

# Guide to Teaching and Learning about Loss and Bereavement in PSHE lessons

## 1 Introduction

*On average, 1 in every 29 children will be bereaved of a parent. That's the equivalent of one in every class.<sup>1</sup>*

For many people in the UK, talking about death is still a taboo which means that it is not something that is often talked about in families and in communities. However, it is something that impacts us all and it is important to provide the opportunity to learn about bereavement in PSHE and to support children and young people to develop the skills and understanding they need now and in the future to deal with this particular life event.

As PSHE teachers we are used to teaching about topics that many would consider sensitive and challenging. Please read this guide prior to delivering these lessons in order to be as prepared as possible to teach these lessons and ensure a safe learning environment for all.

## 2 About the lessons

### 2.1 Development of lessons

These lessons have been written by PSHE teachers working in Brighton & Hove schools and in partnership with Brighton & Hove's PSHE Service along with practitioners from the childhood bereavement charity Winston's Wish. Feedback has been sought from other teachers and this has informed the development of the lessons. The piloting phase was not possible because of the closing of schools over the summer term 2020. We ask schools to evaluate these lessons both with teachers delivering them and with pupils (Section 3.4 and Appendices B and C) and would appreciate feedback so that we can continue to develop these resources. Both forms are available on line and paper forms can be returned by post. See Section 3.4 for more details.

### 2.2 Lesson content

In this resources package you will find two lessons each for Key Stages, 1, 2, 3 and 4. We have kept the number of lessons limited as we are aware of how much there is to cover in the PSHE curriculum. The focus of these lessons is on grief and loss in relation to bereavement. Schools will want to ensure their PSHE curriculum covers a range of other losses including as a result of separation and divorce and change and transition such as moving class, school or home.

The lessons cover statutory content and the PSHE Association learning objectives outlined below:

Key Stage	Statutory PSHE content covered	<a href="#">PSHE Association Programme of Study references</a>	Learning outcomes
1	that there is a normal range of emotions (e.g. happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, nervousness) and scale of emotions that	H11 H12 H14 H15 H18	I can recognise and name some feelings I can describe how others might feel

<sup>1</sup> [www.winstonswish.org/about-us/facts-and-figures/](http://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/facts-and-figures/) | [www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/research/key-statistics.aspx](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/research/key-statistics.aspx)

	all humans experience in relation to different experiences and situation show to recognise and talk about their emotions, including having a varied vocabulary of words to use when talking about their own and others' feelings	H19 H20	I can explain what is meant by alive and dead I can tell you who I would ask for help if I needed it I can identify some ways to manage feelings of loss I can tell you who can help me with difficult feelings.
2	where and how to seek support (including recognising the triggers for seeking support), including whom in school they should speak to if they are worried about their own or someone else's mental wellbeing or ability to control their emotions (including issues arising online)	H14 H17 H18 H19 H20 H23	I can recognise and name feelings associated with sadness and loss I can explain what is meant by the word loss and grief I can respectfully discuss difficult issues I can identify who I can ask for support with difficult feelings I can describe what I would do to support a friend who felt sad I can identify three ways of coping with loss or grief
3	that mental wellbeing is a normal part of daily life, in the same way as physical health  that there is a normal range of emotions (e.g. happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, nervousness) and scale of emotions that all humans experience in relation to different experiences and situations  how to recognise and talk about their emotions, including having a varied vocabulary of words to use when talking about their own and others' feelings	H6 H12 R21 R22	I can explain one thing about the nature of grief I can identify a variety of emotions someone might experience when someone important dies. I can explain where someone can go to get help after a bereavement. I can describe a number of strategies that might help someone manage grief and loss I can support someone to get help.
4	where and how to seek support	H5. H6. H10. R11. R13.	I am able to discuss and define grief and bereavement I can describe the impact a death may have on a young person I can reflect on people and things that I can be grateful for I can describe a number of strategies that might help someone manage grief and loss I can suggest where to get help.

### 2.3 Cross-curricular links

Death will be a topic that comes up in a range of subjects including books studied in literacy and English, in the exploration of historical events, exploration of issues such as poverty, and in response to current affairs and world events. Specific learning about death in PSHE, science and RE below will strengthen ability of pupils and students to develop their own understandings and responses.

Schools may wish to consider explicit linking so that KS2 Year 5 pupils will explore this topic in Science, RE and PSHE.

#### Science

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-science-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-science-programmes-of-study>

National Curriculum Science Year 2 Programme of Study:

- Pupils should be taught to:
  - explore and compare the differences between things that are living, dead, and things that have never been alive

National Curriculum Science Year 5 Programme of Study:

- Pupils should be taught to:
  - describe the differences in the life cycles of a mammal, an amphibian, an insect and a bird

#### Religious Education (RE)

Schools will follow the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) Agreed Syllabus for RE for their areas. It is likely that this curriculum at Key Stages 2 and 3 will include references to death, the afterlife and rites of passage including funerals. This would effectively support these lessons as showing diversity of experience on the death of a loved one.

