

Sharing sad news with children/young people and parents

Preparation

The response to each death should be considered individually, based on family wishes, and whether it is deemed appropriate that the news is shared with the wider school community.

If news of a death is being circulated, there needs to be clarity regarding what information can be shared with the wider community and what is already known, e.g. what is in the public domain, what has been agreed by the family.

If any member of staff feels unable to share sad news, they need to know that this is okay and alternative arrangements should be made.

Be aware of children/young people who have recently been bereaved.

In the current context consider how you will share information. At the moment, parents (and pupils if appropriate) could be told of the event through letter or by email (see template below). The most vulnerable pupils might be told separately by phone or by their parent following a call to the parent, if this is felt to be better for them. Check in with these pupils regularly following the event.

Guidance and suggested wording:

Be clear with parents regarding what information can be shared with children/young people. Adults should answer questions open and honestly. It is okay for any adult to say *'I/we don't know'* or *'maybe we will be able to find out later'*.

Acknowledge that different people will react/feel differently. Advise parents to tell children that they should try to talk to someone if they feel really upset, worried, anxious, can't sleep, etc. Say that it is also okay to carry on as they normally would and have fun.

Encourage parents to allow children to talk about the person who died. Consider facilitating means of expressing feelings such as painting, drawing, writing, etc.

Perhaps encourage parents to end conversations with "There will be opportunities for us all to have time to think, talk and remember ... in our own way. We will talk to you again at some point about how we want to do this."

Helpful information on talking to children/young people about deaths in relation to COVID-19 can be found on the Winstons Wish website:

<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-schools-support-children-young-people/>

See below for sample letters.

Sample Letter - Informing Parents

Dear Parents/Carers,

You may have heard...../ It is with sadness and regret that I have to inform you...(known facts of the incident)

As a school community, we are all deeply affected by this tragedy/
I am sure that you will wish to join me and my staff in offering our condolences and sympathy to those affected/to ...(refer to individuals/families affected only where it is appropriate to release this information)

I have now spoken to all pupils and staff in school about what has happened and you will need to be aware of the following arrangements that we have now made the plans:

- *any changes to timings of school day / organisation of the school*
- *lunch time arrangements*
- *changes to staffing*
- *arrangements for specific classes/year groups*
- *emotional support has been arranged for school staff to assist us in supporting the children and our wider school community including yourselves as parents/carers*
- *provision of further information as relevant)*

(If appropriate, advice about media contacts)

I think it is very important that we all take the time to talk with and reassure children about what has happened. This is likely to be a very difficult time for us as a school community and we will all need to support each other. We have some information in school about loss and bereavement and how to support children and each other so please ask if you would like to have any of this.

We appreciate the expressions of concern we have received, however, it would be helpful if parents did not telephone the school during this time so we can keep phones and staff free to manage the situation.

Yours faithfully

Sample Letter - Informing Pupils during Coronavirus

Dear Pupil,

I am writing to share with you some sad news. You may have heard that ...[add details of the event] .

X's condition is / is not related to the Coronavirus. X's parents have told us that X had ...{add details of the event}. He was taken to a hospital that specialises in helping people with this condition. His/her parents are with him and the doctors and nurses are doing all that they can to make him/her better. We do not know what will happen.

We know that this news will come as a shock to you at a time when we are faced with sad news each day and we cannot yet be together as a school community. However, we are sure that X and his/her family would like to know that they are all in our thoughts and, if you would like to, perhaps you could remember them in your prayers and/or send a message or picture via email for us to pass on when the time is right.

We will keep you updated with news as we receive it and would ask you to take extra special care of yourselves and each other. It is important to talk about the things that are happening to people that we care about, so please talk to a trusted adult in a way that is safe during this time. Although we cannot see each other for a while, we will still be there for each other and we are together.

Warmest Regards/Sending Good Wishes/Thinking of You/