

## **Volume 1**

**“It’s not my grief to be had, but those children are my responsibility” – Secondary school teaching staff’s experiences and perceptions of working with bereaved children and young people.**

by

Rebecca Prosser

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## **Abstract**

Bereavement is a common experience for children and young people (CYP) in the UK. Research indicates that this can impact a CYP's psychosocial and educational outcomes, however there is a lack of formalised support for bereaved CYP in their education settings. There have been calls for research to explore the views of teaching staff who work with bereaved CYP, with there being a lack of research focusing on those in secondary schools. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the experiences of secondary school teaching staff who have worked with bereaved CYP. To explore this, semi-structured interviews of seven members of teaching staff were conducted and analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Analysis showed that participants had worked with CYP who had experienced and had been impacted by a range of bereavements. Many staff also reported different ways in which their settings had supported CYP and the impact these bereavements had on themselves. Interviews also indicated facilitators and barriers to providing CYP with support, as well as how staff had encountered support for themselves whilst working with these CYP. The analysis highlighted the importance of: communication and relationships, socio-cultural factors, training and guidance, perceptions of bereavement, and access to suitable support. Overall, the research indicated that support for bereaved students and for the staff working with them remains inconsistent, with a need for this to be developed further to increase staff confidence and the availability of suitable support.

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## Abbreviations

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<b>BPS</b>	British Psychological Society
<b>BSP</b>	Bereavement Support Provision
<b>CPD</b>	Continuing Professional Development
<b>CR</b>	Critical Realism
<b>CYP</b>	Children and Young People
<b>DfE</b>	Department for Education
<b>DofHSC</b>	Department of Health and Social Care
<b>ELSA</b>	Emotional Literacy Support Assistants
<b>EP</b>	Educational Psychologist
<b>EPS</b>	Educational Psychology Service
<b>HCPC</b>	Health and Care Professionals Council
<b>ITT</b>	Initial Teacher Training
<b>LA</b>	Local Authority
<b>QTS</b>	Qualified Teacher Status
<b>RSE</b>	Relationships and Sex Education
<b>RTA</b>	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
<b>SEN</b>	Special Educational Needs
<b>SEND</b>	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
<b>SES</b>	Socioeconomic Status
<b>SMHL</b>	Senior Mental Health Lead
<b>TEP</b>	Trainee Educational Psychologist
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UKCB</b>	United Kingdom Commission on Bereavement

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## **Chapter One: Introduction and Context**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This study is the first volume of a two-volume thesis, submitted as a requirement of the Applied Educational and Child Psychology Doctorate. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of secondary school teaching staff who have worked with bereaved children and young people (CYP).

This chapter will introduce the rationale for the current research alongside key terms, prior to introducing the aims of the study and the research questions to be examined.

### **1.2 Rationale for Current Research**

The rationale for this research has been informed by my personal experience of bereavement and by current literature regarding the role of schools in childhood bereavement. With regards to my personal experiences, I was bereaved of my father when attending secondary school and felt I experienced a lack of support from my school during a time of great uncertainty and difficulty. I also worked as a primary school teacher in adulthood and having worked with bereaved CYP myself, I found it difficult to access appropriate guidance to provide them with appropriate support.

Within the UK, bereavement support provision (BSP) available in schools remains inconsistent despite ongoing calls for its development (McLaughlin et al., 2019; UKCB, 2022). Research has an important role to play with regards to developing our understanding of teaching staffs' experiences of working with bereaved CYP and the BSP that they are able to offer. There is a limited amount of peer-reviewed UK research that can contribute to our current understanding of these areas, which explored in depth in Chapter Three. Despite international research providing valuable insights into teaching staff experiences, it is

important to gather further understanding of UK BSP to consider how UK education systems and societal factors may influence BSP in schools and staff experiences.

Calls for further research are also apparent in the literature. For example, in conducting reviews of the current BSP available to bereaved CYP, McLaughlin et al. (2019) argue that there is a further need to include school staff in research, particularly in the UK context. At present, most UK research has been based on smaller sample sizes of <30 (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021; Costelloe et al., 2020; Lane et al., 2014 and Potts, 2013). Conducting larger scale, quantitative research focusing specifically on bereavement may be useful for the generalisation of data. However, at present, there is also a lack of research exploring the views of secondary school staff, with the most recent research solely focusing on their experiences being published in 2014 (Lane et al., 2014). This demonstrates a gap in this area, especially regarding the experiences of secondary school teaching staff, with research of primary school teachers also calling for more exploration of the views of secondary school staff (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021). Therefore, using qualitative methodology to capture these views will allow for in-depth exploration of staff experiences.

Additionally, previous UK research aiming to explore the views of secondary school teaching staff has solely focused on subject teachers (Lane et al., 2014). However, within a school environment, students encounter teaching staff with numerous roles such as teaching assistants and pastoral staff with roles in mental health support (Rice O'Toole and Soan, 2022). Therefore, the present study allows for self-identified teaching staff to contribute their views with a wider range of experiences of working with bereaved CYP.

### **1.3 Defining Terms**

Due to the nature of the research exploring the experiences of secondary school teaching staff working with bereaved CYP, it is important to define key terms used within the literature,

namely those of ‘bereavement’ and ‘grief’. Death is a universal experience, with bereavement and grief being experienced by those surviving.

### **1.3.1 Bereavement**

Bereavement is experiencing the death of a loved one or a person who was part of one’s life, such as a family member (Bonanno and Kaltman, 1999; Mannarino and Cohen, 2011; Zisook et al., 2014). Stroebe et al. (2007) describe bereavement as a “normal, natural human experience” in which individuals will inevitably experience the death of someone they know (pp. 1960).

### **1.3.2 Grief**

Although bereavement is universally experienced (Maddrell, 2016; Schuler et al., 2012; Shear and Skritskaya, 2012), there is debate and variability as to how individuals respond to death. Grief is defined as the emotional response to a bereavement (Mannarino and Cohen, 2011; Stroebe et al., 2007; Zisook et al., 2014). Whereas bereavement is experiencing the death of a known person, Revet et al. (2018) explain grief as “a normative reaction to loss, which can either be physical (the death of a loved one) or symbolic. It refers to the psychological components of bereavement, especially suffering, following a significant loss” (pp. 64). Suffering is a psychological experience associated with grief including other feelings such as anger, sadness, anxiety and yearning (Boelen and van den Bout, 2005; Bonanno and Kaltman, 2001; Maciejewski et al., 2007). However, grief is not limited to singular reactions; individuals respond to loss in many ways and may still experience positive emotion (Shear, 2012).

## **1.4 Research aims and questions**

This research aims to contribute to literature examining the BSP available to CYP in the UK due to calls for further exploration of this area (McLaughlin et al., 2019; UKCB, 2022).

There is emerging literature in this area with regards to the experiences of primary school teaching staff (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021; Costelloe et al., 2020). However, there is a lack of recent literature that focuses upon the experiences of secondary school staff.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap in the literature and explore the role that secondary school teaching staff may have in supporting bereaved CYP.

In consideration of the above, the research questions (RQ) that will be explored in this study are as follows:

**RQ1:** What are the experiences of secondary school teaching staff who have worked with bereaved CYP?

**RQ2:** What are the facilitators and barriers to staff providing support for bereaved CYP?

**RQ3:** How are staff themselves supported to support bereaved CYP?

### **1.5 Chapter summary**

This chapter has presented the rationale for the present study alongside defining key terms related to the study. Following on from this, it has also addressed the key research aims prior to introducing the research questions. The next chapter will introduce the first literature review of the thesis which will explore concepts regarding childhood bereavement, how bereavement impacts on children and young people's outcomes, and policy and legislation relating to the UK context.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review of Childhood Bereavement and Education.

This chapter is a literature review that will examine background research and concepts related to the area of childhood bereavement and education, prior to a further literature review in Chapter Three that specifically examines existing research regarding perceptions of school staff who have worked with bereaved CYP. The current chapter will discuss how CYP are impacted by bereavement psychosocially and academically prior to considering how this relates to UK education settings.

### 2.1 Models of Grief

Following from the previous definitions of grief explored in Section 1.3.1, different models of grief have been proposed and adopted throughout research to demonstrate how individuals may process a bereavement (please see Table 1 for examples). The grief responses proposed within these models vary, demonstrating that psychological responses to bereavement may differ on an individual level.

**Table 1.**

*Examples of Grief Models*

Model	Summary
<b><i>Four Stages of Mourning</i></b> Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) and Parkes (2002)	1) <b>Numbing and shock:</b> In the immediate aftermath of the death of a loved one, individuals may experience shock and find it difficult to come to terms with the event.  2) <b>Yearning-searching:</b> The bereaved may feel different emotions such as anger and confusion. They will express longing for the deceased and want their presence.

- 
- 3) **Disorganisation-despair:** During this stage, the bereaved begin to accept the loss and may withdraw from activities and loved ones.
  - 4) **Reorganisation- recovery:** Intense feelings begin to lessen and the bereaved start to engage in their new way of life.

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***Five Stages of Grief***

Kübler-Ross (1970)

- 1) **Denial:** In the immediate aftermath of a death, a bereaved individual may experience numbness and a sense of disbelief that their loved one has died.
- 2) **Anger:** An individual may experience feelings of anger and injustice that their loved one has died. These feelings of anger may also be directed towards the deceased and/or the bereaved.
- 3) **Bargaining:** During this stage, an individual may struggle to accept the death and may make deals with themselves or religious deities to ease their suffering or bring the deceased back.
- 4) **Depression:** Moving on from feelings of disbelief and anger, the bereaved feels immense sadness.
- 5) **Acceptance:** The bereaved begins to accept their new way of life and starts to make steps to move forward.

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***Dual Process Model***

Stroebe and Schut (1999)

Those bereaved oscillate between two processes as they move through everyday life following bereavement.

**Loss-oriented:** This may be experiencing the pain of the loss and breaking of bonds, engaging in grief work (such as

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therapy). When engaged in this process, individuals may seek to avoid engaging in restoration.

**Restoration-oriented:** Individuals will be seeking to understand the changes in their life. They may distract themselves from grief by engaging in new experiences and relationships. They may also be trying to adjust to new family dynamics. When engaged in this process, individuals may seek to avoid feelings of grief.

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### 2.3 Childhood and Adolescent Bereavement and Grief

Within this research, secondary school teaching staff's perceptions of working with bereaved CYP will be explored. Childhood and adolescent bereavement is a common experience within the UK, with 1 in 29 of school aged CYP (aged 5 –16 years old) having experienced the death of a sibling or parent (Childhood Bereavement Network, 2024). When considering the other losses CYP may encounter, such as the death of other relatives and peers, the incidents of bereavement will be higher (Harrison and Harrington, 2001).

Many authors and researchers have proposed theories for how grief and bereavement may present in CYP. For example, Dowdney (2008) argues that CYP's understanding and processing of death and bereavement is influenced by developmental stages, as seen in Table 2.

Additionally, there have been applications of Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1972, 1990) to childhood bereavement. For example, Webb (2010) argues that:



- In the pre-operational stage (2 to 7 years-old), children do not yet understand concrete logic, nor that death is permanent. Children may believe they have caused a death as they are not yet able to separate their thoughts from actions.
- In the concrete operational stage (7 to 11 years-old), children are better able to engage in reason and begin to understand the permanence of death. They may understand that a deceased person may be, depending on religious beliefs, buried or cremated whilst also existing in an afterlife.
- In the formal operational stage (12 years-old onwards), children fully understand the finality of death.

In contrast, Bonoti et al. (2013) argue that children's understanding of death-related concepts is affected by their experiences of death (rather than solely by their developmental stage), with children who have had death-related experiences having a better understanding of its irreversibility compared to their peers.

However, when specifically examining the responses to bereavement from CYP, there have been misconceptions that children do not experience grief or, if they do, they experience this linearly (Auman, 2007). Lancaster (2011) argues that although CYP may not linearly move through stages of grief (e.g. Kübler-Ross, 1970), they still grieve in unique ways.

Following on from the work of Stroebe and Schut's Dual Process Model (1999), Gao and Slaven (2017) argue that children may 'puddle jump' when grieving, to protect themselves from becoming overwhelmed. Children may appear to be upset at one moment, only to reengage with everyday activities, such as play, the next (as if jumping in and out of puddles), and will learn to live with their bereavement with time and appropriate support (Childhood Bereavement UK, 2024). Whitman (2017) argues that as children move into adolescence, they may spend longer periods of time in each behavioural state.

**Table 2.**

*Grief-related behaviours by stage of childhood as proposed by Dowdney (2008)*

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Behaviour</b>
<b>Early Childhood</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Active searching for deceased loved ones</li><li>• Loss being incorporated into play</li><li>• Potential developmental regression</li><li>• An increase in dependency</li><li>• Emotional dysregulation</li></ul>
<b>Middle Childhood</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sadness when learning of death</li><li>• Difficulties sleeping</li><li>• Psychosomatic complaints</li><li>• Difficulties concentrating</li><li>• Curiosity and questioning</li><li>• Worrying about mortality of surviving family members</li></ul>
<b>Adolescence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Withdrawing from family</li><li>• Seeking peer support</li><li>• Contemplating life's meaning</li><li>• Risk taking</li><li>• Reflecting on relationship with those who have died (this may comfort or cause distress)</li><li>• Undertaking new responsibilities</li><li>• Wanting to protect others</li></ul>

Overall, literature indicates that there is no consensus on the grief processes of CYP. Instead, CYP may respond to bereavements in a variety of ways which may be mediated by their development.

## **2.4 Childhood and Adolescent Bereavement and Psychosocial Outcomes**

Research summarised in literature reviews (Akerman and Statham, 2011; Lytje and Dyregrov, 2019) has indicated that there are a range of psychosocial outcomes related to childhood bereavement such as:

- Increased risk of anxiety and depressive symptoms.
- Increased risk of mental health conditions (compared to non-bereaved peers) such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression, including an increased risk of this persisting into adulthood.
- Engaging in risky behaviour such as smoking, drinking alcohol, abusing substances and engaging in criminal activity.

Additionally, research indicates that the circumstances of death may also impact the psychosocial outcomes associated with childhood bereavement. For example, in a longitudinal study of 7–25-year-olds, Brent et al. (2009) reported that bereaved CYP had an increased risk of depression and substance abuse compared to control participants, with a further risk of depression if parent death was by suicide.

Despite these increased risks, it is key to note that there may be other factors associated with death that may increase the risk of negative psychosocial outcomes including the wellbeing of surviving caregivers and changes to economic circumstances, such as no longer being able to afford the family home (Lytje and Dyregrov, 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2019).

Despite reports of negative psychosocial outcomes for bereaved CYP, there is additional evidence that bereaved CYP may have positive life outcomes following bereavement (Lytje

and Dyregrov, 2019), and in some cases, post-traumatic growth (Brewer and Sparkes, 2011). Post-traumatic growth is a concept introduced by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) as positive changes and adaptations that individuals might experience following trauma. Further investigation of post-traumatic growth was examined in a systematic review by Şimşek Arslan et al. (2022), highlighting that parentally bereaved CYP had experienced post-traumatic growth. However, this may be less likely for those who experience sudden or violent losses, with secondary losses such as losing a home also decreasing likelihood of post-traumatic growth. The authors also argued that post-traumatic growth can be supported by different factors such as CYP expressing their feelings, having spirituality, experiencing caregiving, and positive family reinforcement (Şimşek Arslan et al., 2022).

## **2.5 Childhood and Adolescent Bereavement and Educational Outcomes**

Research has also explored the impact of childhood bereavement on educational outcomes, producing mixed results. For example, in reviewing UK and Scandinavian studies, Dyregrov et al. (2022) found an association between bereavement and reduced educational attainment, alongside increased chances of school noncompletion (compared to non-bereaved peers). A large-scale cohort study of 373,104 individuals in Norway contributes to such evidence, finding that those whose parents had died from an external cause, compared to those not bereaved in childhood, had lower levels of educational attainment and a higher level of noncompletion of mandatory schooling and higher education (Burrell et al., 2020). Another systematic review reported similar findings from international studies, with bereavement being associated with lower academic attainment (Elsner et al., 2022). There is some limited UK data regarding the impact of bereavement on academic attainment, with Abdelnoor and Hollins (2002) reporting an association between CYP bereavement and decreased examination results. Reasons for such reduced attainment are explored by McLaughlin et al. (2019), who argue that, due to grief, bereaved CYP may struggle to maintain concentration

during learning. However, it has been debated as to whether other psychosocial factors interact with decreased academic attainment. For example, Elsner et al. (2022) argue that bereaved individuals from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds and from minoritised ethnic backgrounds face higher risks of reduced attainment, as do those whose bereavement is due to a sudden, externalised form of death (such as suicide or murder). However, Dyregrov et al. (2022) found mixed results as to whether these psychosocial factors impact educational attainment following bereavement. It may be that research has not readily considered other factors associated with attainment, with McLaughlin et al. (2019) arguing that many studies they reviewed “did not take pre-loss factors into account, such as previous school performance, the child’s overall level of competence and the type of loss” (pp.13). Therefore, further consideration of how different factors within a child’s life may interact with the experience of bereavement to affect the child’s outcomes is required. For example, McLaughlin et al. (2019) reflect that there is a social bias surrounding childhood bereavement and its outcomes as CYP from lower SES backgrounds are more likely to experience parental bereavement.

## **2.6 Current National context: Legislation and Support for Bereaved CYP**

Within the UK educational landscape, governmental bodies such as the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department of Health and Social Care (DoHSC) have increased emphasis on the mental health and wellbeing of CYP. Within their 2018 Green paper, the DfE and DoHSC acknowledged the importance of ensuring healthy mental wellbeing for CYP and expressed aims to address inequalities in mental health provision for CYP (DfE and DoHSC, 2018). Although the green paper does not explicitly name bereavement as a factor in impacting the mental wellbeing of CYP, the impact of trauma is addressed, with the paper arguing that educators have an important role in supporting children and their families with issues related to mental wellbeing.

The importance of support for CYP experiencing bereavement is directly highlighted within the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2014), with bereavement being recognised as a factor that may contribute to mental health difficulties for CYP:

*“6.22 Professionals should also be alert to other events that can lead to learning difficulties or wider mental health difficulties, such as bullying or bereavement. Such events will not always lead to children having SEN, but it can have an impact on wellbeing and sometimes this can be severe.” - pp.96*

Additionally, the established Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) (DfE, 2019) guidance states that teachers need to have awareness of pupils’ bereavement experiences when implementing lessons:

*“102. Teachers should be aware of common ‘adverse childhood experiences’ (such as family breakdown, bereavement and exposure to domestic violence) and when and how these may be affecting any of their pupils and so may be influencing how they experience these subjects” - pp. 36*

More recently, new draft RSE guidance (DfE, 2024) has been put out for consultation. This indicates a responsibility to teach children in both primary and secondary school about death and the impact this can have on individuals and families (DfE, 2024). This highlights the recent developments with regards to schools’ responsibilities regarding CYP wellbeing and understanding of bereavement.

## **2.7 School-Based Support and Bereaved CYP’s Experiences**

Regarding the delivery of support for bereaved CYP, Dyregrov et al. (2020) argue that schools may be best placed to deliver such assistance due to the amount of time children spend at school. Additionally, schools may have the capacity to provide pupils with routine

and predictability following a life-changing event (Duncan, 2020). Despite this, research has demonstrated that support available for CYP in schools varies.

In evaluating the current bereavement support provision (BSP) available in British schools, McLaughlin et al. (2019) reported that although many schools acknowledge the importance of bereavement, they do not necessarily know how to implement appropriate BSP for their pupils. They further indicate that there is no specific national guidance available to schools to inform their bereavement response.

In contrast, there are established bereavement responses in Norway, Denmark and Australia (Lytje, 2017) that have been informed by bereavement plans (known as b-plans). These originated in Norway (Dyregrov et al., 2013) and were then adapted and both widely used and researched in Denmark (Lytje et al., 2023). Data from 2018 indicates that bespoke b-plans for schools are adopted by between 94% to 98% of schools in Denmark (Lytje, 2018). B-plans aim to provide schools with both information and guidance to support pupils experiencing a bereavement.

Within the UK, despite there being some recognition of bereavement in education within governmental policy, the UK Commission on Bereavement (UKCB) (2022) highlights a dearth of BSP available for CYP. Gathering the views of bereaved CYP in the UK, the commission found that 49% of respondents reported that they had ‘a little support’ or ‘no support’ following a bereavement. The UKCB (2022) argued there may be barriers to educators in delivering this support due to lack of confidence and inflexible systems. They expressed a need for bereavement policies mandated in schools to provide support for CYP. Similarly, McLaughlin et al. (2019) reported that there is an inconsistency in the availability of BSP in schools.

## **2.8 Chapter Summary**

Overall, this literature review introduces key concepts relating to the present study. Models of grief were explored prior to contextualising this in the experiences of bereaved CYP.

Furthermore, as the current study has taken place in a UK schooling context, the implications of childhood bereavement in this context were also explored. The following chapter will present a further literature review with a narrower focus upon “What are the experiences of teaching staff who have worked with bereaved CYP?”



## Chapter Three: Literature Review of School Staff Experiences of Working with Bereaved CYP.

### 3.1 Overview of Chapter

This chapter investigates existing research regarding the perceptions and experiences of teaching staff who have worked with bereaved CYP. Here, I discuss literature that investigates the perceived role of teaching staff in working with bereaved students, as well as the facilitators and barriers they encounter. Published, peer-reviewed qualitative and mixed-methods research papers published after 2010 were included in this narrative review. The literature review features studies in which at least 50% of the participants have experienced working with bereaved CYP, to allow for their perceptions to be highlighted. Papers were initially identified using search terms (see Table 3) in the following databases: EBSCO, Proquest, APA Psych Articles and Info and Web of Science. Supplementary searches were also undertaken in Google Scholar and additional papers were identified via hand searches.

**Table 3.**

*Search terms used in narrative literature review regarding school staff experiences.*

Search terms used for abstracts	Search terms used for titles
childhood bereavement or bereavement or bereaved pupil or bereaved student <b>AND</b> teacher or teachers or educator or educators or teaching staff or teaching assistant or school staff or pastoral staff <b>AND</b> perspectives or views or perceptions or attitudes or opinion or experience	childhood bereavement or bereavement or bereaved pupil or bereaved student <b>AND</b> teacher or teachers or educator or educators or teaching staff or teaching assistant or school staff or pastoral staff <b>AND</b> perspectives or views or perceptions or attitudes or opinion or experience

## **3.2 Education Staff's Perceptions of Their Role in Working With Bereaved CYP.**

### **3.2.1 Assessment of Their Role**

Most research in this area highlights that many teaching staff believe that they, and their educational settings, can have an important role in working with and supporting bereaved CYP (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021; Costelloe et al., 2020; Lane et al., 2014; Potts, 2013). For example, Abraham-Steele and Edmonds (2021) conducted semi-structured interviews with UK primary school teachers, exploring their experiences of working with bereaved CYP to develop a greater understanding of BSP available to CYP (please see Table 4 for further details of studies in the literature review, including the roles of participants). Data was analysed using inductive Thematic Analysis to allow for “unanticipated insights” to be captured rather than applying a priori concepts (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021, pp.11). When determining what their role in BSP may encompass, teaching staff expressed that this may be pastoral and emotional in nature, allowing children to express their grief.

However, there are also conflicting views from teaching staff as to what their role is or should be with regards to bereavement. Multiple studies indicated that teaching staff feel that supporting bereaved children results in them taking on responsibilities beyond their specified role. Potts (2013) conducted mixed-methodology research, using hermeneutical analysis, in which 21 UK school teachers and one teaching assistant were surveyed about their experiences working with bereaved CYP and BSP offered by their settings. Participants were presented with a fictionalised account of a Key Stage 1 child's internal monologue following a bereavement and were asked to comment on this. With regards to their role in working with bereaved CYP, a participant reported that teaching staff should not offer BSP as they are not “trained counsellors” (pp.99). Opposing views were presented by Lane et al.'s (2014) study. 12 UK secondary school teachers, having worked with bereaved CYP in the previous five years, engaged in semi-structured interviews that used Grounded Theory to explore staff

responses to bereaved students. Lane et al. (2014) found that, due to the nature of working in a classroom, teachers can assume multiple roles, “becoming counsellors without knowing it” (pp.657). In Israel, Levkovich and Elyoseph (2023) interviewed 25 teachers of primary and secondary-aged children. A qualitative-phenomenological approach using Thematic Content Analysis was used to gain an understanding of the perceptions of educators in their experience of working with bereaved CYP. Although many teaching staff felt motivated to support CYP, some experienced lack of clarity of the expectations and boundaries of their role (Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023). Such themes were also present in Abraham-Steel and Edmonds’ (2021) UK research.

