Bereavement Policy

This policy relates to any death of a child within the preschool, any death of a preschool child outside of the setting and any loss of a family member/friend of a preschool child

Policy statement

Many children will experience bereavement, through the loss of a parent, sibling, grandparent or friend. Children can also face the loss of a loved animal or pet, which can be as significant for them as losing a relative or friend. The term ‘bereavement’ refers to the process of grieving and mourning and is associated with a deep sense of loss and sadness. It is a natural process, but its effects can be overwhelming.

Binfield Preschool appreciates that bereavement and loss are an inevitable part of life, but are sometimes difficult to accept and understand, especially when incredibly young. We will support as best we can and provide opportunities for the child(ren) to develop their own appropriate range of emotional, spiritual and intellectual responses to manage these experiences. We believe that the ethos of our preschool, based on openness and mutual respect, provides a framework in which the experiences can be realised in an enriching manner.

The manager Emma Hone is the preschool bereavement contact, supported by the SENCo Jenna MacCormack. The manager has access to collated resources in order to support the staff. The bereavement contact will coordinate the preschool's response and will be fundamental in liaising with the bereaved family.

Procedures

Binfield preschool recognises that after a bereavement, children often feel isolated during their grief and may feel that nobody understands their feelings. We know that every experience of bereavement is unique, and it is very difficult to predict how someone will respond. Certain reactions are common to children as well as adults.

Normality
For the majority of children, whose life has been turned upside down as the result of a bereavement, the routines of preschool life can give them a sense of normality. Everything else may have fallen apart, but preschool and the staff and children within it are still there, offering a sense of security and continuity. Therefore, we will try to keep things as normal as possible for the child and try not to treat them any differently, whilst still recognising their need for comfort and reassurance.
Supporting a Child after a Bereavement

Although, after a bereavement, it is normal to want to keep family members close, we would recommend allowing children to return to preschool soon after. For young children, returning to preschool after a bereavement can provide a welcome relief from an emotionally charged atmosphere at home. The child may feel confused or overwhelmed by a grieving family. There may be a constant stream of visitors to the home expressing their own grief, which could be confusing, especially if you do not usually have many visitors. Young children can find this difficult to deal with and can sometimes blame themselves for what is going on or feel neglected while their parent(s)/relatives are so wrapped up in their own grief.

Family members struggling to deal with their own grief can sometimes overlook young children. For a child who wishes to, preschool staff can provide the opportunity to talk about what has happened with a familiar and trusted adult in relative peace and calm. Our staff know the importance of allowing a child to be a child even when deeply sad and will offer opportunities for the child to play, laugh, sing and be physical without feeling guilty.

Following a bereavement, the preschool has identified activities that will support the child(ren) to explore their feelings and memories. Some opportunities may include:

- **Telling the story**
  - Using puppets
  - Using toys
  - Using stories
  - Using playdough
- **Expressing feelings**
  - Feelings biscuits
  - Volcano/mad box
  - Water balloons
  - Bag of feathers
- **Remembering**
  - Memory box
  - Memory jar
  - Photo albums
  - Memory bracelets
- **Coping strategies**
  - Sad box
  - Worry dolls
  - Worry monster
Managing Behaviour

When a parent, sibling or close relative has died, young children can sometimes try to spare their surviving parent/family from more hurt by hiding their own grief and appearing to be OK. Alternatively, he/she may act out and show negative/violent behaviour because they are confused, angry, upset or scared by what is going on and are too young to express it in words. Preschool can be somewhere safe for them to go to escape the situation and express their grief. The staff are trained and experienced enough to:

- Listen to the child, and only speak/interrupt when deemed appropriate
- Talk to the child at a suitable level for their stage/understanding
- Offer comfort
- Support the child in interacting with the other children
- Managing behaviour so as not to cause further distress to the child

The manager, acting as bereavement contact, and/or key person will keep the parent/carer informed of all incidents of negative behaviour and will:

- work with parents/carers to devise strategies for managing the behaviour moving forward
- discuss concerns and successes with the parents/carers
- provide a realistic picture of how the child is coping
- seek professional advice/support/assistance if deemed necessary

Our staff know that each child has a different understanding of death depending on their age/stage. We are aware that preschool aged children (from 2-5 years old) tend to believe that death is reversible. They may also be convinced that it was something that they said or did that caused the person to die. We recognise that abstract concepts are not easily grasped, and it is important for the child(ren) to be spoken to in very concrete terms. We are prepared for the child to ask the same questions over and over again while making sense of what has happened and will have the patience and understanding to deal with this.

