



Bereavement Support &
Grief Education

Youth Assembly Survey Report
May - July 2024



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Background

Marie Curie approached Youth Assembly in April 2024 regarding a project they have been leading on for the last three years which is focused on addressing the need for better information and support for pupils on grief education and bereavement support.

The programme has included piloting interactive teacher training on supporting bereaved young people and lesson materials for teachers to use. It has also included surveys with parents, carers and young people to better understand their views on whether loss/ bereavement should be discussed in school and to gather their experiences of support provided by schools for young people who have been bereaved.

The programme is supported by a Programme Board made up of Marie Curie staff, Cruse, Public Health Agency, Education Authority, a bereavement counsellor, primary and post primary teaching staff, Childhood Bereavement Network staff, a parent and young people, some of whom have experience of bereavement. The views of children and young people are central to all phases of the programme. Youth representatives from the Secondary Schools Students Union (SSUNI), the Cancer Fund for Children (CFFC) and CRUSE have been involved so far this work.

Marie Curie asked Youth Assembly Members to work with them on this project to ensure a wider youth demographic. Youth Assembly Members completed an online survey which was open from 15 May 2024 until 5 July 2024. The survey was also shared with members of the Youth Assembly Consultation forum. In total, there were 105 responses.

Youth Assembly Members will attend a workshop event in Parliament Buildings on 1 August 2024 where they will discuss the research and explore the following questions:

- What does effective grief education in schools look like?
- How do we make it happen?
- What does effective bereavement support in schools look like?
- How do we make it happen?

The Survey

Youth Assembly Members were given the following information:

The [Marie Curie Schools Bereavement Programme](#) is interested in strengthening school-based loss and bereavement information and support for pupils.

The Youth Assembly will meet with Marie Curie over the summer to discuss their proposals and hear directly from you about your experiences and ideas.

Please let us know your views. Ideally, ask a teacher in school the three questions below first and before you fill in this survey. If you can't, don't worry just fill in the survey anyway!

Questions for school:

1. Does our school have a bereavement policy?
2. Are pupils asked their views on it?
3. Do teachers get training in bereavement support?

IMPORTANT

Some people might find thinking about this subject or answering these questions upsetting. If you do, please do talk to a friend or adult you trust.

Please note that you do not have to complete this survey if you find it difficult.

You can also find helpful information from the following organisations:

Cruse- [Hope Again](#) Helpline- 0808 808 1677

Winston's Wish- <https://www.winstonswish.org/>

The questions:

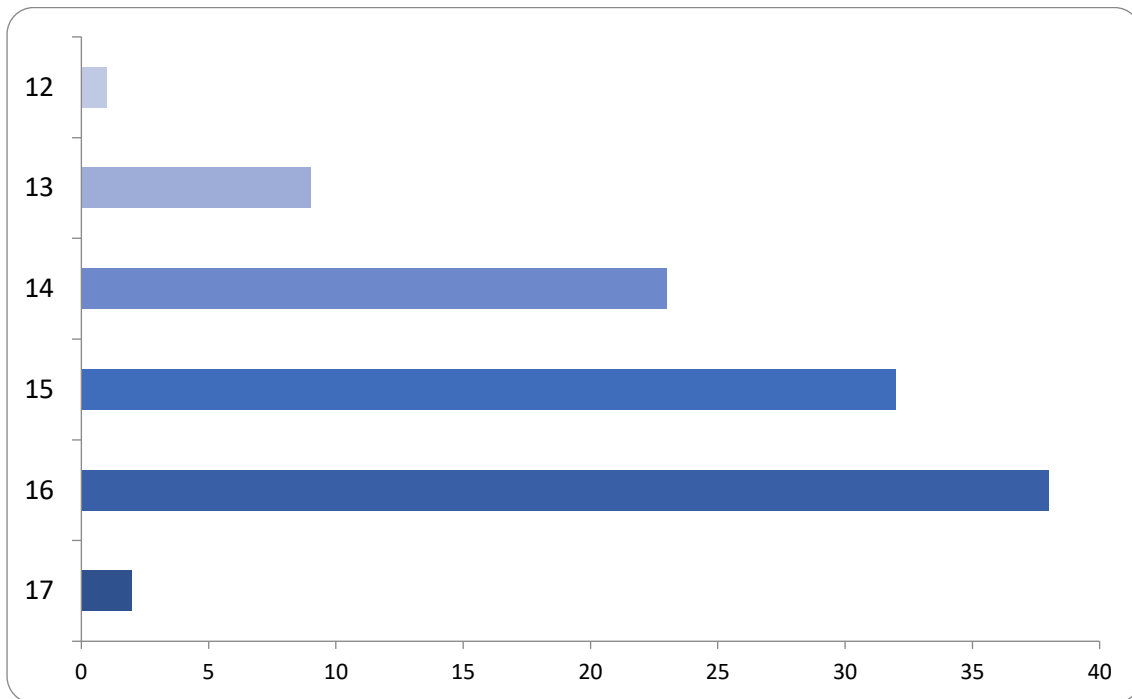
1. What age are you?
2. What type of school do you attend? - school type
3. Does your school have a bereavement policy?
4. Would you know where to find your school's bereavement policy or have you ever seen it?

