

How do pastoral staff in secondary education settings understand and respond to pupils' grief following the death of a peer?

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Summary

This Doctoral Thesis comprises three main chapters: literature review, empirical study and the researcher's reflections.

The literature review explores theoretical frameworks relevant to bereavement as well as current understandings of children and young people's experiences of grief. The national context of bereavement support is discussed and themes within the research on bereavement support in schools are also explored.

The empirical chapter presents a qualitative study exploring the perspectives of secondary school pastoral staff who have supported peer-bereaved pupils. This exploration is conducted through thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews. This chapter discusses the findings and subsequent implications for professional practice and future research.

The final chapter provides an account of the researcher's journey throughout the project, exploring experiences, reflections and personal and professional development during the process. Additionally, reflections are provided on the methodology and design of the study. Strategies for appropriate dissemination are also discussed.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Harrison Chapple, Charlie Green and all of the pupils from our school who were so affected by their deaths.

Harri, it will always be immeasurably sad that you are not here. Your influence on the trajectory of my life continues though and I take solace in that. Thank you for the happiness and sense of belonging that you gave me.

'People you love don't die. Not completely... They live in your mind, the way they always lived inside you. You keep their light alive. If you remember them well enough, they can still guide you, like the shine of long-extinguished stars could guide ships in unfamiliar waters.'

Matt Haig

1. Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

Almost all children and young people (CYP) will experience bereavement through the death of a parent, sibling, close relative or peer before they reach adulthood (Schonfeld & Quackenbush, 2010). Bereavement has been identified as one of the most difficult and impactful experiences for children and young people (CYP), which can lead to negative impacts on psychological and academic outcomes (Nielsen et al., 2012; Pham et al., 2018). Therefore, it is essential for the support systems around bereaved CYP to effectively address their grief experiences and implement strategies to mitigate potential negative outcomes (McCarthy & Jessop, 2005.). Consequently, research relating to bereavement provision for CYP is particularly relevant for Educational Psychologists (EPs), who are well-positioned to guide schools and communities in providing compassionate and evidence-based support.

A systematic literature review by McCarthy and Jessop (2005) suggested that an enhanced understanding of the subject was needed through further research. They recommended rigorous qualitative and quantitative studies, covering a broad spectrum of bereavement experiences, and drawing on diverse theoretical perspectives. However, since this review was published, bereavement support provision (BSP) for CYP remains under-researched (Costelloe et al, 2020). BSP in schools refers to pastoral care that is specifically focused on the impact of loss that a bereaved CYP may be experiencing (James, 2015).

Recent studies have begun to broaden this field of research but these investigations often group and/or conflate various aspects of bereavement. These include factors such as the age of the bereaved, their relationship to the deceased, and the nature of

the death (Papadatou et al., 2018). Subsequently, there is limited understanding of the nuances that exist between distinct bereavement contexts and how to best support affected CYP.

This literature review aims to explore current understandings of CYPs' experiences of grief and BSP in schools. The majority of the research in this area is conducted in the fields of psychology, particularly educational psychology. To provide a clear, structured synthesis, this review adopts a systematic search strategy followed by a thematic review to organise and present significant findings and gaps in the literature. This approach allows for a holistic exploration of the area, identifying key themes and patterns that are present within the literature (Snyder, 2019).

This literature review initially explores theoretical bereavement models that have been used or referenced in the existing research. The review then explores CYPs' development and understanding of death including a focus on peer-bereavement. The impact of bereavement on CYPs outcomes is also discussed. Themes regarding BSP for CYP in UK schools are then explored.

1.2 Search Strategy

A structured, systematic approach guided the literature search to ensure a comprehensive and balanced review. The process began with identifying relevant databases. The databases PsychINFO, ERIC (Educational Resources Information Centre), EBSCO, and Scopus were selected for their coverage of research in psychology and education and were used to identify relevant articles in the chosen research area. Databases were selected based on their relevance the research area.

The search parameters were carefully defined to maintain a focused scope. Keywords and inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to screen articles for review. The Boolean operators (such as 'AND' and 'OR') were employed to combine the search terms (see keyword lists in Table 1.1 and Table 1.2). For example, terms such as 'bereavement', 'grief,' 'loss,' 'mourning' and 'death' were used to capture relevant studies across various aspects of BSP. To ensure relevance and accessibility, the limiter "Language – English" was applied and only peer-reviewed articles published in English were considered.

The literature search was conducted in December 2023 and occurred in two stages, to widen access to relevant literature and address different aspects of the topic. The first stage focused on general BSP for CYP within UK schools, providing an overview of how bereavement support is typically approached in educational contexts. In reading the literature from the initial search strategy, common practices for BSP in schools were highlighted. However, it revealed a gap in the research regarding BSP for peer-bereaved pupils. A second search was then made to focus specifically on peer-bereavement. Papers were not restricted to the UK for the second search, to widen access to the relevant literature as there was limited UK-based research in this area.

Additionally searches were undertaken on the Department for Education, Office for Standards in Education, World Health Organisation, Office for National Statistics and bereavement charity websites including Winston's Wish, Child Bereavement

Network, Child Bereavement UK, Cruse Bereavement Care. These sources provided practical and policy-based insights, complementing the academic literature with perspectives on bereavement support practices and resources available to schools. Literature that was referenced in relevant research and articles was also explored.

Initial search to explore BSP in UK schools:

Keyword list 1	Keyword list 2
Bereavement Grief Loss Mourning Death	Educational Psychology research Education School Learning Teaching Class* Education System
Keyword list 3	Keyword list 4
Pastoral support Pastoral role Pastoral provision Bereavement provision Bereavement support Bereavement support provision	UK United Kingdom Britain England Scotland Wales Northern Ireland

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
<i>Printed in English</i>	<i>No English translation</i>
<i>Peer reviewed</i>	<i>News articles or magazine articles</i>
<i>Results after the year 2003</i>	<i>Results from before the year 2003</i>
<i>Doctoral theses</i>	<i>Results from countries outside of the UK</i>

Second search to explore BSP in schools following the death of a peer:

Keyword list 1	Keyword list 2
Bereavement	Educational Psychology research
Grief	Education
Loss	School
Mourning	Learning
Death	Teaching
	Class
	Education System
Keyword list 3	Keyword list 4
Peers	Pastoral support
Peer relations	Pastoral role
Friendship	Pastoral provision

Classmates	Bereavement provision
Pupil	Bereavement support
Student	Bereavement support provision
Child or Young Person	

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
<i>Printed in English</i>	<i>No English translation</i>
<i>Peer reviewed</i>	<i>News articles or magazine articles</i>
<i>Results after the year 2000</i>	<i>Results from before the year 2000</i>
<i>Doctoral theses</i>	<i>Parental bereavement</i>
	<i>Parents or caregivers</i>

An initial search to explore BSP in UK schools returned 53 results. Of these, **13** articles explored BSP for pupils in UK schools. These studies included: the views of teachers (Abraham-Steele & Edmonds, 2020); the views of school staff (Potts, 2013) on BSP for parentally bereaved children in primary schools; responses of school staff to bereaved children in a secondary context (Lane et al., 2014); an exploration of bereavement support provision in primary schools (Costelloe et al., 2020); responses of adults who were bereaved as children regarding the role of teachers in bereavement support (Dimery & Templeton, 2021); use of a storytelling intervention in schools to explore death and loss (Blake et al., 2020); non-empirical discussions around bereavement (Balk et al., 2011; Holland, 2008) and understanding of managerial

bereavement practice in schools, such as school policies and staff training (Tracey & Holland, 2008; Holland & McLennan, 2015; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015; McGovern & Tracey, 2010; McManus & Paul, 2019).

A further 16 articles were considered relevant as they provided insight into outcomes for bereaved CYP or referred to related Critical Incident (CI) work in schools (See '1.6.4 Role of EP's in BSP' for definition of CI). The research papers on CI work explored EP provision for school staff. For example, EP use of stress debriefing approaches for school staff (Aucott & Soni, 2016).

The second search to explore BSP for peer-bereavement returned 76 results. Of these, **3** articles considered adolescent grief following the death of a peer, with some consideration of BSP in schools. These articles were not UK-based. Subjects included: the role of Norwegian schools following pupils' bereavement of a family member or peer due to suicide (Dyregrov, 2009); adolescents' trajectory through peer loss after a school bus traffic accident (Papadatou et al., 2018); and a non-empirical article offering suggestions for strengthening school-based grief support for adolescents coping with a peers' death (Balk et al., 2011). Literature that was referenced in the relevant research was also explored.

1.3 Thematic Analysis

The identified articles from the systematic search were analysed for recurring themes and gaps in the literature. Using a thematic approach allowed for a more comprehensive and organised synthesis of the literature. This approach identified the following 6 key themes which shape the structure of the review, with each providing insights into different aspects of BSP:

1) Types of Grief Reaction

Grief reactions can vary significantly depending on the individual and circumstances surrounding the death. This theme addresses several distinct and recognised grief reactions, including traumatic grief, postponed grief, complex grief, and disenfranchised grief. Grief reactions vary significantly depending on whether the death was anticipated or sudden, such as in cases of accidents or suicide, both of which present unique challenges for school-based support (Dyregrov et al., 2015; Cohen et al., 2016). These grief reactions are explored in the context of CYP and relevant research on bereavement in schools.