In addition, death will come up in books read in **literacy and English**.

### 2.4 Teaching and learning methodology and resources

These lesson plans follow best practice for PSHE guidance and include use of needs assessment, ground rules, active teaching and learning, assessment and calming activities.

The Key Stages 1 and 2 lesson plans use texts (picture books) as the foundation of the learning as we think this is the best way to approach these sensitive discussions. These lessons are loosely based on a Philosophy for Children approach and so encourage the gentle development of discussion and opinion giving skills whilst building pupil skills in managing difficult feelings.

The Key Stages 3 and 4 lesson plans use a range of stimulus material to prompt discussion and exploration.

Some picture book resources may need to be purchased to deliver these lessons. These, along with other resources would also be useful to have in the library for pupils to read or to share with families who may be supported by them (see Reading List below). However, many of the primary books used in these lessons can be found read online if buying resources is a challenge.

[www.winstonswish.org/suggested-reading-list/](http://www.winstonswish.org/suggested-reading-list/)

## 2.5 Representation of equality and diversity

Some diversity is shown on the PowerPoints and in some of the resources. Winston's Wish is currently working to improve the diversity shown in its website videos and will reflect this in these resources over time. We would welcome any suggestions from teachers who have identified other story books and other resources about bereavement that better represent diverse families.

Schools can ensure that all staff have understanding of the different approaches to death in the faiths represented in school. RE teaching about rites of passage as described above could be supportive to these lessons. One place to start could be [www.religionmediacentre.org.uk/factsheets/death-funeral-rituals-in-world-religions/](http://www.religionmediacentre.org.uk/factsheets/death-funeral-rituals-in-world-religions/)

## 2.6 Preparing for delivery

These lessons will need to be embedded in your school Programme of Study for PSHE. To do this:

- Identify the year group where the lessons fit best (considering any cross-curricular links).
- Review and make any changes to the lessons to support pupils or students in your setting and source necessary resources
- Identify the part of the PSHE curriculum where the lessons can be slotted in: this is likely to be in parts of the curriculum about managing difficult feelings or mental health and wellbeing
- Add reference to these lessons to the curriculum overview shared on the school website.

## 2.7 Teacher training and ongoing support

Teacher training is recommended prior to the delivery of these lessons to ensure a safe and effective learning environment for all. Some of the following suggestions for training may be beneficial.

1. Training to build understanding of how bereavement can impact on children and young people. This can be accessed via the following providers:
  - Winston's Wish offer free online training modules for primary and secondary teachers or face to face/video training days: <https://www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/professionals-and-training/>
  - Educare in partnership with Winston's Wish: <https://www.educare.co.uk/courses/dealing-with-bereavement-and-loss>
  - Creative Education <https://elearning.creativeeducation.co.uk/courses/supporting-students-with-bereavement/>
2. Training in how to deliver bereavement lessons as part of PSHE education: [www.winstonswish.org/wp-content/courses/pshe\\_elearning/index.html#/id/5ef07c876a21c6074e18e645](http://www.winstonswish.org/wp-content/courses/pshe_elearning/index.html#/id/5ef07c876a21c6074e18e645)
3. You may also wish to view the following video which sets out some of the theory behind supporting grieving children:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9rqJlbQDpk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9rqJlbQDpk)

In addition, support can be provided by the Winston's Wish Freephone National Helpline. For example, if you are not sure how to respond to a question on specific issues call this Helpline (08088 020 021 Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm) [www.winstonswish.org/helpline/](http://www.winstonswish.org/helpline/).

## Reading

- **A Child's Grief** (for supporting primary school-aged young people) <https://shop.winstonswish.org/collections/books/products/a-child-s-grief> or
- **You Just Don't Understand** (for supporting secondary school-aged young people) <https://shop.winstonswish.org/collections/books/products/you-just-don-t-understand>

will also help you prepare for these lessons.

In addition, all teachers delivering the lessons should read the following guidance on creating a safe learning environment.

### **3. Creating a safe learning environment for teaching about loss and bereavement**

As with all PSHE lessons it is very important to reflect on procedures and practices to establish a safe learning environment for pupils, students and staff. It is especially important to be mindful of how to keep pupils, students and staff safe before, during and after the lesson. Distancing techniques including the use of story will support a developmental understanding of death and loss.

