

RESOURCE
FAMILIES and
SCHOOLS

What's important to families?

www.sudc.org.uk

WINSTON'S WISH
* TRAINING PACKAGES for SCHOOLS

UK TRAUMA COUNCIL
* VIDEOS & SECONDARY SCHOOL

SUDC UK
* RESOURCES * TRAINING * VIDEOS

Other information
SUDC FOUNDATION USA
SCHOOLS RESOURCE - US

CHILD BEREAVEMENT UK
* RESOURCES * TRAINING * VIDEOS

SIBLING SUPPORT

A place of comfort and routine

IMMEDIATE SUPPORT to REPROCESSING GRIEF

Different reactions: sometimes **LOUD** sometimes WITH-DRAWN

Book List - To take to the library

growing up = new questions?

ongoing support and meetings

Schools having resources + knowledge about next steps

support on how to talk to class/peers

Teacher explaining to class what had happened or an assembly

SUDC Support in Schools

Feeling loss of agency

WHAT is NOT HELPFUL?

Organisational structure in secondary school

Schools communicating with all other parents without consulting bereaved family

Other parents giving false explanations to their children

Other parents/school not communicating that there's no reason

Zoom calls with training

Acknowledgement of child's grief

PARENT TEACHER COMMUNICATION

RAINBOW ROOM
↳ SPACES for time out

WHAT is HELPFUL?

Support with drop-off/pick up

- Earlier
- Avoid crowds/explaining
- Collecting children from office

Talking directly to children

Children want to be involved!

Schools understanding varied reactions children have

WITH TEACHERS Open + Frank discussions

Parents knowing if child has been triggered at school

Helping prepare in TRIGGERS

Teachers Making a SHARED PLAN

School checking in with parents about triggers in advance

MEMORIALS

School supporting charity effort

Fundraising

Demonstration of love and support

Short home visit from teacher or teachers

Support for children going back to school

Candles

Chat in cafe

Having something special to take to school

PERSONAL FLEXIBLE

Transition support to secondary

Having a **CARD to SHOW**

Choosing own special adult

1 Key point of contact
↳ not class teacher

Triggers e.g. PSHE

Understanding how children grieve

How this changes over time

Dear Parent or Carer and School,
This booklet aims to help suddenly bereaved brothers and sisters receive the emotional care they need. Although this resource focuses on SUDC and sibling loss, it may also be helpful if a child experiences the significant loss of a close family member. For example, following the death of parent or close grandparent or after a family break up.

What is SUDC?

One fifth of child deaths are sudden and unexpected and often it takes a long time to find out what happened, sometimes, tragically, deaths remain unexplained.

Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood (SUDC) is the sudden and unexpected death of a child between 1 and 18 years of age, which remains unexplained after a thorough investigation is conducted.

SUDC UK is a registered, national charity dedicated to raising awareness, funding research and supporting families affected by SUDC.

For more information please visit www.sudc.org.uk Please do not hesitate to contact info@sudc.org.uk or 07880 350 942 if a conversation with our team would feel helpful.



Amy's Story

My name is Amy. I lost my sister as a child and had to cope with that sudden, traumatic loss throughout primary and secondary school. I am now a teacher myself and I helped produce this resource for SUDC UK to help schools feel informed and confident after Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood.

On Christmas night, when I was nine years old, my sister Hattie, suddenly and unexpectedly died in her sleep. I experienced the sudden and traumatic loss, and all the feelings of confusion and grief attached with it, in my last two years of primary school and throughout secondary school. I had no answers to the numerous questions going through my head. As a child, and truthfully even still as an adult, it did not make sense that a perfectly healthy child could go to sleep one night and just not wake up the next morning. It was hard to think, at such a young age, I would have the rest of my life without my sister by my side; and the fact there was no apparent or explainable reason or illness that caused her death made it even harder to make sense of.

I returned to school as usual when the Christmas holidays finished, surrounded by my peers who were still full of Christmas excitement and questions of "what did you do over the Christmas holidays?" Grieving isn't your usual answer to this.