5. If you answered yes to Q4 above, have you been asked for your views on what should be included in your school's bereavement policy?
6. Have any of the teachers in your school received training on how to support bereaved pupils?
7. How important do you think it is for teachers to have training on how to respond to a pupil who has been bereaved?
8. How important do you think it is for schools to offer grief education?
9. Any other comments/ views on school-based bereavement information and support or grief education please add them here.

Analysis of responses

1. What age are you?

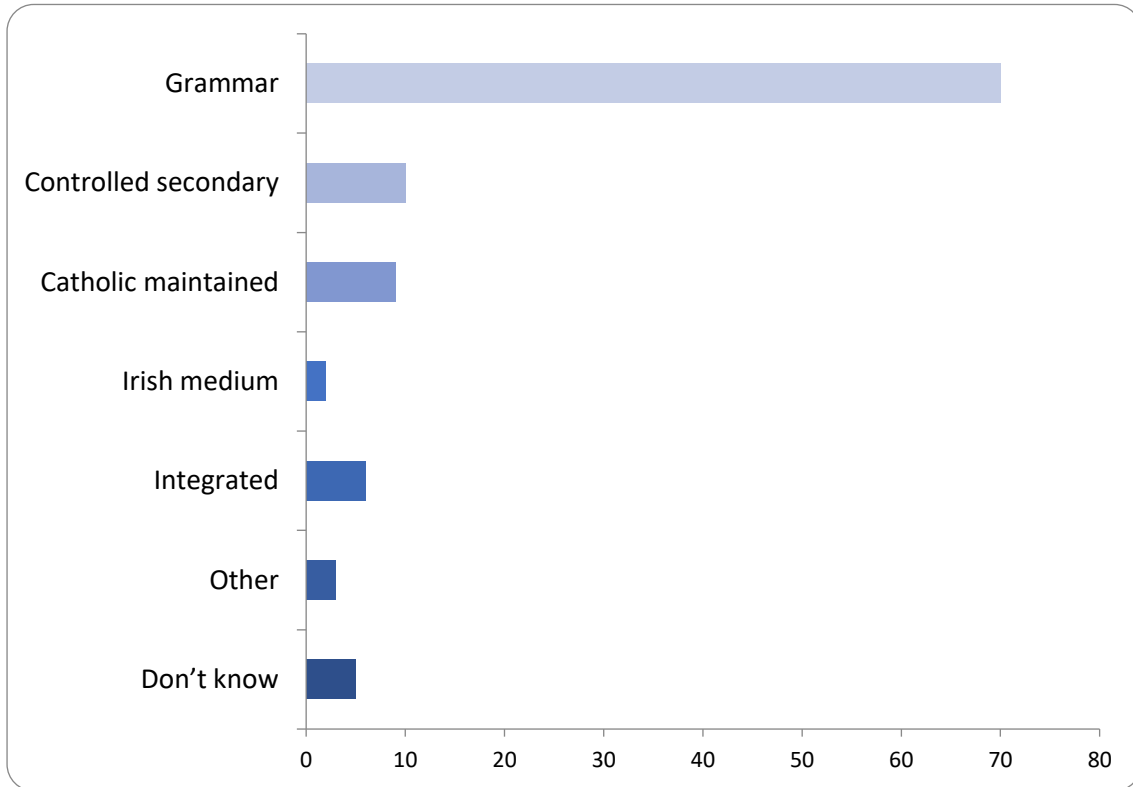
Respondents were between 12 and 17. The vast majority (89%) of the 105 respondents fell into the 14-16 age bracket.