In Denmark, staff have more established roles due to the development of b-plans. Within Lytje’s (2013) research (which was part of a national mixed-methods study, of which the quantitative element [Lytje, 2017] will be discussed in this literature review) three teachers, two of whom had worked with bereaved CYP, participated to develop an understanding of what teaching staff felt contributed to good and bad BSP practices. This included one participant completing a timeline interview of their experiences working with bereaved CYP, and all participants being in a focus group interview. Within this study, outcomes of the focus group interview indicated that participants acknowledged teaching staff having an important role in supporting bereaved CYP, with bad practice being an avoidance of engaging in support. However, participants also agreed that staff should not be “overindulgent” in their attempts to support CYP, which may be based on serving their own needs (pp.136).

However, although many of the papers in this literature review include smaller scale qualitative studies, in this piece of research three participants worked together to determine what made ‘good’ and ‘bad’ BSP provision. Due to this particularly small sample, it should be noted that these views cannot necessarily be applied to other staff who engage in Danish b-plans.

Overall, across both the UK and international research, there is motivation to support CYP but a lack of clarity of what this entails.

**Table 4.**

*Details of studies included in the narrative literature review*

Study	Participants and roles	Country
Abraham-Steele and Edmonds (2021)	n= 11 Head Teachers (n = 2), Assistant Head Teachers (n = 2), Teaching Assistant (n = 1), SENDCo (n =1) , Assistant SENDCo/Class Teacher (n =1) , Trainee Teachers, Deputy Head/ Inclusion Manager	UK
Costelloe et al. (2020)	n = 16 Teacher (n = 8), Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (n =3), Special Educational Needs Coordinator (n = 2), Pastoral Lead (n = 1), Assistant Headteacher (n = 2)	UK
Demuth et al. (2020)	n = 29 Teachers (n = 18), counsellors and school psychologists (n = 7), administrators (n = 2) and “other” (n = 2)	USA
Lane et al. (2014)	n = 12 Secondary school teachers (n = 12)	UK
Levkovich and Elyoseph (2023)	n = 25 Elementary school teacher (n = 14), Junior high school teacher (n = 6), High school teacher (n =5)	Israel
Lynam et al. (2019)	n = 354	Republic of Ireland

	Primary/early childhood pre-service teachers (n = 278),	And
	Post-primary pre-service teachers (n =76)	Northern Ireland (UK)
Lytje (2013)	n = 3	Denmark
	Primary and secondary school teachers (n = 2), secondary school teachers (n = 1)	
Lytje (2017)	n = 967	Denmark
	School teachers (n = 967)	
Morell-Velasco et al. (2020)	n = 63 Primary education teachers (n = 32), secondary education teachers (n = 31)	Spain
Potts (2013)	n = 22 Primary school teachers (n=22)	UK

### 3.2.2 Confidence in Supporting Bereaved CYP.

Lack of role clarity when working with bereaved CYP can lead to a recurrent pattern of fear and hesitation in teaching staff. For example, participants reported feeling “helpless” in three studies when considering supporting bereaved pupils (Lane et al. 2014; Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023 and Morell-Velasco et al. 2020). Morell-Velasco et al. (2020) explored perceptions of Spanish primary and secondary school teachers in response to childhood bereavement, in a large-scale qualitative study of 63 teachers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and analysed using Thematic Analysis. For younger participants (aged between 23 and 30-years-old), researchers noted that feelings of helplessness were more common than for other participants. However, despite the authors stating that the interviews were of a semi-structured nature, participants provided written responses to questions.

Therefore, it could be argued that these were in fact structured interviews, meaning that researchers were not able to capture the potential nuances of a conversation and flexible questioning in response to participants engagement with the dialogue. However, using a written interview may have allowed for participants to feel safer to provide honest, vulnerable responses to questions. As these were handwritten responses, two responses were eliminated “as they were illegible” (Morell-Velasco et al., 2020). Therefore, this may be a limitation of the study as the views of these staff members were not included but may have provided valuable insights that could have been captured by other means.

Feelings of helplessness may arise from staff feeling unequipped with the experience and practical tools to provide BSP. Studies also noted that school staff experience fears of incompetence and unpreparedness in response to bereavement (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021; Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023; Morell-Velasco et al., 2020). Such worries also include a fear of saying something wrong in response to a bereavement. For example, Costelloe et al. (2020) explored BSP on offer in UK schools in London and how staff are supported to deliver this by interviewing 16 members of school staff that had worked with a child who had been bereaved of a sibling, parent or peer in the previous five years. 16 participants were interviewed using questions generated from 260 questionnaire responses from the first phase of an unpublished study and data was subsequently analysed using inductive Thematic Analysis. Within this study, Costelloe et al. (2021) applied Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (2005) to explore how different levels (such as microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem) of a child’s school environment and their interactions may impact bereavement support. Within the study, some school staff felt that they had not had adequate preparation or guidance for BSP work which made them concerned about not getting things ‘right’. Furthermore, staff in Lytje’s (2013) research reflecting on Danish BSP also noted that staff need “courage” to support bereaved

CYP and to ask for help when needed (pp.135). Therefore, it may also be important for research to consider factors that impact on staff confidence.

Some teaching staff applied their previous experiences regarding bereavement to inform their work (Lane et al., 2014), with this acting as “the main sources of their knowledge regarding bereavement support” (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021; pp. 20). Reflecting on their own experiences of bereavement also influenced the work of teaching staff in Costelloe et al.’s (2020) study.

The impact of personal experiences was also raised by participants in research by Lynam et al. (2020). Lynam et al. (2020) surveyed 354 pre-service teachers from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and, using a semi-structured format, interviewed six of these teachers to explore their experiences and training related to children who had experienced bereavement and separation. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics and semi-structured interview data was analysed using Thematic Analysis. Within this study, 52% of all survey respondents reported feeling confident in supporting bereaved pupils, with 80% of participants who had been bereaved feeling that they were more able to provide positive support based on their experiences.

The impact of personal and professional experiences has also been explored in Spain by Morell-Velasco et al. (2020). A lack of confidence in supporting bereaved CYP was more likely in less experienced, younger teachers. However, in contrast, although a small majority, more pre-service teachers in Lynam et al. (2020)’s study felt more confident than not.

Overall, despite a minority of studies indicating some confidence from teaching staff regarding work in bereavement, it appears that this is an area for development.

### **3.2.3 Emotional Impact on Teaching Staff**

Studies also explored the emotional impact of a pupil's bereavement on teaching staff. A wide range of emotional reactions were described by staff including sadness, shock, distress and pity (Costelloe et al, 2020; Lane et al., 2014; Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023). Different factors may impact emotional responses of staff such as circumstances of death (Lane et al., 2014), fears of losing their own loved ones (Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023) and relating children's bereavement experiences to their own (Costelloe et al., 2020).

Participants in the studies reviewed also demonstrate an awareness of staff protecting themselves emotionally. For example, within Lane et al's (2014) study, participants reported creating emotional distance from the situation and that acting as a professional facilitated such a boundary. This was also reported by Levkovich and Elyoseph (2023), where teaching staff reported that they used their professional role to create emotional distance, and to try to display strength and hide their feelings.

It may be that some teaching staff foster emotional distance as a form of protection due to a fear of distress. Teachers in Levkovich and Elyoseph's (2023) study reported that the emotional distress they experienced from working with bereaved CYP began to impact them negatively outside of work, with some feeling the desire to protect their emotions.

Additionally, individuals have reported finding work with bereaved pupils to be "emotionally draining" (Lane et al, 2014, pp. 657).

Teaching staff have therefore indicated that their emotions can be a barrier to working with bereaved CYP (Morell-Velasco et al., 2020). Therefore, it may be interesting for future research to explore the support that staff have available to feel that they are able to support bereaved students.



### **3.2.4 Support for Staff**

Regarding support for staff when working with bereaved CYP, a common thread across research indicates that school staff rely on incidental support from colleagues and managerial figures, as opposed to having formal support structures available (Costelloe et al., 2020; Lane et al., 2014; Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023; Morell-Velasco et al., 2020). Throughout the literature, the purpose of staff support ranged from emotional support (Lane et al., 2014; Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023), to learning from other's experiences to utilise in their own practice (Morell-Velasco et al., 2020). It was also indicated from Israeli research that some teaching staff may also have access to school guidance counsellors who can provide emotional support directly (Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023). Access to guidance counsellors was not raised in UK research, demonstrating a difference in what may be on offer to students and staff. Although some participants within the literature highlight the positive impact of support from other staff, such as feeling "thankful" and experiencing "relief" (Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023, pp. 953), as well as a sense of appreciation (Costelloe et al., 2020), others have reported a lack of support, indicating how this impacts them. For example, within Lynam et al.'s (2020) research, participants expressed that staff need more wellbeing support whilst working with CYP who are experiencing bereavement, separation and divorce within their families. Participants opined that in receiving such support, they would have better capacity to support bereaved CYP if they felt well in themselves (Lynam et al., 2020).

### **3.3 Discussing Death and Bereavement**

#### **3.3.1 Acknowledging the Bereavement of CYP**

Research that explores the discussion and acknowledgement of a bereavement with the affected CYP has garnered various responses. Although some participants felt it was important for teaching staff to talk about bereavements (Lane et al., 2014), other research has indicated that teachers may feel discomfort discussing a CYP's bereavement (Morell-Velasco et al., 2020). Furthermore, within Elyoseph and Levkovich's (2023) study, teaching staff reported that they had been asked to either support the surviving parent in delivering, or delivering themselves, the news of a family member's death to pupils, despite feeling overwhelmed and that this was beyond their role.

In contrast to some teaching staff informing students of a death (Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023), not all school staff have been actively made aware of pupil's bereavements, with some bereavements not being identified (Costelloe et al., 2020). For example, teaching staff had even reported finding out about a CYP's bereavement via pieces of set work. A lack of information regarding instances of bereavement, may inhibit these conversations being had.

In contrast to other studies, Abraham-Steele and Edmonds (2021) found that participants had used facilitative resources to support conversing with children about bereavements, such as using memory boxes, including special items and memories related to the deceased, and looking at photos of them.

Overall, there are mixed responses both within the UK and internationally with regards to acknowledging a CYP's bereavement. Whereas some staff members may feel supported to have these conversations, they can be a source of discomfort for others.

### **3.3.2 Discussing Death in the Classroom Context**

When considering the discussion of death with classes, teaching staff across the literature reported that they felt that these discussions were important to have and children can engage in such topics (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021; DeMuth et al., 2020; Potts, 2013). For example, DeMuth et al. (2020) completed a study of 29 American school staff who worked with primary and secondary-age children across public and private schools. Positions included teachers, counsellors and psychologists, administrators, and ‘other’ roles. The study aimed to gather educators’ views, regarding working with bereaved students and their opinions regarding the BSP available, using surveys with open and closed responses. Survey output was analysed using descriptive content analysis and a coding framework. With regards to discussing death, some participants expressed a desire to ensure that students knew that they were there to talk to them. However, participants in the study were recruited from a conference focusing on supporting students with trauma. Therefore, they may have already had a vested interest in trauma related subjects, such as bereavement, meaning that this study may have lacked a wider range of perspectives.

However, with regards to this topic, some members of teaching staff expressed uncertainty in discussing death due to a lack of confidence (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021) and concerns about the timing of such conversations (Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023). Regarding their lack of confidence in discussing death with pupils, fear of saying the wrong thing was also noted by Lane et al. (2014). Additionally, staff were concerned about including discussions of their own bereavements (Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023; Lane et al., 2014) whilst also being conflicted as to whether this could impact how a child processes their own loss or be a facilitator towards discussing bereavement (Lane et al., 2014). There were some enabling factors, towards discussing death, identified too. For example, one teacher reflected upon the death of a class pet acting as a natural introduction to death-related concepts

(Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021). Other teaching staff stated that their school curricula facilitated discussion regarding death in subjects such as PSHE (DeMuth et al. 2020).

Furthermore, staff in Abraham-Steele and Edmonds' (2021) research expressed acknowledgement of children being able to talk about difficult subjects and the importance of not underestimating them.

### **3.4 Teaching Staff's Perceptions of Bereaved CYP**

#### **3.4.1 Perceptions of Bereaved CYP and Their Needs.**

Much of the research regarding teaching staff's experiences of working with bereaved children includes an exploration of staff perceptions about bereaved CYP's understanding, reactions, and needs following bereavement. Within the literature, some participants demonstrated a belief that children's developmental stages influence the support they require at school. For example, some teachers reported that younger children may have less of an understanding of bereavement (Morell-Velasco et al., 2020) and that the "developmental needs" of a student may impact the response of a teacher (Lane et al., 2014, pp.658). Set ideas of what children understand and need with regards to their bereavement was also demonstrated in Lytje's 2017 study, surveying 967 Danish teachers with regards to school bereavement responses. Many of the questions allowed for yes/no responses with teachers also being able to add additional comments. Within this study, most participants believed that children's grief is characterised via "a series of specific stages" (Lytje, 2017, pp.31), showing a belief from teaching staff that processing bereavement may be a homogenous experience. It is also interesting to note that, within this study, as there was a large number of participants, analysis focused upon the frequency of responses and 'issues' that arose. Therefore, there could have been an opportunity for the research to examine the statistical significance of the survey responses and to use further analysis to generate themes of participants' open

responses. However, the researchers note that the capacity for more complex analysis of the data was constrained by it being part of a master's dissertation.

In contrast to Lytje's (2017) study, other teaching staff across the literature demonstrated a belief that children have varied bereavement responses (Costelloe et al., 2020 and Morell-Velasco et al., 2020). For example, teachers in Costelloe et al.'s (2020) work demonstrated a belief that children's bereavement responses are unique, presenting differently across individuals. In contrast to grief being in a distinct set of stages, teachers in Morell-Velasco et al.'s (2020) study expressed that bereaved children experience a range of emotions and their emotional affect can vary over time between and within individuals. Furthermore, some teaching staff believe that a child's response to bereavement may vary due to "environmental and developmental triggers" (Costelloe et al., 2020, pp. 286), demonstrating a belief of a wide variety of bereavement reactions. However, it is also useful to note that this study had a self-selecting sample. Therefore, the members of staff taking part in this study may have had a vested interest in bereavement and could have been more attuned to the bereavement responses of CYP.

### **3.4.2 Relationships Between Teaching Staff and Bereaved CYP.**

The topic of relationships between bereaved pupils and teaching staff recurs across the literature. Within multiple studies, teaching staff felt it was important for them to demonstrate empathy towards bereaved CYP (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021; Costelloe et al., 2020; Morell-Velasco et al., 2020) and to listen to them (Costelloe et al., 2020; Potts, 2013). Some teaching staff felt that their relationship with a pupil was influential in their response to bereavements, alongside how they were perceived by the child. For example, secondary school teachers in Lane et al.'s (2014) study felt that their pre-existing relationships with students impacted their response to them after a bereavement, feeling that knowing a pupil better allowed for a personalised response. Furthermore, teaching staff in Costelloe et al.'s

(2020) study similarly reflected on the benefits of “attuned relationships” with pupils to facilitate BSP.

Across studies, there was also discussion as to which staff members may be better suited for a supportive relationship with bereaved CYP. For example, some teaching staff within Abraham-Steele and Edmonds’ (2021) study reflected that they felt that teaching assistants may be better suited to support a bereaved pupil, in comparison to class teachers, due to the demands of their workload. They also acknowledged that children may struggle to talk to adults perceived as authority figures, such as senior members of staff, potentially inhibiting how much support those adults can offer. However, in Lane et al.’s (2014) study, some secondary school teachers identified that they could often be the first adults at school that CYP would approach for support regarding a bereavement. This is an interesting contrast between the two UK studies as one may assume that a primary school teacher may be more readily able to support a bereaved child due to being their main class teacher, whereas in secondary school, students see individual members of staff less frequently. Furthermore, Abraham-Steele and Edmonds (2021) reported that participants sometimes honoured the wishes of parents and carers, in their response to a bereavement, as opposed to what a student may want. This demonstrates potential tension for staff to ensure that surviving family members agree upon the level of school involvement following a death.

In contrast to many members of teaching staff expressing high levels of empathy towards bereaved CYP (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021; Costelloe et al., 2020; Morell-Velasco et al., 2020), research in UK primary schools from Abraham-Steele and Edmonds (2021) reflected upon low levels of empathy and expectations from some teaching staff. For example, they reported that some participants had been dismissive of children’s experiences, describing children as fragile in their ability to cope with their bereavement. It could be argued that this distance from bereaved CYP created by staff members may be a protective

strategy. For example, teachers in Levkovich and Elyoseph's (2023) study reported that, at times, they needed to have some emotional separation between themselves and the pupil as a form of emotional protection. Some staff also reported that they thought about what the life outcomes of their bereaved students may be, with this becoming a source of worry. It may be that for some staff members, creating a separation and distance may reduce the impact and frequency of such worries.

### **3.4.3 Perceptions of Bereaved CYP's Behaviours**

Across international and UK research, many members of teaching staff have reported bereavements having an impact on CYP's behaviour in school. For example, Morell-Velasco et al. (2020) reported that teachers felt there was an increased risk of social isolation in bereaved students. Similar findings were also found by Lynam et al. (2020) with participants reporting that bereaved CYP had increased social withdrawal.

Other teaching staff have reported that some bereaved pupils had struggled emotionally and exhibited behaviours that may be perceived as disruptive (Costelloe et al., 2020).

### **3.4.4 Perceptions of bereaved CYP's Academic Attainment and Performance**

Within some studies, teaching staff expressed their views of perceived changes in CYP's academic attainment and performance following a bereavement. For example, teaching staff reported that, following a bereavement, CYP may have had difficulties with concentration (Lynam et al, 2020) and a lack of engagement in work, resulting in a negative impact on academic attainment (Morell-Velasco et al, 2020).

In contrast, pre-service teachers within Lynam et al.'s (2020) study reported that they did not notice any differences in the academic performance of bereaved children. This may highlight that, compared to preservice teachers, more experienced teaching staff (such as those in Morell-Velasco et al., 2020) could be more attuned to observing changes in their students.

### **3.5 Accommodations and Support for Bereaved CYP**

#### **3.5.1 Perceptions of Internal Support Available**

Across many studies examining teaching staff's perceptions of bereavement, most indicated that staff were able to identify different types of support available to students within school. Providing emotional support was consistently identified as a key element of student support (Costelloe et al., 2020; DeMuth et al., 2020; Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023; Morell-Velasco et al., 2020). Some direct emotional and therapeutic interventions were identified as being used by teaching staff including Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) (Costelloe et al., 2020; DeMuth et al., 2020, Morell-Velasco et al., 2020), whereas other staff reported informal offerings of emotional support such as making sure the child had someone to talk to and to listen to them (DeMuth et al., 2020). British primary school teachers also reflected that it is important for each child to be seen as an individual, with support varying on a case-by-case basis (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021). For some teachers, this support extended beyond the school day, with teachers attending the deceased's funeral (DeMuth et al., 2020; Lytje, 2013).

Additional support given to children in school was also identified, including making academic accommodations, such as alterations to examinations and deadlines, and having additional breaks (DeMuth et al., 2020). Adaptations were also discussed by teaching staff regarding reflections upon learning content following a bereavement. Whereas some teaching staff wanted to ensure that children still had opportunities to engage in events like Father's Day by making a card for a deceased parent (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021), others provided exemption from topics that were sensitive or related to circumstances of death (Lane et al., 2014). However, although some teachers worried about potentially distressing topics arising in the curriculum, some were uncertain as to whether changes could be made and were not sure about how helpful this would be. In contrast, although participants in



Abraham-Steele and Edmonds' (2021) study were mindful of potentially upsetting events such as sensitive topics and anniversaries, some teaching staff felt that it was important to address these issues, rather than ignore them. Similarly, there were contrasting feelings experienced by American school staff in DeMuth et al.'s (2020) study. Where some teachers felt sensitive to context in the classroom surrounding the death, others felt it was important for death to be addressed in the curriculum and for children to share their experiences if they so wished.

Although both direct and indirect adaptations and support have been raised by school staff across the curriculum, others have expressed a belief in the importance of routine and familiarity in supporting bereaved pupils (DeMuth et al., 2020; Morell-Velasco et al., 2020). Despite recognising a need for routine, other teaching staff noted that flexible adaptations may be necessary (DeMuth et al., 2020). For example, Lane et al. (2014) noted that participants "identify[ed] schools as constant and normal at times of need but also able to adapt in report to the student's need" (pp.655).

### **3.5.2 The Use of External Agencies**

Across the literature, the use of external agencies to support bereaved CYP was also discussed by teaching staff. In UK research, there were teaching staff who demonstrated some awareness of external agencies and had signposted children and families towards these (Lane et al., 2014). One type of service highlighted by participants was the delivery of bereavement services and counselling to pupils (Costelloe et al., 2020; DeMuth et al., 2020; Lane et al., 2014; Lynam et al., 2020; Lytje, 2013; Morell-Velasco et al., 2020). The use of educational psychologists (EPs) was also raised in Costelloe et al.'s (2020) research of British primary school staff. However, there were mixed views expressed by participants regarding the use of EPs and other external agencies in supporting CYP bereavement. Whereas some appreciated the use of external agencies, others did not find it helpful, with one participant

stating that they found it difficult to speak to external agencies. In contrast, secondary school teaching staff have reflected on external agencies also being able to support them and their practice (Lane et al., 2014).

It is important to note that in the research included in this literature review, the majority of participants had opted-in to sharing their experiences. Reflecting on their own research, Abraham-Steele and Edmonds (2021) commented that participants deciding to take part in their study may have had an interest in bereavement which may have “give[n] an exaggerated view of what is really available in schools.” (pp. 27). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that this is a limitation potentially present across other studies.

### **3.6 Perceptions of School Environments and Systems Regarding Their role in Bereavement**

#### **3.6.1 Roles And Responsibilities of the School Community.**

As well as reflecting on their role in working with bereaved CYP, teaching staff have discussed their understanding of the roles and responsibilities of other staff. Some teaching staff noted a lack of nominated responsibility within this area (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021), expressing a desire for such a role to be formed (Lynam et al., 2014). Others noted that collaborative work amongst colleagues is used to support working with bereaved children and to agree future actions (DeMuth et al., 2020; Morell-Velasco et al., 2020). There was also a theme of participants desiring more support from senior management (Costelloe et al., 2020) and not feeling listened to by them (Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023). Although some teaching staff in Levkovich and Elyoseph’s (2023) study reported having consultative support from school guidance counsellors, others reported feeling alone and lacking assistance.

### **3.6.2 Student Peer Support**

Some participants in the literature shared their perspectives on the responses of CYP's classmates following a bereavement. Teachers reported that relationships with peers may impact CYP's bereavement experience, noting that they felt it was important to cultivate companionship for these children (Morell-Velasco et al., 2020). In contrast, other teaching staff expressed concern around what primary-aged peers may say to bereaved pupils and would sometimes censor conversations to reduce upset, worrying that a death may be commented upon negatively (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021).

### **3.6.3 Resources Available to Staff**

Another theme across the literature was a reflection upon the availability of resources to enable BSP such as time and information (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021; Lane et al., 2014). Teachers in Abraham-Steele and Edmonds' (2021) research reported being self-sufficient in researching information online about bereavement but not having the guidance of how to implement it, nor the time. A lack of structured time and resources available to teaching staff was also reflected by Lynam et al. (2020) in which 77% of participants surveyed agreed that they would rely on their own intuition when supporting bereaved CYP. Such findings across literature indicate that many members of teaching staff lack access to resources to facilitate BSP.

