



St. Richard's Hospice
CARING FOR LIFE

Supporting teachers to help children affected by Covid-19 and bereavement

Intense media coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic – including daily reports on death tolls – means death and dying is now talked about more openly. The effects of this, and other consequences of the pandemic, on children has been a key focus for the Social Work Team at St Richard's Hospice. The team realise that: “children need adults to help them understand what's going on, to help them talk about what frightens them and to help reassure them.” (The Irish Childhood Bereavement Network, 2020) In the early phases of the pandemic, the hospice team recognised staff at schools across Worcestershire played a crucial role in supporting children affected by Covid-19.

Pre and post bereavement care for children and families is part of the hospice social work role. The team knew they could use their skills to support school staff to help children affected by bereavement, and other issues caused by the pandemic.

A focus on ideas to help teachers support children both in school – but also whilst schools were closed – felt important.

Why was support needed?

Through the pandemic, children experienced:

- Bereavement
- Social isolation
- Missing their peers
- Anxiety about exams
- Fears for their future
- Concerns for loved ones
- Uncertainty

The team aimed to encourage schools to support pupils both during and after lockdown.

What did the Social Work Team do?

The team consulted local bereavement services and developed three virtual workshops for school and nursery staff on supporting children through the pandemic. More than 250 staff attended the workshops, which were advertised by the local authority.



The sessions covered topics including:

- Impact of Covid-19 on children
- Impact on children with varying needs
- Impact on bereaved children
- Covid-19 and grief
- How to support bereaved children
- Resources and useful links
- Referral process and support provided by hospices and local bereavement services

They supported staff in a number of ways, including:

- Helping teachers support children in school
 - Building the knowledge and confidence of school staff
 - Supporting teachers to recognise the need for additional support
 - Guiding staff on how to refer into local bereavement services.



The Social Work Team supporting children in the gardens of St Richard's. Picture taken before the pandemic.

The first training session was recorded and uploaded to the hospice's YouTube channel and website so others could access the information freely.

To view the session, scan the QR code below – or visit youtu.be/1gEzWIHuWsk



Alternatively, search - St Richard's Hospice: Supporting Children Through Covid 19 Grief and Loss on YouTube.

Who was involved?

- St Richard's Specialist Palliative Care Social Workers
- St Richard's Child and Family Support Practitioners
- Other local hospices were approached to ensure their referral processes were clearly outlined

What were the results?

School staff said the hospice's training informed their practice in ways including:

- How to use direct, compassionate language for dealing with death, and worries about death
- Strategies to help children remember loved ones

- Listening and giving children time, to make them feel safe
- The need for good communication lines with parents

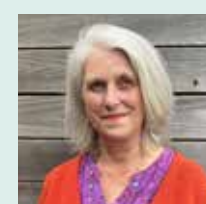
One attendee said: “I feel much better prepared to help staff and pupils deal with death.”

Conclusion

The full impact of Covid-19 on children and young people's mental health, is yet to be fully understood.

The hospice Social Work Team continues to help schools develop staff skills to support grieving children and staff wellbeing. It also supports schools to implement bereavement policies, and introduce school bereavement champions.

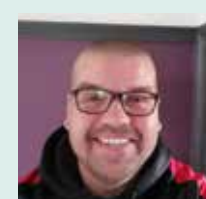
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References: The Irish Childhood Bereavement Network, 2020
www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

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