2) Theories and Models of Grief

This theme explores foundational models that were found to underpin research on bereavement support, such as the Dual Process Model (Stroebe & Schut, 1999), Continuing Bonds Model (Klass et al., 1996), and the Bio-Ecological Theory of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 2006). These models provide theoretical frameworks that inform BSP by offering perspectives on how individuals, especially children and young people (CYP), process grief and adapt to loss. Each model contributes to an understanding of different aspects of grief and highlights how environmental, cognitive, and social factors can influence grieving processes (Costelloe et al., 2020).

3) Child and Adolescent Grief

This theme explores how grief manifests differently across developmental stages, with a particular focus on adolescents. Peer-bereavement is a less-explored area and is discussed as a unique form of loss that may have a profound impact due to the developmental importance of peer relationships during adolescence (Balk et al., 2011;

Dyregrov et al., 2020). Understanding these developmental distinctions provides context for the specific needs of grieving CYP.

4) National Context of Bereavement Support Provision (BSP)

This section considers BSP within the socio-cultural and educational context of the UK. Cultural attitudes toward death in the UK are acknowledged, as well as the specific challenges posed by the post-COVID context.

5) Bereavement Support Provision (BSP) in UK Schools

This theme explores practical approaches to BSP in UK schools and distinguishes between proactive and reactive strategies. Although the literature suggests that proactive approaches are associated with more effective BSP, limited resources and a lack of structured guidance often result in UK schools relying on reactive measures (Holland & Wilkinson, 2015). This theme also addresses the need for adequate training and emotional support for school staff responsible for providing BSP.

Through these themes, this literature review presents a comprehensive overview of the current understanding of BSP for CYP in UK schools and draws attention to areas where further research is needed. The literature review concludes with a discussion about the importance of addressing gaps in peer-bereavement research and refining BSP practices to meet the needs of both CYP and the school staff who support them.

1.4 Types of grief reactions

The terms 'bereavement' and 'grief' are often used interchangeably. However, while they are related concepts, they refer to different aspects of loss. Bereavement typically refers to the enduring state of experiencing the death of someone significant, encompassing emotional, social and practical implications (Goldman, 2014). In contrast, grief is the psychological response to loss and includes a range of emotions, such as anger, contempt, hostility, fear, guilt and positive emotions such as affection, happiness, and pride (Bonnano et al., 2008).

Experiences of bereavement and grief are influenced by the unique circumstances surrounding the related death. Various terms have been used to describe both the type of death experienced and the spectrum of grief reactions a person may experience. Bonanno (2004) has critiqued the notion of grief disorders as pathologising the human experience of grief, suggesting that differences in grief reactions should not be considered disordered. However, discerning the nuances between experiences is arguably necessary in order to inform approaches to support the varied needs of bereaved individuals. Nonetheless, creating such distinctions can be complex, as the boundaries between the concepts of grief often overlap. Subsequently, some studies may use different terms interchangeably, whereas others highlight important distinctions between them. It is not within the scope of this literature review to consider all of these concepts. Therefore, definitions of the following well-known concepts are briefly explored: disenfranchised grief, complex grief, prolonged grief, postponed grief and traumatic grief.

1.4.1 Traumatic Grief and PTSD

Trauma and grief are not mutually exclusive (Regehr & Sussman, 2004). Subsequently, it can be challenging to define the boundaries between related experiences of trauma symptoms, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), grief and traumatic grief. While the experience of death may be inherently painful and stressful, it is not typically considered traumatic. Grief, which can be characterised as the intense sorrow caused by the loss of a loved one, can become traumatic when it includes trauma symptoms that significantly disrupt the grieving process (Cohen et al., 2016).

Traumatic events can lead individuals to develop a range of trauma symptoms, including affective, behavioural, biological, interpersonal and cognitive difficulties (Cohen et al., 2016). While these trauma symptoms can persist for some people, not everyone will experience them long-term. This variation depends on individual contexts, with social support recognised as a protective factor (Bonanno, 2008). Enduring trauma symptoms may be indicative of PTSD, which is defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5; APA, 2013) as occurring following exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence. This includes experiencing, witnessing, or learning that the traumatic event occurred to a close family member or close friend. However, enduring trauma symptoms that are death-related and interfere with 'typical' grief processes, could be defined as 'traumatic grief.' (Cohen et al., 2016). According to Cohen et al. (2016) traumatic grief can occur after any type of death, including those that may not objectively be judged as traumatic, such as illness-related or expected deaths. In contrast, the DSM-5 specifies that to meet the criteria for PTSD, the death must be sudden or violent (APA, 2013). This indicates that a key distinction between traumatic grief and PTSD lies in the nature of the death that has been experienced; while PTSD

is associated with sudden or violent losses, traumatic grief can occur in response to a wider range of circumstances.

While an anticipated death or death by illness could be traumatic for a CYP, it is important to acknowledge that direct exposure to violent or sudden deaths can be more severe and long-lasting than other bereavement experiences (Greenway, 2005). Sudden deaths may increase the risk of PTSD (Keyes et al., 2014) and depression (Brent et al., 2009) compared to anticipated deaths. However, it is also important to acknowledge that grief responses are influenced by various factors beyond the nature of death (Please see 1.6.2 'Contextual factors influencing outcomes'), which may make CYP more vulnerable or resilient to a bereavement. Michael & Cooper (2013) contend that assuming anticipated deaths are less impactful may perpetuate misconceptions that CYP can navigate such losses without any adult help. This is significant as the quality of emotional support is recognised to influence responses to trauma experiences (Allen et al., 2021). This highlights the importance of establishing supportive systems to meet the diverse needs and experiences of bereaved CYP, in order to mitigate trauma symptoms that may lead to traumatic grief or PTSD.

1.4.2 Postponed Grief

Postponed grief (also known as delayed grief) refers to grief that is thought to occur following a prolonged absence of conscious grieving and is considered to stem from denial or inhibition. Dyregrov et al. (2015) suggest that this type of grief may be of particular relevance to CYP who may suppress grief due to inexperience in regulating strong emotions.

1.4.3 Complex Grief

The concept of complex grief (also referred to as prolonged grief) was first proposed by Bowlby (1973) to describe the separation anxiety experienced by the bereaved individual from the deceased. It has since been proposed as a separate diagnosis from typical grief, characterised by intense rumination, strong feelings of longing and loneliness that interfere with daily functioning and adaptation (Horowitz et al., 2003). Melhelm et al. (2013) suggest that 5-10% of bereaved CYP will experience complex grief following a bereavement.

Some researchers use the term 'prolonged grief' interchangeably with 'complex grief'. A review of terms from the literature suggests that 'prolonged grief disorder' and 'persistent complex bereavement disorder' are essentially the same diagnostic entities (Maciejewski et al., 2016). However, Dyregrov et al. (2015) suggest that complex grief should be an overarching concept and sub-categorised to include varying experiences such as postponed grief, traumatic grief and prolonged grief. Prolonged grief is considered by Dyregrov et al. (2015) to reflect internal factors such as relation-based concerns. For example, separation distress following the death.

1.4.4 Disenfranchised Grief

Disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1989) has been suggested as a term to define grief that may feel less validated by society because it is not as acknowledged or socially accepted. Disenfranchised grief may occur in the following contexts:

- When death is not openly acknowledged or is considered taboo. For example, perinatal losses, death by suicide or drug overdose.

- If the relationship between an individual and the person who has died is not socially accepted or recognised as significant. For example, the loss of a loved one who is not related, relationships that were considered inappropriate
- If the bereaved person's ability to grieve is not recognised. For example, CYP or people with additional needs.

Balk (2011) suggests that adolescents may be more vulnerable to experiencing disenfranchised grief, particularly in the context of the death of a peer, as these relationships may be considered transitory. Such relationships may not be considered meaningful and therefore devalued. Balk (2011) further suggests that deaths that occur due to risk-taking could also be viewed with blame, which may negate the adolescent's experience of grief. It is suggested that disenfranchised grief can lead to the bereaved person receiving limited support which can increase the risk of experiencing complex grief (Doka, 1989).

1.5 Theories and models of grief

Theoretical explorations of grief aim to understand how individuals process emotions after a loss. This can provide a framework for researchers and practitioners when considering people's experiences and coping strategies. This literature review found several prominent theoretical models underpinning studies of BSP in schools, including the Dual Process Model (DPM; Schut & Stroebe, 1999), Continuing Bonds Model (CBM; Klass et al., 1996), Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Theory of Human Development (BTHD; 1979) and the Grief to Growth Model (Hogan & Schmidt, 2002).

It is essential to recognise the limitations of any theoretical framework for grief as they reflect their author's epistemological and societal views, often with a Western and European cultural bias. Therefore, these models may not fully encompass all cultural dimensions of grief. Furthermore, although some models specifically examine CYPs' experiences of grief, many are based on the experience of grief from the perspective of adults. This is significant as the developmental capabilities and functioning of CYP will influence their grief responses. Subsequently, there is less evidence for the applicability of many grief models to CYP. Despite these limitations, the following models have provided valuable insights when applied to research on BSP in schools.