### **3.6.4 Bereavement Systems, Guidance and Training**

Consistently, across UK and international research, many members of teaching staff reported a lack of bereavement training despite a desire to engage in it (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021; Costelloe et al., 2020; Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023; Lynam et al, 2020; Morell-Velasco et al., 2020; Potts, 2013). Some teaching staff expressed that having access to training would reduce feelings of uncertainty regarding practice surrounding bereavement

(Lane et al., 2014). Reflections were also made about the availability of bereavement training during initial teacher training (ITT), with teachers expressing that this was not available to them during their ITT, but they believed that this would be most beneficial for individuals early on in their careers, whereas more established staff members may have learned more from experiences (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021). In contrast, teachers in Israel noted that they had access to training from their school guidance counsellors (Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023).

The literature has also explored the use of formal guidance in schools to direct bereavement responses from staff. Within UK research, the majority of participants reported that their setting did not have formal guidance with regards to responding to bereaved CYP (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021; Costelloe et al., 2020; Potts, 2013). However, some teaching staff expressed a desire for guidance to be available due to feeling apprehensive about how to respond to a bereavement (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021 and Costelloe et al., 2020). It was noted that the DfE provides guidance to schools in other areas, such as mental wellbeing in schools, with participants expressing that this should also be the case for bereavement (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021). When considering what guidance might look like, American teachers suggested that this could be individualised for each child but be informed by more general information regarding childhood bereavement and could offer up accommodations that schools could make for bereaved CYP (DeMuth et al., 2020). Furthermore, in UK research, teaching staff have suggested having access to a central pastoral file that communicates any issues or major life events faced by students to school staff (Lane et al., 2014).

As indicated, bereavement plans, known as b-plans, are commonly implemented in Denmark with their development beginning in 1994, following the work of Norwegian bereavement responses (Lytje, 2013). Research from Lytje (2013, 2017) has explored teaching staff's

perceptions of working with bereaved CYP against the backdrop of these plans, reflecting on their use. Many staff involved in the study felt that b-plans were useful with 85% of teachers finding them useful in the initial weeks after death and 61% finding them useful in the year after (Lytje, 2017). The majority of participants felt more secure in their ability to support a bereaved pupil due to access to b-plans. Within the b-plans, there may still be need for flexibility for individual needs and updates as 59% of respondents believed that b-plans could accommodate for individual needs and only around half of the schools regularly updated their plans. Furthermore, although b-plans were seen as useful by those using them, even in countries with established b-plans, only 56% of staff felt that the b-plan provided enough training and support, indicating that other measures may need to be in place to support staff in their work with bereaved CYP (Lytje, 2017). In Lytje's (2013) study, participants reflected that these plans can provide a reassurance for staff but that flexibility is required.

Overall, the literature suggests that school staff would value access to guidance and training to support their practice. However, in contrast to Danish settings, this is not commonplace in the UK and requires more exploration.

### **3.7 Perceptions of Bereaved Families and the Roles of the Wider Community.**

#### **3.7.1 Relationships With Surviving Family Members**

The majority of the studies within the literature have explored the relationships between school staff and surviving family members of CYP following a bereavement. They present a varying level of communication and connection. Whereas some participants reported working closely with family members (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021; DeMuth et al., 2020 and Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023), others reported difficulties in engaging in conversation and sustaining relationships following a bereavement (Lane et al., 2014; Lynam et al., 2020; Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023). Having contact with families was a theme consistently

discussed, with staff noting that they had conversations with families to forge next steps in their child's education following a bereavement, prioritising communication and empathy (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021; DeMuth et al., 2020; Lane et al., 2014; Lytje, 2013; Morell-Velasco et al., 2020). However, teaching staff also expressed uncertainty in how to address such conversations, despite feeling that connection was important (Lane et al., 2014; Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023). In contrast, other participants demonstrated hesitancy in having conversations with parents, being wary of overwhelming or burdening them (Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023). However, British primary school teachers in Abraham-Steele and Edmonds' (2021) study reported that they would ask parents and families how they want to be supported.

Throughout the literature, school staff discussed forms of contact with families that had a range of purposes and outcomes such as:

- Attending the funeral of the deceased (DeMuth et al., 2020; Lytje, 2013).
- Expressing condolences and support (Lytje, 2017; Lytje, 2013).
- Providing reassurance to surviving family members (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021).
- Ensuring agreement and understanding with regards to the death being discussed at school (Lynam et al., 2020).

There are also some barriers to having contact with a family following a bereavement. Where some participants felt overwhelmed by the concerns of parents (Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023), others noted that they had prioritised the views of bereaved CYP and had not contacted family members (Lane et al., 2014). Some teaching staff may experience difficulties in understanding how to effectively and sensitively work with bereaved families (Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023). In contrast, it was reflected upon by some participants that

although schools had asked how parents and families would like to be supported, this could create tension whereby family members' wishes were prioritised rather than the wishes of the pupil (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021). Such findings demonstrate a difficult balance that school staff face between respecting the wishes of families and ensuring that a child's needs are met.

### **3.7.2 Understanding Family Circumstances**

As well as reflecting upon their interactions with surviving family members, school staff also explored the impact of family circumstances on their work with bereaved CYP. Pre-service teachers discussed the importance of staff members reporting any changes to family structures following a bereavement so that schools are able to provide BSP (Lynam et al., 2020). Participants in Levkovich and Elyoseph's (2023) study demonstrated awareness that, following a death, families may now be in single parent households and have new lifestyles that they are adjusting to, which may impact their capacity to be involved with school discussions.

It was also reflected in Spanish research that primary school teachers were more likely to refer to families coping (following a bereavement) as a factor impacting a child's bereavement response in comparison to secondary school teachers (Morell-Velasco et al., 2023). Understanding such family structures may impact the practice of teaching staff and their understanding of their pupil's needs. Within research, school staff have reflected upon children's relationships with deceased family members impacting the type of response required from staff (Lane et al., 2014). However, teaching staff have also discussed the relationships between pupils and surviving family members also impacting their work with children. For example, UK teachers stated that those children who had surviving parents with poor mental health experienced more difficulty following a bereavement (Costelloe et al., 2020). Additionally, another teacher in this study reflected upon contacting a bereaved pupil's

preferred point of contact, rather than their father who subsequently became upset. Such findings demonstrate that family circumstances can influence the role of teaching staff working with bereaved pupils.

### **3.7.3 Role of Culture in the Community.**

Within the literature, there was limited discussion from teaching staff concerning the role of culture and community with regards to their work with bereaved CYP and families. Where some participants had not acknowledged any role of culture or religion in their response, others demonstrated awareness of different cultural practices amongst their school community but there were no examples of adaptation in the bereavement response from teaching staff (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021).

Specifically considering the role of faith in school responses to bereavement, teaching staff who worked in UK faith schools felt confident in discussing death, as religious practices provided a scaffold for such discussions (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021 and Lane et al., 2014). Faith being a support to navigate childhood bereavement was also reflected upon by some Spanish teachers who acknowledged that faith can be used by pupils in “finding meaning in their loss.” (Morell-Velasco et al., 2020, pp.104).

## **3.8 Societal Factors Impacting Childhood Bereavement Responses in Schools**

### **3.8.1 Societal Attitudes Towards Death**

Research in UK settings reflected upon death being a ‘taboo’ subject in wider society (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021; Costelloe et al., 2020). For example, Costelloe et al.’s (2020) work noted that the ‘taboo’ quality of death within the UK has a negative impact on bereaved children who may be less able to express their grief. Despite also acknowledging this barrier, teaching staff in Abraham-Steele and Edmond’s (2021) study reported having the



opportunity to talk to primary-age students about death, with the authors noting that such conversations play an important role in breaking down taboo.

### **3.8.2 Education Systems and Socioeconomic Circumstances**

A difficulty reflected upon by teaching staff in UK research, was that pressures on the education system and other public services act as a barrier for children accessing and staff delivering BSP (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021; Potts, 2013). For example, students have struggled to access services to support their emotional wellbeing following a bereavement with many of these being “impossible to access” unless the service is being paid for (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021, pp.18). Additionally, despite many teaching staff showing a desire for further training in childhood bereavement, restricted budgets have acted as a barrier to this (Potts, 2013) and to providing pastoral support (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021).

Within Abraham-Steele and Edmonds (2021) study, participants also shared beliefs that the expectations of educational authorities, such as the DfE, do not allow for the flexibility and time required to support CYP. Furthermore, participants opined that the education system, within which they work, prioritises academic attainment over pastoral needs, meaning that bereavements may not be given due attention.

The socioeconomic status (SES) of bereaved children was also reflected upon by some teaching staff with regards to what BSP is available to bereaved CYP. For example, Abraham-Steele and Edmonds (2021) reported that best practice in terms of BSP was more evident in areas with higher SES and for staff who worked in private schools. One reason for this may be that schools in these environments may have more resource access. However, it was also noted by Lane et al. (2014) that teachers working in boarding schools would have contact more often with students than their non-boarding counterparts. Lane et al. (2014) suggests

that having such ongoing interactions with students may mean that staff are better able to develop relationships with students where they are able to discuss the bereavement.

Within some international studies, private school teachers were also interviewed. Whereas Morell-Velasco et al. (2020) found that private school teachers were more likely to attribute CYP's bereavement reactions to family and environmental factors, DeMuth et al. (2020) did not report a difference in responses between public and private school teachers, also noting that participant numbers prevented this from being closely examined.

### **3.9 Chapter Summary**

This literature review has closely examined international literature exploring the experiences of school staff who have worked with bereaved CYP. This has highlighted that school staff have a wide range of experiences in working with bereaved CYP and that instances of bereavement are commonly encountered by staff. Many staff wish to support their bereaved students, however guidance and confidence in this area is limited. Exceptions to this are in cases where staff have drawn upon previous experiences regarding bereavement or have had access to guidance such as b-plans. Further facilitators and barriers to staff supporting bereaved CYP have included: access to resources, relationships with bereaved families, sociocultural factors and the emotional impact on staff. The literature review also indicated that there is limited research in this area that specifically focuses on a UK context, with the most recent of these studies being in a primary school setting (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021; Costelloe et al., 2020) and the most recently published study in a secondary school setting being from a decade ago (Lane et al., 2014). This further emphasises the rationale for the present study in which the following research questions will be explored with secondary school staff in the UK:

**RQ1:** What are the experiences of secondary school teaching staff who have worked with bereaved CYP?

**RQ2:** What are the facilitators and barriers to staff providing support for bereaved CYP?

**RQ3:** How are staff themselves supported to support bereaved CYP?

## **Chapter Four: Methodology**

### **4.1 Chapter Overview**

The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss the methodology and methods used to answer the research questions as stated in Chapter One. My philosophical positioning as a researcher will be discussed within the context of this study. Following this, the methods used to investigate the research questions will be examined, prior to exploring the use of Reflexive Thematic Analysis to analyse the data.

### **4.2 Philosophical Positioning**

When conducting research, it is important for a researcher to explain their philosophical positioning as a form of presenting and reflecting upon the foundations of their research (Coates, 2021). Furthermore, it promotes transparency regarding the researcher's ontological and epistemological positioning and how this impacts their research (Pring, 2015). Within this section, philosophical assumptions of ontology and epistemology will be examined prior to exploring the philosophical position of Critical Realism applied in this study.

#### **4.2.1 Ontology**

The study of ontology consists of the study of the nature of reality (Delanty and Strydom, 2003) and what we constitute reality to be (Blaikie, 2000). Theories surrounding ontology can be conceptualised on a scale between whether reality is universal and observable or if it is non-observable and wholly dependent on individual interpretation (Risjord, 2014). For example, within a realist ontology, reality is proposed to exist independently of individuals and their perceptions (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2013). In contrast to this, a relativist ontology argues that reality is wholly mind-dependent and is dependent on how an individual conceives and perceives it (Jarvie and Zamora-Bonilla, 2017).

### **4.2.2 Epistemology**

Epistemology is concerned with the theory of knowledge and how we can come to acquire it. Within the spectrum of epistemology, there are two main opposing positions: empiricism and interpretivism (della Porta and Keating, 2008). Empiricists assert that knowledge is gained via experience and that we, as humans, obtain knowledge by objectively experiencing and perceiving the world external to us (Risjord, 2014). In contrast, an interpretivist epistemological stance argues that knowledge is shaped socially by the minds of individuals and their subjective interpretations of the world around them, as opposed to there being an objective reality (Capper, 2018).

### **4.2.3 Critical Realism**

Critical Realism (CR) acts as a philosophical position that is underpinned by a realist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology (Braun and Clarke, 2022). CR accepts that there is a reality independent of the individual, however this is observed and interpreted differently by the agents that interact with it (Bhaksar, 2013). Although reality within CR is proposed as a singular entity, it is interpreted individually by those who enact upon it, and researchers do not have direct access to this reality. Considering the interpretivist epistemology within CR, our understanding and acquisition of knowledge is mediated by culture and language (Vincent and O'Mahoney, 2018). When considering this in the practice of research, CR does not aim to find absolute truths using empirical means; instead it aims to develop possible understandings of an observed reality within its context (Maxwell, 2022).

### **4.2.4 Rationale for Critical Realism**

Within my research, I have adopted the paradigm of CR as it aligns with my personal conception of reality and knowledge. Specifically considering the research at hand, the use of a CR paradigm complements my stance that although death and bereavement are universal,

realist experiences, the individual's interpretation of this causal reality is mediated by social mechanisms and structures (Bhaksar, 2013). Therefore, the research understands that what we can learn about death and bereavement is mediated by the interpretations and discursive understanding of individuals interacting with these social objects. For example, within the context of the current research, I believe that although death is a universal, human experience, perceiving and experiencing bereavement is moderated by individual interactions with this social object and socio-cultural factors.

### **4.3 Qualitative Research Design**

Within this study, qualitative research design has been used. Qualitative research is an umbrella term for research that allows for the experiences and subjectivity of data to be captured with values and context being considered throughout (Neuman, 2013). It permits research to enquire and interpret experiences of the social world in a flexible and data-driven manner (Hammersley, 2013).

Due to the application of CR as my philosophical positioning, qualitative research methods were used within the study as CR allows for methodological flexibility (Fletcher, 2017; Lawani, 2021; Vincent and Mahoney, 2018). Furthermore, Roberts (2014) argues that CR can be applied to qualitative research as mechanisms are observed within the context of a social world and its influences. Additionally, the use of qualitative methods allows for participant's voices and perspectives of reality to be heard and for social phenomena to be explored on a deeper level (Roberts, 2014).

Furthermore, by taking a stance of CR, Willig (2021) argues that a researcher is acknowledging their participating role within the research with an understanding that researcher's observations of reality are bound in personal and social context. By applying CR within a qualitative methodology, there is an allowance for subjectivity and reflexivity to be included by the researcher, understanding that our perception of reality is mediated by

contextual factors (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Therefore, applying qualitative methods to my philosophical stance of CR was most appropriate (for more information regarding reflexivity please see Section 4.7).

The current study implemented an exploratory research design. Exploratory research is a typically inductive and qualitative approach that aims to develop an understanding of research questions and phenomena when there is limited data in an area (Casula et al., 2021). Due to the limited research data regarding the experiences of secondary school teaching staff in relation to bereavement, an exploratory design was deemed appropriate to answer the research questions. Different cases of staff working with bereaved CYP were explored using Reflexive Thematic Analysis which allows for the exploration of cases to be considered alongside across-case patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2021). The implementation of this will be explored in Section 4.5.

## **4.4 Methods**

### **4.4.1 Participants**

Seven participants took part in the study, expressing their interest via email. Recruitment procedures are discussed below. Prospective participants were asked to read the study information to identify if they met participation criteria prior to engaging in the study. Inclusion criteria included:

- Being a member of teaching staff at a secondary school within the geographical region of study.
- Having worked with a bereaved young person within the last five years of their career.

As opposed to solely including teachers with qualified teaching status (QTS), teaching staff were identified to participate. Within this study, teaching staff has been defined as members of staff that have a teaching and/or supportive role working directly with students. The

teaching delivered by these members of staff may include teaching or interventions delivered to a whole class, small group or in a 1:1 context. This reflects that teaching workforces have continually developed over the last two decades with more roles in settings becoming diverse (such as the development of specialised pupil support roles), suggesting that pastoral care has a key integral role that cannot be separated from the teaching of subject content (Edmond and Price, 2009). The initial research aim was to focus on instances where CYP had been bereaved of immediate family members (such as siblings and parents). However, due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, participants also explored other experiences of working with bereaved CYP that were salient to them (such as the death of peers and grandparents). Further implications of this are discussed in Section 4.7.

Participants included in the study were working in the local authority within which I was carrying out a professional practice placement. Five participants worked in mainstream secondary schools, and two participants in specialist secondary settings. Participants had a range of religious backgrounds including Christian and Sikh faiths, alongside having no religious affiliation. Table 5 provides further demographic data for each participant alongside pseudonyms which were created and chosen by the participants themselves.

#### **4.4.2 Recruitment**

Participants were recruited via email between July 2023 and December 2023 using opportunity sampling. Educational psychologists within my host local authority were asked to share contact information of their special educational needs and disability coordinators (SENDCo) with me. I then contacted SENDCos to request that they share a recruitment flyer (see Appendix A) and participant information sheet with staff (see Appendix B), which invited potential participants to email me if they met the inclusion criteria.



**Table 5.***Participant demographic data*

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Role(s)</b>	<b>Time in Education</b>
<b>Alex</b>	Female	Mental Health Lead	20 years
<b>Bruce</b>	Male	Therapeutic Lead Practitioner, DSL	8 years
<b>Cilla</b>	Female	Mental Health Practitioner	5 years
<b>Christina</b>	Female	Deputy Headteacher	34 Years
<b>Edward</b>	Male	Secondary Teacher	3 years
<b>Jason</b>	Male	Head of Year, Secondary Teacher	10 Years
<b>Victoria</b>	Female	Inclusion Manager	25 years

Once potential participants had contacted me, they were re-sent the participant information sheet alongside the consent form (see Appendix C). Participants were also given the opportunity to read the interview schedule (see Appendix D) as part of a process of informed consent and to ask any clarifying questions prior to taking part in the study.

#### **4.4.3 Procedure**

After informed consent was gathered, participants were provided with the option to conduct semi-structured interviews either face-to-face or online using Microsoft Teams. These options were provided to ensure that participants could engage in a modality that was most convenient and comfortable for them. Interviews ranged between 48 minutes and 55 minutes. Three interviews were conducted face-to-face with the remaining interviews being online.

#### **4.4.4 Data Collection**

To answer the aforementioned research questions, semi-structured interviews, as part of the qualitative research design, were conducted. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as they allow for flexibility in gathering views of individuals (Rabionet, 2011). Whereas structured interviews allow for interviewers to cover a set of designated topics, this does not allow for interviews to go ‘off script’ and explore topics of interest in further depth (Howitt, 2019). In contrast, semi-structured interviews allow for exploration of particular topic areas, promote the ability of the interviewer to seek further clarification from interviewees (Lune and Berg, 2017) and promote dialogue between participants and researchers (May, 2011).

Within the context of the present research, the use of semi-structured interviews meant that an interview schedule could allow for topics of interest related to the research questions to be explored. The current study contributes to a small pool of UK based research that explores the experiences of school staff working with bereaved CYP. As discussed in the literature review, the most recent research primarily based in the UK focused solely on the experiences of primary school staff (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021 and Costelloe et al., 2020). As the current study is focusing on secondary school staff, I felt that drawing upon similar topics of research questions (which are discussed by Abraham-Steele and Edmonds [2021] and Costelloe et al. [2020] in their papers) would be helpful to consider how these topics resonate with secondary school staff. Therefore, as well as the research questions presented in Chapter One, the interview schedule also considered the use of guidance and training to support BSP. Appendix D presents the interview schedule alongside the literature that informed the questions.

A benefit of using semi-structured interviews was that participants could be provided with the interview schedule to prepare them for potentially sensitive subjects that may be discussed. Additionally, alongside the broad scope of the questions themselves, the flexible nature of

using a semi-structured interview schedule meant that interviewees were able to focus on areas that were of interest to them.

#### **4.4.5 Pilot Interview**

At the beginning of the study, a pilot interview was conducted. This participant was recruited via the procedure outlined in the recruitment section above. The participant was the first to be recruited in the study and was therefore treated as a pilot case to gain insight and reflection on the use of the interview schedule with a participant. The participant felt able to answer the questions posed and we were able to explore multiple areas concerning bereavement and secondary schools. A point of reflection was how the interview organically included the exploration of religion and faith, alongside societal factors (such as public service funding) that may interact with bereavement. This also resonated with the work of Abraham-Steele and Edmonds (2021) who also explored sociocultural factors influencing work associated with bereaved CYP in primary schools. Therefore, an additional question was included to explicitly ask participants about sociocultural factors. As these factors were discussed in the pilot interview, the data was included for analysis.

#### **4.4.6 Ethical Considerations**

Throughout the process of their work, researchers have an obligation to promote and engage in ethical research to protect the welfare of research participants and to ensure the integrity of their work within the research community (May, 2011). Throughout the process of the research, ethical standards set out by both the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics (BPS, 2021) and HCPC Standards of Conduct (Health and Care Professionals Council, 2016) were adhered to. Ethical approval for the study was sought from the University of Birmingham's Humanities and Social Sciences Committee, with approval being granted on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2023 (see Appendix E). Key ethical considerations are set out in Table 6.

In addition to the considerations set out in Table 6, ensuring the safety of participants and myself as a researcher was key. Research regarding death is often considered to be a sensitive topic due to its potential emotionality and significance across cultures (Borgstrom et al., 2021). When engaging in potentially sensitive research, it is important that researchers take the appropriate measures to protect the safety and welfare of both their participants and themselves (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). For example, in addition to the steps presented in Table 6, I promoted the wellbeing of my participants by providing them with a sense of agency and safety throughout. This was evidenced by participants being presented with the interview schedule prior to the study so that they were fully aware of the topics to be explored and could have the opportunity to withdraw from the study or decline to answer certain questions. Additionally, participants were informed that they could have breaks or cease the interview if they no longer felt comfortable and I monitored them throughout. At the end of the interviews, I would enquire as to how the participant was feeling, ensuring that they were psychologically safe for the session to come to a close. They were also provided with a list of contacts related to bereavement and well-being organisations if they wished for further support.

With regards to the wellbeing of the researcher, Silverio et al. (2022) argue that there needs to be more consideration of the wellbeing of researchers within the literature, especially when research of sensitive topics is closely related to their own life experiences. For example, I have had my own experiences of childhood bereavement and working with bereaved CYP which made me both invested in my topic but also aware of the potential psychological impact exploring bereavement may have on my wellbeing. In response to researching bereavement, Silverio et al. (2022) argue that supervision is a key element of promoting the wellbeing of the researcher. Therefore, throughout my research I endeavoured to seek

supervision from both my academic and placement supervisors as an opportunity to reflect and support my emotional wellbeing.