#### **3.1 Before delivering the lessons:**

##### **Reflect on self**

As a teacher facilitating these sessions, it is really important that time is taken to reflect on the potential impact this may have on you as an individual and how this in turn could impact on the pupils and students in class. If you have suffered a recent and / or really difficult bereavement you may not feel able to deliver these lessons at this time. Seek support from Senior Leaders or colleagues to either opt out or team teach.

Children and young people look to the adults around them to help them develop their responses and feelings in difficult situations. It is important that teachers feel comfortable in normalising emotional responses to loss. If the teacher identifies and models that some of the discussion makes them feel sad or upset too, this will help the children see that it is OK to express these feelings and explore ways to manage them appropriately. It would not, however, be appropriate for an adult to share personal or detailed experiences of loss with the class or become very upset.

Teachers delivering these lessons will also need to have sufficient training and have given thought to how to ensure the diversity of the class, including religious difference, is reflected in the lesson and the resources as much as possible.

##### **Inform parents and carers**

It would be best practice to inform all parents and carers at the beginning of teaching about loss, grief and bereavement so that firstly, they can inform the school of any issues it could raise in their children and secondly, they can be ready to discuss issues or respond to questions that may have been prompted by this topic in school. An example letter is provided that can be amended for this purpose in Appendix A.

Parents and carers could be informed via usual curriculum information and could additionally be signposted to websites such as Winston's Wish for families who wanted extra support whilst these lessons are being delivered. Parents and carers can be reassured that the materials do not focus on any specific religious beliefs, but relate to handling the feelings related to loss and bereavement.

**Know your class**

It will be important to reflect on the needs and experiences of children and young people in the class for whom the content of the lesson may be a trigger for difficult memories. Consider the needs of children who have experienced a death of a friend or relative, are refugees, have a friend or relative with a serious illness, children with SEND and, in particular, those who are working at a different developmental stage and decide if this lesson at this time is appropriate for them. All arrangements should be discussed with the child, the school team (for example the Inclusion manager/SENCO; INAs; mentors etc) around these children and in close consultation with parent and carers.

Options to support these students may be to let them see the resources before the lesson. This often works to calm a pupil or student anxious that something might come up that is a trigger. Some students may ask to be withdrawn from the lesson, and where possible a pupil may look at the lesson in a private space on their own computer. Others may ask for a pass or note that they can produce at any point during the lesson, depending on how possible this is in your school setting. For example, it can be prearranged for older pupils or students to go to the library as and when they feel it's a bit overwhelming.

It is also important to remember teachers and support staff might not know if a child has suffered a bereavement. Although this information can be asked for from parents and carers prior to the lesson, it is vital that during the course of the lesson, you 'check in' with pupils or notice if any seem to be struggling with the content.

If appropriate, a simple confidential questionnaire can be issued to secondary age students before the topic begins (this is included with the materials for KS4). It is important that students feel reassured staff will not single them out publicly or ask questions should they identify as someone recently bereaved.

It would also be helpful for the teacher to know the different religions of children in the class and reflect some of this in the lessons (including through RE).

**Prepare carefully and identify a second member of staff**

Read through the lesson plan and resources carefully. Reflect on whether any of the content is triggering for you and how you will manage this. Reflect with colleagues how you will answer difficult questions (see Appendix D) or respond to disclosures. Prepare scripts to support you with this. Identify a second member of staff who can be in the lesson so that if a child becomes upset there is a second adult to support them whilst the teacher continues with the lesson.

**When to teach this lesson and explain it is coming**

Ensure that these lessons follow on from other related learning – perhaps on managing feelings or maintaining positive emotional and mental health and wellbeing. In the lesson before, inform pupils and students that the next two lessons will be about managing bereavement as a part of life. Acknowledge this may be difficult for some and invite anyone concerned to come and speak with you prior to the next lesson. If possible, consider teaching this lesson before a break or at the end of the day, so that pupils and students do not have to go straight into another lesson afterwards. Make sure there is someone available who can then offer support at this time.

**3.2 During the lesson:****Pre-teaching and right to pass**

Some children and young people may be supported to participate in the lesson by some pre-teaching before the lesson, some may need *right to pass* arrangements during the lesson and there may be some children for whom the lesson is not appropriate and alternative provision will be provided as discussed above.

**Revisit and share ground rules**

As a PSHE teacher you will already be using ground rules in your lessons. Revisit these at the start of lessons and particularly emphasise the following ground rules:

- guide the class to think carefully about what they share in the public setting of the classroom suggest no names are used and instead, say instead *someone I know; my friend etc.*
- discourage individual disclosures, but remind the class who they can safely share this information with
- provide a right to pass if the lesson gets too difficult
- signpost to whom they can talk to if the lesson has given rise to difficult feelings

**Manage questions and disclosures**

Have in place a question box or 'ask it basket' where children and young people can be invited to post questions – including those that you want to think about before answering. Have in place scripts that can be used and adapted to respond to questions. Discourage too many personal disclosures through the ground rules while, at the same time, reminding pupils and students about who they can talk with about a bereavement that has affected them.