I was incredibly lucky and cannot fault the support I received. Over the holidays, my school became aware of the situation and my teacher at the time came to visit me and took me out for hot chocolate. Whilst going shopping and to a café with your teacher isn't a normal experience for all, I was just



Amy aged 9 with her sister Hattie aged 2

extremely appreciative for having the time with her, an adult who knew me so well, to just chat and feel a bit of normality outside the bubble of grief that I and all around me were in and a distraction from the unanswered questions I had. This level of support continued throughout primary school, I was well supported throughout the transition to secondary school and as I was beginning to understand my new normal the support eased. The teachers would pre-empt lessons that may have triggered me to become

upset and always gave me warning and offered me an out of class alternative if I did not think I could emotionally manage it. The whole school staff knew the situation and worked as a team to support me and my family.

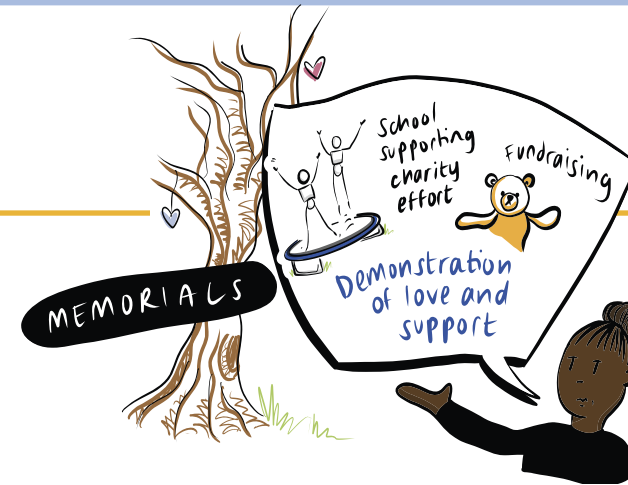
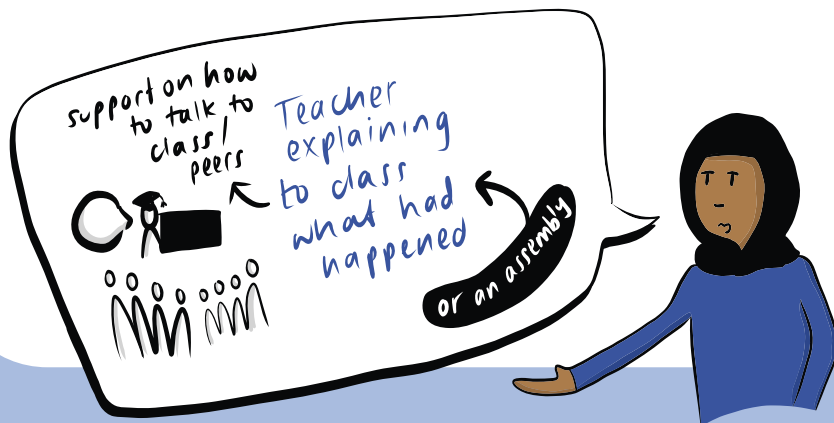
For this reason, it came as a shock to me to have completed my teacher training and had no training on how to support bereaved children. Supporting a child who has lost a sibling to SUDC is tricky. There are no answers to these questions, there are no reasons to explain what they are going through. Children will need help over the years as they grieve for their sibling and process the loss and the associated trauma at different ages. Children will have different reactions and different needs depending on their personality, experience, environment and age. This is normal and bereavement training will help you feel prepared. I hope this document is able to provide a good starting point for providing children with the best support possible in an unthinkable situation.

Immediate Support Recommendations

The first few weeks are going to be an extremely traumatic and confusing time for families affected by SUDC. Families are going to want to communicate with the school and ensure their children are being well looked after and well supported. In a time of such high emotions, it is essential they feel the school is there for them and listening to them.

Through discussions with families who have experienced SUDC, the following examples were raised as essential in support immediately after the death of a loved one:

- 1 Warmly invite the family for a meeting so you can understand exactly what happened to ensure you can help fully informed. The family need to know you care and want to communicate each step and understand any support that could help over time.
- 2 Please invest time in training. Winston's Wish and Child Bereavement UK offer a variety of training options starting with a 1 hour zoom call. This is recommended for all those directly teaching or supporting a bereaved child so that they themselves feel supported and prepared (e.g. class teachers, form tutors, pastoral care and trusted adults).