Option	Total	Percent
12	1	0.95%
13	9	8.57%
14	23	21.90%
15	32	30.48%
16	38	36.19%
17	2	1.90%
18	0	0.00%
other	0	0.00%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

2. What type of school do you attend?

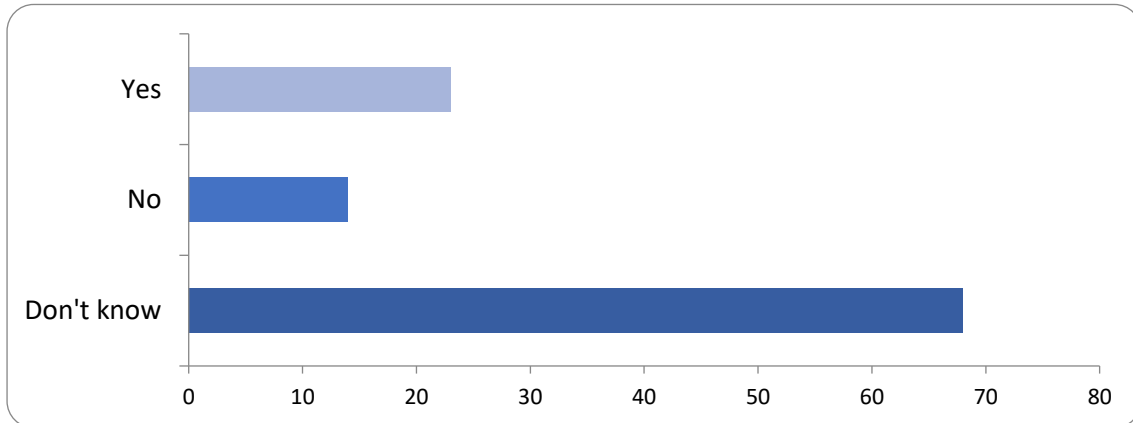
Respondents were from all education sectors however the vast majority (67%) cited Grammar as their school type.



Option	Total	Percent
Grammar	70	66.67%
Controlled secondary	10	9.52%
Catholic maintained	9	8.57%
Irish medium	2	1.90%
Integrated	6	5.71%
Other	3	2.86%
Don't know	5	4.76%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

3. Does your school have a bereavement policy?

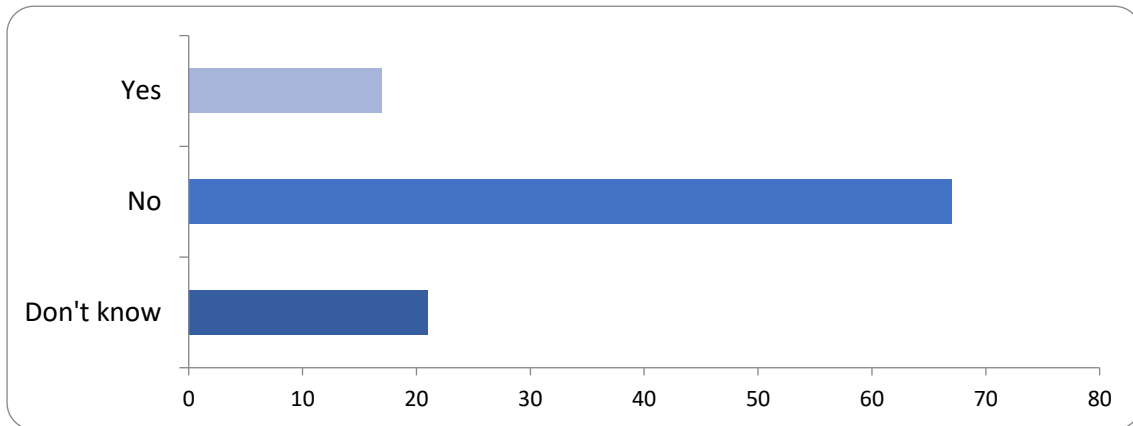
Most respondents (65%) said that they did not know if their school had a bereavement policy. Only 22% said that their school had a bereavement policy.