If a child does share personal information, have a clear response such as; '*Thank you for sharing that with us. That must have been really difficult for you.*' Then follow-up with the child after class and signpost to further support (in the school or from other sources) if they need it.

Be prepared to refer on any concerns to your designated safeguarding lead in line with your safeguarding policy.

**Provide reassurance**

Reassure the class that when we talk about difficult or upsetting things in lessons we are doing so to understand and recognise our feelings and think about strategies that might help us to cope with these difficult, but normal and natural feelings. Model how we are strong enough to deal with these and that these feelings are important. Sometimes feelings can, for example, reveal how we felt and still feel about someone who has died.

**Signpost**

Signpost pupils and students to key members of staff within school who they may wish to talk to about any issues raised during the lesson. Remind the group of where they can go to get help and signpost children to local and national organisations that they could contact for help and support. This can include the Winston's Wish online chat or email service [www.winstonswish.org/](http://www.winstonswish.org/), and also ChildLine [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk) and The Mix for teenagers [www.themix.org.uk](http://www.themix.org.uk)

**3.3 After the lesson**

Provide some space for any pupils or students who want to discuss issues arising from the lesson. Reflect on responses to questions raised with supportive colleagues. Evaluate the lesson with pupils and students and use this to improve the programme.

### 3.4 Evaluating the learning

In order to ensure that these lessons achieve their objectives, feedback and evaluation after delivery would be greatly appreciated. The use of questionnaires, focus groups or other established routines ensure that the delivery of lessons has been evaluated with both the teachers delivering them and with pupils in order to establish whether the lessons enabled pupils to achieve the learning outcomes and whether their experience of this learning was safe and comfortable. We also appreciate that there are many demands on your time. An evaluation sheet for **teachers** can be completed online here: [www.tfaforms.com/4856790](http://www.tfaforms.com/4856790) – see **Appendix B** for a paper version.

Questions for teachers:

- Which PSHE lessons did you teach?
- Are the lesson objectives and learning outcomes clear? What could be improved?
- Are the lesson plans clear? What could be improved?
- Are the PowerPoint presentations sufficiently supportive of the lesson plans? What could be improved?
- Do you have all of the resources and materials you require to deliver the lessons? What could be improved?
- Is there a sufficient mix of activities to keep pupils interested? What could be improved?
- Do you feel the material is appropriate to a variety of abilities within one class? Are sufficient differentiation and extension tasks suggested? What could be improved?
- What did your class find the most helpful activity?
- And the least helpful activity?
- Is there anything you would like to be covered in the lessons that isn't?
- Did you learn anything that surprised you? What was it?
- Does it feel comfortable to be teaching this subject? Is the Guide to Teaching and Learning about Loss and Bereavement in PSHE lessons useful? What could be improved?
- Any other comments.

A standard evaluation questionnaire for **pupils and students** is attached as **Appendix C**. These questions could be used to facilitate class or group discussion or could be completed individually. You may need to make small changes to ensure that the questions used are age and development appropriate.

Questions for pupils and students

- What are two things you have learnt about grief, loss and bereavement?
- What is the most helpful thing you have learnt?
- Is there anything you would have liked to be covered in the lessons and wasn't?
- Do you feel better informed about how to support a friend who has been bereaved?
- What two strategies to manage the feelings that may come with grief and loss do you think are the most helpful?
- Did you learn anything that surprised you? What was it?
- Did it feel comfortable to be studying this subject in school?
- Would you like to talk to anyone about how you feel after these lessons?
- What school year are you in?

Please send any completed questionnaires to the address below or by email to [education@winstonswish.org](mailto:education@winstonswish.org). Thank you.

PSHE Evaluations, Winston's Wish, 17 Royal Crescent, Cheltenham. GL50 3DA

## **4 Skill development as part of teaching and learning about loss and bereavement**

As with all PSHE teaching, the development of skills is of central importance. The main focus for skill development in lessons about bereavement is in finding helpful ways to express feelings and thoughts and in knowing where to look for help. Pupils and students should be encouraged to consider how they can safely express their own feelings around loss and bereavement and how they can support others to do so. They should also look at how and where they can get help for themselves or their friends inside and outside school, as well as ways in which they can help their friends or others who have experienced a bereavement.

Pupils and students should be given opportunities to practice these skills through things such as discussion, role play, scenario responses and identifying suitable support. Whilst the lessons provide ideas for coping strategies this is not about denying or fixing difficult feelings, but living with them and allowing them to take their course. A key skill is to increase pupils' and students' learning about what are normal responses and feelings when someone dies, and what we mean by grief.