**Table 6.**

*Key Ethical Considerations of the study*

<b>Ethical Consideration</b>	<b>Demonstration in current study</b>
<b>Informed Consent</b>  Ensuring that participants are informed of the intent and procedures of research, as well as how resultant data will be protected and shared (Hardicre, 2014).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants were presented with the participant information form detailing the intent, purpose and methodology of the study, alongside contact details of myself and my supervisor to allow the opportunity for any questions to be raised (see Appendix B).</li> <li>• Signed consent forms were received prior to interviews and participants were provided with their own copy.</li> <li>• Upon the interviews taking place, participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions they had about the research prior to giving further verbal consent to taking part.</li> </ul>
<b>Right to withdraw</b>  Ensuring that participants are aware of their rights to withdraw their participation and data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw as a part of the informed consent process.</li> <li>• Participants were able to withdraw their data at any point prior to or during the interview.</li> <li>• Post-interview, participants were provided with a two-week period after the completion of the interview in which they were able to withdraw their data prior to the transcription of data.</li> <li>• No participants requested that their data be withdrawn.</li> </ul>

<hr/> <b>Risk</b>  The consideration and mitigation of potential risk to both researcher and participants (Fisher and Anushko, 2008).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional consideration was taken towards the potential risk associated with this study due to its focus upon the sensitive topic of death.</li> <li>• Participants were provided with the semi-structured interview schedule prior to participation so that they knew what would be asked and could decline to participate or answer particular questions. Reminders of this were also given at the start of each interview.</li> <li>• I employed active listening and therapeutic skills as part of my Educational Psychology training to ensure that the interviews were empathetic, non-judgmental and containing. Continual monitoring of participant's affect and potential distress was monitored throughout in case participants needed a break or to stop the interview.</li> <li>• When debriefed, I enquired as to the mental wellbeing of participants and they were provided with a list of contacts for bereavement and wellbeing support that they would be able to contact should they wish to seek support following the interview.</li> <li>• When considering potential risks to the researcher, minimal risks were identified. However, due to the sensitive nature of the research topic, appropriate supervision from my academic supervisor was made available throughout.</li> </ul>
<hr/> <b>Confidentiality, anonymity and data storage</b>	<hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During the recruitment process and when seeking consent, participants were informed that their data would be stored confidentially.</li> </ul> <hr/>

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- Data was stored on a password protected computer. All files, such as audio, transcripts and demographic data were uploaded to password protected files in the University of Birmingham Research Data Store.
  - When the research data was transcribed all identifiable information (such as names and places) were anonymised.
  - Following the transcription of data, all audio files were permanently deleted.
  - Participants were also asked to provide their own pseudonym to be used within the write-up of the study.
- 

## **4.5 Data Analysis**

### **4.5.1 Reflexive Thematic Analysis**

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) was chosen to analyse the interview data. RTA is a method for interpreting and analysing qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2022), and is achieved through a process of coding interview transcripts and identifying themes (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Throughout the process of using RTA, reflexivity is key for the researcher to develop criticality and consider their role and position in the research (Braun and Clarke, 2022); please see Section 4.7 for more information.

Braun and Clarke (2022) identify a six-step process for RTA; the implementation of this in the current study is presented in Table 7. These steps include:

- Familiarisation with the data set via a process of immersion.
- Coding individual segments of data that may be related to the research questions.
- Generating initial themes from compiling codes related to the research questions.

- Developing and reviewing themes by considering how they relate to the data set.
- Refining, defining and naming themes.
- Writing up the analysis to present the findings.

Engagement with these stages is done so iteratively in order to allow for continual, reflexive engagement with the data (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Within the present research, NVivo-14 (Lumivero, 2023) was used as a tool to support data analysis. NVivo-14 is a form of computer-assistant qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), which provides tools for a researcher to aid them in organising and analysing their data (Dhakal, 2022). For example, in NVivo-14 specifically, users are able to import interview transcripts prior to selecting text to create codes (labelled at ‘nodes’ in the software), before grouping such data sets together (Phillips and Lu, 2018). Further exploration of the RTA process, and its application to a participant data set within the study, is outlined in Appendix K.

RTA can be used both deductively, in which analysis has been shaped by pre-existing theory, and inductively, in which the analysis is data-driven (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Due to the limited bereavement research focusing on the perceptions of secondary school staff, the current study used an inductive approach to RTA to find patterns in the data to begin to develop an understanding of patterns and themes across participants’ experiences. An important tenet of RTA is the role of the researcher in being reflective and acknowledging their stance and assumptions within the research (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Within my role as researcher, I have been aware of my positioning as both an ex-teacher and having been bereaved of a parent during secondary school. Therefore, throughout the entire research process I have continuously updated a reflexive research diary to be consciously reflective on my assumptions and how this relates to my research (more information regarding this is presented in Section 4.7).



#### **4.5.2 Rationale for Using RTA**

When deciding to implement RTA, multiple considerations were made. Firstly, the research adopts a CR approach in which there is an assumption that whilst there is a true reality, how we access this and perceive it can be subjective (Willig, 2021). This positioning is compatible with RTA because whilst this method can explore and identify patterns and themes across individual data, it also acknowledges the importance of individual interpretation and potential subjectivity (Braun and Clarke, 2022). The use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was briefly considered as a methodology for this study, more information on this approach and why it was not chosen, in relation to RTA, is described in Appendix L.

The reflexive nature of RTA was also an important personal consideration when deciding to use this method of analysis. As previously discussed, I recognise that I have a personal vested interest in the research topic. Therefore, engaging with a method that actively encourages researchers to be aware of and, if necessary, challenge their assumptions felt pertinent to this research.

#### **4.6 Evaluating Research Quality**

Assessing the quality of qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research, has challenges due to difficulties in applying concepts such as validity, reliability and generalisability (Mays and Pope, 2000).

**Table 7.**

*Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis and application to the present study.*

<b>Phase of RTA and purpose (as detailed in Braun and Clarke, 2022)</b>	<b>Process in current study</b>
<b>1) Familiarisation</b>  A process whereby which the researcher begins to develop observations and thoughts around the data via a process of immersion and engagement with the data.	Audio recording of interviews were listened to with notes of initial thoughts being noted in my reflexive diary. Recordings were then transcribed verbatim and then read alongside the audio recordings to check accuracy (see Appendix F for transcript sample shared with participant consent). Transcriptions were then read twice through with familiarisation maps completed for each participant to support immersion in data and develop ideas of patterns identified in the data (see Appendix G).
<b>2) Coding the data</b>  Within this stage the researcher begins labelling important features of the data and starts to consider what may be important for the research questions.	Coding was completed systematically using NVivo-14 (Lumivero, 2023).  With each research question in mind, each participant's transcripts were coded twice in different orders. Throughout this process, codes were refined to consider if they were too broad or narrow and examine if there were duplicates or highly similar codes that could be combined. See Appendix H for example NVivo codes.

Data is examined and coded on both a semantic and latent level to begin the identification of patterns within the data.	This was a reflective and iterative process throughout where codes were amended throughout as new latent and semantic data was identified when transcripts were repeatedly worked on. An audited trail of the coding process was saved via NVivo.
<b>3) Generating initial themes</b>  Within this process, the researcher identifies patterns and connections across the coded labels	Themes were initially generated by using FreeMind (2016) mind-mapping software in order to be able to identify patterns and connections between codes (See Appendix I). This allowed me to visually map and cluster sub-themes and themes.  Please see the first iteration of themes in Appendix J.
<b>4) Reviewing and developing themes</b>  In this stage, there is further development of the themes by assessing their patterns and applicability to the data set.	Following the initial generation of themes, these were reviewed and developed a further four times.  During this process, I reviewed the thematic maps to determine if there were overlapping elements to themes and to ensure that clear boundaries were in place. This process was supported by using peer supervision to discuss themes and sub-themes. I also checked my themes and sub-themes against the data extracts to ensure that they were captured by the evidence. This was checked against a Microsoft Excel sheet of all the codes used in the study. As RTA is an iterative process with phases being revisited, some codes were reviewed during this part of the process with some not being clustered into codes or being

	amended after being cross-referenced with their data extracts. Any changes were audited on the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.
<b>5) Refining, defining and naming themes</b>  In this part of the process themes are named and summarised.	After a continually iterative process, final themes were established. Thematic maps were created for research question one (exclusively) and grouped for research question two and three due to how some themes responded to both research questions. Additional peer supervision was also undertaken to discuss themes and these were also shared with my academic supervisor.  Themes were then named to convey their overall message and saliency, prior to being defined (please see Chapter Five).
<b>6) Writing up</b>  In this part of the process, the narrative analysis of the data extracts are presented.	Please see Chapter Five for a written account of the data analysis and findings.

For example, it would not be appropriate to seek or ascertain the validity of research when seeking to explore individual's understandings of their own experience. Mays and Pope (2000) argue that whilst it is still necessary to assess the quality of qualitative research, there needs to be adaptations from quantitative assessments of quality that are more applicable to the nature of qualitative research. Therefore, in order ascertain the quality of qualitative research, Yardley (2001, 2008), proposes four principles: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; and, impact and importance. Table 8 demonstrates how Yardley's (2000, 2008) principles of quality have been addressed in the present research.

#### **4.7 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is a key element of the RTA process (Braun and Clarke, 2022) and allows for critical reflection of a researcher's active role in studies, including bringing their own assumptions, belief and knowledge to the process (Finlay, 2002). It provides an opportunity to consider these factors and question how they impact the researcher's role and how research is undertaken (Jamieson et al., 2023).

To support this process, I kept a reflexive diary throughout my research. Braun and Clarke (2022) promote the use of reflexive diaries during RTA as an opportunity for researchers to reflect on what they may take for granted and question this. See Appendix M for diary extracts.

One crucial element of reflexivity is for researchers to consider how they, as an individual with their own experiences and perspectives, impact the process of research (Jamieson et al., 2023). The consideration of personal experiences, referred to in the previous section, has been important during my research journey. Namely with my bereavement, I have been aware of the fact that my personal experiences will have generated unique assumptions within this area and my beliefs around support that should be available to both bereaved CYP and staff.

**Table 8.**

*Yardley's Principles of Quality (2000, 2008) and application to the present study*

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Demonstration in present study</b>
<b>Sensitivity to context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This is the awareness of relevant literature and previous theory relating to the current research. Such awareness also includes an awareness of the socio-cultural context in which the research is taking place.</li><li>• Additionally, researchers should demonstrate an understanding of the potential power dynamics between themselves and their participants.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A literature review was undertaken to determine, summarise and identify gaps in the literature. This allowed for the present study to aim to address these gaps by focusing on secondary school staff in the UK.</li><li>• Ethical considerations, especially in light of the sensitive area of study were prioritised (see Section 4.4.6).</li></ul>
<b>Commitment and rigour</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This is the demonstration of thorough practice within collecting data, analysis and its interpretation.  Researchers should have an immersive explore of data and ensure that a suitable amount of data has been collected to allow for thorough analysis.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Please see Chapter Four for the justification of decisions made during the research process.</li><li>• Additionally, upkeep of my research diary was used to justify and reflect upon research decisions.</li></ul>

<b>Transparency and coherence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researchers should ensure that there is a congruence between their research questions, methodology, and their philosophical assumptions, with these being clear throughout their research. Additionally, in order to promote transparency, researchers should be clear and explicit in presenting their methodology and analysis, disclosing what is relevant.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The interview schedule was offered to participants prior to engaging in the study.</li> <li>• Within Chapter Four, I have explicitly stated research questions, methodology and philosophical assumptions throughout the thesis.</li> <li>• A reflexive research diary was kept throughout.</li> <li>• An auditing trail was kept when going through the analysis process using means such as: familiarisation maps; NVivo files and iterations of thematic maps.</li> </ul>
<b>Impact and importance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research should aim to provide valuable insight into the field of research and consider the impact that it may generate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implications for research have been discussed in Chapter Six.</li> <li>• Previous research findings informed the rationale for the study.</li> </ul>

Therefore, throughout the research I have created opportunities to reflect and question my assumptions with peers, supervisors and by using my research diary (again, please refer to Appendix M for extracts).

A key reflection that has arisen throughout this process is the examination of the nature of the relationships that bereaved CYP have had with the deceased. This study initially intended to explore instances where CYP had been bereaved of a sibling or parent; however, throughout the interviews, participants explored a range of relationships in which CYP had been bereaved (such as the deaths of grandparents, aunts, uncles and peers) which had had a significant impact upon them. This made me consider assumptions that existing research, and even myself, may have that the bereavement of a parent or sibling may somehow be impactful on a CYP compared to another loss. For example, some CYP live in multigenerational households and may have significant relationships with multiple family members. This also reflects on the applicability of CR in this research as, although death is understood to be universal, how we understand and experience it is mediated by linguistic, contextual and cultural factors.

#### **4.8 Chapter summary**

In this chapter, I presented the research methods and methodology undertaken in the present study. This considered my philosophical position of CR and how this contributed to the implementation of RTA. The process of recruitment and data collection was also examined prior to considering how reflexivity and research quality was assured in the process. In the next chapter, the findings of the study are presented and discussed in light of relevant literature.



## Chapter Five: Results and Discussion

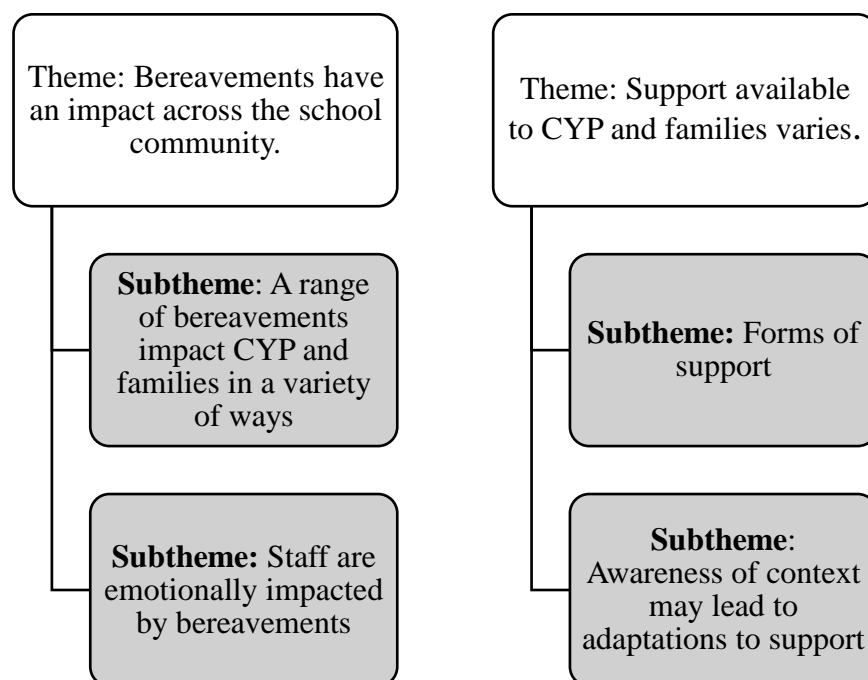
### 5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the research interviews conducted in this study. The themes generated in the research are presented alongside their relevant research questions prior to being individually discussed. This analysis will include findings being supported by quotes from the interview data examined alongside pre-existing literature.

### 5.2 Themes Relating to the Research Question: What Are the Experiences of Secondary School Staff Who Have Worked with Bereaved CYP?

**Figure 1.**

*Themes generated in relation to research question one.*



#### 5.2.1 Theme 1: Bereavements Have an Impact Across the School Community

This theme explores staff perceptions of the impacts of a bereavement on the school community, including CYP, staff and families. An important aspect of this theme was that

staff perceived CYP to be impacted by death in a multitude of ways (such as academically, practically and emotionally), with the circumstances of death also contributing to this. Being impacted by a death in the community was not limited to students and families but staff too. Staff recounted how they also felt emotionally affected by deaths in their school community and, in some cases, also experienced grief, demonstrating that death has a ripple effect across a community.

#### **5.2.1.1 Subtheme 1a: A Range of Bereavements Impact CYP and Families in a Variety of Ways**

All participants reported deaths and bereavements experienced by CYP and their families whilst working with them, with the majority reporting CYP being bereaved of a parent. Participants reflected upon the different circumstances of death and the relationships CYP had with the deceased:

*We've had...a number of pupils who...have gone through a bereavement whilst they've been with us. We've had some who have had some quite significant past bereavement issues that have been present...For example, they've ranged from kind of health issue related bereavements and some suicide.* [Bruce]

Deaths experienced within school communities were both from natural causes (for example, illnesses such as COVID-19) and unnatural causes (such as suicide and murder). In addition to the deaths of family members, some participants also reported that students had been bereaved of peers (E.g. *“the death of one of our students which impacts on the students around”* [Victoria]).

Within the literature, it is not uncommon for CYP to be bereaved, with one in 29 CYP being bereaved of a parent or sibling (Childhood Bereavement Network, 2024). Rates are likely higher when considering other family members and peers (Harrison and Harrington, 2001).

Although the literature mostly considers immediate familial relationships, it is also important to consider the bereavement of peers and family members such as grandparents. For example, noting such a gap in the literature, Livings et al. (2022) found that, when bereaved of a maternal grandmother, there was an increased risk of depressive symptoms for adolescent boys.

When exploring their perceptions of the impact of bereavements on their students, staff reported that bereaved CYP had been impacted in a range of areas such as their mental wellbeing, behaviour, and engagement with school. For example, in terms of the behavioural presentation of CYP after a bereavement, staff perceptions ranged from a sense of withdrawal (*“She kind of isolated herself socially.”* [Bruce]) to appearing emotionally dysregulated (*“I mean there’s been some... explosions in behaviour at times...”* [Edward]). Previous research also indicates that it is common for CYP to be emotionally and behaviourally impacted by bereavements. For example, within their systematic literature review of adolescent parental bereavement, Guzzo and Gobbi (2023) reported that bereaved CYP were at risk of experiencing low mood, depressive and anxious symptoms, and irritability.

Staff within the present study also described that student’s school engagement was also affected by bereavements. For example, most staff members reported that some students had a reduced level of motivation to engage with schooling following a bereavement:

*When mom died, [CYP] just couldn’t go to any lesson at all. He was coming into school ‘cos Dad was sending him [in] and he knew he had to come into school, but he just couldn’t attend lessons or even do any work in a smaller, like learning support, setting or anything like that. He was completely, obviously, disengaged.* [Alex]

In contrast, some participants reported that CYP remained engaged with their education following a bereavement, with Jason considering whether this was a protective mechanism for students:

***But actually, that's a child ...who is... as far as I'm aware, is doing really well and has sort of gone through this really difficult experience and ... sort of maintained all the things we would want a child to be maintaining. You know, friendships, ... academic success and so on. And I think it was her way of dealing with it really... [Jason]***

Changes to academic engagement have also been reported within wider literature, with a selection of studies being summarised by Elsner et al. (2022). In examining qualitative and quantitative papers, Elsner et al. (2022) found that whilst CYP had an increased risk of disengagement and declines in academic attainment, this tended to be short term.

Additionally, similarly to the reported experience of Jason, some of the reviewed studies indicate that engagement with education may be used as a coping mechanism for CYP in the face of bereavement. For example, in applying the Dual Process Model of Grief (Stroebe and Schut, 1999), Bennett et al. (2010) argue that individuals may use distraction as a coping mechanism when bereaved.

Another implication of CYP bereavement highlighted by participants was the practical impact of a familial death on CYP and families. Instances explored by staff included changes in care, whether that be by a surviving family member or by social services (***“she doesn't have dad anymore, doesn't have mum anymore, is placed in this home where staff constantly change on shifts.”*** [Christina]) to families being financially implicated by the loss of both a family member and a provider of income:

***And again, you know, family were in total disarray ...there were questions about how they were going to cope financially. It was really awful for the family. [Jason]***

Bereavements can have a widespread impact on a family, regarding their livelihood and living circumstances. For example, McLaughlin et al. (2019) note that economic circumstances of families can be put under further strain following parental death.

As well as recognising the practical implications of a familial death upon CYP and their families, some participants reported having become privy to the emotional impact that a death had on other family members who may have been experiencing their own grief in tandem with the young person:

*Sometimes, you do have parents that are actually struggling with grief themselves...*

[Bruce]

This demonstrates that it is important for school staff to also consider the impact of deaths on the whole family, not just their student.

#### **5.2.1.2 Subtheme 1b: Staff are Emotionally Impacted by Bereavements**

Staff also reflected on the emotional impact that bereavements within the school community had on themselves. Many staff members reported that news of bereavements made them feel upset for CYP and families experiencing the death of a loved one:

*I just got a call from the auntie, saying, and she broke down in tears on the phone, like, her brother's died...and ...that's really hard to hear and I was a bit sort of shell-shocked for the rest of that day.* [Jason]

Some members of staff reported that, in addition to having an emotional response on behalf of the bereaved CYP and families, they too experienced their own grief, especially when they had pre-existing relationships with CYP and families:

*It was immense and I didn't realise the real impact it had on me until weeks later when it really kind of hit me and I realised I was grieving as well.* [Victoria]

Whereas for some members of staff, deaths within their community had had a lasting impact, other members of staff, such as Jason, did not experience a long-term emotional impact of the bereavements faced by CYP:

*Like, it wasn't great but, it didn't have any kind of lasting negative impact on me other than just, you know, feeling really sorry for them.* [Jason]

Within previous literature, primary school staff have also reported that bereavements within their school community have led to their own emotional strain and upset (Costelloe et al., 2020). Such emotional strain may give rise to compassion fatigue, a common phenomenon in helping professions, such as working in education, defined as experiencing negative emotional outcomes such as secondary traumatisation or burnout (Ondrejko and Halamova, 2022).

### **5.2.2 Theme 2: Support Available for Students and Families Varies.**

This theme explores staff perceptions of the ways in which CYP are supported following a death. This ranges from informal monitoring to intensive 1:1 support offered both in-house and externally. Staff noted that support offered for CYP requires flexibility and adaptation dependent on the circumstances of each child. Overall, this theme shows that there is a variety of potential support available to CYP and families following a bereavement.

#### **5.2.2.1 Subtheme 2a: Forms of Support**

All participants reported different forms of support being on offer to students and families following a bereavement. Generally, participants noted that the opportunities for time and space were key for CYP and families. For most staff members this meant being able to offer time to CYP (*"We're just really fortunate to... be able to pick up these kids and spend time with them"* [Cilla]), with some schools having dedicated in-house spaces and services to provide support:

***I mean we're lucky enough to have a school where we do have a learning support department.*** [Alex]

For other members of staff, the offering of time and space also related to attendance and having a supportive awareness that CYP and families may not be prioritising attending school immediately following a bereavement:

***Instead of saying to that young person, "You're late, you should be in school". It's actually thinking, "Oh, this has been happening in your house, you've had loads of visitors and people coming round, so obviously that's going to impact on you as well as the bereavement."*** [Victoria]

In terms of further in-house support for CYP, staff offered emotional support and opportunities for CYP to express themselves following a bereavement:

***I get that young person's perspective of you know, how they're feeling, how their family's feeling...we might talk about who they've lost.*** [Cilla]

Within some settings, emotional support had formalised procedures with children being referred for in-house support from members of staff such as pastoral staff and onsite therapeutic practitioners ("***We have a referral system for me to work with them***" [Bruce]).

This work included 1:1 sessions with CYP to provide wellbeing support, directly or indirectly associated with their bereavement. In contrast, other staff used informal and indirect offerings of support in which they 'checked in' with students or used monitoring to detect if students required further support:

***We have to know them well enough to reflect on behaviours and pick up the nuances of a difference and say, "This isn't good, this isn't right. Something's not right here."***

[Christina]

Forms of direct and indirect support from staff have also been raised by primary school staff who have offered emotional support to bereaved CYP (Costelloe et al., 2020). Similarly to the secondary school staff interviewed in this study, staff reported that they monitored potential behavioural changes in CYP in order to be responsive to their needs.

Regarding specific bereavement practices, some staff members also discussed supporting families and students by facilitating students to attend funerals and attending funerals themselves:

***I personally attended the funeral with another person there for the child...We took the child out of the funeral because he couldn't cope.*** [Christina]

Some staff also reflected on other ways in which they had supported students to commemorate their loved ones such as marking anniversaries and engaging in creative activities:

***We have our tree out there where students are able to put their feelings on...Like an emotion tree. So we do things like that.*** [Victoria]

Opportunities to support CYP and families via commemoration is present across the literature. For example, across primary and secondary schools, teachers in Lowton and Higginson's (2003) study reflected upon supporting CYP and their families by attending funerals and marking special dates, such as anniversaries, with CYP and their families.

Additionally, staff members whose roles aligned with mental health support also had opportunities to discuss death and wellbeing with CYP:

***That boy ...came to me like, "Oh look, I've written this big reflective piece on, on my uncle and how I'm feeling and how I'm feeling about the anniversary". And those are skills that they might not have had before having that... time to just sit and talk about it.*** [Cilla]



As well as the offering of in-house support, most participants discussed external support available. This included access to a range of services including EPs, bereavement charities and social workers. Additionally, most participants noted that schools had supported sourcing counselling services for CYP following a bereavement:

*So I do recall, with one of the girls in my form... she was getting one, if not two, counselling sessions a week...*[Edward]

Across the literature, it is common that schools have worked with external agencies to provide support for bereaved CYP and their families. Within the UK context, school staff have reported finding it beneficial to work with external agencies to support their bereaved pupils (Costelloe et al., 2020; Lane et al., 2014).

