

Pilot version (2024)



Bereavement
Charter
FOR SCOTLAND



The Bereavement Charter for Children, Young People and Adults in Scotland

A Guide for Primary Schools

Many of us will experience difficulties following the death of someone we know. When that happens, it is important that we receive the support we need from the people around us.

The people we know in our neighbourhood, at work, at school or through other communities we are part of, can help by being understanding of the situation, and by offering acknowledgement and support.

The Bereavement Charter has been created to raise awareness of the ways we can all support people who are experiencing bereavement.

What is the Bereavement Charter for Scotland?

The **Bereavement Charter** describes a vision for how we can all work together to ensure adults, young people and children who are experiencing bereavement are supported.



There are also **Bereavement Charter Guidance Notes** that provide some more information about bereavement and the kind of support that people can find helpful.

Schools have a key role to play in providing a supportive environment for children and staff who have been bereaved.

How a bereaved child is supported at school will make a huge difference to their ability to cope both now and in the future.

Why is it important that schools are 'bereavement-friendly'?

Bereavement is more common than you might think

Research suggests that by the age of eight most children have experienced a bereavement of either a parent, sibling, grandparent or other close relative.

Bereavement has short and long-term negative effects on children

Experiences of caregiving and loss often have a negative impact on a child's social, emotional and physical health, educational outcomes and future functioning. For example, they have been found to place children at increased risk of anxiety or depression, social isolation, school absences, bullying and academic under-achievement.

Schools can help children to cope with bereavement

Support from family, friends and school is a key protective factor for children. Not everyone will need specialist counselling, but everyone can benefit from understanding and support from their teachers, classmates and other school staff.

Learning about death is part of life

Children see, read or hear about the impact of illness and dying in relation to people in their wider community, as well as in books, films, video games, history and science lessons, and in the media. It is therefore important that these experiences are consistently acknowledged and recognised as a common part of a child's life by adults and in their education. This is significant given that the importance of informing, including and promoting self-efficacy when someone is ill or dies has been found to support children's coping.

Schools can model positive behaviours that a child will carry with them

Attitudes and behaviours developed during childhood can follow into adulthood. Experiencing supportive environments relating to bereavement can help children to understand how to look after themselves and others in the future.

Schools are workplaces

Everyone will experience a bereavement at some stage in their life, and a supportive workplace can play an important role providing flexibility, information and social support to help someone adapt to their new circumstances.

Text adapted from Paul, S. (2022). Public health palliative care education: children and schools. In Abel, J. & A. Kellehear, A. (Eds.), Oxford Textbook of Public Health and Palliative Care (1 ed.). Oxford University Press.

Additional references:

Paul, S., & Vaswani, N. (2020). The prevalence of childhood bereavement in Scotland and its relationship with disadvantage: the significance of a public health approach to death, dying and bereavement. *Palliative Care and Social Practice*, 14.

The Bereavement-friendly Workplaces Toolkit: www.goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk

The Bereavement Charter Mark

Adopting the Bereavement Charter Mark for Schools can help your school to become a more supportive place for children and staff who are bereaved.

It is also a good way to create opportunities for your school community to learn more about bereavement and how to show understanding and provide support.

Your school will be awarded the Bereavement Charter mark if it can meet at least **four** of the following criteria:

1. All staff and parents are informed that the school is applying for the Bereavement Charter Mark and provided with access to information about bereavement support, both for adults and for children.

2. All members of the management team have read the "Supporting Managers' section of the Scottish Bereavement Friendly Workplaces Toolkit.

3. Senior Management has developed/adopted a Bereavement Policy and/or bereavement guidance for the school, covering best practice for both staff and student bereavement.



4. All classes will read and undertake an activity (eg a book or lesson) that explores themes relating to death and bereavement.

5. Staff and students have worked together to develop and display a School Bereavement Charter. (See p.4-5)

6. Staff have received an education session on understanding childhood grief.

Every three years the school should review its ability to meet the above criteria, and re-apply for the charter mark.

Developing a Bereavement Charter for your school



Working with students and staff to create your own School Bereavement Charter can help:

- raise awareness that bereavement can effect everyone.
- people understand how they can support each other through grief.
- create a compassionate culture within your school, where bereavement is acknowledged and supported.
- staff and students to understand eachother's different experiences relating to bereavement.
- create expectations about how people within your school support each other through difficult times.

Remember, you can never know what people are dealing with

Acknowledging the impact of bereavement is something that many bereaved people welcome. However, some students and staff may have good reason for not wishing to be involved in discussions about the bereavement charter. Being involved in discussing the charter should be something people opt-in to, rather than opt-out of. Ensure no-one feels awkward for not wanting to be around these discussions.

Some topics for discussion



Those who are interested in developing the charter can come together you to explore questions like:

- how might you feel if you've been bereaved?
- how would you like to be treated by students and staff if this happened?
- what could staff do to help?
- what could children do to help?
- what are the good things about how we look after eachother at our school and what could be improved?
- what would make this school a 'bereavement friendly school'?

Remember - staff experience bereavement too, and the bereavement charter is there to support everyone.

Example of a School Bereavement Charter

Below is an example of the kind of issues you might wish to consider within your local charter.

