

PEOPLE (CHILDREN'S SERVICES)

DEVON HOSPITALS SHORT STAY SCHOOL

BEREAVEMENT GUIDELINES

Death is something that most people choose not to think about, so when faced with it we often find ourselves ill prepared.

The purpose of these guidelines is to help everyone involved at a time when there may be shock, upset and confusion, ensuring that there is effective communication and support at a very difficult time.

Working with terminally ill children:

Children who are terminally ill, whilst they are still able, may benefit enormously from normal routines, such as attending school. Children who spend long periods of time in hospital, or are admitted on a regular basis, usually welcome attending school as an opportunity to have some normality in their lives.

Continuing to take part in school routines as much as possible can give a feeling of achievement, with the emphasis on living rather than dying. It can also give back a sense of identity as a person rather than a patient.

This can present challenges; sensitive and honest communication between the family and professionals involved will help to overcome these, hopefully enriching the lives of all those who come into contact with the child or young person.

Careful consideration needs to be given to:

- The duration of the school session, ensuring that the pupil does not become too tired.
- The location for schooling: would it be more appropriate in a cubicle, giving the pupil privacy if they required it?
- The make up of the group, if it was felt appropriate for a pupil to attend the schoolroom with other pupils. Classmates will often ask questions and these need to be addressed sensitively.
- The nature and content of the lesson.
- The use of an alternative planning sheet.
- The purchase of any specific resources to support the pupil.
- The involvement of the family and close friends.
- Infection control issues.

- Liaison with the home school, another hospital school, any Schools Company provision.
- Possible home or Children's Hospice visits.

Action following the death of a pupil:

It is likely that one or more staff members will have worked closely with a pupil at some time in his or her life, possibly in the time directly leading up to the child's death. Staff may have also spent time with the pupil's family and friends and become involved on a more personal level.

It may, therefore, be appropriate for members of staff to continue to be involved in the days and weeks following the death of a pupil.

This is a time when other services are quickly withdrawn and families lose much of the support that was previously available in the care of their child.

Careful consideration needs to be given to:

- Attendance at the funeral.
- The wishes of the family.
- Any cultural or religious implications.
- Direct involvement in the funeral.
- Cover for staff who may be going to the funeral.
- Possible closure of the school.
- Future involvement with the family.
- Liaison with multi disciplinary team re staff regarding what to say to other pupils/parents/carers who may have questions about the child who has died.
- Emotional support for the staff members themselves, who are also experiencing the bereavement. It is important for staff to understand their own need for emotional support.
- Time during staff meetings to reflect on practice and possible improvements that could be made when working with terminally ill pupils, families , carers and home schools.