Option	Total	Percent
Yes	23	21.90%
No	14	13.33%
Don't know	68	64.76%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

4. Would you know where to find your school's bereavement policy or have you ever seen it?

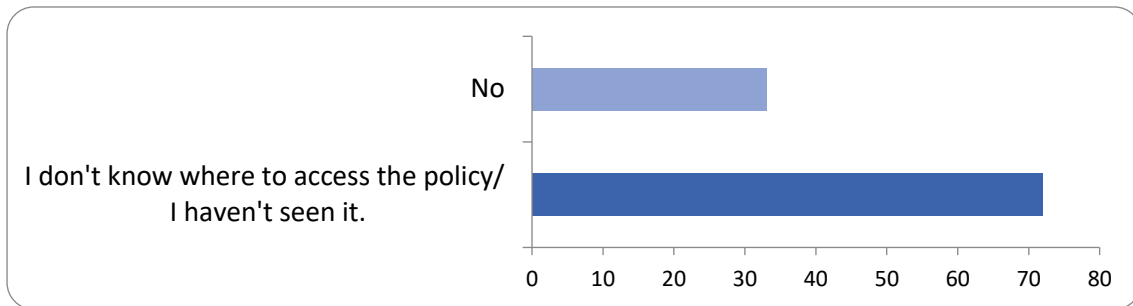
The vast majority of respondents (84%) said that they had not seen their school's bereavement policy or would not know where to find it.



Option	Total	Percent
Yes	17	16.19%
No	67	63.81%
Don't know	21	20.00%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

5. If you answered yes to Q4 above, have you been asked for your views on what should be included in your school's bereavement policy?

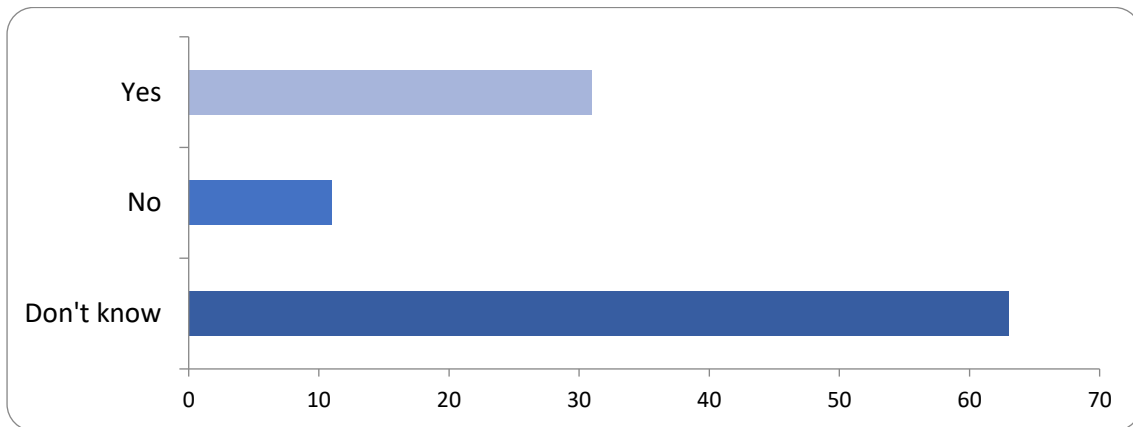
All of the respondents answered this question. All stated that they had not been asked for their views on the school's policy or had not seen the policy.