OTHER THINGS FAMILIES MENTIONED AS THOUGHTFUL, POSITIVE EXPERIENCES:

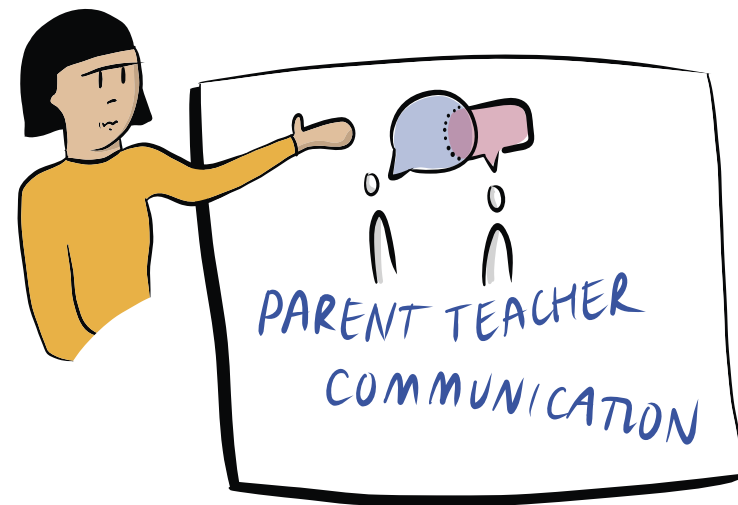
- ★ Agree with the family how the situation will be explained to the class or other children at the school. Remember to tell the bereaved pupil what is happening and what will be said.
- ★ Discussions around a memorial in the school – if the child who dies was a pupil at the school.
- ★ Allowing a home comfort into school, e.g. a teddy belonging to the sibling.
- ★ Some children can feel uncomfortable or shy about flowers being displayed at the entrance to the school. Agree with the family a special place where these can be inside the grounds.
- ★ Fundraising opportunities in which the child feels like they have some ownership.

Ongoing Support Recommendations

As with any kind of bereavement, as children grow and their understanding of life develops, they will have new questions and be realising things they didn't realise or understand before. Unfortunately, grief is not an experience that is the same for everyone. Children will be reprocessing their grief as they grow and this will mean their needs and the support required will change.

We recommend that schools create an evolving, shared, written plan (see template at end of document) that has been developed collaboratively with the family. All members of staff who work with the child should be made aware of the plan so that the approaches for support can be consistent with what the family and supporting adults in school have agreed. From speaking to families, the following things were noted as important to include on the plan:

- A safe space or room they are able to access when needed, it might be helpful to offer the child an 'exit card' which they can flash to an adult without the need for explanation.
- A named trusted adult who the child feels they are able to go to – this adult should be someone the child is comfortable with. If capacity allows the child to choose the adult, this would be even more positive.
- A list (which can be added to) of potential triggers – as previously stated, there is no explanation for SUDC so some of the things that may trigger the child to feel upset may also be unknown until they arise. By writing a list of all known triggers, it allows the child to become unexpectedly upset less.
- Potential next steps for bereavement support – this allows the family to feel informed and have peace of mind.



- An agreed plan for transition (whether this is to the next academic year or to a new school) – a working plan can be shared easily with the new adults who will be working with the child and ensure that everyone has the same understanding of this child's needs.

When writing this plan with the family, it can be really helpful for families if the SENCo (Special educational needs coordinator) can also be involved. A bereaved child is not considered a child with SEN (Special educational needs), however in many schools the SENCo also is responsible for ensuring provision is in place for all children needing support in many different areas. In most cases, they will have also already completed training in supporting children's emotional and mental wellbeing and their knowledge and expertise for support and referrals can be very helpful.