1.5.1 BTHD.

Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Theory of Human Development (BTHD; Bronfenbrenner, 2006), revised from earlier models (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1986) is widely adopted across various professional fields including EP research and practice (Vivash, 2015). It offers a holistic framework to understand how individuals are affected by interconnected systems and dynamics within their external environment, each exerting varying levels of influence. These systems are labelled as the microsystem (encompassing the child, family, and school), mesosystem (interconnections between microsystems), exosystem (indirect external influences affecting the mesosystem and microsystem, such as EPs), macrosystem (political and cultural influences), and chronosystem (the impact of changes across an individual's lifetime). Interactions occurring between the individual and their immediate environment (e.g., school, family) are categorised as proximal processes, while those extending beyond this scope (such as the parents' work) are considered distal processes. The framework highlights the significance of the interaction between a

CYP and their environment on developmental outcomes. Despite its widespread use, critiques exist regarding the reliability of some researchers' application of BTHD which may oversimplify or misuse the model by using outdated concepts from the original framework (Darling, 2007).

The BTHD has been used in studies investigating how schools respond to bereaved children (Holland & McLennan, 2015; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015; Costelloe et al., 2020). Through the lens of BTHD, Holland & McLennan (2015) highlighted that schools are well-placed to support bereaved pupils, while Holland & Wilkinson (2015) noted schools require increased awareness of their role and ability to effectively fulfil this responsibility.

Conversely, Costelloe et al. (2020) argue that BTHD is limited as a stand-alone model for bereavement, as it fails to encompass the internal cognitive and emotional processes unique to loss. In their exploration of the perspectives of primary school staff who had supported bereaved children, they found that BTHD was a useful framework for exploring BSP within school systems. However, Bion's model of containment (1983) offered an additional lens to explore the emotional experiences of the children and staff.

Bion's model of containment (1983) focuses on the emotional connection and interaction between a caregiver and a child, whereby the caregiver helps the child manage, process and understand their emotions. Costelloe et al. (2020) applied this model to illustrate the necessity for containment across the different levels of Bronfenbrenner's BTHD model. For instance, emphasising the interaction between bereaved children and the staff who support them (Microsystem), and the need for

containment within the broader school system, with staff requiring supervisory containment (Mesosystem). However, this approach is limited as it overlooks other relevant theoretical frameworks that could provide complementary perspectives on grief. A comprehensive approach that considers multiple theoretical models may offer a more enhanced understanding of the various factors in supporting bereaved CYP in schools. In particular, other models may be more appropriate for the intrapersonal system, which focuses on the internal processes of the CYP, including their thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Models such as the 'Dual Process model' (Stroebe & Schut, 1999) may be more applicable at this level, as they offer an additional lens as to how CYP may navigate grief and adapt to loss.

1.5.2 Dual Process Model

The Dual Process Model (Stroebe & Schut, 1999) is referenced in numerous studies exploring support for bereavement in schools. Aucott & Soni, (2015) discuss its relevance in stress debriefing by EPs for CI work, while Arksey & Greidanus (2022) explore its implications in their study of teachers' responses to sudden pupil deaths. Lane & Rowland (2012) also utilise the model to interpret secondary school teachers' responses to the needs of parentally bereaved pupils.

This model (Stroebe & Schut, 1999) highlights the cognitive processes associated with grief. This includes: recognition of the reality of death; reflection of events that occurred preceding and during the time of death; and fostering a healthy detachment from the person who has died. The model suggests that bereaved individuals will oscillate between 'loss orientation' and 'restoration orientation', as part of adaptive coping. Loss orientation refers to active grief expression, whereas restoration orientation refers to the process of managing secondary sources of stress associated with the loss, such

as adjustments to the individual's sense of identity. Over time, a relatively constant oscillation occurs between the processes. Restoration-orientated behaviours may begin to increase in frequency, suggesting that the bereaved individual can cope with life without the person who has died. However, Blueford et al. (2021) suggest that rapid oscillation between the orientations is not necessarily indicative of healthy adjustment for bereaved individuals, highlighting Bisconti et al's. (2006) finding that less oscillation and dysregulation from the loss is more indicative of healthy adjustment. It is important to note that this insight is limited, as the study does not address the grief experiences of CYP or account for developmental differences.

Lane et al. (2013) applied the model to a school context to explore secondary school teacher's responses to parentally bereaved pupils. Through a grounded theory design, a Unique Response Model was proposed. This model outlines 6 processes of response that a teacher may demonstrate, which are each expressed on a continuum. For example, within the process of 'flexibility', teachers move on a continuum between 'adapting practice to meet student needs' and 'maintaining normal practice'. The authors draw parallels with the Dual Process Model, proposing that teachers will adapt their BSP according to bereaved pupils' oscillating grief responses.

In summary, the Dual Process Model offers insights into adaptive coping with grief. Integration of the model with other frameworks, such as Lane et al.'s (2013) Unique Response Model, could enhance understanding and support provision in educational settings.

1.5.3 Continuing Bonds Model –

The CBM (Klass et al., 1996) highlights the importance of maintaining a meaningful connection with the person who has died during the grieving process. Cultural beliefs heavily influence how these connections are upheld. In a study of peer-bereaved adolescents' experiences of grief, Papadatou et al. (2016) explored continuing bonds by using the 'Comforting' scale of the Continuing Bond Scale (Klass, Silverman, and Nickman, 1996) to assess experiences of a continuing bond with the deceased. Results showed that, after 34 months, most adolescents found comfort in maintaining bonds with their peers who died, which supported them to move forward and plan for the future. This bond evolved over time and was reinforced by acknowledgement and celebrations from parents, teachers and peers. Psychologist involvement was considered to be significant in facilitating this support and it remains uncertain whether schools effectively foster continuing bonds without said involvement.

1.5.4 Grief to Growth Model and Post-Traumatic Growth

Several theorists have conceptualised the idea of grief leading to growth, including post-traumatic growth (Nerken, 1993; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1998), which proposes that there can be positive growth and transformation for an individual following adversity (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Post-traumatic growth dimensions include: an improved ability to relate to others; exploration of new possibilities; development of personal strength; spiritual changes and a heightened appreciation for life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Lynham et al. (2019) argue that growth falls under the broader notion of resilience (an individual's ability to adapt and recover from adversity). However, resilience generally refers to an individual's capacity to positively adapt to and recover from difficulties,

maintaining a 'stable equilibrium' despite adversity (Bonanno, 2005). Conversely, models of growth suggest there is personal progress following adversity, moving beyond the individual's prior levels of functioning (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). This can include a renewed sense of purpose or meaning (Hogan & Schmid, 2002) or positive self-transformation such as having more compassion and patience (Micheal & Cooper, 2013).

Mediating factors encouraging post-traumatic growth following bereavement include social support, active meaning-making (attributing significance to their experiences), benefit finding, reattributions and positive reappraisal (Micheal & Cooper, 2013).

The Grief to Personal Growth Model proposed by Hogan & Schmid (2002), provides another conceptualisation of growth within the context of bereavement. The model suggests two distinct pathways from grief to personal growth. One pathway represents a direct relationship between grief to personal growth. This may entail initial feelings of despair, with personal growth emerging as an outcome as individuals work through their grief. Another pathway involves the bereaved individual experiencing despair, intrusive thoughts and a preoccupation with grief. Some individuals may become 'stuck' during this grieving process, requiring social support to enable subsequent personal growth.

This model addresses 'complex' grief and highlights the important role of social support, which is considered to help bereaved individuals find meaning and reconstruct their sense of self and the world. This emphasis on social support aligns with models such as BTHD and Bion's model of containment. It also resonates with the DPM (Hogan and Schmidt, 2002; Strobe & Schut, 1999), as it acknowledges oscillations between coping and avoidance. Furthermore, Papadatou et al. (2018)

support the applicability of the Growth to Grief model to adolescents, highlighting that peer-bereaved pupils developed enhanced self-efficacy, self-control and personal growth.

There is some criticism that growth models oversimplify grief and assume universal positive outcomes (Henson et al., 2021). Not all bereaved individuals experience growth and societal pressure to achieve this could be harmful. Papadatou et al., (2018) found that an emphasis on overcoming grief could cause anger for bereaved individuals. Furthermore, growth is understood to occur later in the grieving process, with individuals needing to work through initial despair and detachment before experiencing personal growth (Hogan & Schmid). Therefore, growth ought to organically unfold, rather than be a dominant aim in BSP (Papadatou et al., 2016). A balanced approach between acknowledging negative sequelae and sensitively fostering positive outcomes should be an important feature of BSP for CYP.

1.6 Child and adolescent grief.

This section needs to be clearer:

In this literature review, the term 'adolescent grief' is used to refer to the developmental experiences of grief for individuals aged between 11-18. 'CYP' is used to refer to children and young people up to the age of 18, unless specified otherwise. 'Pupil' is used to refer to a child or young person in the context of school.

Many factors influence experiences of bereavement and manifestations of grief. It is beyond the scope of this literature review to discuss all of these factors in depth. The following factors are considered, due to featuring in related research (McCarthy & Jessop, 2005, 2005): developmental age; socio-economic factors; culture; relationship

to the person who died; type of death; and personal characteristics. The following also explores peer-bereavement, adolescents' vulnerability to experiencing sudden peer-bereavement compared to other age groups (due to accidents, violence, and self-harm), and the impact of different types of death. Limitations in the literature are also acknowledged. For example, many grief measures have been developed for adults and there is a lack of diversity in samples (Alvis et al., 2023).