Option	Total	Percent
Yes	0	0.00%
No	33	31.43%
I don't know where to access the policy/ I haven't seen it.	72	68.57%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

6. Have any of the teachers in your school received training on how to support bereaved pupils?

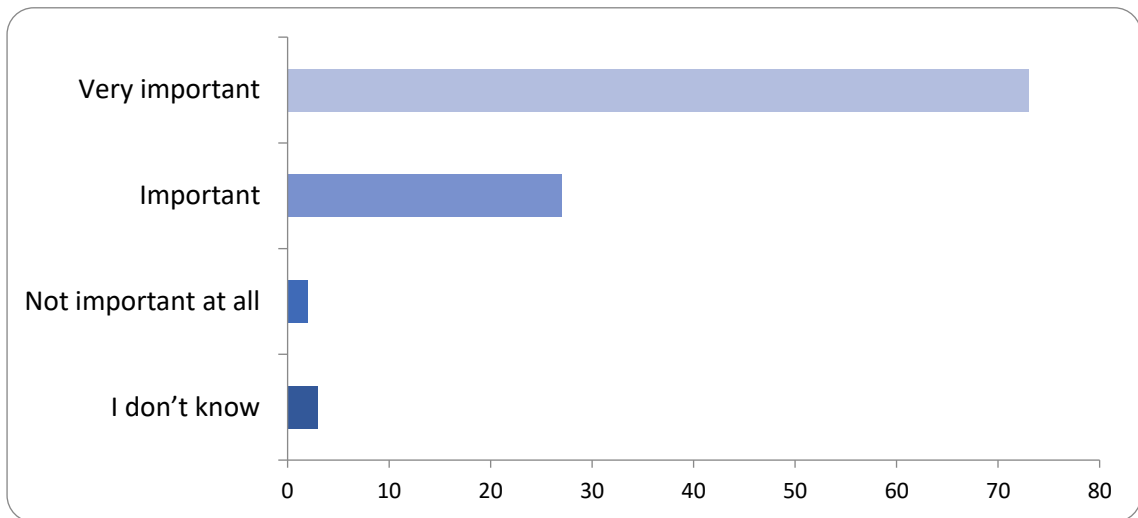
Most of the respondents (60%) did not know if teachers had received training on how to support bereaved pupils. 29% said that teachers in their school had received training.



Option	Total	Percent
Yes	31	29.52%
No	11	10.48%
Don't know	63	60.00%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

7. How important do you think it is for teachers to have training on how to respond to a pupil who has been bereaved?

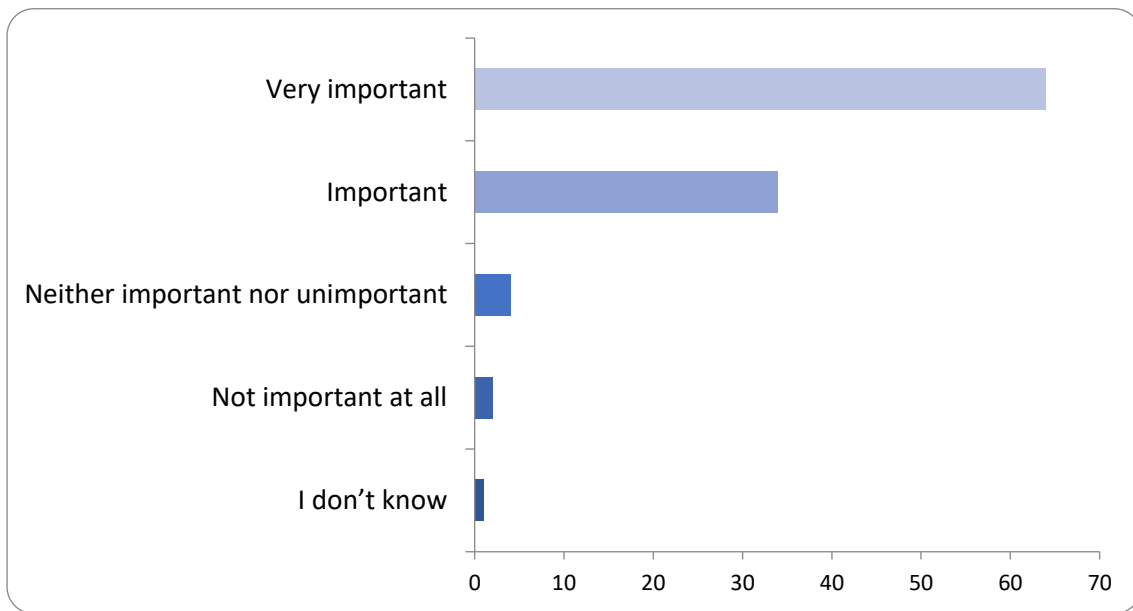
Almost all respondents (96%) felt that it is important or very important for teachers to have training on how to respond to a pupil who has been bereaved.