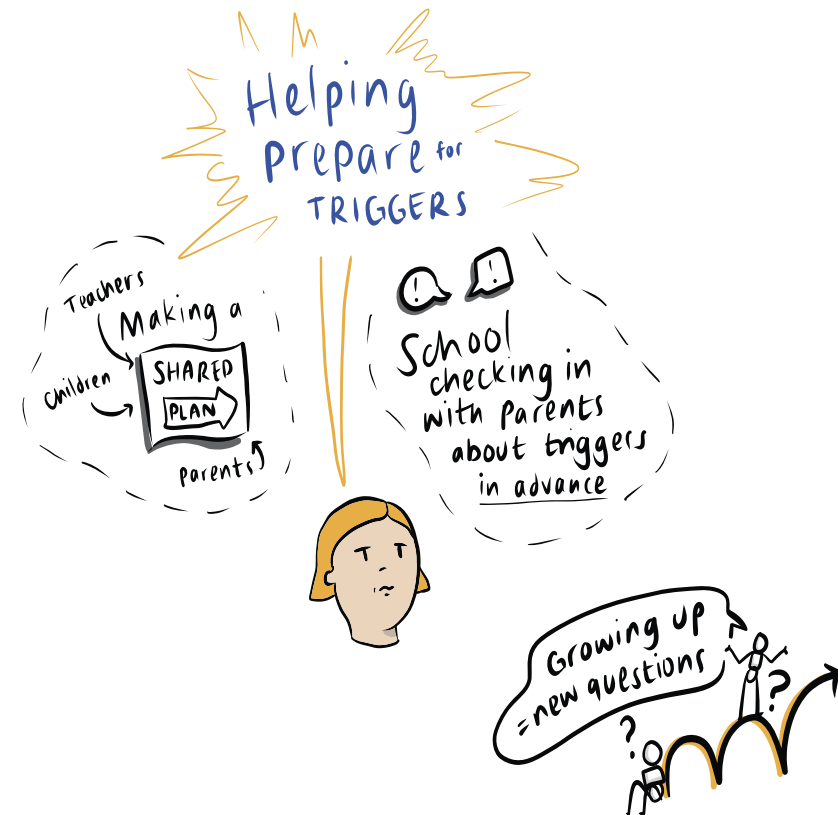
Another thing to consider when writing the plan with the family, would be to look at the topics long term plan for the year. This will allow you and the family to pre-empt anything that may act as an emotional trigger. For example, children creating a family tree or learning about the Great Fire of London or the Holocaust. Have open discussions with the family about what is coming up in your topics – for example what are you doing in RE, PSHE, English or History. Sometimes these areas can touch on death, and whilst this is important to be covered, for a child who has experienced loss, it can be very traumatic, as can trips to local places of worship. Their struggles wouldn't always be obvious at school and could present as nightmares, distress at home or anxiety and trouble sleeping.

Families will want to know anything that has upset their child and will want to know of any changes in their behaviour. Please consider the different impacts bereavement can have on different children and their behaviour. This even includes when:

- children are becoming quieter and less engaged
- it has been many years since their loss

Sometimes, because SUDC is unexplained, children can feel anxious about their own health. This can happen even if they were born after their sibling's death. A parent told us *"Every time she gets ill, and she doesn't understand what something is, she gets worried it will cause her death"*.

After some time, the family may feel it is appropriate for support to be lessened. This is a conversation that needs to be inclusive of all relevant adults as, throughout life, there will always be something that could trigger the children to become upset or bring back a memory unexpectedly, and there should still always be something in place to support these instances.



Children may react in different ways. It will be clear in some children who show all the suspected signs of grief, or show a 'big' or 'loud' change in their behaviour. But for some children this is not how they will respond and their reaction may be a more quiet one. Grief has no time limit, and though it may become easier to become used to their new day-to-day life without their sibling, the grief may be reprocessed by the child at any age and support may need increasing again.

APPENDIX

Adam's journey reprocessing his grief

After his sister, Rosie, died Adam had waves of grief and sadness but his parents felt able to support him. He was in Reception at school. Years later, in year 5, he struggled to attend school. He suffered with PTSD symptoms, depression and reactive anxiety, only able to attend school if he was on his tablet, crying in the cloakroom. Adam's parents were worried and they and the school were unprepared with how to support Adam. Although the primary school generously made time for meetings, they struggled to understand that this was associated with his grief due to the time that had passed since Rosie's death.

The parents eventually found a private clinical psychologist. With her help Adam had the conversations necessary for him to reprocess his grief and the experience of being there when Rosie was found, his parents' reactions, ambulances, police and her suddenly no longer in his life. The school were open to the psychologist attending meetings and worked closely with her and the parents to ensure Adam was well supported.

Adam struggled again when he was 12 - there were triggers at home and school. For example, in English they read a book where a bereaved boy discussed the death of his sister. Although Adam describes that inside he was 'silently crying', Adam was made to read this aloud in class. At this time his new, younger sister was the same age as the sister who died, and this was difficult too.

