

Li and her colleagues (2005) are an indication of a cultural difference.

Obviously, further research is needed to clarify this point. However, I would like to emphasise that such research will mainly be of theoretical relevance. As far as caring for the bereaved is concerned, it is most important to remember that support from family and friends helps to reduce distress and depression, even though one should accept that ultimately it might not soften the pain felt over the loss of a loved one. ●

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WEBWATCH

Bereavement in schools

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WITH INCREDIBLE NOISE the sea of teenage children swept into the classroom and took to their seats. As a young trainee I watched the much older, experienced member of staff call names on the register, one by one, above the good-natured hum of voices. Then one name was called and the mood instantly changed. Nobody replied. The name was called again. After a few moments of silence a boy at the front of the class, his voice filled with suppressed anger, said 'He died Sir – don't you remember? At the end of last term'. 'Oh yes, so he did!' the teacher replied, continuing to mark the register with barely a pause. The class remained silent, staring, until the teacher eventually closed the register and casually slipped his pen into his top pocket. A moment later the bell rang. The children filed out of the classroom with voices barely raised above a whisper, and were swallowed up by the jostling crowds in the corridors.

I am sure that incidents such as this are rare in UK schools today. Yet in an article published in 2000, the authors found that 94% of 145 sampled Australian schools had a plan in place to manage traumatic incidents and identify good practice and programmes related to grief education, compared with only 15% of the 200 UK schools sampled. Fortunately all UK schools are now required to have a policy detailing their response to a major incident or crisis.

When a pupil suffers the loss of a family member, or a fellow pupil or member of staff dies, the whole school community is affected and having a solid, workable plan to help staff and pupils cope is vital. There are some useful online resources that can be adapted to suit the needs of individual schools. The charity **Winston's Wish** provides specialised in-school staff training. Its website at www.winstonswish.org.uk offers many resources that can be adapted by schools wherever they may be. In the Schools/Professionals section the downloadable **Schools Information Pack** is written by teachers and includes advice on talking to pupils and age-related responses. **Strategy**

for Schools offers guidelines on informing staff, governors, pupils and parents about a death, including sample letters.

The site has some very good ideas for **lesson plans** for children of all ages within a variety of disciplines, including art, music and English, and ideas for **creative activities** connected with loss, such as memory jars, including a section for Christmas. An excellent **30-minute film**, *School Matters – Coping with Bereavement*, can be downloaded which describes how a primary and secondary school have coped with the loss of parents and pupils (this can also be purchased, after registering on the site, as a DVD from www.teachers.tv/video).

Major incidents, such as school shootings like those in Dumblane, Helsinki, Colorado and Virginia, are relatively rare but, again, highlight the need for all schools to have a crisis response in place. Much useful information on planning for crises and dealing with bereavement in schools can be found at www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu, a vast site created by the USA Center for Mental Health in Schools. The centre's School Mental Health Project addresses psychosocial and mental health concerns through school-based interventions. Access its **Resource Aid Packet**, *Responding to a Crisis at a School*, by selecting Grief and Bereavement on the search engine. This 148-page downloadable document includes a **crisis screening interview**, advice on facilitating classroom **discussion**, aftermath classroom **activities** for various ages, dealing with the **media**, organising a school-based **crisis team** and **mapping community resources**. It considers the school's role in addressing reactions to loss, building resilience in children and adolescents, identifying coping strategies, realistic goal-setting and helping bereaved students return to school. The site also provides links to many other useful websites and resources. ●

* Rowling L, Holland J (2000). Grief and school communities: the impact of social context, a comparison between Australia and England. *Death Studies* **24**(1): 35-50.