Option	Total	Percent
Very important	73	69.52%
Important	27	25.71%
Neither important nor unimportant	0	0.00%
Not important	0	0.00%
Not important at all	2	1.90%
I don't know	3	2.86%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

8. How important do you think it is for schools to offer grief education?

Almost all respondents (93%) felt that it is important or very important for schools to offer grief education.



Option	Total	Percent
Very important	64	60.95%
Important	34	32.38%
Neither important nor unimportant	4	3.81%
Not important	0	0.00%
Not important at all	2	1.90%
I don't know	1	0.95%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

9. Any other comments/ views on school-based bereavement information and support or grief education.

There were 38 responses to this question. Responses have been changed to correct grammar and spelling. Otherwise, each comment is included in full below.

Additional Comments from Respondents

My school has a senior student-run bereavement team but most students wouldn't know how to access it.

Although my school does not have an official bereavement policy, mental health services are available which can help students facing bereavement. However, I also feel that raising more awareness and support for students facing bereavement is a positive development.

Every time a student mentions a bereavement to a teacher, the teachers normally don't know what to do.

Do not go up to check up on someone who experienced the death of a loved one several times a day. Most of them do not want to be seen as a distraction or burden to people as many people are checking up on them at the same time. Therefore, it's important to be sensitive around pupils suffering a hard time. But also allowing these pupils with special benefits like allowing them to walk around the school during class. No sanctions for these pupils if they fail to complete any homework.

I feel it's very important. It's part of life and not everyone will deal with it the same way. Think at my age staff and teachers should help kids deal with it. As some teens would go of the rails with hormones etc. and not know how to cope.

I lost my mother not that long ago and I was only offered counselling.

Bereavement policies should be compulsory in every school.

I believe that a bereavement policy should be implemented in every school and when they are introduced it should not be strict e.g. after 6 months of a bereavement the student will be immediately penalised for behavioural issues. Grief is not linear and policies should reflect this therefore teachers or staff should work closely with bereaved pupils.

All staff should have mandatory bereavement training as pupils should feel safe talking to any member of staff they are comfortable with rather only being able to speak to a head of year/key stage with this specialised training.

All pupils should also be educated on how to deal with grief or help a grieving friend through the curriculum or special talks or assemblies. This will ensure pupils will be equipped with vital life skills as almost everyone will experience a bereavement and studies have shown there is at least one pupil bereaved of a parent or sibling in each classroom.

I also feel that as pupils enter a new school for example when starting secondary education, they should be asked of prior bereavements and any way they would require support from the school for example someone to speak to close to anniversaries. As someone who was bereaved of a sibling before entering my current school, I feel this would be very effective.

Schools should do more to support students after a bereavement and have better systems in place to do so. For example, having a part time strategy for students in the weeks after their return from school if required.

It's not very well known in schools, and certainly a lot do not have one in general. Most offer support just through in-school or outside therapists and sources.