1.6.1 Cognitive understanding and presentation of grief for children

It is typically understood that the manifestation of grief is directly impacted by a CYP's cognitive understanding of death. Longbottom and Slaughter (2018), suggest that a comprehensive understanding of death involves the knowledge of several concepts: irreversibility (once something dies, it cannot become alive again); non-functionality (the dead cannot biologically function); universality (all living things die); and causation (death is caused by the breakdown of bodily function). While there is some debate regarding the order in which these concepts are acquired, causality is typically considered the hardest to grasp, typically understood after the age of 8 (Panagiotak et al., 2014). However, the development of children's understanding of death and when this occurs continues to not be clearly defined, with discrepancies within the research.

Typically, staged frameworks such as Piaget's (1963) Theory of Cognitive Development have been used to conceptualise CYP's understanding of death. However, stage frameworks have been criticised for discounting socio-cultural differences and variability amongst children. Recent research challenges the linear

view of development and emphasises the role of important external factors, such as direct and indirect experiences and socio-cultural contexts (Bonoti et al., 2013).

Rowling (2003) highlights the impact of age and cognitive understanding on grief manifestation for CYP. For example, younger children may present with 'clingy' behaviour, due to fear of further loss or separation. This is linked to their reliance on attachment relationships, with distress conveyed through non-verbal expressions in the context of limited language development (Bowlby, 1973). Children aged between 2-7 years may also grieve intermittently, due to not understanding death's finality and thinking it is reversible (Wiseman, 2013). Subsequently, younger children may require reassurance to address their fear of further loss, whereas older children who do not understand the permanence of death may require age-appropriate explanations.

1.6.2 Cognitive understanding and presentation of grief for adolescents

While adolescents may comprehend the finality of death in a way that a child may struggle to, they may not have the ability to grasp the long-term consequences of the death of a significant person (Brown, Jimerson & Comerchero, 2014). Responses also vary between early adolescence (ages 13-14) and middle adolescence (15-17). Brown, Jimerson & Comerchero (2014) suggest that, while early adolescents may be more involved with friends compared to earlier childhood, they may not necessarily confide in friends about a bereavement. Conversely, middle adolescents may be more comfortable expressing their emotions but may be at elevated risk of engaging in high-risk behaviours following a bereavement (Brown, Jimerson & Comerchero, 2014). Additionally, Steinberg et al. (2014) suggest that adolescents may be more vulnerable to the adverse effects of a traumatic death due to factors such as increased need for

autonomy, immature executive functioning skills, and heightened neuroplasticity. Steinberg (2014) emphasises the significance of neuroplasticity, suggesting that the adolescent window of neural 'wiring' of brain systems for relationships, self-regulation and planning for the future, may be highly susceptible to disruptions. Oosterhoff et al. (2018), similarly reflects that the increased malleability of the adolescent brain may make them more vulnerable to psychological harm. Furthermore, adolescence is a transitional age in which major developmental experiences occur. A significant bereavement may cause disruption and psychological distress during such transitions, potentially causing long-lasting consequences (Bartik et al., 2013).

Micheal & Cooper, (2013) suggest that adolescents may particularly find post-traumatic growth challenging following a bereavement due to feeling they have less independence and control over their environment. This echoes similar concerns in the literature regarding adolescents' limited power following a bereavement, which impacts their sense of autonomy and dignity. For example, McCarthy and Jessop (2005) note that young people may be particularly vulnerable following a bereavement due to a sense of powerlessness to express and deal with their grief, which may prevent them from adjusting to a major bereavement. Young people may feel that their emotions are not acknowledged (McCarthy & Jessop, 2005; Ribbens McCarthy, 2007), with adults and teachers not including young people in decisions such as how the school should respond to a bereavement. Additionally, young people may have little choice about whether they would prefer to withdraw from social settings for a period of time, due to the obligation to attend school (McCarthy & Jessop, 2005). This highlights the need to consider factors that can encourage post-traumatic growth when supporting adolescents, such as promoting autonomy in the context of their grief.

Balk et al (2009) present a holistic framework that addresses adolescent grief and suggests how this can be supported to meet their developmental needs. This has been referenced by numerous authors (Hart & Garza, 2012; Dimery & Templeton, 2021; Dyregrov et al., 2015, Costelloe et al., 2020; Abraham-Steele & Edmonds, 2021 Arksey & Greidanus, 2022). It encompasses six dimensions of the human experience: material or physical, cognitive, behavioural, emotional, interpersonal, and spiritual. These dimensions encompass various aspects of adolescent growth and maturation, from physical changes to existential questioning. The framework suggests that interventions for bereaved adolescents should address each dimension, recognizing that grief impacts all aspects of their development.

Specifically, Balk et al's (2011) article discusses the framework in the context of school-based BSP following the death of a peer. This article emphasises the unique developmental aspects of adolescence and how the related impact of peer-bereavement is often overlooked in research.

1.6.3 Contextual factors

Many contextual factors impact grief, including (but not limited to): the relationship with the person who died and the nature of their death (Dowdney, 2008); the developmental stage of the CYP (McCarthy & Jessop, 2005, 2005; Kaplow et al., 2010; Dyregrov et al., 2015); cultural context (McLaughlin et al. 2019); socio-economic status (McCarthy & Jessop, 2005); familial dynamics and wider systems such as school (Dimery & Templeton, 2021); protective and risk factors before the death; and the CYP's personality and gender (Holland, 2008). Existing research on BSP in UK schools presents limited exploration of many of these contextual factors. However, emerging

research is beginning to acknowledge the role of cultural context when providing BSP (Abraham-Steele & Edmonds, 2021; Costelloe et al, 2020).

1.6.4 Adolescent grief following peer-bereavement

There is limited research on the impact of peer-bereavement on CYP and the support they receive. Some studies in UK schools have combined explorations of support for peer-bereavement alongside other types of loss but do not provide sufficient focus for inclusion. Through their review of the literature, McCarthy and Jessop (2005), highlighted Rosen's earlier study (1984) suggesting peer-bereaved pupils may initially struggle to share their emotions, indicating a need for longer-term support. Due to this study's date of publication, it may no longer accurately reflect experiences of peer-bereavement and current educational contexts. Research has recently emerged in other countries outside of the UK, within which some studies are focusing on peer-bereavement among adolescents (Hart & Garza, 2012; Papadatou, 2018; Levkovich & Duvshan, 2020; Arskey and Greidanus 2022; Mirick & Berkowitz, 2023). The focus on adolescent age groups in studies of peer-bereavement highlights the significance of this developmental stage in experiencing and processing loss. However, the conflation of different bereavement contexts (such as the nature of death) complicates efforts to understand the specific impact of peer loss on adolescents and there is a need for focused exploration of a range of contexts in future research. Recent studies specifically focused on bereavement contexts include Mirick & Berkowitz (2023), which looked at peer-bereavement following suicide.

Grief reactions to suicide are understood to differ from other experiences of bereavement (Mirick & Berkowitz, 2023). Most pertinently, adolescents exposed to a peer's suicide are at heightened risk of suicide contagion (the social transmission of suicide ideation from one victim to another) and PTSD, compared to other suicide-bereaved populations (Gould et al., 2018). One study has explored the prevalence of PTSD in adolescents who have experienced the death of peers in traffic accidents. Papadatou et al. (2018) conducted a longitudinal, mixed-methods study across 34 months, revealing a higher incidence of PTSD for those directly exposed to the accident. PTSD symptoms decreased from 30% of young people at 2 months post-accident to 13% at 6 months post-accident. The development of new skills for young people was observed, including a revised sense of belonging among peers. These outcomes were attributed to the strong support network provided within the school.

Hart & Garza, (2012) suggest that peer-bereaved adolescents have limited prior experience of bereavement, resulting in a lack of awareness of related social norms which may affect how they express their emotions. Balk et al. (2011) highlighted that peer-bereaved adolescents' grief manifestations may include academic decline, reduced concentration, difficulty in making decisions, sleep disturbances and headaches.

Balk et al. (2011) emphasised the influential role of peers in shaping adolescents' developing sense of self. As adolescents mature and work towards developing autonomy and self-efficacy, peers have an increasingly influential role, emphasising a shift from parental reliance. Spending more time with peers creates opportunities to develop interpersonal relationships and refine social skills (Balk, 2011). Peer feedback

and reactions can contribute to the CYP developing 'social intelligence.' Interactions with peers can result in feedback regarding behaviour, which helps them to acquire a refined understanding of appropriate behaviours. For adolescents with less-developed social skills, a cycle can be created whereby the adolescent's isolation from peers leads to less opportunity to develop their social skills, exacerbating their social isolation (Balk et al., 2011). Given that adolescence is a developmental period in which identity formation occurs, the prolonged experience of loneliness during this time can be especially significant and painful (Hall-Lande, et al., 2007). Therefore, peers also play an important role in creating a sense of belonging for adolescents. As a result, the death of a peer may be profoundly challenging for this age group, especially as they encounter significant milestones in contexts (such as school) where their peer would typically be alongside them, which may cause grief to resurface (Dyregrov, 2020).

Hart & Garza (2012) explored the perspectives of teachers supporting peer-bereaved pupils in USA schools. Honouring the memory of the peer who had died was found to be an effective way of coping and coming to terms with the death for many of the pupils. The study, however, highlighted that many teachers felt unequipped to support pupils in this context. Many teachers focused on lost academic time and the importance of redirecting to academic tasks. Hart and Garza (2012) suggested that adolescents may be vulnerable to experiencing disenfranchised grief after the death of a peer, as their grief may not be appropriately acknowledged and supported by teachers. Adolescents may then develop trauma due to unresolved grief. To address this, Hart & Garza (2012) proposed that there should be teacher training for BSP, to enhance their ability and confidence to provide effective support for pupils. While the

study offers valuable insights into bereavement support for peer-bereaved pupils, cultural disparities are apparent in the study's references to school shootings, which are notably more common in the USA than in other Western countries. This emphasises the limited generalisability of research conducted in different cultural contexts.