He had a wonderful Pastoral lead who compassionately listened to Adam, acknowledged his grief, would say Rosie's name and talk about



Adam aged 4 with his sister Rosie aged 2

his own experience of loss. He kindly spoke with the parents, making time for meetings and Adam found a safe space when he needed it in the SEN department. This enabled open and trusted communication between all parties and quickly helped Adam with a phased return to school whilst he had regular counselling.

The key points to be taken from Adam's story are –

- Understanding and acknowledging the potential impact of grief is important.
- It helps to discuss and mitigate triggers together with the family and circulate this to teachers.
- A trusted adult can provide great comfort, especially if they also communicate well with the parents.
- Access to counselling is challenging. Helping parents understand potential next steps (including private options) is helpful and realistic.



Adam (age 15) is now happy and enjoying year 10 – he reflects

"It was really necessary to talk to someone. If it hadn't been for Mr*** in year 7 and [the psychologist] it would have taken so much longer to stop grieving like that."

APPENDIX

Immediately after the death of Amy's sister:

EXAMPLE IDEAS

Below are some examples from Amy's very positive experience of support from her school staff. These examples have had a long-lasting effect and show just how key school staff are in both the immediate and long-term processing of grief.

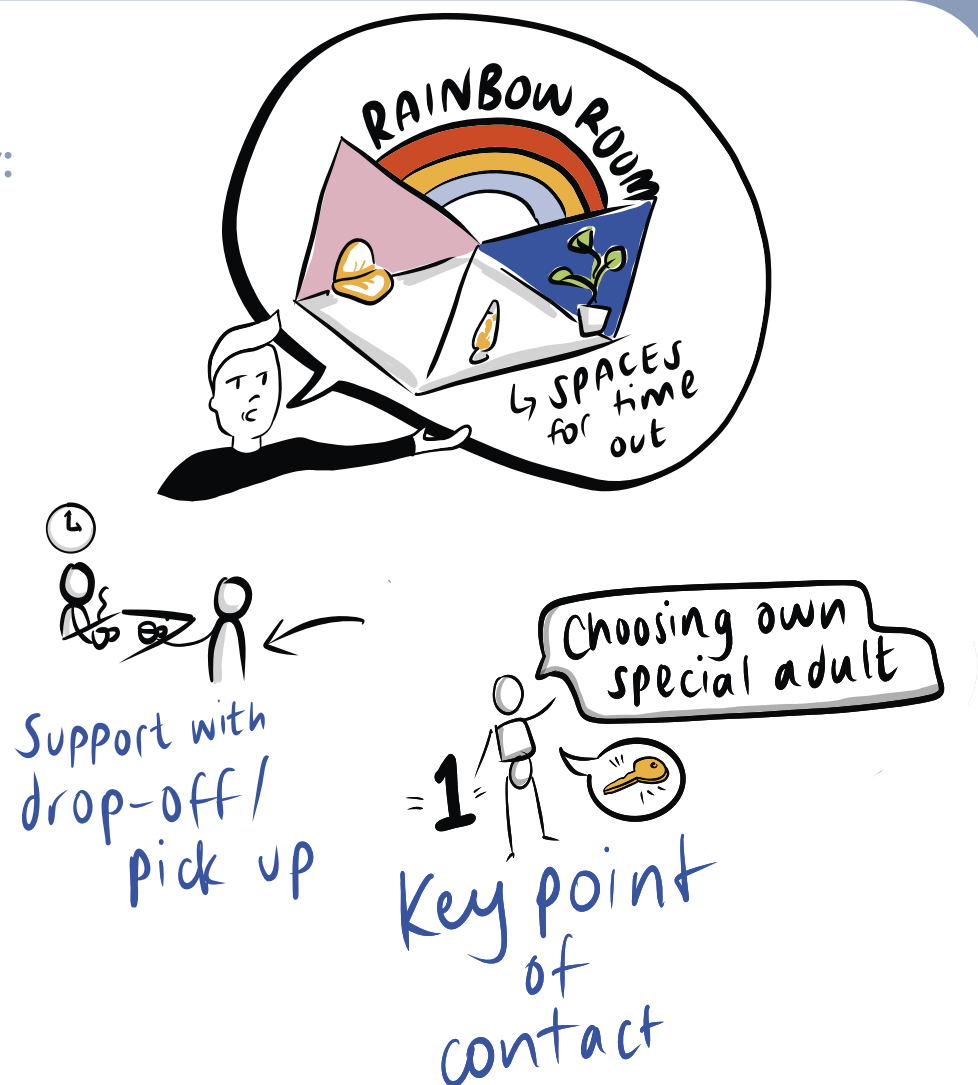
Before returning to school, the head teacher and class teachers came to the home to see the family. The family were able to speak to them about what had happened and how they wanted to return to school.