My school does not have an independent bereavement policy. It is part of a wider policy.

They have posters and leaflets about Cruse bereavement.

I am, along with another student, part of Cruse's youth advisory group. I can provide more information if that is helpful.

I asked my school office if there was a bereavement policy, they had to check and come back to me as they didn't know. I then got emailed a copy as it is not available on our school website. The policy says that school council had input to the policy. No one in my class is a member of the school council. The policy is dated December 2021 and to be reviewed every two years. The school office told me that if any pupil needed bereavement support that they can talk to the councillors within school who are all trained on bereavement support.

My school doesn't really bring up the topic of grief in my pastoral classes (Learning for Life and Work) even though I think it's very important that young people should get guidance on how to handle the emotional stress that grief causes.

It is not widely spoken about on a public forum, rather handled more privately within my school through the pastoral care team.

I asked a few teachers in my school about the subject and not many knew if there was an actual protocol if something happens.

I think it's often thought of as a taboo subject and not talked about how you can speak to someone who is grieving and how to cope with grief yourself.

I don't ever remember there being any sort of presentation or workshop based on grief education and, as school is an institution that has a duty of care to us and that we will attend it for a significant part of our lives, I feel let down that I am unsure if I would be adequately supported in the event of a bereavement.

I always afraid that death will come to me or a loved one as if I were to lose a loved one, it would leave me with no point and ultimately no ambition in life.

My school has a bereavement programme but it is part of a wider well-being programme. They do not teach it and before asking I did not know of it but in terms of wellbeing (which includes grief and bereavement in our school) it is very much known to students how to get that help.

Whilst many schools do offer bereavement support, I feel that there should be a greater emphasis placed on it. Just as RSE and pastoral periods are compulsory, I feel as though education on bereavement and how to cope with it/ help others should be too.

I think my school does a very good job informing us on grief education and how to access help if we need it. As a class, we spoke to a grief counsellor who gave a deeper insight into understanding the different stages of grief and explained to us about the common misconceptions people have about grief.

In my Learning for Life and Work class, we have never covered the topic of grief and bereavement which I think is quite disappointing as I've been in my school for three years now and I'm going into my GCSEs in September. This is because I know some people that have lost loved ones and they perhaps constantly might not have support outside of school. I feel like it's important for all schools to educate and discuss about this topic as it's a very important part of life and that everyone is going to experience grief at some point in their life. It's vital that teachers should be able to receive proper training so they can teach and help pupils with grief and bereavement. Schools should also have a special policy and area in the school to benefit pupils e.g. someone to talk to.

I think that schools should outline their policy and give information on the steps they take along with the way they will go about the topic, such as in my school when a pupil passed away they held an assembly in honour of them etc. and held a non-uniform day to give money to the family. This was a good way to encircle everyone so they can feel comfortable, but grief education should be more developed so we can be respectful of the matter. Schools should find other ways to develop the way they educate themselves and the younger generation.

I feel that students should know how to access this support.

In my experience, this is an area not spoken of very much. Especially, since "Covid," bereavement & grief are words that seem to be omitted and avoided. Whilst there has been much discussion after Covid, on anxiety stress, isolation, depression escalating within the community, no one seems to want to highlight the bereavement & grief Covid brought. The youth have never really recovered. Support is evident for anxiety and depression however there seems to be little by the way of grief counselling. It's avoided, as it is a very painful, difficult topic to bring up. I hear many in school talking about mental health issues with reference to anxiety, depression, but rarely bereavement or grief. Teachers don't talk about it. It seems to be avoided as no one knows how-to talk about it. However, it needs to be talked about as there is a lot of deep pain with bereavement especially focusing on the devastation of Covid. Losing someone is difficult, and needs careful, experienced management when talking about it. Schools never addressed the areas of grief, it was assumed

your family did that at home! Support is offered, I believe but I don't know what that entails. Time for change.

Schools should offer extensions on homeworks and/or other tests/ assignments to allow a pupil to emotionally recover. They should send pupils catch-up work so they are prepared for their return to the classroom.

