

Childhood Bereavement Network response to Revisions to the Schools Admissions Code

Introduction

1. The Childhood Bereavement Network is the hub for those supporting bereaved children and young people. We provide our members with essential support and representation, advocating for bereaved children and those supporting them.
2. For more information on our work and on this response, please contact Alison Penny, CBN Coordinator apenny@ncb.org.uk

Our proposal

3. We would like children bereaved of a parent or sibling – or those whose parent or sibling is terminally ill – to be included among those for whom schools can give admissions priority.
4. This could be achieved in two ways:
 - a) By adding to paragraph 1.9 (f) to read ‘...children of staff at the school, children whose parent or sibling has died or is terminally ill, and those eligible for the early years...’. This would also require changes to paragraphs 2.4, and the insertion of a paragraph between 1.39 and 1.39A.
 - b) By including children whose parent or sibling has died or is terminally ill among those who qualify for the pupil premium. This could be achieved by making these children eligible for free school meals, by including Widowed Parents Allowance or a DS1500 in the list of benefits which qualify claimants’ children for free school meals.

Why does this matter?

5. Bereaved children face many challenges as they adjust to life without a parent or sibling. For some, bereavement can bring additional changes, for example, a move closer to grandparents may mean a change of school, out of school activities, new friendship groups. Standard transition stages from infant to junior, junior to secondary and secondary to college, university or workplace bring a range of adjustments and losses to all children that can be particularly heightened for those who have been bereaved or are anticipating the death of a parent or sibling.
6. Children and young people need as much continuity as possible following the death of a parent or sibling. Stressful changes and disruptions which accompany or follow a death (such as moving house or school, changed household routines and childcare arrangements) are associated with worse mental health (Haine et al 2008).

7. This is also true when children and young people are facing the anticipated death of a parent or sibling
8. The longer these changes persist, the greater the detrimental effect on children and young people's behaviour (Worden, 1996).
9. The importance of access to friends who know what has happened / is happening and can continue to provide support and understanding in the future is key. It can be hard, if not impossible, to explain to new groups of people how one's parent or sibling died (especially if, for example, the death was by suicide), or about a terminal illness or why particular days or memories can trigger emotional responses
10. Children who are bereaved or facing the death of someone close may face educational challenges and require high quality education and pastoral support at a school with a 'good' or 'outstanding' OFSTED report
11. Parents may face overwhelming challenges if they have a partner or child requiring end of life care or if they need to return to work following the death of a partner and the allocated school is not convenient to their workplace or to out-of-school arrangements for the child
12. There may be very specific reasons why a particular school choice would be helpful to a bereaved pupil. For example
 - a) A child may want to attend (or avoid) the same school as the parent/sibling who died or is ill
 - b) They may wish to pursue a subject (eg music, Latin) that links them to their parent/sibling that is only offered at a particular school
 - c) There may be a particular link between a parent/sibling and a specific school (eg if the parent had been a teacher there).