



PRACTICAL AND IMMEDIATE SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS

For a bereavement of family member or friend

HELPING A STUDENT RETURNING TO SCHOOL AFTER A DIAGNOSIS OR DEATH

Following any significant news of a death or terminal diagnosis, the needs of individual students will be carefully considered by teaching staff.

These hints, tips, and ideas will help you to engage with an individual student in such an instance. Remember, they may want to do all, some, or none of these. They may want to talk straight away, or not for several months. Knowing that you are available, honest, understanding and trustworthy will be a great comfort to the student concerned.

What should I expect?

Sometimes students may be off school for a few days after the death, although some may choose to return sooner. For some students, the prospect of them ever coming back to school again can seem impossible to comprehend or it may be the very thing that they want so that they can "experience normality" again and "take their mind off things". It is impossible to know quite how a student of yours may react. A simple phone call home can be a great way of determining this and also letting the family know that you care. No student has ever failed to be impressed by a teacher who went out of their way to make a tough phone call. A visit to the family home can also be especially helpful and help you to get some idea of the family's frame of mind.



How should I tell the class?

If possible, liaise with the student about their return. Ideally you will consult with them as to how other friends and classmates are told about what has happened. They may like to get straight back into things and be treated almost as if nothing has happened. The chances are that they will have been surrounded by grieving family members for days and all they want is a break from it. Equally they may want to answer questions from their classmates – this can help some children cope. Again, make sure the decision is theirs and that you are available to support them the whole time.

What can I do to make their return to school as easy as possible?

Whilst the student is off school, you may like to start to complete the ASK Me Bereavement Plan with them. This will allow them a space to share how they would like this news to be shared with their peers and what might make their return to school easier.

If they are not ready to do this yet it would be helpful to start some conversations with the student and their family about how you tell the rest of the class about what has happened. It is important that they feel in control of this news, but it is worth gently challenging them if they suggest that no-one is told. This can be done by pointing out that others may be unknowingly insensitive, for instance, maybe asking if they have been skiving whilst off school. If there is time and it is appropriate to do so, get the class to write letters or cards to them, assuring them of how sorry they are to hear the news, but also how much they are looking forward to them coming back. This will be a great parcel for you to deliver to the family home and will make the return to school much easier.

Keep the student informed about what has been going on in their absence. It may be helpful to think through with them about how they can answer difficult questions others might ask them, or what to say if they don't want to talk about things at any time, for example, 'I feel really sad he died, and I don't feel ready to talk about it at the moment'. Be flexible about their timetable on their first day back. They might prefer to come in for part of the day only or have plenty of breaks built into their day to allow them to complete a phased return.



Will their behaviour have changed?

Maybe. This probably won't be a permanent thing, but immediately after the death they may not seem their 'normal' self. They may:

- Have less concentration.
- Be a lot more tired and therefore irritable.
- Have a heightened sensitivity to comments and remarks.
- Be so wrapped up in their own feelings that they fail to take the feelings of others into account, which can result in arguments and fights.
- Could have a lot of anger and frustration about the death.

It is important that you recognise that some, or all these things may happen, and that you are ready to be patient and understanding. It is also important though that normal rules and expectations of behaviour are maintained. Boundaries and a routine actually helps, and a lack of it may cause more problems within the class and amongst peers.

The ASK Me Bereavement Plan is designed help young people to share some of what they are feeling and to help them to develop a support plan for times when their emotions might be overwhelming. Remember, the young person, their family and yourselves can contact our on demand services at any time to get advice and support.



**THEY ASKED ME IF
I WAS OKAY. THEY
ASKED ME HOW I
WAS FEELING. AND
THAT MADE ALL
THE DIFFERENCE.
— ELLA —**



GIVING ADVICE

You may find that a pupil and/or family members look to you for advice on a range of death-related topics.

For instance, about seeing the body or attending the funeral. Although it's the decision of the family, there has been research that found that children value and appreciate being involved in important rituals. It is vital that they feel prepared and informed and that their needs are thought through in advance.

You may feel confident to advise in these areas and/or may like to suggest that parents/carers call our Helpline. Do remember that you can always get in touch with our on-demand services yourself for any help.



WE ARE HERE TO HELP

If you require assistance with any aspect of this guide or would like more information about supporting bereaved children and young people, please contact us:

On our Freephone National Helpline during office hours: 08088 020 021 or email us at ask@winstonswish.org

Take a look at our website: www.winstonswish.org to contact us by Live Chat and for more information about our resources and guidance.

Text or WhatsApp us on 07418 341 800 (check website for opening times).

A range of specialist publications are available to buy through the Winston's Wish website shop.winstonswish.org

If you require information about our ASK Me Training package, Rapid Response training sessions, Study Days and Bespoke Training please take a look at the website, contact us by phone on 01242 515157 or email training@winstonswish.org



**WINSTON'S
WISH WW**

Giving hope to grieving children