

## PE1820/H

Petitioner submission of 30 January 2021

I would like to provide this written submission in response to the Scottish Government submission of 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

The Scottish Government states that the curriculum is flexible and schools are encouraged to “do their own thing”. However, it appears that many schools and councils are still choosing not to teach children about death and bereavement. As mentioned in previous submissions, death will affect everyone at some point, so why is this education not made compulsory? I strongly urge the Scottish Government to reconsider this flexible approach and make it mandatory for all schools to teach about death and bereavement. We teach our children many things they may never use after school, so it is very surprising that we don't teach them about something that will definitely affect them at some point.

Research published by Strathclyde University in the journal “ Palliative Care and Social Practice “ found that by 7.8 years, 50.8% of children had suffered bereavement. This figure rises to 62% by age 10. Bereavement can make children vulnerable to depression and anxiety, self-harm, suicide, underachievement at school, unemployment and crime. It was found that a lack of social support from schools contributes to this. Furthermore, age appropriate education on bereavement and death in early years and primary education could help to engage with children on these issues. So why is bereavement education not compulsory in our schools? I will only benefit our children in the future. These children are our future and we must do all we can to help and nurture them into adulthood.

[www.strath.ac.uk/whystrathclyde/news/studyrevealsmorethanhalfscottishchildrenexperiencebereavementbytheageofeight](http://www.strath.ac.uk/whystrathclyde/news/studyrevealsmorethanhalfscottishchildrenexperiencebereavementbytheageofeight)

In relation to this, the Scottish Government states that “training required to work with children under 10 is more complex...” and that is why their commitment is for children aged 11 to 18. As mentioned in the above research paper, intervention in early years can make all the difference to a bereaved child, so why is it not available for children under 10? If anything, this age group need it more. If a bereaved child is not given the appropriate help when needed, this will impact on their mental development into adulthood. If a child under the age of 10 needs help, then it should be readily available for them. We can't just ignore them because the “training required to work with children under 10 is very different and more complex“. Agreed, some local authorities do have “Seasons For Growth”, but not all of them. In addition, this programme is only offered to children who have suffered bereavement. A compulsory bereavement education policy should be in place that is delivered to all children so that those not affected by bereavement can understand the feelings of those who have suffered loss. This will teach our children to be more understanding and empathetic.

Child Bereavement UK believe that having a bereavement policy in every school would be a great help. Unfortunately, just now this “flexible” policy appears to be that we don't deal with death and bereavement unless we have to, and sadly, schools are a reflection of this.

In an interview with “Holyrood” magazine on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2020, the National Bereavement Coordinator agreed that if bereavement education is a part of the school curriculum, then we can better support our children to understand and prepare for grief and death.

[www.holyrood.com/inside-politics/view,a-lesson-in-death-why-bereavement-should-be-on-the-school-curriculum](http://www.holyrood.com/inside-politics/view,a-lesson-in-death-why-bereavement-should-be-on-the-school-curriculum))

If all these experts and organisations agree that bereavement education should be part of the school curriculum, then why is the Scottish Government reluctant to listen to these experts and ignore the research findings?

In conclusion, I would once again strongly urge the Scottish Government to make bereavement education a compulsory part of the school curriculum. As mentioned earlier, death is something that will definitely affect everybody at some point, so why are we not teaching our children about this? We teach them about things they may never use again after school, so why not about this? If teachers don't feel comfortable teaching about death and bereavement, then make it a compulsory part of teacher training. Bereavement education should be mandatory in every school, and not something that teachers can choose to teach if they wish. Research also indicates that our children would definitely benefit from compulsory bereavement education, and there should be counsellors in our schools for children under 10 as well. If children under 10 are not given the appropriate help at the appropriate time, then the consequences can be dire.

Our children are our future. We need to equip them with the necessary life skills they need to be successful, especially in these difficult times. Please make bereavement education compulsory in our schools.