spiritual and intellectual responses to manage these experiences.

We believe that the ethos of ICP Nurseries which is based on openness and mutual support, provides a framework in which these experiences can be realised in an enriching manner.

This policy has been developed using guidance from the publication: Small Steps – Supporting Bereaved Young Children in Pre-School Settings

Named nursery bereavement contact

The named nursery bereavement contact is: [insert name]

This person will have attended a Not Too Young to Grieve Workshop, be aware of the needs of bereaved children and will have collated resources in order to support them.

Supporting bereaved children under 5 years of age

It is now well recognised that very young children, including babies, do experience grief, they just show it differently. When someone familiar dies, the overriding response in the under 5s is a sense of loss. Being too young to understand the cause, and lacking the vocabulary, they express their distress through their behaviour.

Even a very young baby, with clearly no concept of what being dead means, will pick up on an emotionally charged atmosphere and will probably have a reaction of some sort. When it is a parent or main carer who has died, this loss will be particularly acutely felt through the inevitable changes such as an upset routine, a different carer, and unfamiliar surroundings with strange sounds and smells. A toddler is capable of taking in much more than most adults realise and will be very aware that something significant has happened. Under 5s can, and often do, react strongly to their own grief, but also to the grief of significant adults involved in their day-to-day care.

Whatever the circumstances, babies and children under five years of age need to have their grief acknowledged,

and their distress comforted.

The death of a child or member of staff

In the event of a death of a child or member of staff our nursery management team will act in a planned and agreed manner, so that all staff know what is expected and can contribute their part in a way that is consistent with the values that have been adopted.

- The nursery bereavement contact, in partnership with the practitioners will co-ordinate the nursery's response and be fundamental in liaising with the bereaved family.
- As far as possible, all staff should be told together by the named person. By creating a list of people to be told, the nursery can be sure that no one close to the situation will find out by chance.
- All the parents/carers will be told in writing at the same time and as promptly as circumstances will allow.
- Following this the children in nursery will be told at a time previously notified to the parents.
- Staff will be consistent in their use of terminology to ensure clear understanding of the concept of death.
- Absentees from nursery will also need to be informed at the earliest opportunity. The nursery will have procedures to track who is informed, when and by whom, to ensure that no one is missed.
- Attendance at the funeral and other forms of remembering will be agreed by the staff team.
- Staff will have ongoing opportunities for peer support in order to maintain their well-being.
- The nursery will provide ongoing support and will ensure that the anniversary of the death is remembered.

Significant loss for children

- The nursery will have a range of strategies that it may adopt in the days and weeks that follow any significant loss. Decisions about which to undertake will be determined following discussions with the family concerned and will take into account the cultural/religious beliefs of the family.
- The child's key person or other named member of staff will be identified to keep in touch with the family so contact from the family's perspectives is manageable. This person will co-ordinate the sending of a card.

- The nursery bereavement contact will take responsibility for recording details of a bereavement on the child's transition record and ensuring this information is passed to the next setting, with parent's permission.

Curriculum

In the event of bereavement or significant loss the nursery has identified activities that will support the child/children to explore their feelings and memories. Some opportunities may include:

Telling the Story

- Use puppets
- Use photographs
- Use the home corner or small world toys e.g. Lego or Playmobil
- Use stories and social stories
- Use playdough
- Use sand tray

Expressing feelings

- Feelings and emotions resources, including superhero caves
- Feelings biscuits
- Mad and sad box
- Water balloons
- Wooden spoon feelings faces or feelings pebbles

Remembering

- Chatterbox
- Memory box
- Memory jar
- Play dough model memories
- Photo albums

Coping strategies

- Worry dolls
- Handprints
- Special dates
- Friendship Bands
- Feather comforts

Parents/carers

In acknowledging the role of the nursery in supporting children with bereavement and loss, the nursery will work alongside the parents/carers in this process.

The parents/carers remain the most significant support to young children in understanding death. The nursery can support parents/carers in this by:

- Sharing with parents/carers the intentions of the nursery to act in a particular way in the event of a death.
- Offering guidance to parents/carers on how they might support their child.
- Sharing information with families about other sources of support e.g. Winston's Wish Helpline, participation in a Small Steps nursery workshop.
- Keeping parents/carers fully informed about the actions of the nursery throughout the immediate period of grieving.
- Parents/carers will be invited to be involved in any nursery response that occurs after the death, e.g. a remembering time. The format of this will take into account the beliefs and wishes of the bereaved family.

Outcomes

By adopting a planned and considered approach the nursery can with some degree of confidence support the emotional well being of the child. As a result:

Staff will:

Feel equally valued. Have an opportunity to prepare themselves for the supportive role they adopt. Be given time and space to work through their own feelings. Become aware of the needs of bereaved children, and be offered training, to develop strategies to support them.

Children will:

Be offered support by sensitive, trained staff working together. Have the opportunity to tell their story, express their feelings, share their memories and develop coping strategies.

The nursery will:

Have clear expectations about the way that it will respond to the death, not simply react. Provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment where there are no expectations in their responses to the children's grief.

The family will:

Feel supported. Be given an opportunity to express their feelings of loss. Have opportunities to understand and communicate with their child about their loss as a result of the activities provided by the nursery.

The parents/carers will

Be given guidance on how to support their child/children. Be aware of the support offered and understand the processes that will follow bereavement.

Resources and further reading for adults

Grief in Young Children - a Handbook for Adults Atle Dyregrov

For pre-school children - parents, teachers, and childminders. Available from www.jkp.com

Never Too Young to Grieve: Supporting Children under 5 after the Death of a Parent

This booklet is designed for parents/carers and professionals supporting under 5's. Available from Winston's Wish www.winstonswish.org.uk