## **5 Some approaches to answering questions about loss, grief and bereavement**

### **Principles:**

- If you need to buy time: respond with 'That's a good question, I am going to think about how to answer that and get back to you'
- In some cases, it might be appropriate to ask pupils and students what they think the answer to the question might be, in addition to adding your own thoughts
- Talk with colleagues, parents and carers, faith leaders etc. about how to best respond
- In responses, try to be truthful, and use simple and clear language, without euphemisms
- Recognise different religious and other beliefs about death and that this is something we develop our understanding or beliefs about through life
- Check in with the pupils to find out if they have understood, or need to know anything further.

See Appendix D for some guidance on answering some questions pupils may ask. Further information on talking about death to children is here: [www.winstonswish.org/how-to-talk-to-a-bereaved-child/](http://www.winstonswish.org/how-to-talk-to-a-bereaved-child/) and some guidance for answering questions from Winston's Wish is here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yh8WHeEEhVE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yh8WHeEEhVE)

The primary lesson plans use story books as a way to introduce the topic of death and, to answer some of the questions that children may have. By hearing what happened in the story, children can process and make sense of what may have happened in their own lives, and provide some answers to questions they find it difficult to put into words. Further books can be found here: [www.winstonswish.org/suggested-reading-list/](http://www.winstonswish.org/suggested-reading-list/)

## **6 Thank you**

Thank you for your commitment to delivering these lessons which we believe will be of great value to your pupils and students both now and in their future lives.

## Appendix A

### Example letter to parents and carers prior to the delivery of the lessons on loss, grief and bereavement.

Dear parents and carers

{Next term} we will be delivering two lessons on loss, grief and bereavement to year {X} as part of our PSHE curriculum.

Loss, grief and bereavement are an inevitable part of our lives, so members of our school community will have experienced significant losses or will do so in the future. We think it is important to provide {children / young people} with the skills they need to manage difficult feelings, to understand grief and be able to support others.

Our teachers have been trained to deliver this sensitive area of the curriculum and will use age appropriate materials {story books / film clips / poems} to support learning.

It is possible your child will come home and ask you questions about this topic. You may find it helpful to look at the information and resources on the website of Winston's Wish, a child bereavement charity or to watch the following short video which explains one way of looking at grief and grieving.

[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9rqJlbQDpk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9rqJlbQDpk)

If you would like to know more about these lessons please contact {add name of class teacher}

**Most importantly, if your child has experienced a significant loss or bereavement, recently or in the past, or if there is a family member or friend who is seriously ill, please contact your child's {PSHE / class teacher}. We can discuss with you whether it is appropriate for them to be in the lesson and be prepared to give them any additional support they may need.**

Signed...

## Appendix B – Teacher evaluation form

See below for a copy of the form, an online version can be found [here](#) and a downloadable PDF version [here](#).

### **Evaluation of the Winston's Wish PSHE lessons on loss, grief and bereavement - teachers' feedback form.**

Thank you for delivering our PSHE lessons on loss, grief and bereavement. We would like to know about your experience of these lessons and the resources you've used. Any answers you give will help us to adapt and improve the material. Please give as much feedback as possible in your answers.

Which PSHE lessons did you teach?

- KS1
- KS2
- KS3
- KS4

Are the lesson objectives and learning outcomes clear? What could be improved?

Are the lesson plans clear? What could be improved?

Are the PowerPoint presentations sufficiently supportive of the lesson plans? What could be improved?

Do you have all of the resources and materials you require to deliver the lessons? What could be improved?

Is there a sufficient mix of activities to keep pupils interested? What could be improved?

Do you feel the material is appropriate to a variety of abilities within one class? Are sufficient differentiation and extension tasks suggested? What could be improved?

What did your class find the most helpful activity?

And the least helpful activity?

Is there anything you would like to be covered in the lessons that isn't?

Did you learn anything that surprised you? What was it?

Does it feel comfortable to be teaching this subject? Is the Guide to Teaching and Learning about Loss and Bereavement in PSHE lessons useful? What could be improved?

Any other comments?

*Thank you very much for your feedback!*

Your contact details

Name

Email address

*This is just in case we want to ask you for further feedback - we won't send you marketing emails unless you have already opted in. You can change your preferences at any time by contacting us on the details below.*

*Email us at [supportercare@winstonswish.org](mailto:supportercare@winstonswish.org)*

*Visit our website [winstonswish.org/contact-updates](http://winstonswish.org/contact-updates)*

*Call us on 01242 515157*

*Write to us at Winston's Wish, 17 Royal Crescent, Cheltenham, GL50 3DA*

*Please either email completed forms back to [education@winstonswish.org](mailto:education@winstonswish.org) or send them in the post to PSHE Evaluation Feedback, Winston's Wish, 17 Royal Crescent, Cheltenham, GL50 3DA. Thank you.*

## Appendix C – Pupil and student evaluation forms

This form can be found as a downloadable PDF [here](#).