1.6.5 Outcomes for bereaved CYP

Nielsen et al. (2012) and Pham et al. (2018) suggest that bereaved CYP can experience impairments in their daily functioning and may have fewer educational aspirations (Brent et al., 2012). McLaughlin et al's. (2019) literature review found that parental bereavement can negatively impact psychological, physical, social, and educational outcomes. However, Melhem et al. (2013) suggest that only a small minority (around 10%) experience severe psychological problems related to complicated grief.

Moreover, bereavement can also lead to some positive outcomes. Mclaughlin et al. (2019) noted that some studies reported positive effects on social and emotional development, such as greater life appreciation; showing greater care for loved ones; strengthened emotional bonds and increased emotional strength.

In summary, while the majority of bereaved CYP may not experience severe outcomes (Melhem et al., 2013), many may still face challenges that hinder their development and well-being. Recognising both the negative and positive outcomes of bereavement could help to inform BSP interventions to meet immediate needs and support the long-term resilience and growth of pupils.

1.7 National Context of BSP

1.7.1 Culture of UK

While death is a universal experience, bereavement responses are influenced by cultural and religious perspectives (Gire, 2014). Within the UK, there have been distinct societal changes in the last hundred years in how death is viewed and addressed (Akerman & Statham, 2014). In the context of bereavement, there have traditionally been subdued responses to death, no official designated mourning period and often a restrained display of emotions (Walter, 2007). This cultural attitude was largely formed in response to the magnitude of loss from the World Wars of the 20th century, in which concealing grief emerged as a collective coping strategy on a national level. Yet, in recent decades, this is increasingly viewed as a less favourable and outdated approach to coping with loss (Klass & Chow, 2021). Some authors propose that death continues to be a taboo subject in the UK, with evidence suggesting that this is a barrier for adults to engage in conversation with CYP about death and provide effective bereavement support (McManus & Paul, 2019).

A decline in religious faith has further contributed to the evolution of contemporary attitudes towards death and grief. However, the UK's cultural diversity means that many different views on death exist within the population. Therefore, research on bereavement support must include studies focused specifically on the UK to account for its unique cultural context.

1.7.2 Post-COVID context

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in approximately 211,000 deaths in the UK (WHO, 2022). An estimated 10,000 CYP lost a parent or carer, with many more bereaved by the death of grandparents, siblings, or peers (Hillis et al., 2021). Steele & Edmonds (2021) suggest that the pandemic may have increased the fear of loss and reality of death and loss for CYP, increasing the relevancy of bereavement research, policy and guidance for those supporting CYP.

1.7.3 Government guidance

There is currently no specific national policy or government guidance in the UK to support bereaved CYP in schools. While government guidance acknowledges bereavement as a mental health risk factor, explicit provisions are lacking (DfE, 2018; 2021). McClaughlin et al. (2019) highlight the subsequent lack of clarity this creates for schools. Furthermore, schools are under no obligation to create their own bereavement policies. Few UK schools have developed bereavement response policies despite evidence suggesting their effectiveness (McLaughlin et al., 2019).

Some charities advocate for national guidance, which has proved successful in Denmark and Australia (Lytje, 2017), and have created their own guidelines for schools (Cruse Bereavement Care, 2017).

Clear policy and guidance regarding BSP in schools is particularly pertinent in a post-pandemic context as many CYP in the UK may be currently experiencing bereavement. Further relevant research could potentially aid this initiative.

1.7.4 Role of EP's in BSP

In Educational Psychology, significant incidents that disrupt and overwhelm the normal functioning of school communities are often categorised as 'Critical Incidents.' This includes the death of a member of the school community (DfE, 2018). Beeke (2011) defines a CI as a serious and distressing event, which may result from an accident, suicide, criminal act, illness or natural disaster that affects members of the school community. Providing CI support for schools is offered by many EP services in the UK (Aucott & Soni, 2016). This involves EPs supporting individuals or school communities following a traumatic event (Lockhart & Woods, 2016). This is distinct from bereavement support, which is specifically focused on the impact of loss that a bereaved CYP may be experiencing (James, 2015).

Lockhart & Woods (2016) reviewed CI practice in the UK and found that most EP services offer schools the following: telephone advice, individual or group support, signposting to specialist services, staff consultations, and trauma-related advice. They noted limited research on the organisational processes of CI work across agencies like police and medical services.

There is currently no research as to how many schools are aware that EPs offer CI support services and how much uptake there is by schools for this service. Holland & Wilkinson (2015) suggest that some schools may not be aware that EP services can support bereaved pupils, with less than 10% of surveyed schools contacting EP services to support bereavement. This research is limited in that it focused on schools in North Suffolk and Hull and did not focus on CI support.

Psychological First Aid (PFA) is a recommended strategy for EPs during CIs (Aucott & Soni, 2006). PFA is an evidence-informed approach to provide non-intrusive support, a sense of safety, comfort, practical assistance, signposting and information. PFA aims to encourage a supportive and safe environment which promotes adaptive functioning and coping, with an emphasis on resilience. PFA's effectiveness in the context of EP responses to CIs lacks direct empirical evidence and evaluation efficacy (Aucott & Soni, 2006).

Research on EP's bereavement support for schools is scarce. Many services engage in the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme, training teaching assistants to offer social and emotional support to CYP (Eldred, 2021). Supporting CYP with bereavement and loss is included in the ELSA training. The number of EPS and related schools that engage in the ELSA programme is not reported, making it difficult to determine how widespread this support is. Furthermore, there is no research evaluating the effectiveness of ELSA's for BSP.

1.8 BSP in UK schools

Supportive environments can help CYP cope following a bereavement and may encourage positive coping skills (Papadatou, 2018). Costelloe et al., (2020) emphasise that schools are well-positioned to create such supportive environments through their BSP. Some research suggests that teachers may be best placed to recognise behaviour that indicates bereaved CYP are struggling to cope (Dyregrov et al., 2015). However, there is very limited research exploring teachers' understanding of CYP grief, related behaviours, and their ability to identify whether a CYP needs further support (Costelloe et al., 2020). A complicating factor is that CYP may internalise their emotions, making it difficult for staff to understand the function of their

behaviour (Costelloe, 2020) and determine whether they are finding it difficult to cope following a bereavement (Holland, 2004). Additionally, institutional pressures may cause teachers to prioritise teaching over pastoral care (McLaughlin et al., 2019), further limiting their ability to address bereavement needs.

1.8.1 Reactive vs Proactive Responses

A developing body of evidence suggests that schools in the UK often adopt approaches that lack adequate coordination of BSP (Dimery & Templeton, 2021). Holland (2008, 2016) identified that schools typically have either a proactive or reactive approach to BSP. Schools that have proactive approaches to BSP engage in advanced planning, staff training, educating CYP about loss and establishing bereavement policies. Conversely, reactive responses are defined as being unplanned and 'ad-hoc' approaches. Reactive responses have been identified as being more likely to interfere with teachers' confidence to provide effective BSP and result in more inconsistency in approach. In contrast, proactive approaches are aligned with bereavement provision that is considered effective and evidence-based (Holland, 1993). Interestingly, although proactive approaches are considered to provide more effective BSP, UK schools often tend to adopt reactive approaches instead (Holland & Wilkinson, 2015).

In a comparative study of BSP in schools in Hull, Yorkshire, Derry and Northern Ireland (Tracey & Holland, 2008), it was found that staff tend to adopt an 'ad-hoc' approach due to their understanding that differing contexts will make each bereavement unique and difficult to plan for. This is an important observation, as recognising the individual nature of bereavement experiences is necessary when considering how to best support bereaved CYP (Rolls & Payne, 2007). However, Holland and Wilkinson (2016)

highlight that while each experience of death is different, there are patterns of response that can be helpful across most contexts, including communication with the family and thoughtful consideration of funeral arrangements.

Bereavement policies in schools may be one way to effectively create proactive approaches in schools and ensure there is consistency and cohesion in BSP provision (McLaughlin et al., 2019). Bereavement policies have proven to be effective in Denmark, with responses from teachers suggesting that the bereavement plans enable them to feel more confident in their approaches to supporting bereaved pupils (Lytje, 2017). In contrast, studies conducted in UK schools suggest that the majority of schools do not have bereavement policies (Holland, 1993; Tracey & Holland 2008, McGovern & Tracey, 2010; Potts, 2013; Holland & McLennan, 2015; Holland & Wilkinson, 2016). The quantitative studies used or adapted a 'Loss in School' questionnaire (or a variation) to gather information relating to BSP in schools. The questionnaire was first developed by Holland (1993) and explores whether schools have formal procedures for responding to bereavement, have bereavement policies, training and resources on bereavement, and access to other services. A notable comparative study by Holland and Wilkinson (2016) used the 'Loss in Schools' questionnaire across a range of secondary, primary and special schools in Norfolk, Hull and Yorkshire. It found that, while schools from all areas highlighted bereavement as an important priority for the school, the majority of schools did not have policies to support this. This was the case even in Hull, where bereavement training programmes had been run on a regular cycle. The lack of uptake in constructing bereavement policies may be due to a lack of national strategy or government guidance on bereavement provision for schools. For example, in Australia and Denmark, school

bereavement policies have been successfully implemented as part of a national strategy (McLaughlin et al., 2019).