Amy's class teacher took her to a café for a hot chocolate and a chat before her return to year 6. Amy was able to discuss with her schoolteacher what would make it easier for her going back to school.

School had offered alternative drop off through the office to avoid other parents or children who may ask questions or alternatively not know what to say or how to approach the family.

When the children returned to school there was an assembly (without Amy and her brother) which explained to the other children in the school what had happened, so they knew to be kind to Amy and that being kind means not asking too many questions.

Allowing a home comfort. Amy's teacher allowed her to take in one of her sister's teddies. This stayed on her desk in the close weeks after the death, however over time the teddy moved to the back of the classroom until it was no longer needed in school.



Amy was allowed to choose a 'special adult' in the school. This adult would have a weekly slot to do an activity in a grief book with Amy and Amy was aware any time she was upset she could talk to this adult.

APPENDIX

Long term support Amy received:

EXAMPLE IDEAS

Amy's teachers were very mindful of the topics they were teaching. For example, later in the year the history topic was Ancient Egyptians, focusing around their beliefs on the afterlife and mummification. Amy's teachers made her family aware and provided Amy with the choice of an alternative activity if she felt unable to join in the one in class.

Fundraising days for SUDC UK were held in the school annually after the death of Amy's sister. They were as simple as a non-uniform day, but Amy was given the responsibility for announcing the total of the money raised so was always included in a special way.

The school took Amy and a friend to the garden centre. They were able to choose a plant and then decorate the pot it stood in. The plant stayed at the primary school for the remainder of Amy's time there and people knew that it was "Hattie's Rose" and was a special place to remember her.

When it was time for Amy to transition to secondary school the head of year 7 came to visit in the primary school (a known and comfortable place) and spoke to her about who her good friends were and asked if there was one friend she would want in her new form who it would be. They also spoke about what the new school could offer and agreed on what Amy and her parents thought would be the best or what was now needed.



TEMPLATE: AN EVOLVING SHARED PLAN

Date plan created: Who attended meeting:	Child's name:
Year/Class:	Teacher/form tutor:
Trusted adult in school:	Family contact info: Best time to discuss adhoc matters: <input type="checkbox"/> Morning drop off <input type="checkbox"/> End of day pick up <input type="checkbox"/> Over phone
What happened: The name of the loved person who died:	When did they die: Child's understanding of what happened - key language to use with the child, their relationship (e.g.twin, brother, sister, step-sibling):
Significant days which may feel especially hard: e.g. birthdays, anniversary, sibling photo day, whole school events where siblings attend (e.g. plays, sports day):	Plan to support these days:

Potential triggers:	Plans to support with these triggers:
Curriculum topics which may be hard:	Plans for support:
Existing or expected medical considerations: (Families affected by SUDC may have medical screening appointments and may sometimes wear cardiac monitors to school. It is also rationale and normal for SUDC parents to feel anxious about the health of siblings.)	Plans for support:
Existing SEN needs:	Plans for support:
Other specific needs:	Plans for support:
Any upcoming transitions:	Plans for support:
Any other information:	
Date of next review:	

We understand that these situations are really hard for teachers and that everyone is trying their very best.
Thank you so much for all you do for children - it makes such an important difference.

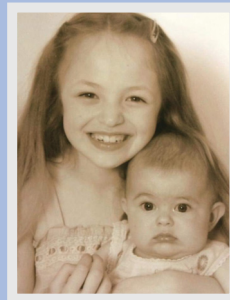
SUDC★UK

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Do not hesitate to contact info@sudc.org.uk or 07880350942 if a conversation with our team would feel helpful.



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