

# Spensley Street Primary School

## BEREAVEMENT POLICY

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### **Rationale:**

Our school aims to meet the needs of our students in the five developmental domains – emotional, social, cognitive, language and physical.

We know that children will experience grief and loss at some point in their lives, either directly or be affected by the grief and loss of those around them. How well these losses are handled will affect a child's capacity to cope with a major bereavement. A child's learning ability, happiness and general school behaviour will be affected by the experience of any major loss.

### **Definition:**

Loss is something we all experience. Children who do not experience the death of a close relative or friend during childhood may still be affected by the grief of others, or their own loss through parental separation or divorce, the loss of friends or teachers through geographic moves, the death of a pet or loss through sickness, disability and separation. Children may also experience grief or trauma following distressing local or world events.

### **Principles**

Our school aims to meet the needs of our students in the five developmental domains.

In developing a policy we need to be aware of children's stage of development in the primary school years.

Families' attitude to loss and grief is the most significant factor affecting children's responses.

The effectiveness of this policy requires strong links between home and school.

### **Goals:**

1. To promote emotional health in the context of loss and grief in the school community.
2. To help teachers, parents and carers respond sensitively and constructively to students suffering loss.
3. To enable an open, supportive and realistic approach within the school to the experience of loss and grief.

### **Strategies**

1. Guidelines for action will be introduced to help the school respond promptly and appropriately in the case of major loss (see attachment).
2. The school will develop and maintain a resource kit, including information about the grieving process, to be available to staff and parents.
3. In-service training and materials, including information about different cultural practices, will be available to staff to prepare them to deal with the issues raised by grief and loss within the classroom.

### **References:**

SSPS Teaching and Learning Policy

SSPS Healthy Relationships Policy

DET Emergency Management Manual

Suggested Bibliography

Date: redrafted 2005

## BEREAVEMENT POLICY GUIDELINES

The following guidelines could be used in the event of grief or loss in the school community, according to the situation.

<b>WHO</b>	<b>WHAT</b>	<b>HOW</b>
<b>Principal</b>	Contact bereaved family. Determine what information family want community to know.	Principal to contact and organise a visit to the grieving family.
<b>Principal</b>	Brief all staff members to inform and determine how to inform students.	Plan a special staff meeting. This will include office and support staff.
<b>Principal</b>	Provide time for discussion, reflection and support for staff. This may include professional counselling provided by DET Officers.	Timetable changes. Provide copies of appropriate reading material and reference list.
<b>Principal</b>	Contact made the Regional Director, G.O. and Visiting Teacher Service.	Phone calls.
<b>Principal /Staff</b>	Inform students. Provide opportunities for children to talk and ask questions. Establish list of students who may be particularly affected by death.	This may be a whole school assembly or home group meetings and followed up with further discussions.
<b>Principal</b>	Inform school community.	Notice or letter sent home to families based on factual information supplied by the family.
<b>Principal /Staff</b>	Allow opportunities to talk.	This could be done through class discussion, special material to read. Refer to suggested booklist to read to the class.
<b>Principal /Staff</b>	Maintain regular school routine.	Maintain normal routine as much as possible. It is important to know that our response will impact upon students.
<b>Principal /Staff</b>	Attend the funeral.	Organise late start, inform community so that staff who want to are able to attend funeral or supervise students.
<b>Principal</b>	Organise expressions of sympathy for the family.	Arrange flowers/card on behalf of the school.
<b>Principal/Staff/Parents</b>	Prepare public expressions of condolence/ farewell.	This would be done in consultation with the family and may lead to a memorial event, eg. a balloon launch. Keep a book of eulogies and comments in a central location for the school community.
<b>Principal/Staff/Parents</b>	Monitor and support reactions within the school community.	Monitor student reactions and inform families. Use specialist support staff to assist staff, students and parents. Reorganise timetable or provide CRT cover to support staff members.

## DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES RELATING TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH

AGE	UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH	CHILD'S NEEDS	PHRASES/TECHNIQUES
<b>Infancy</b> Birth – two years	Death as separation and /or abandonment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brief simple, honest explanations with familiar examples</li> <li>Reassurance of safety, parental support and attention</li> </ul>	“We’ll be here to take care of you. Careful listening and watching Death is when the body stops working
<b>Pre- school</b> 2 – 6 Years Uses magical and intuitive thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Death as sleep, temporary, reversible, impersonal. Or as a person who comes to get you, can be catching</li> <li>Egocentric thinking causes feelings of responsibility or guilt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarification and expanded answers.</li> <li>Permission to attend funeral with assistance</li> <li>Acceptance of feelings without qualification, corrections or judgement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoid euphemisms such as sleep, lost.</li> <li>Check and see if explanations are understood</li> <li>Expect repeat questions</li> <li>Acknowledge everyone’s feelings of sadness and loss. Anticipate and counteract guilt</li> <li>Look out for unusual or subtle expressions of grief</li> </ul>
<b>School Years</b> 6- 11 years Uses concrete thinking, begins rational thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Death is final, perhaps not inevitable</li> <li>Occurs to others</li> <li>Perhaps retaliatory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reassurance that grief is OK, to feel bad is normal</li> <li>Open communication and opportunity to express feelings when ready.</li> <li>Encouragement to attend the funeral</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledge adult feeling, including anger and guilt. It’s OK to cry</li> <li>Accept fluctuating grief</li> </ul>
<b>Adolescence</b> 12 years plus Begins abstract thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Death is an inevitable and universal process. It’s irreversible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reassurance, increased warmth and generous attention.</li> <li>Opportunity for open discussion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognise adult feelings as well as vulnerability due to adolescence.</li> <li>Watch for denial and possible risk taking behaviour</li> </ul>

### NOTES

- Parental behaviour is the most significant influence on child’s coping
- Children develop at different rates, have different experiences and cultural environments and vary in concern, curiosity and emotional expression.
- All children need sympathetic, non- judgemental responses from adults.
- Grieving families may need time and attention from professionals.