While the aforementioned UK-based studies have provided valuable insight into some of the structural aspects of implementing BSP in schools, the dominant use of quantitative methodological approaches limited the potential for insight into the perspectives and experiences of individuals responsible for directly implementing BSP with bereaved pupils.

Recent studies have begun to use a wider variety of qualitative and mixed-method approaches to explore the experiences of staff directly involved in providing BSP for pupils, which has helped to develop a more enriched understanding of practices. Abraham-Steele (2019) explored the perspectives of staff supporting bereaved pupils in UK primary schools using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. Focused on a sample of teachers, teaching assistants, Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) and head teachers, this study found that school staff believe policies and guidance would be beneficial for staff and pupils. The findings of the research provide further support for the incentive to develop the use of bereavement policies in schools. However, the research is limited, as it exclusively explored staff views in the context of BSP for primary-age children. While there are some commonly helpful patterns for BSP across schools (Holland & Wilkinson, 2016), there are likely to be some significant differences in the context of secondary education settings relating to developmental age, cognition and understanding, as well as different systems, staffing and curriculums that BSP is situated within. Moreover, while the study states that participants had experience of supporting a 'bereaved child,' it does not indicate *how* pupils were bereaved. It is also unclear whether the pupils were

bereaved due to the death of a parent, another family member or peer. The relationship to the person who died is an incredibly pertinent factor to consider as different relationships will naturally result in different bereavement experiences for individuals, which are difficult to conflate. For example, the death of a pupil will likely have a more widespread impact on the school and require different procedures and responses compared to the death of a pupil's parent.

Dimery et al. (2021) provided a study of BSP in schools with a more specific focus, considering the teacher's role in supporting parentally bereaved CYP through a combination of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to obtain qualitative data. Through interviews, this study also highlighted that schools often do not have a bereavement policy, despite unanimous findings across participants showing that cohesive and consistent approaches are important when supporting parentally bereaved CYP. Further research is needed across different bereavement contexts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the use of proactive approaches across education settings.

1.8.2 Staff Confidence and Training

A further important proactive approach for BSP is providing staff training. Staff can often experience a lack of confidence in supporting bereavement, which can lead to instances of 'classroom silence' (Loweston & Higgson, 2003). This may be due to staff having limited knowledge about CYP bereavement and the different factors that may affect their presentation in school. This could impact the support that is subsequently offered to bereaved CYP.

A literature review by Akerman and Statham (2011) explored outcomes for parental and sibling-bereaved pupils, as well as the effectiveness of services provided for this

group. This review highlighted that there is a training gap for BSP across UK schools. Several studies indicate that this can result in teachers feeling unprepared to interact with bereaved CYP, with some expressing fear that they may cause harm (Holland & Wilkinson, 2015, Lynam et al., 2019; Dimery and Templeton, 2021).

Lynam et al. (2019) explored the perspectives of pre-service teachers and experts in the field of loss in Northern Ireland. Participants had supported pupils experiencing bereavement, separation and divorce. It was found that trainee teachers also often feel insufficiently prepared to support bereaved pupils and reflect that this topic was not adequately delivered during initial teacher training. Similar concerns were found in a study by Costelloe et al. (2020) which explored how bereaved children are supported in primary schools and how children's grief is understood by school staff. Through semi-structured interviews with primary school staff as participants, it was identified that many staff members are unsure how to help a bereaved child due to their lack of bereavement training (Costelloe et al. 2020). Similarly, a study by McManus and Paul (2019) exploring the impact of bereavement training for eight schools in Scotland found that staff initially had low confidence in supporting bereaved CYP. However, participants reported that receiving training on how to talk to bereaved children gave them confidence and improved their BSP. This suggests that a targeted bereavement training programme may contribute to improving staff confidence to respond to the needs of bereaved CYP.

Using semi-structured interviews with primary school staff and adults who had experienced childhood bereavement, Dimery & Templeton (2021) also reported that training can provide staff with increased confidence in their ability to support parentally bereaved CYP. Training on grief processes and how schools can support bereaved

pupils may be particularly effective as this may enable teachers to identify grief and understand potential long-term impacts for their pupils (Akerman and Statham, 2011).

Akerman and Statham's review (2011) highlighted that teachers may particularly lack confidence in their language choices when supporting bereaved CYP. This is significant, as language may play an important role in BSP, particularly in the CYP's cognition of grief. For example, it is important to ensure that language is concrete, and euphemisms are not used as they may be confusing (Lynam et al., 2019).

Staff may further benefit from training regarding the role of outside agencies when providing BSP. Despite the evidence base that specialised support is not always necessary or helpful for bereaved CYP (Currier, Holand & Neimeyer, 2007), Lynam et al. (2019) found that the majority of teachers assumed that external support was necessary, believing bereavement support to be a specialism. Holland and Wilkinson (2016) present the counter-argument that external agencies may lack familiarity with the school culture, dynamics and individual pupils, which may impair how effectively they can provide BSP. This is supported by Dimery & Templeton's (2021) study of the role of teachers in BSP, which found that adults who had experienced childhood bereavement believe teachers can play a crucial role in helping pupils manage their loss.

However, some school staff may not identify the importance of their role in providing pastoral care and may struggle to prioritise this over other duties. In a review of the existing literature on BSP in schools, McLaughlin et al. (2019) reported that teachers may be reluctant to focus on providing pastoral care because they did not feel that they had the necessary knowledge to provide adequate support. Training can

empower school staff with the understanding that they are likely better placed to provide a school-based response for bereaved pupils, compared to external agencies. Furthermore, training can equip school staff with the important understanding that the majority of pupils will not require support from external services, as well as supporting them to identify vulnerable pupils who may benefit from specialised support.

The absence of a planned approach to bereavement support, including training, may mean that teachers primarily rely on their own experiences when providing BSP (Child Bereavement UK, 2017). Holland (2008) found that some teachers believed their personal bereavement experiences better equipped them for providing BSP. Similarly, Lowton and Higginson (2003) noted that teachers who had experienced bereavement themselves were better equipped to empathise with grieving pupils and recognised the importance of supporting pupils to express their emotions. While personal experiences may contribute to staff's ability to demonstrate empathy and acknowledge the importance of providing BSP, there is potentially a risk of over-reliance on personal experience which fails to consider important factors such as developmental age and various important contexts of bereavement. Training could help to prevent this risk by providing staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to support bereaved pupils effectively (Lynam et al., 2019). Conclusions from the literature highlight that EPs may be well-placed to deliver training in this area as their understanding of psychological theory applies to loss and trauma (Holland & Wilkinson, 2015)

1.8.3 Staff capacity

While the importance of the role of staff in providing BSP is highlighted (Holland & Wilkinson, 2015) research suggests that supporting bereaved pupils can lead to emotional distress for staff (Costelloe et al., 2020). It is therefore imperative that staff

are supported to process their emotional responses to support pupils adequately. Without clear preparation, designated roles or policies to account for this, there is a risk that staff may not receive the necessary support for their own bereavement needs.

In a study by Lynam et al. (2019), it was found that professionals with expertise in the area of bereavement and loss feared that teachers may not have the capacity to support pupils in their care if they had not dealt with their own experiences of grief. While this is an important observation, a limitation of this study is that the role of the professionals is not disclosed. This makes it challenging to determine the validity and applicability of the statements that were made. Costelloe et al. (2020) also found that staff described a pronounced level of stress and emotional exhaustion from providing BSP. The study therefore suggested that systemic support systems should be established in schools to 'contain the containers' by providing emotional support for staff who support bereaved CYP. It is proposed that staff may particularly benefit from EP supervision while supporting bereaved CYP (Costelloe et al, 2020). Staff who practice as Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) currently receive supervision from EPs. This has been shown to improve staff's perceived ability to support CYP with emotional needs (Osbourne & Burton, 2014). It is therefore feasible that EPs could potentially extend their supervisory roles to provide supervision for staff members supporting bereaved CYP.

There are several limitations to Costelloe's study which are important to consider. Firstly, the study includes participants from various roles, such as teachers, SENCOs, pastoral staff and senior management. A challenge of including participants with a diverse range of roles is that some staff may be more directly involved in providing emotional support for bereaved children, which may in turn cause the staff emotional

distress beyond what may be anticipated for less directly involved members of staff. For example, compared to leadership staff, a teacher is likely to spend more time with the bereaved pupil and be more exposed to experiences that cause the staff member emotional distress. Furthermore, pastoral staff often provide more intensive emotional support for bereaved CYP and could be more likely to explicitly explore bereavement themes compared to other staff members. A further limitation is that the study does not focus on a specific context of death and includes participants who have provided support for parentally bereaved pupils, peer-bereaved pupils and sibling-bereaved pupils. Each of these contexts may provide unique perspectives and emotional implications for staff that are required to inform a comprehensive understanding of the needs of staff who support bereaved pupils. Due to a lack of clear differentiation within the study, the differences between these contexts are unable to be fully explored. By focusing on specific contexts in greater depth, researchers may develop a more comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges and needs of each type of bereavement, which could lead to more personalised and effective bereavement support from EPs.

