

PE1820/E

Petitioner submission of 29 November 2020

I would like to provide this written submission in response to the written submissions by Young Scot (4th November) and CHAS (6TH November).

It can be seen from the submission by Young Scot that a lot of young people feel unable to talk to family members after a bereavement and would prefer to speak to staff from professional support services. In addition, the majority of young people feel that schools are the best source of support after bereavement and that there is a lack of information, awareness and understanding about death and bereavement. The submission concludes that there should be “more information on the subject, appropriate support and more conversations on the topic in schools”.

This submission strongly supports the aim of the petition that there should be compulsory bereavement education in our schools. Young people spend a lot of time in school, and that is the best place for them to learn about death, bereavement and associated topics. They will find it easier to process and understand if this education is delivered by teachers and other professionals and will find it easier to talk about bereavement with those who are not relatives and friends.

The submission from CHAS recommends that bereavement support training is “formally included in teachers’ training and education so they are better equipped to support pupils”. It also states that “good bereavement care is a human right” and schools should have an age appropriate bereavement policy in place. Also, counsellors should be available to our schools to support what is being taught in the classroom.

This submission also strongly supports the aim of this petition that bereavement education should be made a compulsory part of the school curriculum in Scotland and that counsellors should be available to all schools in Scotland. As previously stated by the Scottish Government, it is up to individual schools to decide how to teach about bereavement and death. However, after again having spoken to various teachers, parents and organisations, it is clear that the majority of our schools are choosing not to teach this. The Young Scot submission states that teachers don’t feel equipped to teach this topic. That is why the teaching of this topic should be made compulsory and it should also be a compulsory part of teacher training.

It is worth mentioning that relatives (who are now adults) who suffered a major bereavement when they were under eight years old have repeatedly said that if they had been taught about death and bereavement while they were at school, then they might not have suffered the mental and emotional difficulties they did while they were growing up. Furthermore, other young relatives have a close family member who is sadly suffering from a terminal illness. There is no support available in their school to help them understand and process this. This should not be the case. As mentioned in the previous submission, death is guaranteed. It is a part of life and everyone will suffer from some kind of bereavement in their lives. That is why it is important that our young people are taught about death and bereavement, in an age appropriate way, at school. Hopefully this will make it ever so slightly easier to understand and accept.

In addition, it has been noted that counsellors are available to some of our schools for children over the age of ten. But as the submissions from Young Scot and CHAS state, counsellors should be available to all pupils. Do pupils under ten not suffer bereavement? Research states that the majority of children in Scotland have suffered bereavement by the age of eight. If anything, these children need more help to understand it all. That is why there should be counsellors available to every school, for all pupils.

In conclusion, the submissions from Young Scot and CHAS strongly support the aim of this petition that compulsory bereavement education should be introduced into our school curriculum to help our young people prepare for and understand death and bereavement. This evidence strongly suggests that the compulsory teaching of bereavement education in our schools is greatly needed and wanted by the public and is a policy that the Scottish Government should seriously consider adopting.