It is an aspect of life that many cannot deal with without help, support and education, especially young people. They rely on people to provide protect and educate them so grief education and support should be a vital aspect of schooling and a bereavement policy should not be negotiable or optional within any school.

I believe that everyone suffers through grief at some point in their life so, having grief education can and will help you later in life.

Does our school have a bereavement policy? No, but we would have a very strong pastoral presence in place to support a pupil where the parent or child has an illness or is a bereaved. Do teachers get training in bereavement support? Yes, we are part of an education authority initiative called "being well doing well" and all staff receive an intense bereavement and loss training session. By all staff I mean teaching, care taker, office staff etc. every person employed receives that training.

I feel that all schools should have a bereavement support for students as many youths may find it difficult to face the loss of loved ones as well as the pressure from school.

I think schools (grammar schools especially) are really only looking for academic prosperity in students and when a student's grades decline they don't seem to ever ask why (speaking from personal experience). I think they should enquire as to if anything has happened in their life to affect their grades and make sure there isn't an emphasis put solely on grades but a change in the student as a person due to loss. They should have a support system in place and follow through with it. I know personally when I told a teacher about an issue I only received one session of support and then I was forgotten about.

I find that support for grief was heavily offered when one of our pupils had passed. Although this is not available all the time therefore leaving many pupils struggling.

Summary of respondents' comments

In summary, the respondents felt that school-based bereavement support and grief education should be offered in all schools and should be a mandatory part of the curriculum. They emphasised the importance of a school bereavement policy which they can co-design and which is well advertised and understood across the school.

Some mentioned that, in their school, the bereavement policy is part of a wider policy such as a 'wellbeing' policy. Others said that, where a bereavement policy exists, it is out of date, not well understood by pupils and staff and that pupils were not consulted on the policy. They felt that the policy should be made widely available for all (e.g. on the school website) and that it should be regularly reviewed by the whole school community.

Some respondents mentioned good practice that is happening in their school such as talks with trained grief counsellors, posters highlighting support services and compulsory training for all staff in the school.

They felt that training should be mandatory for adults working in a school. They indicated that this is an important subject to understand and that is often ignored or considered taboo.

The vast majority stated that bereavement and grief have not been part of their formal learning. They felt that it could be part of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) lessons or Learning for Life and Work (LLW) and should be compulsory for all.

Some respondents highlighted the duty of care a school has to its pupils and the importance of putting the young person first and tailoring the support to their individual circumstances. Others gave suggestions on measures which they would find helpful.

One respondent mentioned that more could be done during the transition from primary to secondary school to ensure that staff in the new school are informed if a bereavement has occurred.

One respondent stated that their school (a grammar school) was too concerned about academic success and didn't place enough emphasis on the wellbeing of its pupils.

Another stated that there has been much discussion after Covid on anxiety, stress, isolation and depression; however, the bereavement and grief that came with Covid has now been forgotten.

Respondents felt that bereavement is a part of life. They recognised that young people need to develop their own coping skills and be better able to support each other.

Conclusions

There were 105 responses.

Survey Demographic

1. Respondents were between 12 and 17. The vast majority (89%) of the 105 respondents fell into the 14-16 age bracket.
2. Respondents were from all education sectors however the vast majority (67%) cited Grammar as their school type.

Knowledge of bereavement policy

3. Most respondents (65%) said that they did not know if their school had a bereavement policy. Only 22% said that their school had a bereavement policy.
4. The vast majority of respondents (84%) said that they had not seen or would not know where to find their school's policy.
5. None of the 105 respondents said they had been asked for their views on the school's policy.

Teacher Training

6. Most of the respondents (60%) did not know if teachers had received training on how to support bereaved pupils. 29% said that teachers in their school had received training.
7. Almost all respondents (96%) felt that it is important or very important for teachers to have training on how to respond to a pupil who has been bereaved

Importance of grief education

8. Almost all respondents (93%) felt that it is important or very important for schools to offer grief education.