1.8.4 Staff understanding of CYP grief

In the context of parental bereavement, McCarthy and Jessop (2007) highlight that the literature suggests that the long-term implications of the CYP's grief may not be well understood by school staff. It suggests that CYP may feel an expectation to 'get on with life.' Conversely, the various presentations of grief that a CYP may experience are not well understood by staff, resulting in CYP feeling societal pressure to adapt their behaviour and demonstrate their grief through more typically expected responses. Expected responses include a perceived need for 'showing more emotion' (McCarthy and Jessop, 2005).

However, a more recent study by Costelloe et al. (2020), highlighted that primary school staff understood that CYP could experience grief in nuanced ways, reporting it as a unique process, characterised by external, internal and intermittent behaviours. Staff were also able to identify environmental and developmental triggers for grief, as well as an understanding that this grief may impact behaviours as it resurfaces over time. This study is limited to parentally bereaved, primary-age children. It also does not account for the staff's understanding of grief across different developmental ages and contexts.

1.8.5 Working with Parents

An important factor for schools to consider when providing BSP is the role of parents and the potential impact this may have on the effectiveness of providing support for individuals.

Furthermore, school staff need to be aware that surviving parents may face the challenge of managing their grief. Some parents may experience difficulty ensuring that their child has access to emotional support and resources in school. A further complication is that parents and school staff may be reluctant to broach the subject of parental bereavement. Lynam et al. (2019) found that teachers may be hesitant to discuss a parental bereavement with the surviving parent in case it causes distress or discomfort. Additionally, it is noted that some teachers reported experiences of parents fearing stigma and repercussions if they were to involve school and outside services to support the family with their experience of loss. This highlights the silence that can often surround bereavement. Within the context of education, this silence may make it difficult to identify the CYP needs and the essential support they may need with a

significant bereavement. However, it is important to note that the study (Lynam et al., 2019) included perspectives of staff who had also supported pupils experiencing parental separation so it is not clear how many of the reported experiences were exclusively related to the context of bereavement.

It is important to acknowledge that parents can serve as gatekeepers for bereaved CYPs, particularly when considering that parental consent would typically be required for bereaved CYPs to access external support or additional BSP within the school. A further consideration to make is that grief responses are often closely linked to cultural beliefs and practices. It is vital that schools carefully consider the cultural backgrounds of parents and any potential sensitivities that may relate to grief within the cultural community. This may be a challenging task for some members of staff, due to the British cultural reluctance to openly discuss or address bereavement. Despite this unique cultural positioning, there is an absence of research exploring the multicultural implications of BSP provision in UK schools and strategies that may support school staff to effectively navigate these complexities.

1.8.6 Communication

There is evidence to suggest that CYP struggle to communicate about their parental bereavement and may struggle to express their feelings. This in turn could mean that they are not identified as requiring support and there is a risk that they may not receive the help they need (Harrop et al., 2022). CYP may refrain from mentioning their experiences of bereavement due to a sense of powerlessness and a desire to avoid feeling they are imposing their needs on others (Jessops & McCarthy, 2007).

Bereaved CYP may also experience a reluctance to communicate their needs due to finding it difficult to manage and articulate their feelings. This is concerning, as effective communication with the school may serve as an important pathway for accessing needed BSP. Dimery and Templeton (2021) highlight that schools would benefit from gathering both parent and child's perspectives to inform a consistent and personalised approach, with good communication established between school and home whilst supporting the bereaved pupil.

Communication may also be difficult for school staff to initiate in the context of a pupil's bereavement. Holland (2004) found that 63% of schools did not address pupil's bereavement, which led to bereaved pupils feeling isolated. Although this research is now dated, its findings highlight the importance of ensuring that there is open communication within schools and that staff feel equipped and empowered to address the sensitive subject of bereavement. Furthermore, Costelloe (2020) found that when teachers acknowledge a student's loss, it helps the student to cope more effectively.

The study by Lynam et al. (2019) highlighted that 'communication' was an important theme that emerged from their exploration of the perspectives of trainee teachers and other professionals. The study emphasised the need for schools to ensure there is effective communication among the staff to identify bereaved CYP and establish a unified approach towards supporting them.

1.8.7 Peer support

Peers may contribute to supportive environments for CYP. The positive impact of a strong social network of peers is noted to be helpful for bereaved CYP (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Holland, 2001). In particular, CYP may have a preference to engage with peers who have experienced similar losses (Metel & Barnes, 2011). Adolescents

may especially find their peers to be an important source of support, as close relationships with peers may not carry the disadvantage of power differences that may occur in interactions with adults (Jessops, 2007). However, a potential barrier to this is that bereavement may cause CYP to engage less in initiating and responding to peers, thereby making it difficult to establish new relationships (Metal & Barnes, 2011). Furthermore, accounts from young people suggest that they may be at wider risk of social isolation following bereavement due to losing friends, as peers do not know how to respond to the situation (McCarthy & Jessop, 2007). Dimery & Templeton (2021) suggest that CYP can benefit from staff overseeing peer support. For example, staff may help to normalise the situation by providing the pupil's peers with an explanation of their bereavement (Dimery & Templeton, 2021). Dyregrov et al. (2020), further suggest that CYP could be provided with simple and practical guidance on how to help support a bereaved peer. However, this arguably has some ethical implications, as it may place CYP under undue pressure to support a peer during a complex experience, which could potentially cause emotional distress to themselves.

1.9 Conclusion

In summary, bereavement is a significant life experience and the subsequent expression of grief varies depending on the unique circumstances for each impacted individual. For adolescents in particular, navigating grief can be a common aspect of their development (Fauth et al., 2009). Supportive environments are essential in mitigating potential negative outcomes for bereaved CYP as they navigate their grief. For most, this support will not necessitate specialised intervention and should instead be provided within familiar environments by the adults who know them well, such as school staff. Research also suggests that school staff often lack guidance, confidence,

capacity and clarity in supporting bereaved pupils. While existing literature has focused on teachers' perspectives of parentally bereaved pupils, there remains a gap in understanding the needs of peer-bereaved pupils. This gap is noteworthy, considering that the loss of a peer within the school could impact both students and staff members alike.

EPs are well-placed to contribute meaningfully to this area through their expertise in CI response and bereavement support. CI work typically involves addressing traumatic events (including sudden or violent deaths) that disrupt the functioning of a school community, whereas bereavement support focuses on the ongoing needs of pupils coping with bereavement. While there is a developing body of literature exploring the role of EPs in CI work, EP contributions to bereavement support remain an underexplored and undervalued area. The potential contribution of EPs in supporting schools to provide effective BSP warrants further research attention.

2. Empirical Chapter

2.1 Abstract

The death of a peer can have a profound impact on children and young people (CYP; Balk, 2011), yet there is limited research on the BSP offered by schools for peer-bereaved pupils. Specifically, there is limited exploration of BSP in secondary schools and the perspectives of staff who work closely with bereaved pupils. Addressing this gap, this study explored how pastoral staff understand adolescent grief and how this understanding informs their support for peer-bereaved pupils, including the challenges and supportive factors involved in providing BSP in this context. Using a qualitative design and thematic analysis, the study explored the perspectives of eight pastoral staff from secondary schools across England. A key finding is that peer-bereaved pupils were perceived as being in a state of 'learning how to grieve', with pastoral staff adopting a role in guiding and modelling grieving processes for pupils through shared grief experiences. While bereavement experiences were understood to be influenced by contextual, developmental and socio-cultural differences, there were no systematic procedures for identifying or meeting the individual needs of pupils. Participants reported negative outcomes in particular for pupils with social and communication or SEMH needs. Supportive relationships with staff, peers and the person who died were considered important for fostering resilience and growth for peer-bereaved pupils. However, the religious, spiritual and cultural views of pupils were overlooked by pastoral staff. Identified challenges included staff well-being, capacity, and confidence, as well as limited access to internal and external resources. The implications of these findings for

educational psychologists are discussed for Critical Incident work and general bereavement support for schools.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Introduction

Almost all CYP will experience bereavement through the death of a parent, sibling, close relative or peer before they reach adulthood (Schonfeld & Quackenbush, 2010). The experience of loss for bereaved CYP is wide-ranging, as grief responses are unique and impacted by many factors. There is evidence to suggest that bereaved CYP may experience negative psychological, health and academic outcomes (Nielsen et al., 2012; Pham et al., 2018; Abdelnoor & Hollins, 2002). However, Kaplow et al. (2010) highlighted contradictions in the existing research on outcomes for bereaved CYP, with some studies proposing that there can be long-term difficulties such as anxiety and depression, and others showing no significant correlation for this. McLaughlin et al, (2019) suggest that such contradictions may be due to the limited focus on the contexts surrounding CYPs' experiences of death. This echoes McCarthy & Jessop (2005), who highlighted the necessity for comprehensive research that addresses gaps in the bereavement literature by employing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to explore a diverse range of contexts. This also shows the need for a comprehensive understanding of the various bereavement experiences for CYP, to ensure that appropriate and effective BSP can be provided across different contexts.

Appropriate BSP and supportive environments may contribute to bereaved CYP developing positive coping skills (Papadatou, 2018). Bonanno (2008), also suggests that, with appropriate support in place, the majority of bereaved children can have

successful outcomes despite experiencing a significant loss. When considering what may constitute as appropriate BSP, evidence suggests that specialist support is not always helpful for bereaved CYP (Currier et al., 2007). There is increasing recognition that 'most' bereaved children will require emotional support through their existing communities after their experience of loss, while only 'some' will require specialist intervention to manage their grief (Akerman & Statham, 2014). This highlights the importance of differentiated responses to childhood bereavement, taking account of each CYP's needs, circumstances and the context of the death they have experienced.

