

ACADEMY SCHOLARS LIFE SKILLS 4: BEREAVEMENT

- **MEANINGS:**

Bereavement is the word used to refer to the death of a close relative or friend. Often when neighbours or friends hear of a death, they may send a “sympathy card” which contains words like “we send our deepest sympathies to you in your recent bereavement”.

- **STRESS POINTS IN LIFE:**

Psychologists tell us that the death of a close relative or friend is one of life’s greatest trials, ranking above other high-stress events which include:

1. The break up of a long term relationship
2. Being made redundant / becoming unemployed
3. Moving house or moving job.
4. Facing major illness, surgery or hospitalisation for you or a close friend or relative
5. Facing serious financial problems

FOR DISCUSSION:

Why do each of these situations place so much stress on our lives ?

- **THE PAIN OF CLOSENESS:**

Bereavement is a greater stress to people the closer they are to the person who has died. The death of a parent, or your closest friend is much more stressful and painful, far more difficult to cope with than, say, the death of a distant half cousin who you have never really met.

CONSIDER THIS FICTIONAL EXAMPLE:

John Jackson, aged 56, died suddenly and unexpectedly from a heart attack. He was a really kind friendly sort of person , well-liked by family, neighbours and the people who worked at the business which he owned and had built up over the years. He was happily married with two children, a daughter aged 31 who lived away from home since finishing at university, and a son aged 26, who still lived at home and worked with his father in the family business, “Sonjack Ceramics”, a firm making high quality sinks, baths and bathroom ceramics.

HOW MIGHT DIFFERENT PEOPLE REACT TO THE NEWS OF JOHN JACKSON’S DEATH ?

1. A 15 year old school boy who was on a weeks work experience placement at “Sonjack Ceramics” ?
2. The many workers who produced the goods in John Jackson’s factory ?
3. The man who had worked for the business as the accountant and was a close friend and colleague of John Jackson for over 20 years?
4. His family: the wife and son at home and the daughter who lived away?
5. His neighbours.
6. The mates he played squash with regularly.

We are all saddened by bereavement, but there is deeper pain the closer we are to the person who has died.

- **THE PAIN OF CIRCUMSTANCES:**

1. It comes to all.

At some time or another , we will all have to face bereavement, but circumstances will differ.

2. Suddenness.

A sudden death , totally unexpected, brings its own particular pains: no chance to carry out plans or fulfill dreams, or to settle old arguments or tensions.

3. In tragic circumstances.

This poses big questions: why did it happen, who was to blame, could it have been avoided?

4. After a long illness.

We can come to terms somewhat with what is going to happen, but long illnesses are an emotional drain on family and friends.

5. At an early age.

The death of anyone “before their time” seems so unfair and reminds us all of our vulnerability. We at MUFC remember the death of Jimmy Davis with great sadness.

You will be aware of bereavement, through family, friends and football. Remember Jimmy Davis, and recently players from Saville and QPR, who have died tragically. A grandparent, a parent, or family members also may have died: death affects us all.

- **HOW DOES BEREAVEMENT AFFECT PEOPLE ?**

“Bereavement counsellors” tell of stages in the bereavement process which many people experience. These may not always be in this order, and not always every stage is experienced, but often many of these reactions are felt.

1. **UNBELIEF.** The reality just does not hit home, the facts just don't seem real. It seems like a dream, and we think that soon we will wake up and all will be ok again.
2. **SHOCK.** The news affects us emotionally , mentally and physically. We cry uncontrollably, we can't think straight, we shake , we can't sleep.
3. **GUILT.** We think of things we had meant to do or to say, and feel so guilty about not doing them. We think of the past, and remember those things we felt bad about; “I wish I hadn't done that / said that / written that”. Guilt is a common emotion.
4. **ANGER.** We pose the question “why ?”, ponder the issue of fairness, and seek out a reason , or someone to blame. We can get angry, at doctors, hospitals, family, neighbours, God, the clergy, even ourselves !
5. **DESPAIR.** We feel there is no hope for us. How will I cope, how will I manage? Everything seems impossible !
6. **FLASHBACKS.** We feel that we are “getting over it all” and then memories come flooding back, it hits us again, and we are as pained and confused as ever.
7. **READJUSTMENT.** We begin to adjust to new circumstances. But it is not easy. “You never forget, just learn to cope better over time” someone said. “The “firsts” are the worst: first birthday, first Christmas, etc, without the loved one, but every major event is a reminder that they are not there.”

If you are the bereaved one , you may like to remember your loved one and talk about them. Friends of the bereaved will perhaps be embarrassed, feeling that they should avoid talking about the deceased person. Those bereaved may want to tell you about their loved one and will often recall in great detail what exactly happened the day the person died. To listen with interest to the bereaved telling the detailed story is very good for the bereaved person. Here, and in other areas of life, we need to learn to be good listeners. Look at them as they speak, be prepared [if it seems right] to ask more questions, allow them to tell you as much as they wish to tell, and thank them for sharing their personal story. Telling out the story can be part of the healing process. Give them time and space to share what is on their heart.

- **SOURCES OF HELP AT TIMES OF BEREAVEMENT:**

1. THE FUNERAL DIRECTOR.

This is the man who can help you make all the necessary arrangements, from dealing with the body of the deceased to arranging a time for the service. He can advise about registering the death, which minister or priest to be involved, where cremation or burial could take place, etc. Usually, contact numbers appear in local newspapers, and he is available 24 / 7.

2. OFFICIATING CLERGY.

This is the minister/ priest who will take the funeral service. Usually, they will visit to discuss the content of the funeral service, will offer the bereaved some pastoral and spiritual help, and can arrange some local support if that is needed.

3. FAMILY and FRIENDS.

It is good for these to be around at the time of bereavement and at the funeral. It is good for them to listen and to speak appropriately, to offer practical help and support, and to maintain a lasting contact with the bereaved person / family. Any “family rifts” might become healed at funeral times

4. A REALISTIC PERSPECTIVE.

We tend not to think too much about death and dying, but the truth is that life will bring us all into contact, personal contact, with death. It is good to think ahead, and to understand how it could affect those near to us.

Perhaps we ourselves need to think about eternal perspectives, about life and death, here and hereafter.

Do you believe death is the end, or just the end of the beginning ? Do you believe in heaven or in life after death? Do you think we are living for a while then die to go to nothingness?

The reality of death could bring a different perspective on life.

- Some might say : “If we may die tomorrow , then let’s eat, drink and be merry, live life for yourself and for pleasure, because tomorrow may bring the end of it all”
- Others might say “ you come into this world with nothing, and you take nothing out, even the one with the most toys cannot take them to heaven, so perhaps there are more important things than big houses and flash cars.”
- Others might say “If we all are to die, then the big questions in life are about life and the hereafter: Why are we here, where do we go to, is there a God, is there a heaven, how can we find purpose and peace in life if it is sure to end in death ? Is death the end, or just the end of the beginning?”

Do you think it matters what you believe about these things ? For many, faith in God is a source of comfort and hope in times of bereavement, so can I at least encourage you to think about spiritual and eternal things ? What is your opinion on all this ?