### Evaluation of the PSHE lessons on Loss, grief and bereavement

*Teacher note: These questions could be used to facilitate discussion or as a questionnaire for pupils.*

**The people who devised these lessons for the PHSE curriculum about grief, loss and bereavement would like to know if you have found the content helpful. They will use your answers to adapt and improve them.**

1. What are two things you have learnt about grief, loss and bereavement?

1.

2.

2. What is the most helpful thing you have learnt?

3. Is there anything you would have liked to be covered in the lessons that isn't?

4. Do you feel better informed about how to support a friend who has been bereaved? *(Please tick one box)*

Yes – a lot

Yes – a little

No – not really

No – not at all

Don't know

5. What two strategies to manage the feelings that may come with grief and loss do you think are the most helpful?

1.

2.

6. Did you learn anything that surprised you? What was it?

7. Did it feel comfortable to be studying this subject in school? *(Please tick one box)*

Yes – a lot

Yes – a little

Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable

No – not really

No – not at all

Don't know

8. Would you like to talk to anyone about how you feel after these lessons?

*(If 'yes', please tell us your name so that someone can make time to talk with you privately.*

*Name \_\_\_\_\_).*

9. What school year are you in?

**Thank you very much for answering these questions!**

*Note for teachers: please either email completed forms back to [education@winstonswish.org](mailto:education@winstonswish.org) or send by post to Winston's Wish, 17 Royal Crescent, Cheltenham, GL50 3DA. Thank you.*

## Appendix D - Questions and suggested responses

You will find some additional scripts for responding to questions about death and dying here. It will be important to adapt responses so they are appropriate for the age and developmental level of the pupils or students. Remember the key skill above of suggesting the question goes into the question box so that a balanced response can be developed. Some suggested wording is shown in italics below the questions.

### **Where has Mummy gone?**

The child may simply need to be told again that:

*'It's very sad. Mummy has died. It's not the same as going to another house or another town. Her body stopped working and she died.'*

If the question is about what happens after someone dies, you could say something like:

*'When someone dies, their body stops working, they can't feel, hear see, touch; their body doesn't work and the person doesn't need their head and body anymore.'*

### **Do you believe in Heaven?**

Give careful thought to responding to this and other personal questions. Children and young people are impacted by our beliefs. A safe response is to reflect with the child or children that there are lots of different beliefs about what happens to people when they die and that some of these depend on people's religious beliefs. Pupils and students can be encouraged to talk with their families or faith leaders about this. Suggest that as they grow up they will develop their own beliefs.

You could say: *'That's a very interesting question; what do you believe?'*

*'People have many different beliefs about what happens when someone dies, this can depend on a family's religion, or culture, or individual belief. What does your family believe? What we do know is that people can't tell us what happens once they have died and so no one can say that a person's belief is wrong.'*

### **Does dying hurt?**

This is a question to be careful in answering because children can easily become frightened by the answer: however, some young people may have had experience of relatives' pain management treatment.

You could simply say: *'No, it doesn't hurt to die and it doesn't hurt to be dead.'*

If it is a general question or if you know the circumstances that have prompted a child's question (for example, if someone is seriously ill), you could say: *'When someone is very ill, the doctors can give people medicine to reduce and ease any pain a person can feel.'*

If you know that the person the child is asking about died suddenly, for example, in a road traffic collision or by suicide, you could say: *'No, they died very quickly.'*

**Will I see Dad again?**

Even for seemingly simple questions, it is important to consider the child or young person's faith beliefs.

You could say: *'When someone dies, we know that they can't come back to life for us to see them or hold them again. We can still talk about them, and we will always have our memories of them. What do your family think?'*

**Why did he have to die?**

Acknowledge that this feels unjust.

You could say: *'It doesn't seem fair, does it? Everyone wishes he hadn't died. But everything that is alive will die one day. Most of the time, it is because they are very old and their body wears out. Sometimes, they have an accident or an illness that means their body stops working. His heart stopped beating and his brain stopped thinking – and he died.'*

**Will this sadness ever go away?**

There are a number of theories around grief, such as Worden ('Tasks of Mourning'), Stroebe and Schut ('Dual Process Model of Grief'), and Klass ('Continuing Bonds', but these lessons use the concept of 'Growing around grief' as developed by Tonkin. Before the lesson, it can be useful to watch the adaptation of Tonkin's theory made by Winston's Wish, which can be found in Key Stage 3 Lesson 1 ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9rqJlbQDpk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9rqJlbQDpk)) and read the 'Growing around grief' handouts developed for use with some Key Stages (KS2 & KS3 in particular) to familiarise yourself with this and assist you in answering this question.

