

Bereavement Policy

It is recognised that within the Artisans community some will be affected by bereavement at some time, and that this will create very varied responses between individuals. Artisans aims to do all it can to provide compassionate, positive and respectful support to those responding to bereavement.

We will try at all times to know when and how these events may affect the children and adults within Artisans. We recognise that grief has many parts and that it has ripples for many years especially at significant family occasions, festivals and anniversaries. We will endeavour to be respectful and prepared for these occasions and respond to them with the best we can offer for the needs of those involved and their place on the path of grief at the time.

People

Bereavements within Artisans may be any of the following:

Children experiencing bereavement of both close and distant relatives and friends.

Staff experiencing bereavement of both close and distant relatives and friends.

The death of a child in artisans.

The death of a member of staff.

An incident at artisans which may have multiple deaths.

Children

We aim to support children and their families as best we can, responding whenever possible to the uniqueness of their situation in a respectful and positive manner.

A child's experience of grief is very different from an adult's and this must be remembered at all times.

When Artisans is informed of a death, Ruth M should be informed immediately. She will then have further discussions with the family if necessary and will provide all staff with accurate details of the situation as soon as possible.

If a child loses a close relative we are often the only part of their life that is not upside down, Artisans needs to stay that way and be the place and people we have always been. Within this we need to acknowledge to them that we know in order to show them and those for whom they grieve respect as well as to make it clear that conversation is open and available if they want to choose it.

Firstly, we will be honest, and will not use euphemism. Children are very literal and euphemism can lead to them becoming distrustful of the adult who told them and make their grief more complicated later.

We will "Kiss" - keep it short and simple

This age is a highly creative and imaginative one and if you leave room for doubt they are likely to create a situation even more scary in their heads.

Remember - it is almost impossible to make it worse so long as you follow the lead of the child.

Staff we concentrate on being available for them and remove their own emotions from the situation, it is essential teachers do not give them more to handle by expecting or transferring their emotions onto the children in their words or behaviour. The children need us as adults.

If teachers who need support should speak to Ruth M. Remember that cuddles are for the children's needs, not yours, so cuddle them if they want it not because you feel helpless to help them.

Ruth M has had training in working with grieving children and will provide support to staff. Also try www.winstonswish.org.uk whose school guide is available in the policy file.

Childhood and grieving

The primary difference between bereaved adults and children is that intense emotional and behavioral expressions are not continuous in children. A child's grief may appear more intermittent and brief than that of an adult, but, in fact, it usually lasts longer. The work of mourning in childhood may need to be addressed again and again in appropriate ways at different developmental levels. As the child grows he or she will revisit the loss repeatedly, especially during significant life events

Children do not react to loss in the same ways as adults. Grieving children may not display their feelings as openly as adults. Grieving children may not withdraw into preoccupation with thoughts of the deceased person; they often immerse themselves in activities (i.e., they may be sad one minute and then playing outside with friends the next). Often adults incorrectly interpret this behavior to mean the child "doesn't really understand" or has already "gotten over" the death. Neither is true; children's minds protect them from thoughts and feelings that are too powerful. Children's grieving episodes are shortened because they

cannot rationally explore all their thoughts and feelings as adults can. Additionally, children often have difficulty articulating their feelings about grief. A grieving child's behavior may "speak" louder than any words he or she could speak. Strong feelings of anger and fears of abandonment or death may be evident in the behaviors of grieving children. Children often play death games as a way of working out their feelings and anxieties in a relatively safe setting. These games are familiar to the children and provide safe opportunities to express their feelings.

It is important to remember these differences, we cannot imagine what they are feeling because however close we have been we are not them. It can be very confusing for children to have adult emotions transferred to them, it can make them feel their emotions are wrong or simply give them more emotions to handle. It is important we contain their emotion, allow them to describe it their way in their language. There is a fine balance between providing them with vocabulary to express themselves and pre-empting their feelings, so we will try just to listen and use non emotive language as it carries less overtone (do you feel big or small, colourful or dark, bouncy or slow). We will teach more vocabulary in structured ways through planning.

Our Role

Normality

Children will have enough chaos at home, emotional and practical, we need to be a sanctuary of normality where everything is as it always was. That in itself will give them the best support and starting block.

Relief from grief

Home is and will be for a long time full of emotion. It is important they share sadness with their family so they understand that the whole family miss the individual and loved them. It is important by contrast that we are not emotionally charged. It gives the children a chance to be free from the pressure of emotion, which goes back to children's emotional cycles being much shorter than adults.

