

# “You aren't expected to do this on your own”

*An exploration of virtual loss, grief and bereavement training for education and health staff during a pandemic*

*Lisa Forsyth<sup>1</sup>, Mary-Kate Harte<sup>2</sup>, Donna Hastings<sup>3</sup>, Marion Lang<sup>4</sup>*

*<sup>1</sup>Glasgow Psychological Services, <sup>2</sup>NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde, <sup>3</sup>St. Columba's Hospice Care in partnership with Child Bereavement UK, <sup>4</sup>Prince & Princess of Wales Hospice*

**CBUK found that “90% of teachers received no bereavement training during Initial Teacher Training or subsequent professional development”**

**Abbreviated abstract:** In response to lockdown restrictions and suspension of face-to-face training, loss, grief and bereavement sessions were delivered virtually across Edinburgh, East Lothian and Glasgow City to education and healthcare staff. Sessions aimed to build confidence in supporting Children and Young People (CYP) returning to education after experiencing loss. Participants reported being able to link personal experiences to course content and utilise practical resources in their roles. Virtual delivery provided a proactive response to identified needs.

## **Related publications:**

A. Penny. (2019). Childhood bereavement: what do we know in 2019?  
Child Bereavement UK. (2018). Improvement Bereavement Support in Schools.

[Lisa.Forsyth@glasgow.gov.uk](mailto:Lisa.Forsyth@glasgow.gov.uk)



# Previous work, Challenge, and Approach

Pre-pandemic, face-to-face training on loss, grief and bereavement was offered across the three Local Authorities to education and health staff. Evaluations showed that practitioners viewed the input as highly valuable to their practice.



In compliance with Scottish Government guidelines the authors were unable to deliver face-to-face training. This was against a backdrop where school communities were fragmented and both young people and practitioners reported experiencing a loss of connection and a sense of isolation.



Training was offered at the end of the school day via Microsoft Teams. The input aimed to support the return to school for CYP and practitioners as well as acknowledging and validating the lived experience of those involved.



In recognition that an increased number of CYP were facing the impact of loss, grief and bereavement during Covid-19, coupled with a demand from practitioners for input, a decision was made to respond by offering the training virtually.



# Delivery and Content

Spaces on each training input were capped at a maximum of 25 per session. This was based on facilitators capacity to support individual needs within the group. This helped to offer safe and ethical facilitation by being supportive of individuals self care needs.

Sessions included: Contemporary Theories of Grief, Educational Context, Impact of Covid-19, The Voice of the Child & Young Person, Case Studies, Emotional Literacy, Resources, Signposting, Resilience & Self Care. Online breakout rooms were used to facilitate both large and small group discussions.

"I felt a little lost and stuck how best to support my young people, after this training I feel more prepared"

"The input from the young people was superb. Both spoke so passionately and confidently about the work they have been doing"

## Young people's experiences of change during the pandemic

Loss of routine	Supports around the young person	Support for school work	Parental situation
Existing pressures at home	Additional anxiety of being ill, making someone ill	Bereavement both before and during pandemic	Palliative care at home so could be with family
Lack of extra curricular activities	Lack of equity in digital access	Change or cessation of services	Any more?

**What is Anticipatory Grief?**  
Thinking about grief during a pandemic...

Get a feeling that the worst is yet to come? Or that someone can't go on much longer before it affects you personally? These feelings could be linked to anticipatory grief.

**WHAT IS IT**

- When people have a loved one with a terminal illness
- Typically felt if someone is suffering from a chronic illness
- Can be felt when someone has a terminal illness
- Feeling of the future being uncertain or scary
- Common when someone has a terminal illness

**WHAT AM I GRIEVING**

- Loss of life
- For what those were that have been lost
- Loss of our normal lives
- Worries about the future
- Loss of connection

**SOME SIGNS**  
Remember, you don't get to choose if you're grieving

- Being over-greedy when they're away
- Feeling sad when they're not there
- Feeling angry when they're not there
- Feeling guilty when they're not there
- Feeling like you're not ready to let go
- Feeling like you're not ready to let go
- Feeling like you're not ready to let go

**What is Disenfranchised Grief?**  
Thinking about grief during a pandemic...

Disenfranchised grief refers to any grief that is not acknowledged or validated by society. This type of grief is often overlooked or not understood by others, which makes it harder for some to process.

**WHEN CAN IT HAPPEN**

- Death of a pet
- Death of an unborn child
- When the loss is not socially accepted
- When the death is unexpected and sudden
- When the loss is not socially accepted
- When the loss is not socially accepted

**WHAT ARE ITS EFFECTS**  
Along with typical feelings of grief, disenfranchised grief can be linked to the below:

- Isolation
- Shame
- Physical symptoms like stomach aches, headaches, etc.
- Unsettled sleep
- Reducing productivity

**WHAT CAN YOU DO**

- Seek support from friends and family
- Talk to your GP or a counsellor
- Consider your own needs
- Remember that it's okay to not be okay
- Get yourself time and space to grieve



Lisa.Forsyth@glasgow.gov.uk

# Results and Conclusions

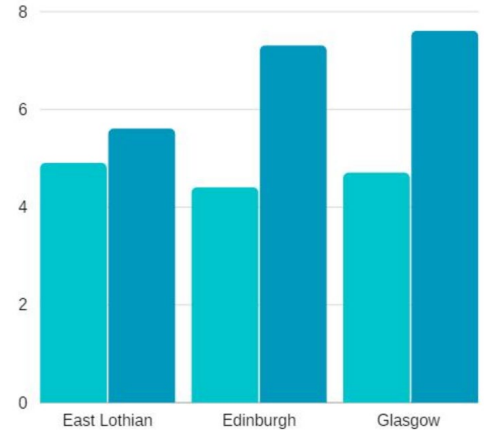
## Conclusions:

- Virtual training reduced the physical barriers to attending training by removing the need to travel distances and allowed those who were isolating and shielding to join the sessions.
- Strengths of the training from qualitative data included: the interactive and approachable nature of the training, course content and the course structure and delivery.
- Participants also noted how they felt better able to support CYP upon returning to school and how they would use the resources given to continue their professional development in this area.

## Recommendations for future delivery include:

- A hybrid approach to future delivery with options for both virtual and in-person
- Ensuring that longitudinal data is collected from participants to look at that long-term outcomes of virtual training.

Levels of confidence and knowledge



“Online, it helped to stay engaged hearing the presenters bounce off each other and hear a variety of voices”

“I for one am just so grateful to know that other agencies still exist. Classrooms can be lonely places.”