You could say: *'There will probably always be some times when you feel this sad but, hopefully, there will be many, many more times when you feel happy.'*

**How would I know if someone/something has died?**

This can helpfully link to science lessons, for example to questions about: What is needed to keep things alive? What happens when one of these things is not present? What happens when your heart stops beating? Using the environment and work on life cycles: How do we know that these leaves are not growing?

You could say: *'We can tell when a person or animal dies because their body stops working; their heart stops beating, their lungs stop breathing and their brain stops thinking.'* 'How do you think we could tell if a plant had died?'

**Did my dog die because I was naughty?**

Children often assume they are to blame when bad things happen: reassurance is important.

You could say: *'No. Animals die because their body stops working the way it should. This happens because their body has grown very old, or there is an accident, or an illness causes the body to stop working. It is nothing to do with anything you did or didn't do – or thought or didn't think.'*

**Why couldn't they make my sister better?**

It is hard for a child to accept there are limits to what grown-ups can do.

You could say: *'Even though all the doctors worked very hard, there are times when a person's illness can't be cured or their body can't be made better with the medicines or operations available. Sometimes this happens, not everyone can be made well again.'*

**When will I die?**

This needs a fairly straightforward answer.

You could say: *'Well, most people die in old age, when they are very old. I expect you will be well over 100!'*

**What happens to a dead person's body?**

We need to answer children's questions, but we also need to be mindful of parents and carers and ensure they are aware of the sort of answers you will give if this question comes up. This is why it is so helpful to ensure parents are informed of the programme and this question is spoken about with parents before the lesson. Winston's Wish has some very useful guidance on what may be involved in 'Saying Goodbye' to someone, including viewing the body, the funeral, burial and cremation:

<https://www.winstonswish.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/WW-Saying-Goodbye.pdf>

It is always important when answering this question to remember to emphasise that when someone has died, they can no longer feel, think, or know anything that is happening.

You could say: *'After someone has died, their body no longer works. There are many customs that people follow to respect the body of someone who has died; the most common ones are called 'burial' when the person's body is placed in a hole in the ground and covered with soft soil or 'cremation' when the person's body is turned into soft ash in a hot fire. Remember, the body can't feel any pain.'*

**I want to go to the funeral but mum won't let me**

Think about cultural/religious reasons as to why the child may not be able to attend. If possible have a conversation with the parent or carer to explain what the child has said to you. It is not your role to change their minds, but to understand the situation from their perspective so that the child can be supported in school. Are there other ways that the child can celebrate the person's life if they are unable to attend? Ideally, it is important that children are given a choice in terms of how they want to remember the person that has died. See the Winston's Wish guidance on 'Saying Goodbye' <https://www.winstonswish.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/WW-Saying-Goodbye.pdf>. The following link may be helpful if families would like ideas on alternative goodbyes:

[www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-funerals-alternative-goodbyes/](http://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-funerals-alternative-goodbyes/)

You could say: *'I am sorry you are upset about this, but perhaps mum has good reasons. Have you been able to talk with your family about how this feels to you?'*

**I am being forced to go to the funeral, I don't want to go**

Again, see the above information – children need to have relevant information conveyed to them to support them in understanding the situation. It may be that they don't fully understand what a funeral is. A conversation with the parent or carer is important so that understanding can be obtained. Asking open questions to the child, so that they are able not to be influenced or directed in any way is helpful. Look at what other information is needed to help the child understand. It is important that their opinions are listened to and that they feel valued when decisions are being made. See the Winston's Wish guidance on 'Saying Goodbye' <https://www.winstonswish.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/WW-Saying-Goodbye.pdf>. The following link may also be helpful to signpost parents and carers towards: [www.winstonswish.org/should-children-attend-funeral/](http://www.winstonswish.org/should-children-attend-funeral/)

You could say: *'I am sorry you are upset about this, but perhaps mum has good reasons. Have you been able to talk with your family about how this feels to you?'*

**Why can't I go and see dad's body?**

The decision whether or not to see ('view') the body of the person after they have died will be a personal one: this is just as true for children as it is for adults. Often parents and carers believe that it would be too distressing for a child – or for themselves. Or they think that the final image of the body of the person who has died will block out other images. Mental images of the person alive will, in time, be more powerful than the images of them after death. Seeing the physical body of the person who has died can help a child begin the process of understanding that death is final and can also play a part of saying goodbye.