#### **5.2.2.2 Subtheme: 2b: Awareness of Context May Lead to Adaptations to Support**

Most participants reported that different individual circumstances may alter their approach and understanding of how a bereaved pupil and family may require support. For example, some staff members reflected upon how circumstances of death prompt adaptations to their approaches to working with bereaved CYP. Additionally, other participants, some of whom worked in specialist settings, considered how the special educational needs of CYP may impact how they are supported following a bereavement:

*If you go and speak to somebody, have this same interview with somebody else in a mainstream setting, it's... you're going to get very different answers and very different responses you know?* [Christina]

Following on from the idea that it is not 'one size fits all', many staff members recognised the importance of being able to adapt to the needs of CYP and families:

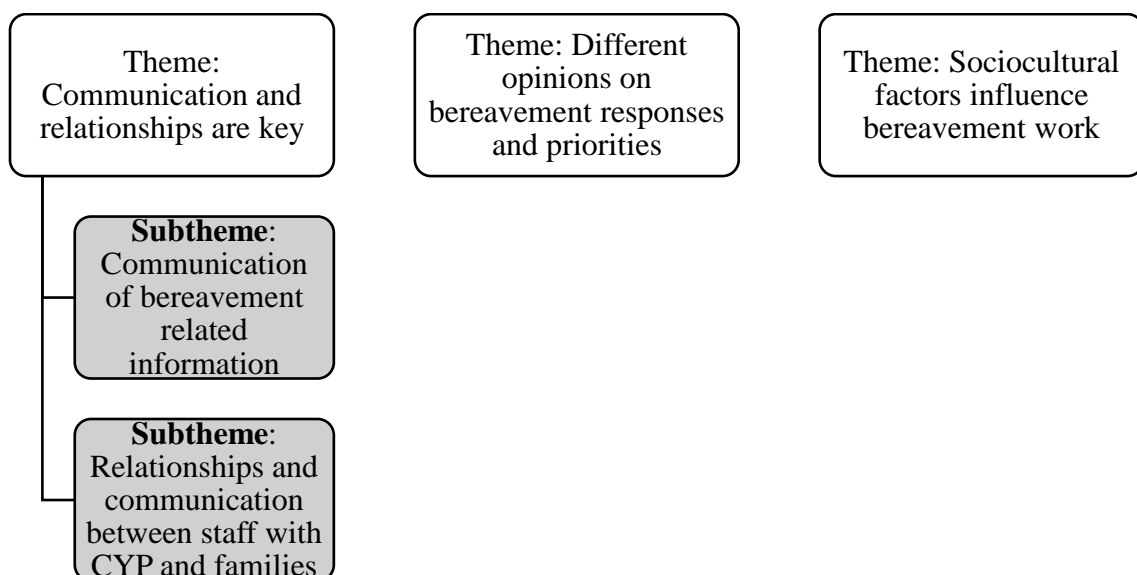
*Within the pastoral team there are things that we do and it's a case-by-case because again, families and young people deal with grief in different ways.* [Victoria]

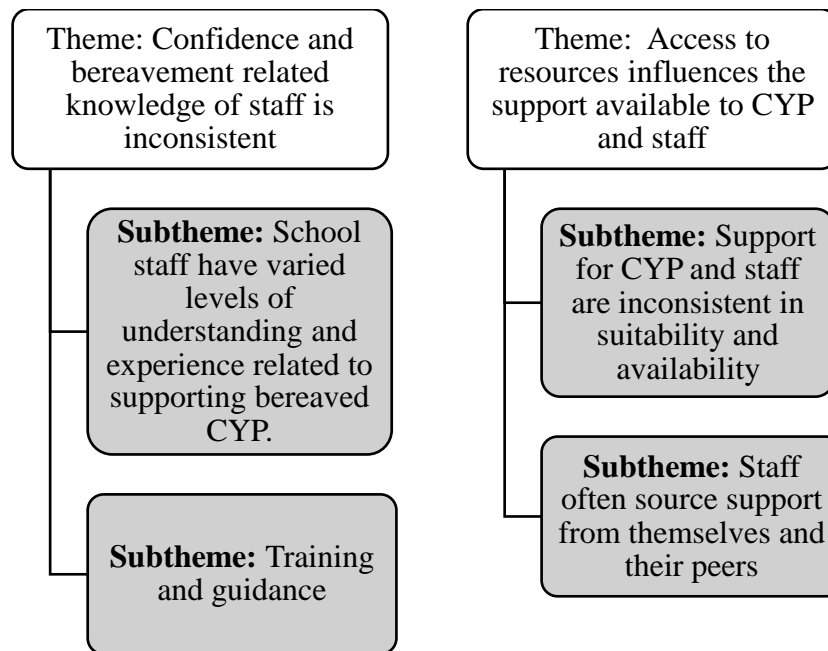
A need for adaptive flexibility is also reflected within the wider literature. For example, Lane et al. (2014) found that flexibility was a key theme of bereavement responses for secondary school staff. Furthermore, families may need different types of support dependent on their circumstances, which should be taken into consideration (Dyregrov et al., 2020).

### **5.3 Themes Relating to Research Question Two: “What are the Facilitators and Barriers to Staff Providing Support to Bereaved CYP?” and Research Question Three: “How are Staff Supported to Support Bereaved Pupils?”**

**Figure 2.**

*Themes generated in relation to research questions two and three.*





### 5.3.1 Theme 3: Communication and Relationships are Key

This theme explores the idea that communication and relationships can act as both significant facilitators and barriers to supporting bereaved CYP. For example, staff members reported being informed of a bereavement in various ways such as at staff briefings and in passing from students and staff; others were not informed at all. Staff noted they would value access to this information to be able to support CYP with good communication perceived as facilitating this.

Communication and relationships between members of the school community is also an important part of this theme. How students and parents relate with staff can impact how they perceive and work with each other following a bereavement. Overall, this theme shows that communication and relationships between members of the school community have a large impact on how CYP are supported following a bereavement.

#### 5.3.1.1 Subtheme 3a: Communication of Bereavement Related Information

For all of the participants, the way in which bereavement related information was communicated was inconsistent, with information being relayed in a multitude of ways. This

included staff being informed of deaths via staff briefings, within the local community and from students themselves:

*What you find in this community, because everyone is linked, often times, you hear it. So, there have been times where there has been a bereavement and I've been at church on a Sunday, because my church is in this community, so I know, before I even get to school on Monday that something's happened.* [Victoria]

Being directly informed of a bereavement also appears to be contingent upon the position held by staff:

*Although, to my recollection, I never had any direct involvement with a bereaved child before I was a Head of Year. Although I have no doubt I would have encountered children who'd...gone through bereavement but it wasn't something I was directly involved with.*

[Jason]

Additionally, there was variation in how schools were informed of deaths by pupils' families. Whereas most staff members noted that family members may directly contact the school to inform them of a death, this was not always the case:

*I mean we've got 1800 kids in our school and I bet we don't know all who are bereaved anyway? 'cos obviously you've got aunts and uncles and whatever else. Children don't necessarily come in and tell us and parents don't tell us.* [Alex]

Despite there being an inconsistency in how bereavements are communicated to staff, some participants reported that having relevant information regarding bereavements would facilitate their practice (*"Just to be mindful of your interactions with them and how they may be presenting"* [Cilla]) and allow them to feel well-informed (*"It's reassuring to have that information, to be mindful of that"* [Edward]).

Communication as a facilitator to support was also dependent on consistency. Where some staff felt that there were good forms of communication that aided their work with bereaved CYP (*“the communication around the school is very helpful”* [Bruce]), Edward reflected that this had not been consistent in his setting:

*I think my experience so far, working in the school I’m in is that there is communication of bereavement but I would say that that process is probably not consistent.* [Edward]

Within the wider literature, communication between school staff is noted as an important facilitative tool, ensuring that appropriate support is provided for bereaved students (McLaughlin et al., 2019). Reid (2002) argues that if bereavements are not effectively communicated amongst staff, this could have negative outcomes for BSP in schools, recommending that school leaders prioritise open communication between staff. Furthermore, Holland (2008) argues that it is important for all staff to be informed of a bereavement to mitigate the risk of insensitivity (if staff are not aware of a death) or behavioural presentations of CYP being misunderstood.

#### **4.3.1.2 Subtheme 3b: Relationships and Communication Between Staff with CYP and Families**

The majority of participants reflected on relationships and communication with CYP and families to be an important factor when considering supporting bereaved CYP. For example, most participants demonstrated genuine care and empathy towards CYP and families of their communities with a desire to support them:

*It’s not my grief to be had, but those children are my responsibility so I try to be empathetic, caring, listen properly to what people are telling me...* [Christina]

Some staff also commented upon the importance of maintaining a dialogue with families and building relationships with them:

*We try and always keep that open, collaborative dialogue with parents.* [Bruce]

*A lot of our staff go above and beyond to show that care for families and that's something that I pride myself on...*[Victoria]

The importance of relationships and dialogue with families has also been raised in research examining the perspectives of primary school teachers, with positive relationships being perceived to increase opportunities for schools to support families (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021). This is also echoed in research focusing on secondary school staff in which communication with families was identified as a key process of school bereavement responses (Lane et al., 2014). Nevertheless, it was noted that some participants lacked communication with parents.

In comparing the response of primary and secondary school staff, Lowton and Higginson (2003) found that there was less contact reported between families and school staff following a bereavement in a secondary school setting. Interestingly, within the present study, most participants had reported having some form of communication and relationship with family members, however this was not necessarily formalised practice. However, establishing communication between schools and families is a helpful factor of support following a bereavement, providing opportunities for collaboration (McLaughlin et al., 2019, DeMuth et al., 2020).

Alongside communication with families, the relationships between staff and students were also raised as a factor of staff's work with bereaved CYP. Staff experienced that some CYP may be more likely to seek and benefit from a key adult relationship following a bereavement:

*And one... familiar adult as well because you don't want to be talking about mom to several different people and say the same story over and over again.* [Alex]

Additionally, it was raised by both Bruce and Victoria that they had experienced situations in which CYP were seeking adult connection from staff at school following a bereavement:

*I've found that those pupils that have had a bereavement, especially those with a parent, they tend to...respond better to adult interactions.* [Bruce]

Interestingly, Edward also reflected on how the amount of daily interactions with CYP may impact the development of relationships where adults are more readily available to be a supportive figure for CYP:

*I think, given the fact we see them, as form tutors, twice a day, every day, our involvement is a little bit more impactful or, certainly, we're more involved than...Key stage 4, a chosen subject, they may only see that teacher twice a week.* [Edward]

Pupil—staff relationships are a key protective factor for fostering emotional wellbeing (Johnson, 2008, McLaughlin and Clarke, 2010) and promoting resilience despite adverse circumstances, such as bereavement (Riley and Masten, 2005). When considering CYP who have been bereaved, Costelloe et al. (2020) argue that relationships between students and school staff built on attunement and trust facilitate bereavement support. However, compared to primary school environments, in which pupils often have an individual class teacher, secondary school pupils may not see subject teachers daily, and although they may have daily contact with a form tutor, this can be brief and in a group setting.

### **5.3.2 Theme 4: Different Opinions on Bereavement Responses and Priorities**

This theme explores how individuals in the school community may have differing opinions on bereavement responses (e.g. regarding support offered to CYP or to how CYP present following a bereavement). Staff expressed that adults in a young person's life may have expectations of how they 'should' respond to a bereavement; staff reflected that CYP may be

aware of these opinions which could influence how CYP express themselves following a bereavement.

Staff noted that CYP and families may have varying levels of receptiveness to support offered to them following a bereavement. Whereas some students may want support, more staff reported instances where they may not wish to engage with provision that has been made available for them:

***They may feel that they don't need to, or don't want talk to a class teacher.*** [Edward]

Participants also noted similar interactions from surviving family members. In some instances, staff perceived family members as being proactive in wanting support in place for the bereaved child:

***And parents... are actually very helpful. Sometimes, parents are the ones that raise to us that, "we really feel this bereavement has had an impact. You know, could you look at options for support?"*** [Bruce]

In contrast, participants discussed that family members may be hesitant to engage in support for CYP. Different reasons for this were explored by staff such as it being a "***sensitive time***" ([Bruce]), that families may not feel that a child needs support ("***maybe they don't see it as such a big problem as it is***" [Alex]) and also considering that family members may not want to engage in bereavement practice suggested by school staff, such as remembrance activities to mark significant dates:

***And I sort of talked to the family about.. how about, you... let a balloon go and have a birthday cake or... They didn't want to do that and that's fine but I was trying to come up with positives and I actually think...for them, part of that grieving process is being allowed to take those periods, those snap shots, of a birthday, of Christmas, of the anniversary and be permissive to be very, very grieving at that point.*** [Christina]



Involvement from families regarding the implementation of BSP may be helpful for school staff (Lowton and Higginson, 2003), with collaboration being an important part of this (DeMuth et al., 2020). However, when families are less likely to engage in bereavement support there may be many reasons for this.

Firstly, it should be considered that other members of the family are also being impacted by a bereavement, not just CYP. Their experience of grief may be inhibiting them from engaging in, and prioritising support, for the young person. Deaths in a family, such as the death of a parent, can create crisis for surviving members (Dyregrov et al., 2020). Therefore, schools need to consider additional factors (such as mental health and financial considerations) which may deprioritise a family's engagement with school support (Dimery and Templeton, 2021). Additionally, death may be perceived as a personal matter for families and school involvement may be perceived as crossing a boundary (Holland, 2008). Therefore, it is important for schools to be considerate of family experiences during a bereavement. For example, Dyregrov et al. (2020) argue that it may be more helpful for schools to offer concrete examples of support rather than ask the question 'what can we do?' so that pressure and decision-making responsibilities are reduced for family members.

Participants reported varying expectations and conceptualisations of how CYP may respond to a bereavement which in turn impacts support that is offered to them. Whereas some participants reported that adults may be dismissive of grief responses (***"So yeah, I think parents to assume that – how children should be feeling. ... Or, "why you feeling like this? It was my brother, I should be worse than you."*** [Alex]) others may expect to see more externalised expressions of grief (***"They seem to want the child to spill their guts and talk about it and say, here's how I feel and you know, kind of wail and gnash their teeth."*** [Jason]). Some participants also noted adult reactions and expectations may also lead to CYP monitoring or amending their behaviour:

***She was more aware of what other people were expecting her to perform right? So she knew that, you know, children who lose a parent are supposed to be really sad ...*** [Jason]

When considering the expectations that adults may impose upon bereaved CYP, it is important to note that grief responses can vary greatly (Christ et al., 2002) and are not necessarily linear (Revet et al., 2020). For example, as discussed in Chapter Two, there are multiple theories of grief. Additionally, CYP's reactions to bereavements may be impacted by their progression through adolescence as a time undergoing a significant period of social, psychological and physical change, such as increasing responsibility in their family (Guzzo and Gobbi, 2023). These factors may impact how students engage with support following a bereavement as they may feel more readily aware of how other surviving family members are feeling and may want to support them:

***That can put the child in a funny place where they can be thinking, "I shouldn't be upset of struggling as much because my mom is. So I shouldn't be talking about it as much."***  
[Bruce]

Such feelings may relate to staff experiences of students declining support offered by school (***"Some students don't want school to get involved at all."*** [Victoria]). Different reasons for this were proposed by participants, such as students not wishing to feel singled out and declining to broach the subject with school staff.

The wider literature also reflects that CYP may or may not engage with direct support. For example, Dyregrov et al. (2013) raised that school can be a safe base for CYP to explore their bereavement; it may also be a place to have respite from being surrounded by the grief at home. They suggest that one of the best things that schools may be able to offer to these CYP is consistency and routine.

Participants in the present study also raised the importance of respecting the wishes of their students and advocating for them to be listened to:

***You know, if you say, “This child has experienced this, therefore they must have counselling.” Well that child might experience that as a huge violation of their consent and of their process.*** [Jason]

The importance of being led by and respecting the wishes of CYP has also been raised by previous research. For example, primary school teachers have reflected on the importance of responses to bereavement taking CYP views into full consideration, whereas other staff could sometimes prioritise the wishes of adults (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021).

Furthermore, secondary school staff have also shared their values of honouring the wishes of CYP (Lane et al., 2014).

Within the interviews, participants also discussed potential tension between the academic responsibilities and expectations of schools and the holistic offering focusing on supporting CYP’s wellbeing. Whereas most participants felt that wellbeing supersedes academic attainment, they did note the pressure for academic attainment that students and teaching staff may face. For example, Alex reflected on tension she experienced in her pastoral role as, when counselling for a young person was during their maths lessons, teaching staff became concerned about their lesson engagement:

**He was doing his GCSEs and I was getting all this backlash from teachers saying, “but he’s not in lesson”, or, if I could get him to the lesson, he was just there head down. “What do we do?” And I was getting a constant barrage of emails, asking why he wasn’t doing any work.** [Alex]

In contrast, Victoria reflected on the journey that her school has had in developing an understanding of what schools can offer CYP, bereaved or not, by prioritising their wellbeing:

**We're not just focused on getting the grades but we're looking more at the emotional wellbeing of our young people, and...their families... [Victoria]**

The tension between the academic demands of schools and holistic responses are not unique to this study nor bereavement. For example, whilst there has been an increased focus on CYP's wellbeing in UK schools and related policy, there remains persistent pressure on schools to deliver exam results (Clarke, 2023). Whereas some researchers argue that emotional wellbeing is directly correlated with academic success, others argue that there is a trade-off in which schools must decide if their priority is student wellbeing or academic attainment (Heller-Sahlgren, 2018).

Specifically regarding bereavement, previous research has indicated that those who have experienced a bereavement of an immediate family member in childhood are more likely to have lower attainment in GCSE examinations and increased anxiety, regardless of attendance (Abdelnoor and Hollins, 2004). Therefore, this may indicate that it is important for schools to ensure that bereaved CYP are offered support during this life-changing transition so that they are enabled to learn.

### **5.3.3 Theme 5: Sociocultural Factors Influence Bereavement Work.**

Participants had varying perceptions of how sociocultural factors, such as faith and culture, may impact working with bereaved CYP. Some staff felt that cultural competence was a crucial part of this. In contrast, other participants felt that cultural and religious factors may act as a barrier to students accessing support following bereavement as they believed that some faiths and cultures may not be receptive to mental health support.

Social factors were also considered in terms of being potential barriers or facilitators. For example, whilst UK 'taboo' towards death was seen as a barrier to bereavement support, other staff members noted that there is an increased awareness of mental health and wellbeing

within UK society which may support access to, and increased demand, of bereavement related support.

All participants noted that culture and faith within their school community may have an impact on their bereavement work. For example, many of the schools have students from a wide range of cultural and religious backgrounds:

*Well my school... it's a non-faith school but it's a multicultural school. So we've got various religious backgrounds that are here. So in terms of... how...certain groups will respond to grief, or bereavement and how they deal with that, we have to be mindful of that.* [Edward]

Many staff noted that they felt it was important to be culturally competent and aware when working with their bereaved CYP and families. For example, staff showed awareness that some faith practices following a bereavement may impact school attendance but showed empathy and respect for these:

*I know...a lot of our students who are, who are Hindu will do a ... ceremony a year after the death of a relative as well. And that has a big impact on attendance...*

*I think we're...quite sensitive, I think, as a school and try to not, try to not sort of raise the issue of attendance particularly much around bereavement ...* [Jason]

Other participants expressed that staff have a responsibility to have an awareness and understanding of the cultural practice and faiths of their students:

*I understand a lot ... of the cultural differences and the way bereavement and grief is experienced... so that has helped me a lot in terms of understanding families ...and the different beliefs that students will have about what happens after death and what happens during that time...* [Victoria]

In contrast, some staff discussed that the cultures and religions of their students could also be a barrier to the implementation of bereavement support:

*And kind of 'cos of being Asian myself I know about some of those barriers. Mental health support isn't really seen as the thing you do. You know... you don't need it. [Bruce]*

*And I think anything that is deemed to be mental health, like counselling or anything like that, some Muslim parents aren't keen on it. ... I think that's potentially a cultural thing because they don't understand counselling and how it works but there's almost a stigma attached to it with some families. [Alex]*

Although some participants felt assured in their understanding of the cultures and faiths of their cohorts, staff may need support to understand the cultural practices of the families in school communities to facilitate their practice.

Within the wider literature, there is limited research exploring how culture and faith may impact school responses to bereavements (McLaughlin et al., 2019). However, more recently, Abraham-Steele and Edmonds (2021) reported that whilst primary school staff also recognised the role that culture and faith have with regards to bereavement, they may need further guidance with how to approach this effectively and sensitively. In considering how schools can support families from a range of cultural and religious backgrounds, Dyregrov et al. (2020) provide recommendations, as although bereavement is a universal experience, how it is processed and grieved can vary greatly between individuals and cultures. Therefore, Dyregrov et al. (2020) recommend that, rather than making assumptions, schools should directly ask family members how they would like a bereavement to be responded to. Furthermore, beyond bereavement specific literature, research calls for school staff to become more culturally competent to address biases and assumptions an individual may hold regarding the cultures of others (Wiseman and Fox, 2011).

Another sociocultural factor raised by participants was that wider societal perceptions surrounding mental wellbeing and bereavement may impact provision offered by schools. Some participants noted that within UK society, death and bereavement can be perceived as a taboo:

*And I do think, ... grief is still kind of a taboo topic isn't it? In society. So naturally, it is that area that nobody wants to touch.* [Bruce]

Whereas in contrast, other participants noted that there has been a shift in society and schools towards matters such as mental health and bereavement:

*I think society's changed over the years. I'd say, in the past, it was like, "Oh, so and so's had a bereavement." You didn't really get involved because it wasn't the school's place to get involved....But I think over the years, because even as a society we're more aware of the impact of certain things on behaviour, on mental health ... [there is] a big push on mental health and emotional wellbeing now.* [Victoria]

In the wider literature, a sense of death being a taboo subject has been identified as a barrier to BSP (Costelloe et al., 2020). This barrier may present due to a hesitancy to discuss and broach the subject of death (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021), with school staff then finding it difficult to overcome this barrier (McLaughlin et al., 2019). In contrast, when considering the impact of death within school communities, Abraham-Steele and Edmonds (2021) argue that teachers have a key role in broaching death and making it less taboo. By initiating these conversations, staff in schools are key to normalising such topics.

#### **5.3.4 Theme 6: Confidence and Bereavement Related Knowledge of Staff is Inconsistent**

This theme explores the idea that staff appeared to have varied levels of confidence and knowledge regarding bereavement and working with bereaved CYP and families. The theme also highlights that current training and guidance for staff is inconsistent in terms of

availability and content and that staff would value access to more relevant continuing professional development (CPD).

#### **5.3.4.1 Subtheme 6a: School Staff Have Varied Levels of Understanding and Experiences Related to Supporting Bereaved CYP.**

Participants had varying perspectives regarding their confidence and experience in working with bereaved pupils, as well as their opinions on the understanding of their co-workers. For example, a facilitator for some participants was their experience in working with bereaved CYP and in previous positions related to bereavement and mental health:

*I think that is only because I feel so informed about it because of my background.* [Bruce]

Additionally, Jason, for example, felt that he had learned a lot from his previous experiences of working with bereaved CYP in his setting which had shaped his more recent responses to bereaved CYP:

*In hindsight, I wouldn't have handled it in the way that I did back then.* [Jason]

In the wider literature, Abraham-Steele and Edmonds (2021) argue that staff apply previous experience in working with bereaved CYP in order to inform present work. Additionally, in interviews of Danish widowed fathers, participants reported that teaching staff who had previous experience working with bereaved CYP and families appeared more confident in supporting them and their children (Holmgren, 2022).