Outlet for grief

Children fight hard to protect those they care for. Children may try to "protect" their family by holding back their emotions so that they don't make others cry. They should not need to protect us and therefore are free to feel. It is important therefore that any emotions teachers express are clearly explained "it makes me sad that you miss your Mummy but I am glad you can let me know, shall we draw a picture of her / play a game she liked..."

Listen and listen and then reply

We understand that it is hard enough for adults to articulate this kind of thing. Some of the emotions children feel will be crystal clear, others will be muddled and dirty; just listen and accept them. If the children ask questions answers will always be given honestly this includes not knowing the answer too, it allows the children not to know the answers too.

Childhood

Being sad is hard work and very grown up. As above the children need time to be neither and just be children without any trace of guilt.

Keep the individual a part of conversation

Talk about the person who died with them in natural conversation, memories are happy things and treasures that need to be kept vibrant.

Positive feedback and supporting families

Artisans will try to give the family positive accounts from each day. We will also ensure we keep a regular and open dialogue about conversations, actions, behaviours and especially any changes we notice. We recognise that what is expressed at home and at Artisans may be very different and that we need to work in partnership to achieve the best support for the children.

Artisans has access to a range of bodies who can offer help directly. We are also able to provide stories and activity suggestions if these are appreciated. We recognise that these may be appropriate instantly or months and years later.

Communications with the family will be through Ruth M and the key worker of the children. Others will be kept informed as necessary, or may be approached but should not initiate conversations without prior discussion with Ruth M or the key worker.

Possible emotions

They may feel anything at all but in study these are the most common

Shock, numbness (a survival tactic of humanity), anger (why did you hurt me this way – to those alive and those who have died), guilt (this is most common at this age with egocentric and imaginative thinking structures so strong), fear (who will be next, is it catching), loneliness, relief (didn't like the hospital, it is absolute not up and down), emptiness, confusion

Activities

Read books, I have several I will bring in.

Tell the story with puppets.

Draw : the colour of your feelings, a memory etc

Pick a face from a sheet of emotions

Talk lots - how do you say goodbye, happy things, any questions?....

Staff

We aim to support staff as best we can, responding whenever possible to the uniqueness of their situation in a compassionate, respectful and positive manner.

When Artisans is informed of a death, Ruth M should be informed immediately. She will then have further discussions with the member of staff if necessary and will provide all staff with accurate details of the situation as soon as possible.

Death of a close relative (parent, sibling, spouse/partner, child) will lead to a minimum of one week's compassionate leave which will be arranged individually between Ruth M and the staff member. It is expected that more leave will be taken but that the pattern of this and its structure will vary between individuals and will therefore be decided at the time.

Death of unborn children will be discussed individually.

Death of other relatives and friends (in laws, aunts, uncles, cousins etc) will be discussed individually. In some cases leave may be appropriate, this will usually be unpaid, it will be arranged with Ruth M at the time.

Staff should feel free to ask for support as they feel necessary for them and every effort will be made to accommodate this if reasonably possible. If staff feel unable to perform professionally leave will be given, in most cases this will be unpaid. If concerns occur regarding a member of staff and how they are coping at work leave may be recommended to them.

Staff supporting each other should also seek guidance from Ruth M where necessary, who will refer to professional bodies as necessary.

Death within the Artisans Community

If not present, Ruth M should be contacted immediately. If Ruth M is a fatality Nick Martin should be contacted immediately by a senior member of staff, and senior staff and Nick will then follow this policy together. Ofsted also need to be informed within 48 hours.

On site emergencies should be handled in accordance with the health and safety and first aid policies.

Parents / partner or spouse and the emergency services should be called immediately, if possible by Ruth M.

If death occurs outside of Artisans to a member of the Artisans community Ruth M should be informed as soon as possible and she will then co-ordinate informing other staff.

If at all possible, Artisans will remain operational as usual. If this is neither possible nor a realistic expectation Ruth M will inform all staff that it is closed and when we will re open. A minimum of three members of staff should be at Artisans to inform parents as they arrive. Parents for other affected days will then be called by these staff.

If it is agreed with by the family Artisans will close on the day of the funeral to allow those who wish to attend. This will be given as compassionate leave to staff.

We understand that at times of grief being together can form a vital part of understanding for both children and adults. For this reason Artisans will endeavour to create the minimum realistic disruption to their opening but when open are likely to re-evaluate the routines in response to the needs of those present.

Ruth M will seek professional advice as soon as possible and may request professionals to come to Artisans. It is recognised that this may be needed for several months and on the anniversary.