We feel this is something the family would be better speaking to the child about. You may want to explore the child's thoughts around what 'dad's body' might look like, or feel like. Sometimes the undertaker will be able to have a child friendly conversation with the child. See the Winston's Wish guidance on 'Saying Goodbye' <https://www.winstonswish.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/WW-Saying-Goodbye.pdf> Another useful information page to signpost parents and carers to is: [www.winstonswish.org/should-children-view-the-body/?fbclid=IwAR11TyyXH7Bo61c3bxxKIJ7U\\_8WyHhKMxRbel3Ct0d9d4xLclv-cmXQZqQw](http://www.winstonswish.org/should-children-view-the-body/?fbclid=IwAR11TyyXH7Bo61c3bxxKIJ7U_8WyHhKMxRbel3Ct0d9d4xLclv-cmXQZqQw)

You could say: *'There might be lots of reasons for this. Have you talked to your grown-up about this? What would it mean to you to go to see their body?'*

**Why are some people cremated and some people buried?**

If this is a general question, you can talk about religious and cultural reasons; personal choice; lack of physical space in terms of burials. You may want to explore the differences between the two. This may prompt a visit to a local burial ground to explore different ways of remembering those that have died.

You could say: *'All around the world, different faiths and cultures have different practices when a person dies. Families also have traditions and choices about what happens to the body after someone has died.'*

**I (parent/carer) can't tell them (child/ren) what is happening: will you tell them, they trust you?**

The hardest thing for a parent is telling your child that you are going to die or that someone important has died. However, for a child, it is important to be able to trust those caring for you to tell you even the hardest things. The work here is more with understanding the parent's perspective. Whilst the primary need as a parent is to protect our children, our role is also to prepare them, inform them and support them through what is happening. If you feel it is necessary and you feel confident, you can offer to be with them when they speak with the child or ask if there is another member of their family who can be with them.

Think about where else you could seek support from if this question comes up. It is really important for children to hear information from adults who they have a relationship with, and whilst you may have this relationship with the child, you will not always be there. Ask if the parent or carer has any support from a health organisation such as a hospice who could advise further. It may assist the family to make contact with a bereavement charity to talk through the words they could use. Winston's Wish can be contacted both through their Freephone National Helpline (08088 020 021 Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm) and also online. Details of how can be found on these links: [www.winstonswish.org/helpline/](http://www.winstonswish.org/helpline/) [www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/ask-a-question/](http://www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/ask-a-question/) [www.winstonswish.org/online-chat/](http://www.winstonswish.org/online-chat/)

You could say: *'I understand how hard this is for you. I think it would be really important for them to hear this from you but let's have a think together how that can best happen...'*

**I wished them dead, is it my fault?**

It is important to help children realise that emotions are real things that can feel impossible to cope with at times. During a long drawn-out illness, for example, the pressure and distress that is felt can at times feel overwhelming. It is a natural reaction to want everything to stop, so that either the person who is ill is not suffering or your own life is not being impacted so negatively at that time. This does not mean you didn't care, it means the feelings were just too overwhelming to cope with at that time. You could continue to explore that everyone can feel overwhelmed and almost paralysed with emotions at times of their lives. It might help to think about the ideas from PSHE lessons that may help with managing difficult feelings.

You could say: *'No, it isn't. Nothing you said, did or thought made them die – nor anything you didn't say or didn't do. But it can be hard to feel like that now and also natural to have felt like that before.'*

**I find it hard to concentrate at school, sometimes I don't come to school, other times I get into trouble as I'm not keeping up or staying focused.**

Explain that it is natural to find it hard to concentrate on school work when you are grieving. Some people find that concentrating on work and being at school helps provide a way to not think about what has happened. What can help is finding a middle ground. Talking to a teacher or someone you trust can help you to find a way to manage through the day. There are lots of ways we can support people in school; we'll find one that works for you and your individual response to what has happened and is happening. The most important thing is to talk about it. For further reading on this: [www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/support-for-schools/](http://www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/support-for-schools/)

You could say: *'I'm not surprised, considering what you have been going through. Let's think of some ways we can help you with that...'*

**I can't talk to my parent, I don't want to upset them/worry them/put more on them.**

Help children to understand that many people think this. Often, they feel they need to protect their parent, as they can see they are struggling too. However, many parents and carers also tell us that they worry and feel more stressed when they don't know how their child is feeling. They may feel that, even though hearing their child's pain is hard, it is easier and better to know about it so that they can look for ways through and some support together. Without this, they may constantly worry about their child.

If a child really feels they can't talk to a parent then it would be good to explore with them if there are any other adults in their family they can talk to, or a trusted adult in school, or online bereavement support services.

You could say: *'Do you wonder if your parent is feeling the same thing? Maybe we could think about how to share how you are feeling with them? Is there anyone else you could talk to?'*