

BUILDING CONFIDENCE TO SUPPORT STUDENTS EXPERIENCING ANTICIPATORY GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT:

Pre-pilot Insights from a Whole-school Training Programme

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Introduction

School communities play a central role in the lives of children and young people (CYP), yet many education staff feel a lack of confidence and knowledge to respond when a child is experiencing anticipatory grief and bereavement.

We have worked together to create a training programme that gives the whole-school community the tools to support CYP in the moment.

We created an e-learning course covering signs of anticipatory grief, attachment theory, the impact of death, supporting CYP with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and practical strategies.



Conclusion

This training improved confidence in supporting CYP with anticipatory grief, reflecting the Ruth Strauss Foundation's mission to equip school communities to Respond in the Moment.

By fostering a whole-school approach, it recognises how uniquely young people experience grief.

The findings highlight the need for specialist professional development to build confidence in conversations and practical support, increasing knowledge for effective care, particularly for those with complex needs.



Methods

Pre-pilot study recruiting 58 participants through charity networks from primary, secondary, and alternative provision settings, representing diverse school community roles aligned with our whole-school approach.

Effectiveness evaluated through matched pre/post-course questionnaires measuring confidence and knowledge changes.

Results

- 84% reported increased confidence in offering practical support.
- 95% of staff reported a significant improvement in confidence when having conversations with students about anticipatory grief.
- Self-reported knowledge increased across four topics, with supporting SEND children, trauma, and identifying anticipatory grief showing the greatest gains.
- Confidence in supporting SEND students increased equally.

While based on a small pre-pilot sample, results suggest the training builds readiness and confidence to respond effectively.

These findings reflect the programme's aim to equip staff across various roles and settings, demonstrating its potential as an inclusive, whole-school approach.