As well as having previous experience working with bereaved CYP, some participants felt that an individual's personal experience with bereavement may impact their approach in working with bereaved CYP. Some staff viewed that having personal experiences with bereavement may be a helpful tool, with others noting that a lack of personal experience with



bereavement may be a barrier. For example, Victoria reflected that she had applied her own death-related experience to her work with bereaved CYP:

*I think, my experiences of that sense of loss and even losing people close to myself, has enabled me to kind of have that empathy and have that understanding even for staff as well as my students.* [Victoria]

In contrast, for Cilla, her own experiences of bereavement had been a barrier to her directly supporting students who were also bereaved as she felt she was in the early stages of processing her loss:

*... so I think the challenges for me have just been personal.* [Cilla]

For some staff, experiences with death may contribute towards empathy for CYP as they are relating to their own experiences. For example, Abraham-Steele and Edmonds (2021) report that experience relating to bereavement may impact the amount of empathy expressed by staff, with those who have experienced a bereavement being more empathetic. However, it may be that not all staff wish to apply or share their experiences of bereavement with CYP, with some opting to remain private (Lane et al., 2014). Furthermore, school staff can find it difficult to support bereaved CYP when they have experienced their own bereavement (Costelloe et al., 2020) with there also being a risk of secondary traumatisation (Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023).

In addition to a range of experience impacting upon their bereavement related work, participants also reported that they and their colleagues had varying understandings of bereavement. For example, Alex's understanding of bereavement reflected qualities of the Stroebe and Schut (1999) Dual Process Model:

*The fact that people assume that people are going to get better every day. So everyday they're a step close to getting better but no, it comes and goes in waves. Erm, they can be*

***absolutely fine one day and then three years down the line they can be absolutely in floods of tears with the bereavement.*** [Alex]

However, Christina noted that for children with communication difficulties in her setting, it can be difficult for staff to understand how they may be processing their bereavement:

***We've got no idea what her processing around this is.*** [Christina]

Such views indicate gaps in staff understanding of bereavement and CYP's bereavement responses, despite all the staff in the study having had experience supporting these CYP. Levels of knowledge, understanding and experience, may, in turn, impact the level of confidence that school staff have in supporting bereaved CYP:

***For some members of staff, that could be quite intimidating, quite scary, "oh my god, what do I do? I don't want to say the wrong thing."*** [Victoria]

***It's only because of my year of experience doing bereavement counselling where I feel quite informed and quite confident.*** [Bruce]

Staff with more related experience demonstrated increased confidence and reflected that those with less experience may have reduced confidence in supporting bereaved CYP, and may worry how to approach the subject.

Such feelings are not uncommon amongst the wider literature. For example, staff can show an awareness of their lack of confidence (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021) and experience fear of saying something wrong or making a mistake when working with bereaved CYP (Levkovich and Elysoseph, 2023). Other research in British secondary schools also highlighted low staff confidence as a barrier to providing support for CYP (Lane et al., 2014). This further demonstrates that staff need support to increase their confidence and knowledge.

#### 5.3.4.2 Subtheme 6b: Training and Guidance

Interviews with participants indicated that staff have had inconsistent training opportunities and guidance with regards to bereavement, with this being an area for development. Some participants have had bereavement training through their current positions or related to their previous roles:

***Within school, we have had training in bereavement*** [Victoria]

Whereas many participants reported having had mental health and wellbeing training at their settings, the majority had not had specific bereavement training in their current educational setting:

***I've not received formal training in bereavement, I kind of have to adapt things as I go.***

[Cilla]

Similarly, the majority of staff were not familiar with established guidance or practice within their settings in response to bereavement. Some participants had become aware of a policy, due to their involvement in the study, but were previously unaware of this:

***I haven't got a clue. I didn't realise it existed.*** [Jason]

With regards to practice, staff also noted that this was currently more ad-hoc in nature without a formalised process:

***There's nothing at the moment in writing, we need to do that because even though we have good practice and we talk about it, and we know what to do if something happens, we instinctively know what to do but maybe we can sort of put that down in writing...***

[Victoria]

Reflecting on the inconsistent access to bereavement training and guidance, most participants did remark that further training and guidance would be valuable:

***I think it would make me more aware of the ways in which I can support. You know... are we doing enough already? Is there more that we could be doing? ...but I think some form of training would be, it could only be a positive thing.*** [Edward]

There is an acknowledgement in the literature internationally that teaching staff would like specific training and guidance surrounding bereavement (Kennedy et al., 2017), with training being considered as having an important role in building confidence in staff (Holland, 2008). For example, Holland and Wilkinson (2015) argue that training projects, such as ‘Lost for Words’ in Hull, have had an important role in increasing school staff confidence to support CYP and families. Furthermore, pre- and post-training questionnaires of Scottish school staff have indicated that training has a role to play in improving the responses of staff to the needs of bereaved CYP (McManus and Paul, 2019). Staff may benefit from training in a variety of ways such as the quelling feelings of uncertainty and increasing their confidence in working in this area (Lane et al., 2014).

In addition to expressing a desire for more training and guidance to be available, all participants suggested different features that training and guidance could include to support their work with bereaved CYP. In terms of training, staff suggested a variety of content that they felt would be helpful such as developing an understanding of bereavement, learning about how bereavement impacts adolescent CYP, opportunities for staff to share experiences and what adaptations and support CYP may need in school:

***You know, do they need to have a reduced timetable? Do they need their work being presented to them in a different way? Are they going to be better off having that work sent home for them to complete?*** [Edward]

Participants also indicated that having established bereavement guidance could support implementing adaptations, instilling confidence in staff processes following bereavement and allowing for current practice to be formalised:

***I think it would help, it would help to facilitate that. And just...standardise the practice a bit more and promote consistency around it. “Actually, yeah, this person is grieving. I think we should know what to do.” Rather than, “Oh let’s panic and throw everything at them or throw nothing.” [Bruce]***

All the participants in the study had ideas of what both training and guidance could contribute to their practice, demonstrating that they have an awareness of gaps in their knowledge and how these could be addressed.

In the UK, there is a limited proportion of schools that have a planned response to bereavements within their settings (McLaughlin et al., 2019). This is in contrast to practice in Denmark, where the previously discussed b-plans – which are designed to support schools in responding to bereavement – have been viewed positively by school staff with regards to informing bereavement responses and increasing confidence (Lytje, 2017). Within the current study, despite participants acknowledging that the implementation of training and guidance may facilitate their bereavement work, most staff raised that such processes should not inhibit flexible responses:

***It needs to be child centred. So, how rigid that policy would be questionable because obviously every kid would be different. [Alex]***

Additionally, some staff reflected that what may be espoused in policy may not always reflect what is enacted:

***It isn’t professional to write, you know, “We will attend funerals, wherever possible and cry with the parents, wherever possible.” That, that’s not what goes into a policy but that’s***

*what reality is when you're dealing with bereavement. "As a senior leader when my staff are breaking down because a child has died at [the setting] I will x, y and z." That doesn't go into a policy [...] That's what reality is.* [Christina]

This indicates that training and guidance needs to be adaptable and reflect the needs of the school community, which mirrors the findings of Lytje (2017) regarding the need for b-plans to be regularly reviewed and adapted.

### **5.3.5 Theme 7: Access to Resources Influences the Support Available to CYP and Staff**

This theme explores how access to resources (such as availability and suitability) can influence the support available to bereaved CYP and staff who are working with them. For example, workload was a common barrier and facilitator discussed by staff. Furthermore, when support is available to staff and pupils, it isn't always suitable. For example, external support agencies may not be able to cater for additional needs bereaved students may have.

Considering staff specifically, although some schools may offer counselling for staff, many staff members rely on themselves and their peers for receiving support. A consistent theme was that teaching staff would like more access to support. Overall, this theme demonstrates that access to resources both impacts the support on offer to CYP and the capacity that staff may have to provide support.

#### **5.3.5.1 Subtheme 7a: Support for CYP and Staff are Inconsistent in Suitability and Availability**

The availability and suitability of support influences the experience of both bereaved pupils and the staff who are supporting them. A key factor raised by staff was their workload and capacity. Some school staff in the study reported flexibility with regards to their timetables, noting this as a facilitator to providing support (*"If I had a teaching timetable as well, then it would be an issue obviously."* [Alex]), with others commenting on the benefits of having

dedicated pupil support services that have the capacity to support children with their social and emotional needs:

*At the schools that I work in, we're really fortunate to have...a dedicated pupil support service...which is not only me but it's ... the success centre, ... we've got a social worker as well who works in the school ...full-time. So, our students are really lucky in that fact and I know not all schools are the same.* [Cilla]

In contrast, other staff noted that a lack of capacity can result in them not being able to support bereaved CYP:

*As part of our daily duty we try to be mindful of the needs of all our students and... as an example, if you've got a class of 30 students and you've got three or four in there who are regulars for poor behaviour, they may be taking up your focus and time in that sense and then you've got students, including any students... who've gone through a bereavement, that need your time and support ... So the pressures of the role, day to day requirements of the role can, at times, be a barrier...*[Edward]

*Like, you know we're so busy and we're so rushed off our feet. We're really aware that every member of the pastoral team is stretched and that's only getting worse as things like the social services are underfunded.* [Jason]

Within UK secondary schools, there has been a marked increase in the number of support staff employed by secondary schools (Rice O'Toole and Soan, 2022). Rice O'Toole and Soan (2022) argue that this has allowed for an increase in the pastoral support available to students. Pastoral care from all staff has an important role in supporting the wellbeing of students (Cowie, 2022). However, Lowton and Higginson (2003) raise capacity and workload as day-to-day issues for school staff, acting as barriers to supporting bereaved CYP. Although this paper was published 20 years ago, the current study indicates that this issue persists. Kennedy

et al. (2017) note the importance of building capacity in school communities so that they can provide support.

As well as capacity influencing the availability of internal support, participants also commented on the availability of external support for staff and students. Whereas Edward had positive experiences with the availability of support (such as counselling for both staff and students), many participants commented on issues and inconsistencies in being able to access external support:

*So [local bereavement charity] for instance, they open their referrals on the first of the month. And they've got this huge waiting list. Now, there's something intrinsically wrong now isn't there?* [Christina]

If support was available for students and staff, some participants also commented that this may not always be suitable for the needs of the user:

*And sometimes... for example, you've got a Muslim kid and...the charities that are available in your area are all based in Christian practice. That might not actually work? ... That might actually be quite insensitive pathways to put them down.* [Jason]

*But I think eventually I had my first supervision in like July ... That was with someone from head office... of the academy trust's head office because they said it's more impartial. And I get that, but again, they're not a mental health professional.* [Cilla]

This demonstrates that there are constraints acting upon the availability of resources impacting upon how staff can support bereaved CYP and feel supported themselves in the process. Financial cuts and budgetary restraints may have an impact on both what schools themselves are able to offer and what they can source from external services who may have growing waiting lists (Long, 2022).



As well as having a practical impact, the availability of time resources to support bereaved CYP also has an emotional impact on staff. When able to provide support for CYP, some participants had a positive response to this and have commented upon the positive outcomes of support:

*He's attending every single lesson, he is... getting a 7 in English, he's going to three after school clubs which he never would have before and – I mean his head of year actually cried today... He was talking to her and saying what he's going to do at college and he's got a college interview on Thursday.* [Alex]

In contrast, Alex also felt “*confused and upset*” when struggling to source external support for a pupil. Additionally, when struggling to get access to support, Cilla expressed her feelings:

*Oh I've felt awful sometimes, awful...I never let the kids see how I'm feeling [...] or I have to have my professional hat on.* [Cilla]

#### **5.3.5.2 Subtheme 7b: Staff often Source Support From Themselves and Their Peers.**

Regarding access to support for themselves when working with bereaved CYP, staff had mixed experiences. Whilst some were able to identify support from their setting, many staff members sourced forms of self-support and support from peers.

Participants noted that for staff engaging in work related to bereavement, they need support too, as well as their students:

*I was able to kind of say, “Well, we need to kind of be putting things in place for us as staff so that when we are dealing with complex cases, where... we have bereavements through sickness but sometimes we have bereavements where this happens. How do we deal with those sorts of things?”* [Victoria]

Some noted that they had had positive experiences from their settings providing support, such as access to line managers, supervision and mental health first aiders:

*Yeah, supervision's been really good. I think the fact that I've got a supportive line manager [helps].* [Alex]

However, other participants felt that their wellbeing and need for support could be overlooked by their settings:

*People often don't have the time, for a start, and... I don't think anyone really wants to hear it, I'm afraid.* [Cilla]

Whereas some research indicates that teaching staff can feel supported by their management (Costelloe et al., 2020), other studies indicated that staff can also feel like they are not getting enough support (Levkovich and Elyoseph, 2023). Dyregrov et al. (2020) argue that staff can feel emotionally strained by working with bereaved CYP and their families and cannot be expected to work in this area on their own.

In light of the availability of support for staff being inconsistent, many participants appeared to source support from themselves and peers. A commonly discussed factor was staff relying on psychological characteristics and skills such as resilience, desensitisation and compartmentalisation to aid them in their work with bereaved CYP:

*I definitely have...over the years developed a sort of compartmentalisation mechanism as pastoral lead.* [Jason]

*We all have, you know, various stuff going on in our private lives as well which, at times, teachers, unlike some... professions, we kind of have to put our own...situations on hold and you know we're almost putting on an act a bit at times aren't we?* [Edward]

Another way in which staff supported themselves was by relying on support from colleagues who would help each other in a responsive, ad-hoc basis by voluntarily covering lessons and responsibilities and providing emotional support:

***We've all got each other's backs and no-one's just kind of left, everyone will chip in with someone.*** [Cilla]

Staff also recognised that they had to, at times, advocate for themselves to get support, implement boundaries to protect their wellbeing or had sourced support themselves:

***If I'm not coping with something, I'm very good at saying, "give us a hand."*** [Christina]

***In terms of me just understanding my own way of dealing with things and way of being, I've been able to kind of protect myself and my own mental health as well.*** [Victoria]

Further research indicates that due to intense stress associated with the education sector, school staff may rely on psychological detachment, such as compartmentalisation, to support their wellbeing (Türktozun et al., 2020). Furthermore, for teaching staff who have worked with CYP who have experienced trauma, they may be at risk of experiencing compassion fatigue (Ormiston et al., 2022), indicating that further support for staff is needed.

Additionally, reaching out to support from peers can also be helpful for school staff with supportive staff relationships being significant protective factors for work-related stress (Lester et al., 2020).

## **5.4 Chapter Summary**

Overall, this chapter has presented and discussed the findings from the current study. Seven themes were presented and discussed in relation to relevant literature. Themes identified the experiences of participants who had worked with bereaved CYP, highlighting that:

- Bereavements have an impact across the whole school community emotionally, academically and practically.
- Staff report a variety of BSP made available to students ranging from ad hoc informal support to formal interventions both provided in-house and externally.

Themes also identified the facilitators and barriers to providing students with support, as well as the experiences of support that staff had themselves. This highlighted that:

- Communication and relationships between members of the school community impact support available to CYP.
- The views of individuals regarding bereavement can impact access to support. For example, staff experience tension between academic and wellbeing priorities.
- Sociocultural factors such as the faith and cultures of communities may impact support.
- Staff confidence regarding working with bereaved CYP can vary due to access to training, guidance and experience.
- Staff would value more access to training and guidance.
- There is an inconsistency in the availability of support available to both CYP and staff.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

### **6.1 Overview of Chapter**

This chapter provides a summary of the major findings of the research in relation to the research questions. Then, the implications of this research are discussed in relation to school professionals and EPs. Following this, the strengths and limitations of the study are considered prior to future directions for research.

### **6.2 Addressing Research Question One**

Within this study, the first research question asked, “What are the experiences of secondary school teaching staff who have worked with bereaved CYP?” Teaching staff in the study reported a wide range of bereavements faced by CYP and their families including the deaths of parents, grandparents and peers who died from both natural and unnatural causes. Staff reported that deaths had an impact on CYP and their families academically, emotionally and practically. The emotional impact of deaths was also experienced by staff (whether this be their own personal grief due to having a relationship with the deceased or having feelings of empathy for CYP and their families).

Additionally, staff addressed the support offered following a bereavement. This included staff members providing direct emotional support for students and families (including inhouse wellbeing interventions and attending funerals), offering time and space, and considering the delivery of indirect support (such as monitoring). Staff also referred to how students and families were guided to access external agency support such as counselling. Participants showed awareness of the impact that contextual factors may have when delivering support, such as the cause of death relating to the bereavement and the individual needs of students. Overall, staff had experienced a wide range of interactions with bereaved students and recognised that school responses will change depending on circumstances.

### **6.3 Addressing Research Question Two**

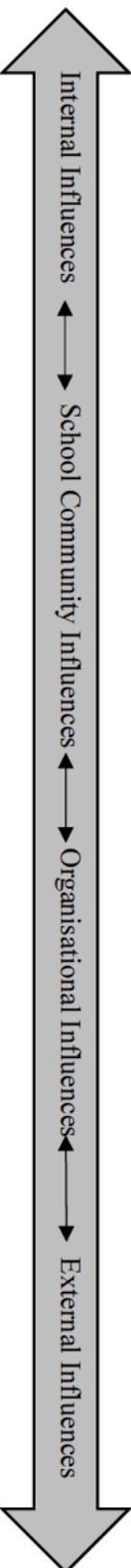
Within research question two, the following was asked: “What are the facilitators and barriers to staff providing support to bereaved CYP?” The nature of these facilitators and barriers range from individual factors (e.g. staff confidence) to community factors (e.g. relationships with families) to societal factors (e.g. societal perceptions of death). Although originally exploring influences on childhood development, Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) ecological systems theory can also be applied to other social objects (such as staff being able to support bereaved CYP) to demonstrate the interactive multi-level influences . Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) has previously been applied to research in bereavement with Kime (2021) arguing that it can be used to examine how schools can support bereaved CYP across different levels of their lives. Additionally, Costelloe et al. (2020) explored how ecological systems theory can be applied to school systems of bereavement support, also arguing that educational psychologists can apply this to develop their support of bereaved CYP. A multi-level model, informed by the work of Bronfenbrenner (2005), representing the facilitators and barriers to bereavement support in schools, as identified by the participants in this study, is presented in Table 9.

### **6.4 Addressing Research Question Three**

Research question three addressed, “How are staff supported to support bereaved pupils?”.

This generated a wide range of responses which were highlighted in Section 5.3 and are summarised in Table 10.

Staff reported facing difficulties in obtaining support which was constrained by factors such as the busy workloads of schools and feeling overlooked by colleagues and school leaders. A lack of offering of support or inappropriate support being offered was a factor contributing to staff relying on self-advocacy. Furthermore, staff noted that accessing additional training and guidance would facilitate their practice and increase confidence in this area. However, staff also noted that this would need to be responsive and flexible to their school community.

**Table 9.***Facilitators and barriers to staff providing bereavement support.*


<b>Facilitators to Bereavement Support</b>	<b>Barriers to Bereavement Support</b>
Staff having confidence and previous experiences related to bereavement.	Staff lacking confidence and experience or having personal experiences which inhibit them from providing support.
Staff being empathetic.	Adults having personal expectations of how CYP should respond to a bereavement.
Staff understanding the needs and wants of pupils.	
Staff being culturally competent and responsive.	Staff lacking an understanding of different cultural responses to bereavement.
Positive relationships and communication between staff members.	Inconsistent communication across school staff.
Positive relationships between staff and students and their families.	Students and families do not wish to engage in support.
Flexible responses to bereavements from schools.	Inconsistent responses to bereavements from schools.
Staff have had training and/or guidance with regards to bereavement.	Staff have not had training and/or guidance with regards to bereavement.
Access to appropriate resources both inhouse and externally (including time, space and workload management).	Lack of access to appropriate resources both in-house and externally.
Acknowledgement of the importance of mental wellbeing in schools.	Prioritization of academic attainment inhibiting bereavement support.
Reduction of stigma in the UK regarding mental wellbeing and related issues.	Taboo of death in the UK.

**Table 10.***Forms of staff support identified by participants*

<b>Source of support</b>	<b>Type of support</b>
External Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counselling</li> <li>• Supervision</li> </ul>
School Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ad-hoc approaches to checking in</li> <li>• Access to supervision</li> <li>• Supportive line management</li> <li>• Timetabling</li> <li>• Changing staff duties</li> <li>• Training and guidance</li> </ul>
Colleagues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional support</li> <li>• Taking on each other's work</li> </ul>
Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-advocacy to gain support</li> <li>• Compartmentalisation and boundary setting</li> <li>• Applying previous experiences</li> </ul>

## **6.5 Implications of the Research**

### **6.5.1 Implications for School Professionals**

When considering the findings of the study, there are implications for school professionals to consider both in terms of supporting bereaved CYP and the staff working with them. For example, as previously discussed, bereavement in childhood is a common occurrence, with participants in the study indicating that they wished to support bereaved CYP. However, analysis of the data indicates offerings of such support was often variable and ad-hoc.

Therefore, school professionals, whether this be at a local or national level, should consider



how to increase the availability and consistency of support available to pupils. This could include introducing training regarding childhood bereavement during ITT and as CPD for all teaching staff to increase their sense of confidence to support bereaved CYP. This is even more pertinent in the recent draft RSE guidance published by DfE (2024) in which it raises that curriculum content in both primary and secondary schools should allow for CYP to learn about death and bereavement.

Furthermore, the present study and recent research in UK primary schools (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021; Costelloe et al., 2020) highlight that lack of staff confidence regarding bereavement related practice is a potential issue. However, research has indicated that school staff participating in bereavement training extended their knowledge in areas such as grief processes in CYP, developing an awareness of bereavement policies and learning support strategies which promoted staff confidence (McManus and Paul, 2019). Therefore, it is crucial for school leaders and ITT providers to ensure that teaching staff feel confident in this domain so that they can both teach children about death but also support them through it if they become bereaved.

Staff also indicated that they would benefit from school-wide guidance regarding bereavement responses. This could be similar to the b-plan format previously discussed in this thesis, in which schools are provided with basic plans of responses that are personalised and amended based on the needs of the school (Lytje, 2017). Applying such a model in a UK context may benefit staff and pupils. However, it is also important that there is flexibility in approaches to allow for adaptation to the needs of pupils and families within different community contexts.

Furthermore, information relating to bereavement should be consistently communicated with staff. Inconsistencies in communication may inhibit staff from being able to provide BSP.

Forms of communication, which could be established in bereavement guidance, could include a clarification of staff roles in response to bereavements to promote the availability of support, taking staff workload into consideration. For example, this could be part of school approaches to supporting mental health and wellbeing via the UK government scheme to train senior mental health leads (SMHL) (Department for Education, 2024). Within schools, the role of a SMHL is to have responsibility for wellbeing approaches in a setting including supporting both staff and pupils (Tonks, 2022). In future, this could explicitly include approaches to BSP.

As part of the development of potential guidance and policy, school leaders should consider how to provide appropriate support available to staff who are working with bereaved CYP. This should be collaboratively agreed between staff and senior leaders to promote a proactive approach. Although a flexible approach is important, if this becomes too ad-hoc, opportunities for staff support may be missed. As discussed previously, school staff such as teachers are at a high risk of compassion fatigue and secondary trauma when working with CYP who have experienced trauma (Ondrejкова, 2022). Therefore, a consideration of staff support and wellbeing is crucial.

Collaboration should also be extended to CYP and families to ensure that their needs are met. Schools should ensure that there is flexibility in their approaches to be sensitive to sociocultural factors within their school community (such as religious practices related to bereavements within a religious community). This would be facilitated by schools prioritising the establishment of positive relationships with CYP and families and incorporating their views when devising bereavement support. Participants in the study noted that pre-existing positive relationships between staff members, students and families facilitated communication and collaboration following a bereavement.

