

11) Practical ideas

Breathing space - 'time out'

The pupil is given permission to leave class for a short time when they begin to feel overwhelmed by their grief, or just to get some personal space when upset. It is important that staff are made aware as this will avoid embarrassing scenes for either the pupil or the teacher. It is essential that the pupil does not just wander around the school but goes to a designated place and person. Identify a way in which the pupil can comfortably show they are struggling. For example: placing an item or bag on the desk; showing a card; or any other non-verbal signal to a member of staff so the pupil may leave the room without having to ask.

Pocket comforter

A pupil can discreetly carry in their pocket a soft piece of fabric or a pebble or stone. Holding on to something solid can help a pupil to remain grounded and in control if upset. Equally, touching a piece of garment that belonged to the person who has died can provide a comfort.

Diary/journal

A way to communicate with a bereaved child who finds it difficult to verbalise feelings. The pupil leaves the diary in a mutually agreed place having written or drawn whatever they wish. The teacher responds in the diary and either leaves it to be picked up or discreetly returns it to the pupil. For some pupils this may also be a way to communicate with the family/carers.

Happy/sad faces

The bereaved pupil is given images of emotions, a strip of paper with a range of feelings or a paper plate with two drawings of faces on either side, one happy, one sad. The pupil shows the image to reflect how they are feeling on a particular day. This gives the teacher an idea of how they are and therefore which approach to use.

I can... you can...

A series of four postcards with ideas about how others can help. Titles include 'To My Teacher' or 'What you can do'. A helpful communication tool is available from The Childhood Bereavement Network: **0207 843 6309**. The National Children's Bureau ncb.org.uk/shop

Creative ideas for capturing memories

An activity can support a child to communicate. Engagement in an activity often negates the need for a child to have eye contact and may help free them up to share their thoughts, feelings and memories. It also affords you an opportunity to work alongside the child to support them.

- **Memory bracelet** - Make a 'friendship bracelet' by plaiting together coloured threads. Each thread could represent a different memory or special quality of the person who has died.
- **Pom-pom** - create a small pom-pom using different colour/texture wool, again representing different memories. This pom-pom can also act as a small fidget toy as well as a reminder of the person who died.
- **Weaving** - weaving different threads representing different memories to create a small wall-hanging piece of art. Offering a selection of items to incorporate into the design can add to the detail and give individual meaning to the final piece. Weaving natural materials through some twine or grasses can make this an outdoor activity.
- **Dream-catcher** - create one of these colourful pieces in memory of a person who has died. Originally created by tribes of Native Americans using natural materials, these were hung above the beds of family members, particularly children. The belief is that all sorts of dreams get caught in the web of the dream catcher but only the good ones can pass through and slide down the feathers to the sleeper below. Bad dreams become

tangled in the protective net and are held until morning, when they burn up in the sunlight. The basis for a dream catcher can be as simple as a thin twig or flexible wire which can be shaped into a circle, or cut out the rim of a paper plate. Wool or twine is traditionally knotted in an intricate pattern but can be simply wound around the frame to create the 'web'. Using natural resources, this could make a great outdoor activity.

The activity may be used to focus on a dream for the future or a goal they wish to achieve.

- **Worry dolls** - According to legend, children in Guatemala tell their worries and fears to the Worry Dolls and place them under their pillow when they go to sleep at night. The doll 'looks after' the worry or problem during the night, so the child can sleep peacefully.

Dolls can be made by simply wrapping coloured wool around lolly sticks, pipe cleaners or sticks. As an alternative, small pom-pom pets or tassel dolls can be created with wool or fine thread or even cut out of paper and coloured in.

As they create their own worry dolls, children and young people can acknowledge their own feelings and share any worries they may have. Adults can help pupils to identify 'big' worries or issues and support them when they need additional help.

- **A memory comfort object** - Sewing something special to the inside of a piece of clothing or into a pocket can be a discreet reminder for a bereaved pupil. This could be a button, small swatch of fabric or piece of ribbon from clothing owned by the person who died, or it could be one of these items chosen by the bereaved pupil to represent a special memory.

Further resources

See *Books and resources* (included in this guide).