The key points for staff to identify and manage for the child are:

- curiosity about death
- expectation of death – that it is temporary or reversible
- understanding of death – that it is like sleeping—the person is dead, but only in a limited way and may continue to breathe or eat after death
- ‘magical thinking’ - understanding of the world as a mix of reality and fantasy
- feelings of guilt - believing that they are responsible for the death of a loved one, perhaps because they were ‘bad’ or wished the person would ‘go away’; they may believe that the person will come back if they are good
- worrying that other people in their life may die and who will take care of them
- being affected by the grief and sadness of family members/those around them

We recognise that young children cannot put into words how they are feeling and may instead react to loss with irritability, aggression, physical symptoms, difficulty sleeping, or regression (e.g. toilet accidents and bed-wetting)
Supporting Bereaved Children with SEND

At Binfield Preschool we do not assume that children with SEND need protection from death and dying more than most or lack the capacity to understand and do not underestimate their ability to cope with difficult situations. We will try to support children with SEND in the same way we would for any other child, by adapting our methods and applying ways to communicate with them that we know are appropriate. We will always seek advice and support from the child’s parents and external professionals as and when needed.

Death of a Child at Preschool

In the event of a death of a child at preschool, the staff will act in a planned and agreed manner so that all staff will know what is expected and can contribute their part. This will include:

- Remaining calm in order to be able to manage the situation and not distress the other children
- Calling the emergency services
- Calling the parent(s)/carer
- Calling the chair of committee, who will take on the responsibility of informing the relevant authorities (and later liaising with the press if necessary)
- Removing the other children from the scene and averting their attention from the situation

Once the situation is under control and the staff are emotionally stable enough to do so, written reports of the event will be recorded, signed, and dated by each member of staff who was in setting that day. Even those who were not directly involved in the incident. Copies will be given to the parent(s)/carer, chair of committee and all necessary authorities. A copy will also be added to the child’s file.

All staff will have the opportunity to prepare themselves for the supportive role they adopt and be given time to work through their own feelings.

As far as possible, all staff who are not on the premises will be contacted soon after the event in order to avoid anyone finding out by chance.

All the parents/carers will be told in writing at the same time as promptly as time will allow; this includes absentees. Following this, the children in preschool will be told at a time previously notified to the parents. Staff will explain at a level they know the children will understand and will be consistent in their use of terminology to ensure clear understanding of death. We will avoid terms, such as lost, passed away etc that may be misunderstood.

The preschool has a range of strategies that it may adopt in the days and weeks that follow any significant loss. The manager will make decisions about which to undertake following discussions with the family and will take into account any personal/family/religious/cultural beliefs.
The child’s key worker, or if appropriate another member of staff, will be identified to keep in touch with the family and will coordinate the sending of a card. Attendance at the funeral and other forms of remembering will be agreed by the staff and if during term time, may result in the closure of preschool. Staff will have ongoing opportunities for peer support in order to maintain their well-being. The preschool bereavement contact and key worker will take responsibility for recording details of bereavement on the child’s Record of Transfer and ensuring this information is passed to the next setting with parent’s permission.

The preschool will provide ongoing support and ensure that the anniversary of the death is remembered. We will acknowledge the role we play in supporting children with bereavement and loss and will work alongside parents/carers in this process.

Working with Parents/Carers to support children with bereavement and loss

The preschool will work alongside parents/carers to support a child after a bereavement, whether it be the loss of a family member or the loss of a peer. The parents/carers will remain the most significant support to the child in understanding death and the preschool can support parents/carers in this process by:

- Sharing with parents/carers the intentions of the preschool to act in a particular way in the event of a death and together devise a plan to best support the child
- Offering guidance to parents/carers on how they might support their child
- Sharing information with families about other sources of support e.g. CRUSE, Daisy’s Dream and other bereavement organisations
- Keeping parents/carers fully informed about the actions of the preschool throughout the immediate period of grieving
- Parents/carers will be invited to be involved in any preschool 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
- Cooperating with any official investigation by the committee/local authorities and sharing all findings with the parents/carers

Outcomes

By adopting a planned and considered approach, the pre-school can with some degree of confidence support the emotional well-being of the child(ren). As a result:

The Child(ren) will:

- Be offered support by the staff, sensitively and cooperatively
- Have the opportunity to tell their story, express their feelings, share their memories, and develop coping strategies

Staff will:

- Feel equally valued
- Be given time and space to work through their own feelings
Feel able to express their feelings
Have an opportunity to prepare for the supportive role they will adopt, including being given sufficient support, training and materials to help themselves and the child(ren)
Be aware of the needs of bereaved children and feel confident in supporting the child(ren) and offering comfort when needed
Feel adequately informed and supported to be able to develop strategies to support the child(ren)

The preschool will:
Have clear expectations about the way 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 pre-school

The parents/carers will
Be given guidance on how to support their child/children.

This document should be read alongside our SEN Policy, Confidentiality Policy and Safeguarding Policy

Useful websites:
www.cruse.org.uk  •  www.daisysdream.org.uk  •  www.youngminds.org.uk  •  www.beyondthehorizon.org.uk
www.griefencounter.org.uk  •  www.winstonswish.org.uk  •  www.childbereavement.org.uk

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