### **6.5.2 Implications for Educational Psychologists**

Regarding the implications of this research for educational psychologists (EPs), EPs have an established role supporting schools in response to highly emotive and potentially traumatic circumstances such as critical incidents (Bennett et al., 2021). These are defined as serious, unexpected events, beyond the expected usual human experience, that impact a whole community that may include accidents, natural disasters and acts of terrorism (Beeke, 2013). However, expected deaths within an immediate school community and those related to students are not defined as critical incidents as they are part of a “typical human experience” (Aucott and Soni, 2016, pp.86). When considering the previously discussed psychosocial implications of bereavement this may be an area for additional EP support. Experiences of critical incidents could be applied by Educational Psychology Services in order to support schools with their BSP and empower staff to feel confident to work with bereaved CYP. This involvement could be on a strategic level to support schools in developing their bereavement guidance to ensure that it is developmentally and psychologically appropriate, supported by evidence-based practice. Within their role, EPs are well placed to work with different stakeholders within a school community to work collaboratively (Cline et al., 2015). For example, EPs could work alongside school leaders to develop their bereavement guidance.

At another strategic level, EPs already have a role in schools development by delivering trauma informed support and training (Shaw et al., 2021). Therefore, they could also be well-placed to deliver bereavement training to staff in order to support them in delivering BSP and potential curriculum content regarding bereavement (as highlighted by recent draft RSE guidance; DfE, 2014). To support this, EP training providers should also consider delivery of bereavement-related course content for trainee EPs in order to increase their confidence and efficacy in the area.

Participants in the study also discussed having access (or a lack thereof) to supervision to support their practice and mental wellbeing. Providing interdisciplinary supervision is an established part of the EP role and could also be used to support staff who have worked with bereaved students (Costelloe et al., 2020). For Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs), teaching assistants who are trained to support CYP in developing their emotional literacy, studies have indicated that they have found supervision from EPs useful, feeling that their needs have been met (Osborne and Burton, 2014). Therefore, supervisory practice from EPs could be broadened further to also include group supervision for staff working with bereaved CYP. EPs supporting teaching staff to provide BSP may be more appropriate than EPs working with young people, as familiar, trusted adults can be best placed to support CYP during a transition of immense change (McManus and Paul, 2019).

## **6.6 Strengths and Limitations of the Research**

A strength of this study is that it has targeted a gap in the literature surrounding secondary school staff perspectives of working with bereaved CYP. Previous UK-based literature of CYP bereavement has identified a need for further exploration of the experiences of secondary school staff (McLaughlin et al., 2019) building upon the previous work of Lane et al. (2014). Therefore, this research is timely in focusing on this area and is also novel in using RTA as a method to explore the views of staff.

Another strength of the study is that it empowered participants to share their experiences freely and to be listened to, with some participants having been enthusiastic to have an opportunity to share their views. Taking part in qualitative research can allow participants to share their experiences and can be perceived as therapeutic when undertaken sensitively (Lakeman et al., 2013). Additionally, engaging in research regarding sensitive topics (such as death) can provide catharsis for participants and support them in developing a new perspective about a situation (Alexander et al., 2018). For example, during some of this

study's interviews, participants noted developments they would like to make to their practice because of participating in the research.

However, it is also important to note that the sample of participants within the study were self-selecting and also were required to offer up to an hour of their time which may have limited the research sample. For example, some participants had commented upon having a vested interest in bereavement which may have motivated them to participate, potentially leading to a degree of bias in the data set. These staff members may have been more proactive in supporting bereaved CYP, with increased knowledge in the area compared to other staff members. For example, half of the participants in the study worked in roles that related to mental health, which again may have meant that they were more likely to have an interest in the study. However, with regards to the philosophical assumption of CR within this study, the intent of such research is not to generalise from a set of data but to instead aim to gather a range of experiences from individuals and their context.

Despite there being an overlap in some roles of the participants, the research also had a strength of providing insight into the experiences of staff working in a large, metropolitan local authority with a diverse range of communities, based in the West Midlands. This meant that participants were able to share their experiences of supporting students within different contexts. It could be argued that the research being based in one geographical area acts as a limitation as the experiences of staff will be impacted by the content of the area in which they work. However, this study also contributes to recent UK research which has been based in London (Costelloe et al., 2021), North West England (Potts, 2013), East of England (Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021) and with a selection of participants from Northern Ireland (Lynam et al., 2020). Therefore, the current study adds to a wider geographical spread of research in the UK.

Another strength of this study was the application of RTA, and particularly the importance of reflexivity. As a researcher, the process allowed me to be aware of and examine my positionality. Coming from a position of having worked both as an education professional and having experienced a bereavement in secondary school myself, I knew that I was coming to the research from a place of vested interest. Again, within a CR lens, although becoming bereaved is a universal experience, how we interact with such a social object is bound by our personal and social context. Therefore, I kept a research diary to record moments of self-interrogation and reflection regarding the potential impact that my experiences may have had on my engagement with the data.

### **6.7 Directions for Future Research**

This research aimed to focus on developing an understanding of secondary school staff's experiences of working with bereaved CYP. Due to limited research within this area, it acts as a stepping stone to further study in the area. Regarding future research, it would be helpful to gain further perceptions of staff with a wider range of experiences of working with bereaved CYP. As discussed earlier, a barrier to participation may be the time required for lengthy interviews. Therefore, research utilising survey data may be helpful for targeting more staff members to engage in the study during times convenient for them, but also to obtain the views of staff members who may have less of a vested interest in bereavement.

Further research could also explore the views of bereaved CYP regarding support received at school. Qualitative research could provide an opportunity to investigate the experiences of CYP and what their views on BSP are. However, this would need to be undertaken with the upmost due care and attention with regards to the ethical considerations of such work (Walker, 2010).

Additionally, considering the interest in staff regarding the use of bereavement policy, future research could help in developing this area. As this is a practice that is widely used in other

countries, it would be useful to develop a UK perspective to consider contextual factors that should be incorporated into school bereavement guidance and policy. For example, this may consider the impact of different deaths impacting a school's community (such as the circumstances of death faced by communities, including COVID-19 and unique qualities of school communities). Additionally, school staff and families who have been impacted by bereavement could collaborate with researchers to devise such plans that could be piloted in schools.

### **6.8 Closing comments**

This study has explored the perspectives and experiences of secondary school teaching staff who have worked with bereaved CYP. The research constitutes an original contribution to the area of BSP in UK schools as there has been a lack of research into the experiences of secondary school staff, with other literature calling for more research involving teachers. The present study has provided insight into the experiences of staff who have worked with bereaved children and their families. It has highlighted that staff have encountered many types of CYP bereavement that have impacted their school community in numerous ways. Although many members of teaching staff endeavour to support bereaved CYP, they face barriers to providing this such as a lack of support and guidance for themselves. Going forward, school leaders should endeavour to increase staff confidence in this area and ensure that they are supported practically and emotionally to deliver support.

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APPENDIX A.  
Recruitment Flyer



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

# Participants Wanted



**Are you a member of teaching staff in a  
secondary school?**

**Have you worked with bereaved students within  
the last five years?**

**You are invited to participate in a doctoral  
research study that explores your experiences of  
working with young people bereaved of a parent  
or sibling.**

**Please contact Rebecca Prosser  
for more details at [\[redacted\]](#)**



## **APPENDIX B.**

### **Participant Information Sheet**



#### **An exploration of secondary school teaching staff's experiences of working with bereaved children and young people.**

My name is Rebecca Prosser, and I am a trainee educational psychologist on the doctoral programme for Applied Educational and Child Psychology at the University of Birmingham. I am currently on professional placement at [REDACTED] and this information leaflet has been given to you as I am seeking participants in my research study.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of the study is to contribute to the research into childhood bereavement and how children and young people are supported within educational contexts by gathering the views of secondary school teaching staff. Childhood bereavement is not a rare occurrence with 1 in 29 of school-aged children and young people (5-16 years old) being bereaved of a parent or sibling. There are increased vulnerabilities associated with childhood bereavement such as risk of depression, reduced sense of belonging and barriers to academic attainment. However, schools and their staff have been identified as potential key supportive factors for children and young people who have been bereaved. Despite these findings, there is a lack of research regarding the experiences of teaching staff who have worked with bereaved young people, especially in secondary schools. My research aims to explore the experiences of secondary school teaching staff who have worked with young people bereaved of a parent or sibling to find out how school staff can be supported in this area of their work.

#### **Who can take part?**

All secondary school teaching staff in the West Midlands will be invited to participate in the research study. You will need to have had some experience of teaching young people, bereaved of a parent or siblings, in the last five years.

We want to explore a range of experiences in a non-judgemental manner. A key aim of the research is to find out more about the facilitators and barriers that teaching staff face when working with bereaved young people in order to consider how they can be supported within this area. The research is aspiring to add to what we already know within this area and potentially contribute to future professional development of school staff.

#### **What happens if I take part?**

If you decide to take part, Rebecca will conduct an interview with you that will last between 45 minutes and 1 hour. During this interview we will explore your experiences of working with bereaved young people, any facilitators and barriers you have faced and available support within your setting. Interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed and analysed.

#### **What happens if I don't want to take part?**

Participation in the study is voluntary and participants have the freedom to withdraw their data at any time prior to or during their interview. Once the interview has been undertaken, participants will be free to withdraw themselves and their data from the study up to two weeks after the interview has taken place. Withdrawing yourself from the data means that all data related to your participation will be destroyed.

### **What are the potential risks and disadvantages of taking part?**

Exploring topics such as grief and bereavement are sensitive topics which some individuals may find upsetting. Therefore, by participating in the study, there is a risk of participants experiencing psychological distress and discomfort. To mitigate this risk, the following considerations have been made:

- Participants will be provided with the semi-structured interview questions prior to their interview so that they can anticipate themes that will be explored in the session.
- As a trainee educational psychologist, I have received training in having sensitive conversations and have also engaged in additional training surrounding bereavement and grief. Using my training, I hope to engage in my research sensitively and empathically, demonstrating awareness of participant's emotional needs.
- Participants will be free to withdraw from the study at any time before or during the interview.
- After the interview, participants will be provided with the contact details of bereavement and grief organisations if they wish to seek out additional support after the research.

### **What are the benefits of participating in the study?**

Taking part in the study will allow participants to contribute to the research field of childhood bereavement. Participation also provides individuals with the opportunity to reflect on and develop their future practice.

### **What will happen to my data?**

All data within the study is treated confidentially and will be stored securely in the University of Birmingham data management system. When audio files are transcribed, they will be anonymised using pseudonyms meaning that names of participants, other individuals, organisations, and geographical locations will not be reported. Once transcribed, all audio files will be deleted with remaining transcription and notes being securely stored on the university system,

Data will be stored for 10 years after the study, in accordance with university policy, on the University of Birmingham's secure IT system.

### **How will results from the research be reported?**

Once transcribed and anonymised, interviews will be analysed to summarise the findings of the interviews. From this, a summative research report will be produced and shared with all participants informing them of the main findings of the research.

Research findings will also be written up as part of my doctoral thesis. As a result, findings from the research may be shared in academic publications or shared as part of professional conferences and CPD in local authorities.

### **Contact information**

If you have any questions regarding the research or would like to see further information, please contact me on the details below.

**Researcher:** Rebecca Prosser **Email address:** [Rebecca.prosser@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:Rebecca.prosser@birmingham.gov.uk)

**Research supervisor:** James Birchwood **Email address:** [j.f.birchwood@bham.ac.uk](mailto:j.f.birchwood@bham.ac.uk)

## APPENDIX C.

### Participant Consent Form

#### Consent form

#### **An exploration of secondary school teaching staff's experiences of working with bereaved children and young people.**

This information is being collected as part of a research project concerned with exploring secondary school teaching staff's experience of working with children and young people bereaved of a parent or sibling, within the School of Education in the University of Birmingham. The information that you supply and that which may be collected as part of the research project will be stored in a secure university data store and will only be accessed by authorised personnel involved in the project. The information will be retained by the University of Birmingham and will only be used for the purpose of research, and statistical and audit purposes. Anonymised reports of the research may be submitted for publication in academic and professional publications. By supplying this information, you are consenting to the University storing your information for the purposes stated above. The information will be processed by the University of Birmingham in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act (1998) and General Data Protection Regulations (2018). No identifiable personal data will be published.

I have read and understood the project information sheet which includes details regarding my right to withdraw, confidentiality, privacy, data storage and useage.	<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>
I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the project and have had these questions answered satisfactorily.	<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>
I confirm that I am currently working within a Secondary School setting in the West Midlands	<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>
I agree to being audio recorded and I understand that the recordings will only be heard by Rebecca Prosser and her research supervisors.	<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any point up to two weeks after the interview, without giving any reason (after this point, the data will have been anonymised and incorporated into the research report). If I withdraw, my data will be destroyed	<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>
I understand that my personal data will be processed for the purposes detailed above, in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) and General Data Protection Regulations (2018).	<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>

Based on the information above, I agree to take part in this study.

Name of participant:..... Date:.....

Signature:.....

Name of researcher:..... Date:.....

Signature:.....

**APPENDIX D.**  
**Interview Schedule**

<b>Issue/topic</b>	<b>Possible questions</b>	<b>Possible follow up questions</b>	<b>Probes</b>	<b>Related literature</b>
<b>Working with bereaved pupils</b>	<p>What experiences have you had working with a bereaved young person?</p> <p>Have you faced any challenges when working with bereaved CYP?</p> <p>Have you had any experiences where you feel you have had a positive impact on a bereaved CYP's experience?</p> <p>Can you tell me about any social or cultural factors that have affected your work with bereaved young people?</p>	<p><i>(As a participant recounts their experiences with a pupil)</i></p> <p>When did the young person experience their bereavement? What was their relation to the person that died?</p> <p>What was that like?</p> <p>How did it make you feel?</p>	<p>Tell me more about that.</p> <p>What happened after that?</p>	<p>These questions were informed by the work of Abraham-Steele and Edmonds' (2021) research into the experiences of primary school teachers who had worked with bereaved CYP.</p> <p>Within this study, the researchers aimed to find out more about the experiences that staff had had with supporting bereaved CYP during their careers.</p> <p>Questions regarding sociocultural factors were informed by areas discussed by a participant in my pilot interview and was further informed by Abraham-Steele and Edmonds' (2021) exploration of staff's perceptions of sociocultural factors.</p>
<b>Facilitators and barriers</b>	<p>Has anything been helpful or facilitated you in being able to support bereaved CYP?</p> <p>Have you faced any barriers in being able to support bereaved CYP?</p>	<p>What was that like?</p> <p>How did it make you feel?</p>	<p>Can you tell me more?</p>	<p>These questions were informed by the work of Costelloe et al. (2020) who explored the experiences of primary school staff working with bereaved CYP. Within their research they explored how staff may be supported to work with bereaved CYP.</p>

<b>Support and training</b>	Have you received any support when working with bereaved young people?	<p>No - If you were to receive support, what would you want it to look like?</p> <p>Yes – What does that support look like? How was that experience for you?</p>	Can you tell me more about that?	<p>These questions were also informed by Costelloe et al's (2020) aims to explore how staff are supported to respond to bereaved CYP.</p> <p>Research from Abraham-Steele and Edmonds (2021) further informed these questions due to their exploration of the training and guidance available to staff in UK schools. This also relates to research regarding bereavement plans in Denmark (Lytje, 2013, 2017).</p>
	Have you ever received bereavement training?	<p>No – If you were to receive bereavement training, what would you want to know?</p> <p>Yes – What did that training look like? How was that experience for you?</p>	Can you expand on that?	
	Does your school have a bereavement policy?	<p>No – If your school were to have a bereavement policy, what would this look like?</p> <p>Yes – What are your opinions on the bereavement policy? Has it impacted your work with bereaved CYP?</p>	Tell me more about that.	



## APPENDIX E.

### Letter of Ethical Approval



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

Dear James Birchwood and Rebecca Prosser

**RE:** What are the experiences of secondary school teaching staff working with bereaved children and young people?

**Application for Ethical Review:** ERN\_0870-May2023

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project, which was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Committee.

On behalf of the Committee, I confirm that this study now has ethical approval.

Any adverse events occurring during the study should be promptly brought to the Committee's attention by the Principal Investigator and may necessitate further ethical review.

Please ensure that the relevant requirements within the University's Code of Practice for Research and the information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages (available at <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Links-and-Resources.aspx>) are adhered to.

Please be aware that whilst Health and Safety (H&S) issues may be considered during the ethical review process, you are still required to follow the University's guidance on H&S and to ensure that H&S risk assessments have been carried out as appropriate. For further information about this, please contact your School H&S representative or the University's H&S Unit at [healthandsafety@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:healthandsafety@contacts.bham.ac.uk).

Kind regards,

The Co-Chairs of the Humanities and Social Sciences Committee

E-mail: [ethics-queries@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:ethics-queries@contacts.bham.ac.uk)

## **APPENDIX F.**

### **Transcript Sample**

#### **Edward – Transcript sample**

RESEARCHER: Just to start off with, being quite broad, what experience have you had working with a bereaved young person?

EDWARD: So it's varied really in that there's probably been times where we've not been aware of having a bereaved child in our school, in our classrooms.

RESEARCHER: Yeah

EDWARD: But it's fairly from students who have recently lost their relatives: parents or grandparents. It could be a recent bereavement, or it could be a bereavement that's happened some period of time before, be it within their time at secondary school or earlier on in their lives in primary school. So, it, erm, kind of varies really, as the, the information we receive about that. So, it could be, for example, I've had students in the past we're I've not been aware that they've had a bereavement which has occurred much earlier on in their life, which could be a contributing factor in how they approach and deal with certain situations. Erm, similarly, if there is a student who has gone through a recent bereavement, we normally receive that information from the designated safeguarding lead.

RESEARCHER: Okay.

EDWARD: Erm, form tutor and subject teachers will be informed so we are mindful and keep an eye on how they're behaving and to support them appropriately.

RESEARCHER: Mhmm, mhmm. And how does that get given, that information... going through that process, how does that make you feel?

EDWARD: Erm, it's not nice, it's you know, it's difficult for anyone going through something like that, especially someone that's so young. It's reassuring to have that information, to be mindful of that.

RESEARCHER: Mhmm

EDWARD: Erm, as part of daily duties as a teacher you try to look out for the changes in behaviour for all students, certainly if there's been a bereavement then that would be a, erm, reason for that. Erm, so at least having that information, you know, it gives us ways of... a heads up of supporting them in whatever was we can do or it may be that they feel they need time out of lesson, whatever it may be, but it's at least that first point of call at, erm, initiating ways of working with them, erm.

RESEARCHER: Mhmm

EDWARD: And supporting them in whatever way we possibly can.

RESEARCHER: Mhmm. You mentioned that the designated safeguarding lead, they communicate bereavements to staff. Is there a certain process used?

EDWARD: Erm, again, I must admit, it tends to vary so it's... sometimes it's been, erm, an email will be sent to the teachers of that student...

RESEARCHER: Mhmm



EDWARD:....If it's a student within my form group, as has happened previously, I might receive that email directly or the head of year will notify me of that.

RESEARCHER: Mhmm

EDWARD: So I think it kind of always filters through from the safeguarding team and then they will liaise with the people they feel it's appropriate to. There has been other cases where certain instances of bereavement have been made aware to staff in, in the staff briefing. So it could be a student that is, is, you know, well known around the academy, whether you teach them or not, just to be mindful of some changes in their behaviour due to a, due to a recent bereavement.

RESEARCHER: Mmm

EDWARD: Or, or equally if say, a particular time of year or an anniversary occurring, then that might be something to be mindful of.

RESEARCHER: Mmm, mhmm. Okay, that's great, thank you. And have you faced any particular challenges in your work with bereaved young people?

EDWARD: Erm, erm not directly in terms of anything that I've had to address directly myself.

RESEARCHER: Yeah

EDWARD: I mean there's been some... explosions in behaviour at times, of the students we are aware are going through a bereavement that I've had to support. But nothing directly in class, erm, yeah and then I guess to facilitate that, we get, we do get training during CPD just to... I mean, it always refers back to, you know, anything they discuss or feel they want to do discuss with us, we have to make them aware that you know we will have to pass on that information.

RESEARCHER: Mhmm.

EDWARD: And they're aware and there's been a big push on, in the academy, making them aware of who they can talk to...

RESEARCHER: Mhmm

EDWARD: ...if they need to. So, they may feel that they don't need to, or don't want to a class teacher, but I know from erm, a student in my form, when she lost a grandparent, i think it was last year, that she was receiving some support with that but it was external support that was coming in school to support her with that and then we do you general, you know, drop ins, ask if they're okay and sometimes, that's just enough that we can gauge from their response how... if they're having a good day or a bad day.

RESEARCHER: Hmmm. So from that, I'm picking up, do you think there's a difference between potentially your role working with a bereavement student as a form tutor and then as a class – well as a subject teacher? Do you think – is there a difference there in terms of information you might be privy to or having more of a pastoral role?

EDWARD: Yeah, definitely, definitely. Erm, I think in terms of – so the set up within our school, we have, in most year groups, we have a head of year and an assistant head of year and they would have all that information regarding all students, whatever it may be, including, in this case, a bereavement.

RESEARCHER: Mhmm

EDWARD: Erm, and then that gets filtered down to the form tutors and from there goes to their subject teachers. I think, given the fact we see them, as form tutors, twice a day, everyday our involvement is a little bit more impactful or, certainly, we're more involved than a subject teacher who they... you know... Key stage 4, a chosen subject, they may only see that teacher twice a week.

RESEARCHER: Yeah.

EDWARD: And so, yeah, we have a lot more of an involvement and usually the process is that, after speaking with heads of year, or the safeguarding team, if there's a safeguarding issue, the form tutor is normally the first port of call with home...

R Okay.

EDWARD:... and having those discussions with them. Whatever, whatever it may be.

RESEARCHER: Mhmm, mhmm. So, just, correct me if I'm wrong, might it be... would subject teachers necessarily know about a bereavement or would it just go from like DSL to head of year, head of form. Would subject teachers be made aware, would that be in staff briefings like you said?

EDWARD: Yeah, erm. Erm, I would say, from my experience so far, here, that process is very inconsistent.

RESEARCHER: Okay.

EDWARD: Erm, so I would say there's been times I've had students in front of me and I've not been aware of something having happened...

RESEARCHER: Yeah

EDWARD: ...in terms of a bereavement. Erm, there has been times in the past where we've been made aware of some students experiencing bereavement in briefing but that isn't always the case.

RESEARCHER: Okay. So when is it that you might... so say if you haven't been told via briefing or from the DSL, how might, how else might you find out about a bereavement in those circumstances where you've said, "I hadn't known."

EDWARD: Erm, so, it, well it could be... we have... as form tutors, we have, we have a form tutor meeting every Thursday. so if there's anything's that's happened within that week we would probably get a notification then. Erm, at the same time, if there's been a briefing on Monday, to the whole staff, if a particular member of staff has not attended the briefing on the Monday, they might not find out until a later part of the week.

RESEARCHER: Okay.

EDWARD: Erm, cos there doesn't, there's an inconsistency in how that information is shared amongst staff.

RESEARCHER: Mhmm

EDWARD: Sometimes, it's shared whole school. Sometimes, it's not. Erm, which I think, due to that inconsistent approach, it leaves gaps...

RESEARCHER: Yeah

EDWARD: ...which people are undoubtedly not gonna hear about, you know, er. For example, we've had a member of our department who was off ill yesterday due to being unwell. Now, had we been notified in school yesterday, they may not be aware until the later part of the week -

RESEARCHER: mmmm

EDWARD: Because we don't have, erm, we don't have minutes taken from the briefings.

RESEARCHER: Okay.

EDWARD: So unless you're there in attendance, or unless someone in attendance relays the message to you, there's a good chance that some aspects of what's said in briefing are, aren't going to be picked up.

RESEARCHER: Okay.

EDWARD: So I'm just. I'm just thinking over the last couple of years it's, there's been various ways that information has been shared with me. It's not just one consistent method of being notified.

RESEARCHER: Okay, great. And have you had any experiences where you feel like you've had a positive impact on a bereaved young person's experience?

EDWARD: Erm, In terms of their, how they're dealing with the bereavement? Or just how they're getting on in school?

RESEARCHER: Either or... Again it's quite, it's quite open to interpretation.

EDWARD: Yeah

RESEARCHER: Yeah.

EDWARD: Erm, yeah I mean, I'd probably use this example more with my form group, so I've had the same form group for – this is my third year with them.

RESEARCHER: Yeah.

EDWARD: Erm and there has been at different points. There's been students who, they're mainly at the age where, some have lost parents but the more, the more common bereavement has been grandparents.

RESEARCHER: Mhmm

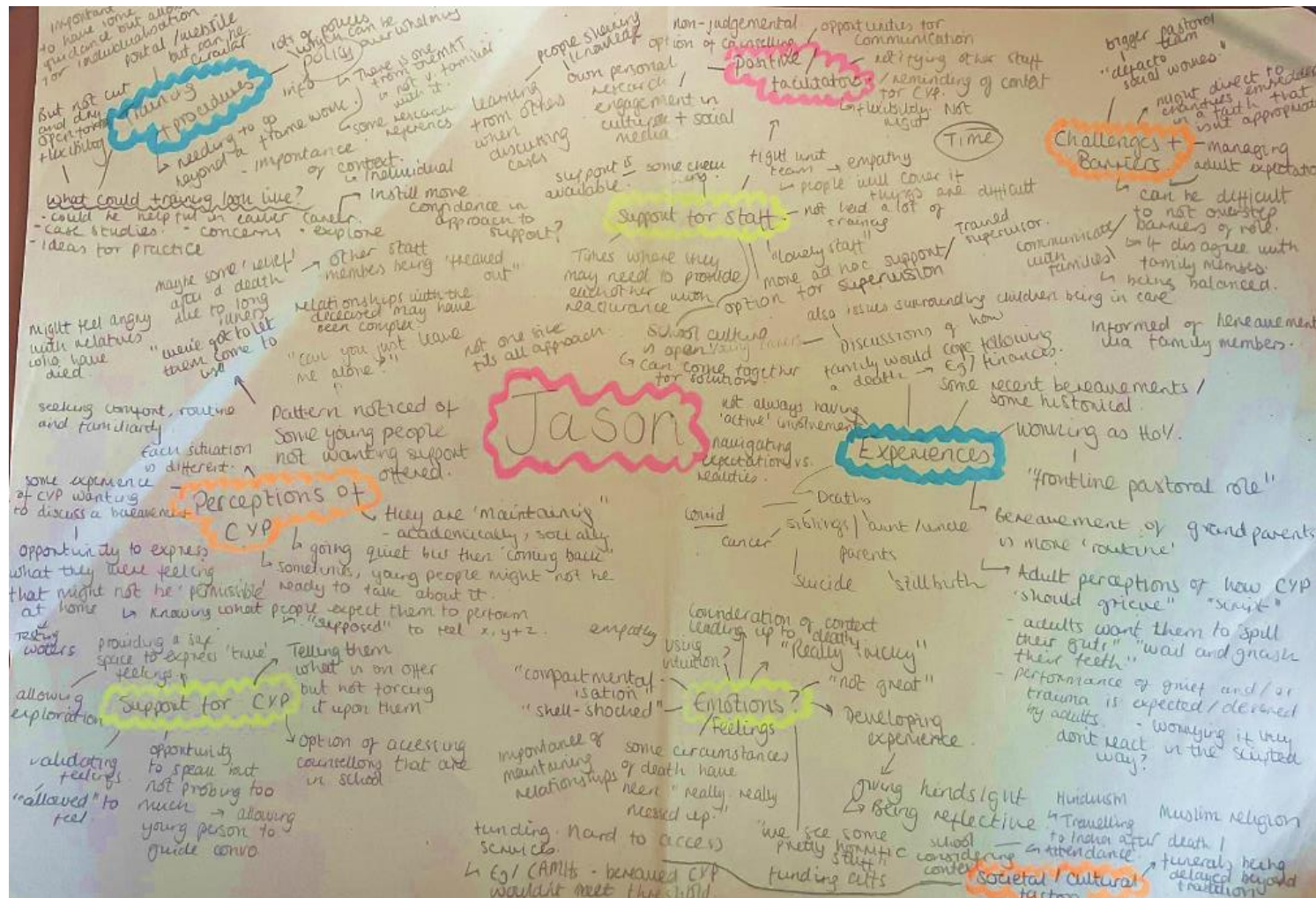
EDWARD: Erm, which I think, you know, is quite common at the age I'm dealing with. Erm, in terms of positive impact... Erm, I think just by having those interactions, by having those drop ins with them, just checking they're okay.

RESEARCHER: Yeah

EDWARD: Having those lines of communication. How impact that is throughout the day, not too sure in all honesty. 'Cos I think some of them their, their characters vary so some of them are just very quiet by nature, regardless of what they're experiencing.

## APPENDIX G.

### Example Familiarisation Map



## APPENDIX H.

### Example NVivo Codes

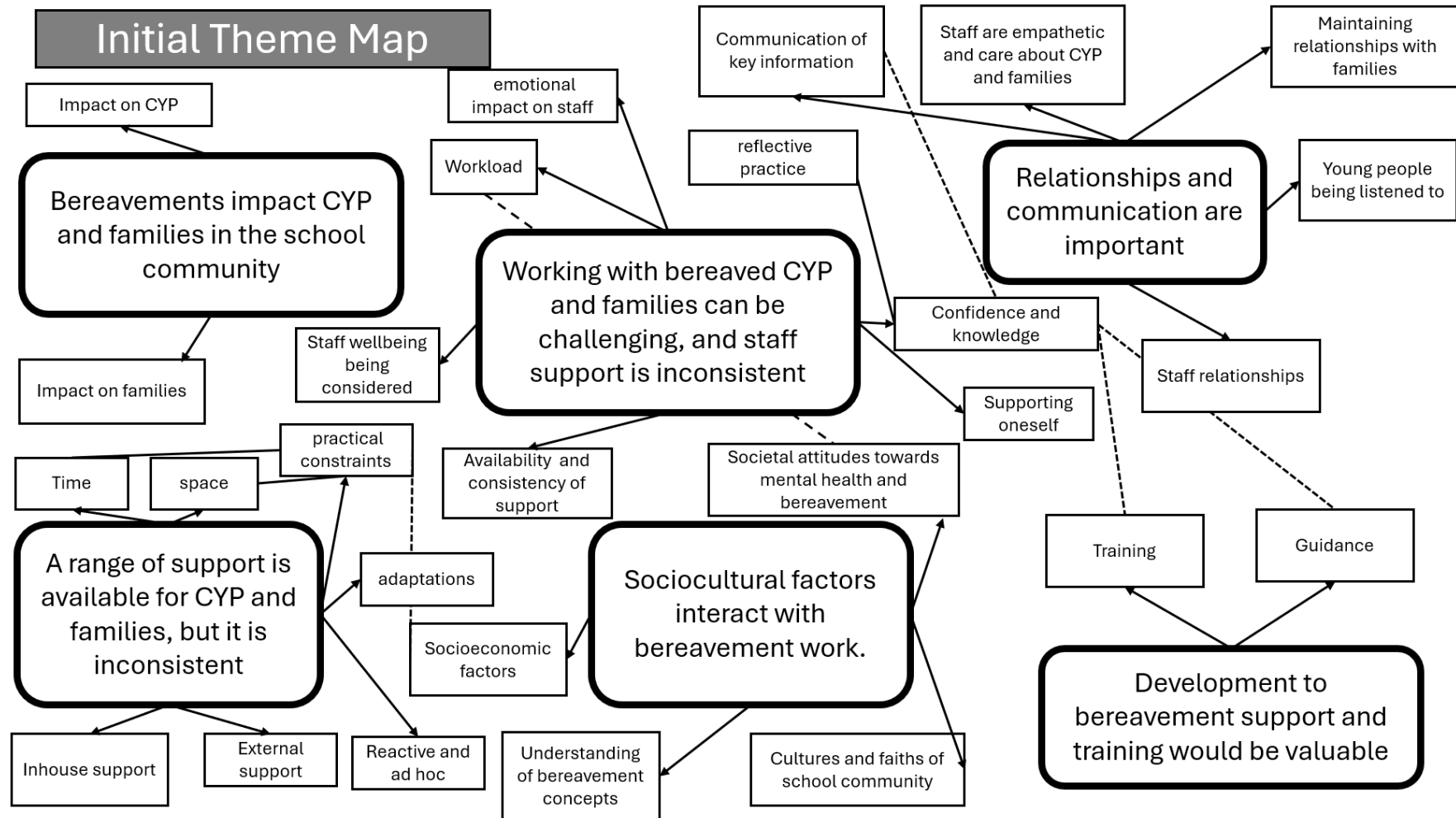
- ☐ a challenge is that not all staff understand bereavement
- ☐ a facilitator is that schools are able to offer inhouse pastoral support
- ☐ a strong sense of community is a facilitator
- ☐ access to external training
- ☐ access to information about a students bereavement is a facilitator
- ☐ access to inhouse support can be impacted by practical constraints
- ☐ active support for CYP and families reducing over time
- ☐ adapting support based on context of child and family
- ☐ adults are uncomfortable if CYP don't respond to death in a way they expect
- ☐ Adults can assume and look for how CYP should be responding to a bereavement
- ☐ adults expectations of what grief looks like is to make them feel better, not the CYP
- ☐ adults may not realise how much a young person has been affected by a bereavement
- ☐ all staff should be aware of issues surrounding bereavement
- ☐ all staff should receive training
- ☐ anticipated death
- ☐ attendance as a potential issue following bereavement
- ☐ aunts and uncles dying
- ☐ aunts dying
- ☐ awareness of death and circumstances may mean staff are more flexible in approach
- ☐ awareness of different cultural and religious bereavement and grief practices
- ☐ awareness of interaction between bereavement and adolescence
- ☐ Being able to offer children time is a facilitator to support
- ☐ being aware of contextual factors impacting behaviour in class
- ☐ being desensitised is a facilitator to providing support
- ☐ being resilient is a supportive factor
- ☐ bereaved pupil able to maintain engagement with school following death
- ☐ bereaved students may inform staff of death
- ☐ bereaved students still able to participate in school routine

## APPENDIX I

### Example of Initial Mind Map Of Potential Themes Areas



## APPENDIX J. Initial Thematic Map



**APPENDIX K.**  
**An Illustration of the RTA Process for an Individual Participant**

Phase of RTA	Examples of process applied to an individual participant (Edward)
<b>1) Familiarisation</b>	<b>Initial thoughts noted whilst listening to participants as noted in my research diary:</b>
I listened to Edward's interview prior to transcribing it verbatim. During this process, I made notes of initial thoughts I had in my research diary.	<p data-bbox="696 499 2096 531">“ - <i>Are staff able to say they are struggling?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="696 563 2096 659">- <i>Those children who already have external agency / extra support might have bereavement support more readily available.</i></li> <li data-bbox="696 691 2096 722">- <i>Empowering young people, giving them the choice to talk if they want to or not.</i></li> <li data-bbox="696 754 2096 786">- <i>Staff members identifying with the community in which they are working? Being a community member?</i></li> <li data-bbox="696 818 2096 850">- <i>Has there been a shift in school's understanding / weight of importance on mental wellbeing?</i></li> <li data-bbox="696 882 2096 914">- <i>Impact of school culture in general – what impact does this have on bereavement?</i></li> <li data-bbox="696 946 2096 978">- <i>Impact on own personal life experiences and working around grief and death.</i></li> <li data-bbox="696 1010 2096 1137">- <i>Would training on bereavement and other SEMH related issues on their own be too overwhelming for staff?”</i></li> </ul>



accuracy, I then read through Edward's transcript twice (in different orders) and created a familiarisation map to support data immersion.

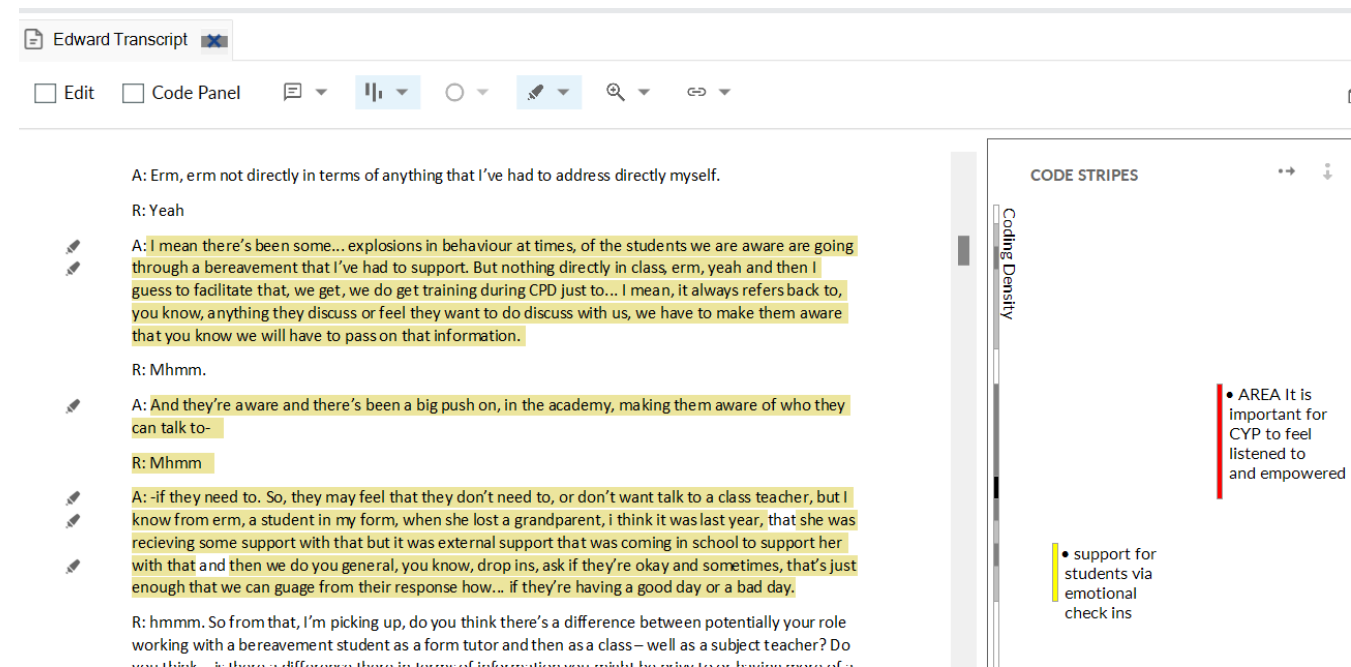
**Edward**

- Perceptions of CYP**
  - not of direct support
  - Support for staff
    - haven't heard of emotional or being available
    - support can be effective
    - students wouldn't use it if it's "singled" out by staff
    - children still need to be offered support
    - family disengage support
  - staff wellbeing not generally checked upon
    - tends to be more of a "have to" relationship with communication
    - chelling in might be limited time + resources
    - in RE
    - lots of elements
    - some lessons not sure what is discussed then w/ pupils
    - previously "withheld"
    - different religions being mind
    - different under standing of death amongst staff
    - different practices
    - different religions
    - being mind
    - not nice
    - empathy
    - Terrible if you get support (knowing that men health support is able to C)
    - reassuring
    - 'pleasing' to know support is valued
    - reflecting on own experiences or loss
    - known staff access coun
    - not familiar w/ OSL
    - if someone off, they might miss information
    - not guarantee to raise inform relayed
    - informed via email
    - staff briefing
    - case-by-case
    - No training
    - relying on professional judgement
    - if there was en strategies + guid
    - adaptations?
    - context of bereavement
  - Challenges + barriers
    - TEACHING CYP regarding them to adulthood
    - inconsistencies
    - instant turnar
    - communication
    - demands of role
    - might be valued less accessible to students or historical
    - measure of working in a school
    - might not be aware of bereavement
    - might hear No current procedures with regards to how to support informing
    - after the fact policy could be made
    - Can vary
    - procedures
    - keeping safeguarding protocol in mind
    - staff tutor meetings
  - Experiences
    - day to day teaching role + it's demands
    - positive experiences + facilitators
    - want to create a safe environment
    - Some can become quiet
    - more common to lose grand parents
    - part box
    - Support for CYP
      - Teachers informed so that they are aware of context
      - eg/ aware of anniversaries
      - form tutors see more regularly
      - staff tutor meetings
      - 5 minute pangs
      - "drop-ins" - You ok?
      - considering language used when discussing family
    - looking out for behavioural changes
    - parental permission
    - External Support
      - form tutors
      - see more regularly
      - staff tutor meetings

## 2) Coding the data

I used NVivo-14 to code Edward's data. This was completed twice with participants in different orders. Throughout both stages of this process codes were refined for clarity and to reduce duplicates.

### A screenshot of NVivo-14 Coding of Edward's Transcript:



### Research Diary Extract:

*"Coding – x2 rounds of open coding to be refined throughout.*

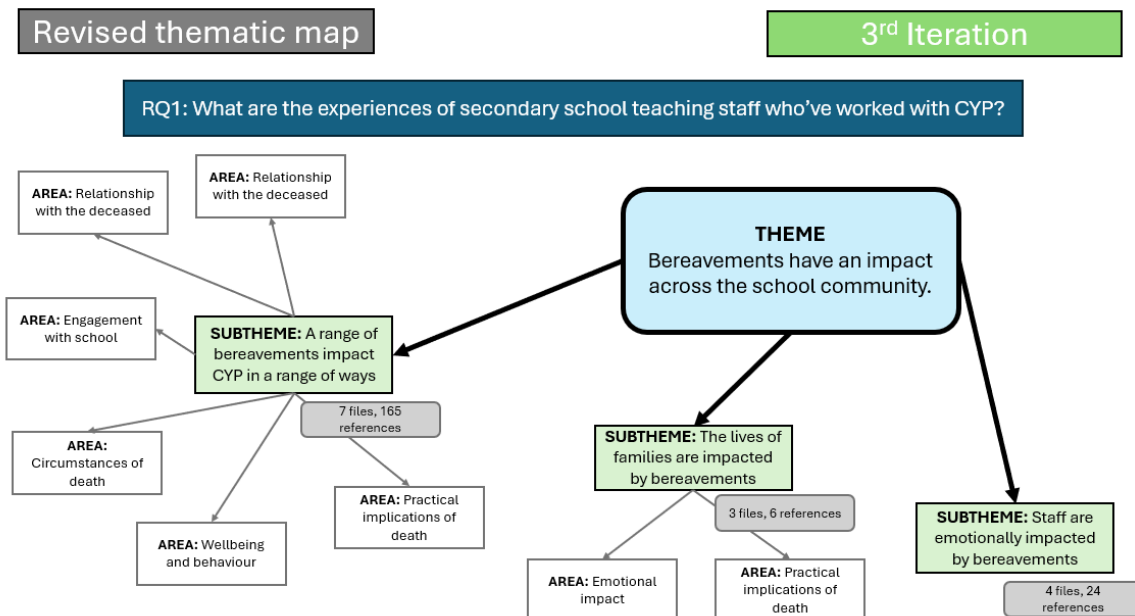
- *Then – go through codes to identify those that are very similar / duplicates. Making data-set more manageable."*

<b>3) Generating initial themes</b>	Please refer to appendix I for an example mindmap created during this process.
<p>After having coded all of the participant data, I used FreeMind (2016) to support a process of mind-mapping codes in order to visually map patterns and connections between codes.</p> <p>During this process I then produced an initial thematic map. Throughout, my research diary was used to support my thought process.</p>	<p>Please refer to appendix J for the initial thematic map produced</p> <p><b>Research diary extract:</b></p> <p><i>“Theme thoughts:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Some staff feel looked after, other staff feel alone.</i></li> <li>- <i>CYP may want or not want support.</i></li> <li>- <i>- External agencies are used but it can be inconsistent in terms of available and quality of support.</i></li> <li>- <i>Support needs to be flexible to child – consider circumstances of death, needs, culture etc.</i></li> <li>- <i>Some staff see the important of understanding cultural and faith to facilitate support.</i></li> <li>- <i>Others perceive it as a barrier or that some sociocultural groups may be more receptive to support.”</i></li> </ul>

#### 4) Reviewing and developing themes

Themes were reviewed and amended numerous times by using thematic maps. These thematic maps were then presented in peer supervision and discussed. During this process some codes were reviewed and amended, with changes being audited. Throughout this process, my research diary was used to support my thinking.

#### An example of a PowerPoint presentation used to share themes with peers:



#### Research Diary Extract

*“Discussion with XXXX on themes.*

- *Reflective, sharing practice.*
- *Advocacy is important.*
- *Phase 3 peer supervision – helping me to feel a bit more confident.*

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Looking at the initial theme map, I am noticing that there may be some overlap in themes.</i></li> <li>- <i>E.g. Relationships and Communication – it feels like maybe this can be merged and/or split into other themes.”</i></li> </ul>
<b>5) Refining, defining and naming themes</b>  In this part of the process I created my final thematic maps. I also took opportunities for peer supervision and discussion with my academic supervisor to reflect on final themes and make adjustments accordingly.	Please see Figure 2 and Figure 3 for the final thematic maps.  <b>Research Diary Extract</b>  <i>“Reviewing final themes with XXXX (peer supervision).</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Spent time reviewing the names and themes for clarity and to ensure that message is clear.</i></li> <li>- <i>Areas to consider further: using ‘accessibility’ or ‘availability’ when discussing what support is on offer for staff and students.</i></li> <li>- <i>Considering how to describe relationships.</i></li> <li>- <i>Changes to make:</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <i>Subtheme ‘CYP expressing feelings to family’ to become ‘Reactions to bereavement responses’</i></li> <li>2) <i>‘Staff relationships’ to become ‘Staff often support themselves and their peers’”</i></li> </ol> </li> </ul>
<b>6) Writing up</b>  In this part of the process, the narrative analysis of the data extracts are presented.	Please see Chapter Four for a written account of the data analysis and findings.

## **APPENDIX L.**

### **Discussion of IPA as an Alternative Form of Analysis**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was briefly considered as a methodology for the study. However, IPA is designed to provide a detailed exploration of an individual's lived experiences and their understanding of it, with an intent to interrogate the deeper meaning of each participant's interpretation (Eatough and Smith, 2017). In contrast, RTA allows for the wider exploration of personal experiences and other subjects beyond this, alongside seeking patterns amongst the data. Within the current research, RTA was deemed most appropriate as participants were discussing a range of experiences they had interacting with bereaved CYP (rather than focusing on one significant event) as well as exploring other topics such as training and policies. Furthermore, IPA tends to lend itself to more homogenous groups of participants, whereas RTA provides more flexibility with regards to the heterogeneity of a group of participants (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Although my participants are similar in the fact that they work as educators in secondary school, they have a range of roles within school which makes their work with bereaved CYP differ.

**APPENDIX M.**  
**Excerpts from Research Diary**

09/05/2023

- *What is the legislation/discussion around childhood bereavement in the UK?*
- *The topic is starting to be explicitly discussed by the government – more recent debated on if there should be a childhood bereavement register?*
- *SEN Code of Practice says that schools should have short term provision to support bereaved CYP – but doesn't actually identify what this is or could be.*

02/01/2024

Thoughts when transcribing Alex

- *Something to consider: what happens when a parent dies in a single family household? Seismic change?*
- *Other parent now responsible adult? Other family members? Going into care?*
- *Impact of bereavement on lesson attendance – there's tension between school staff re: pastoral and academic needs requirements.*
- *Consequence of bereavement – disengagement from learning*
- *Talking is coming up again – it's important for young people to be offered this opportunity Having time and opportunity to do this acts as a facilitator.*

03/03/2024

- *If codes are very specific, it may preclude them from themes*
  - *do I need to think about relationships?*
- *Edward stated that staff wellbeing isn't checked in on*
  - *How does this related to the experiences of Victoria?*

- *Did I go through this transcript too quickly or was I more efficient?*
- *Looking at my codes, there's overlap. Need to explore refining.*
- *Need to do more reading as to whether codes need to be unique or can share some similarity.*

19/03/2024

*Jason commented in how a parent took their own life. I found this triggering as it related to my own experiences. It makes me feels unsettled emotionally as it ties to my own experiences of bereaved. However, it's important to keep my positionality in mind so that I can confront it and be reflexive when analysing the data. Need to bring this to supervision to discuss further.*