As CYP spend much of their time in education, schools may serve as a secure environment in which they can navigate and process challenging experiences and emotions (Akerman & Statham, 2014). Education settings are therefore arguably well placed to offer support throughout difficult experiences such as loss (Holland, 2008; Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2008; Tracey & Holland, 2011, Lytje, 2017; Costelloe et al., 2020). However, despite the high likelihood that CYP will experience bereavement, there is limited research regarding the support that is available in schools for CYP. Bereaved pupils have been referred to as "hidden grievers," (Balk; 2001) due to the limited research and policy relating to the provision of support for this population. In recent years, a small but developing body of research has begun to explore available BSP in UK schools, with some relevant models and frameworks identified.

2.2.2 Relevant grief models and frameworks

Several grief models and frameworks have been used to conceptualise existing research on BSP in schools, including Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Theory of

Human Development (BTHD; 1979), Bion's Model of Containment, Dual Process Model (Schut & Stroebe, 1999), Continuing Bonds Model (Klass et al., 1996) and Grief to Growth Model (Hogan & Schmidt, 2002).

The BTHD framework has been applied in some studies of school support for parentally bereaved pupils in the UK (Holland & McLennan, 2015; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015; Costelloe et al., 2020). This ecological systems framework highlights how an individual's development is influenced by several interconnected systems, ranging from immediate environments to broader societal contexts. Through this conceptual lens, studies have emphasised that schools could play a significant role in supporting bereaved pupils (Holland & Wilkinson, 2015). This is attributed to schools having an important presence in a pupil's immediate environment, as well as providing a context for reciprocal interactions between school staff and the bereaved pupils over an extended time.

In their research exploring the perspectives of primary school staff who had supported bereaved children, Costelloe et al. (2020) used Bion's Model of Containment (1983) as an additional lens within the BTHD framework to facilitate an exploration of the emotional experiences of the children and school staff. Bion's Model of Containment emphasises the caregiver's role in providing a safe space for individuals to process their emotions. This parallels attachment theory (Bowlby, 1954), where caregivers offer a secure base for emotional regulation and development. In both models, caregivers are recognised to have an important role in developing a sense of emotional security and creating healthy attachment bonds.

In Lane et al.'s (2014) study, the Dual Process model (Stroebe & Schut) provides a different perspective on grief and is used to inform an understanding of how secondary school teachers adapt their practice to meet the needs of parentally bereaved pupils. The Dual Process Model suggests that grief involves both confronting emotional pain and adapting to life changes, emphasizing the importance of balancing these processes. For teachers, it can inform BSP strategies by acknowledging both the emotional and practical needs of bereaved pupils and adapting practice accordingly.

In studies of BSP for peer-bereaved pupils, the 'Grief to Growth' model (Hogan & Schmidt, 2002) is utilised to conceptualise pupils' manifestations of grief (Balk et al., 2011; Papadatou et al., 2018). The Grief to Growth model is linked to the concept of Post-Traumatic Growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), which refers to the psychological process where individuals may experience personal development and positive change following exposure to a traumatic event, including sudden or violent death (APA, 2013). Conversely, the Grief to Growth model considers how growth may occur following bereavement or loss. The model suggests there are two distinct pathways that an individual's experiences of grief may follow, ultimately leading to a heightened sense of self-efficacy, self-control, and personal growth. One pathway represents a direct relationship between grief to personal growth. A second pathway includes the bereaved experiencing feelings of despair and detachment, with personal growth emerging as an outcome of the grieving process as individuals learn ways to cope with their grief. However, some individuals may become 'stuck' in this process and require additional support to help them (Hogan & Schmidt's, 2002).

The Continuing Bonds Model' (CBM) of grief (Klass et al., 1996) is also referenced in related research (Papadatou et al., 2018), highlighting the importance for pupils to maintain a meaningful connection with the person who has died during the grieving process.

2.2.3 BSP in UK schools: Ad-Hoc approaches

The existing research suggests that schools are well-placed and can be an important factor in providing BSP for their parentally bereaved pupils (Holland, 2008; Abraham Steele & Edmonds, 2021). However, there is evidence to suggest that schools can feel unprepared to support bereaved pupils and lack the confidence to do so. A prominent finding that has emerged across studies, is that the majority of schools do not have planned approaches and policies for supporting bereaved pupils. (Holland, 1993, 2008, 2016; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015; McLaughlin et al., 2019; Abraham-Steele & Edmonds; 2019). In their review of the existing literature, McLaughlin et al, (2019) highlighted a tendency within schools to employ an 'ad-hoc' approach to BSP. A lack of systematic and consistent approaches across schools, with provision and quality of practice varying widely, was also noted. Furthermore, studies suggest that school staff lack confidence, feel they do not receive enough training or guidance on bereavement, and do not feel prepared to support bereaved CYP (Holland & Wilkinson, 2016; Dimery & Templeton, Costelloe et al., 2019; Lane et al., 2014). The use of 'reactive' ad-hoc approaches over 'proactive' approaches (such as staff training, policy planning) is problematic, given that proactive approaches are aligned with effective and evidence-based bereavement provision (Holland, 2008).

2.2.4 Policy and guidance

There is currently no national policy or government guidance relating to bereavement support in schools and UK schools are presently under no obligation to formulate their own bereavement policies. While some existing government guidance for mental health provision (DfE, 2015; DfE 2018) could be applied to the context of bereavement, there are no documents or legislation that explicitly address this area of need. McLaughlin et al. (2019) emphasises the subsequent lack of clarity this creates for schools. Furthermore, a significant criticism of the existing relevant government policies is that they fail to address the impact of austerity and provide limited framings of inequality (Griffin et al., 2022). This is relevant given the evidence that these factors influence mortality rates and the likelihood of CYP experiencing bereavement (McLaughlin et al., 2019) Griffen et al. (2022) propose that national and local policies should more extensively incorporate the social determinants of mental health.

The absence of government guidance is significant given that there is evidence to suggest that nationwide bereavement policies can be successful in improving BSP for school pupils, as demonstrated by practice in Denmark and Australia (McLaughlin et al., 2019). Clear policy and guidance regarding BSP in schools is particularly pertinent in a post-pandemic context, as many CYP in the UK have experienced increased exposure to bereavement (Hillis et al., 2021). Some UK bereavement charities, such as the National Bereavement Alliance (2024), advocate for national guidance policy. The lack of current government guidance has also led to charitable organisations, such as Cruse Bereavement Care (2024), to publish their own guidelines for policymakers and schools supporting bereaved CYP.

2.2.5 Perspectives of staff

Given the limited guidance that is available for schools, it is perhaps unsurprising that teachers may not recognise that they are well-placed to support bereaved pupils and / or may not consider it to be part of their professional role. In a review of the literature, McLaughlin et al. (2019) noted that teachers were reluctant to engage in bereavement support due to concerns that it would interfere with core academic duties and because they did not feel they had the energy or necessary knowledge to provide appropriate support. Conversely, one study exploring the perspectives of a wider range of school staff (including pastoral staff, SENCOs, headteachers and teachers) suggested that school staff acknowledge the substantial role of schools in supporting CYPs' grief (Costelloe et al., 2020). This discrepancy could be due to the wider range of roles held by staff that contributed to the research, suggesting that there may be variation in understandings among school staff regarding their roles in providing BSP. Interestingly, existing research on BSP in schools typically explores the views of teaching staff (Holland, 2008; Hart & Garza, 2013; Potts, 2013; Lane et al., 2014; Dyregrov et al., 2015; Lynam et al., 2019; Steele & Edmunds, 2020; Dimery & Templeton, 2021), with only one study including the views of pastoral staff in primary schools (Costelloe et al., 2020). This is significant given that pastoral staff may be more likely to provide direct BSP for pupil, particularly in secondary education settings, where pupils might receive less pastoral support from their teachers compared to their primary school counterparts. A primary reason for this is that secondary school teachers are responsible for a larger number of pupils, which limits their capacity to provide individualised support (Lane et al., 2014).

Existing research on teachers' perspectives have highlighted that those with personal experiences of bereavement often developed greater efficacy in providing BSP (Holland, 2008). Lowton and Higginson (2003) also recognised this, noting that teachers who have experienced bereavement can empathise more deeply and understand the importance of expressing emotions. However, teachers may also be faced with their personal losses, which could interfere with their ability to support CYP due to this bringing back difficult memories. Training may mitigate this, by preventing over-reliance on personal intuition and experiences of loss when considering how to support pupils (Lynam et al., 2019). Studies from countries outside of the UK suggest that this can be particularly relevant in the context of the death of a pupil, as staff may need support to process their own experiences of the loss before they can support others (Hart and Garza, 2015; Dyregrov, 2020).

2.2.6 BSP for peer-bereaved pupils

Determining how often pupils experience peer-bereavement is difficult to establish, as there is limited research in this area. However, it has been estimated that one in sixteen people will experience the death of a friend during childhood (Fauth et al., 2009), meaning that it is likely that schools will experience this context of bereavement. Furthermore, the death of a peer is not a normative experience for CYP in developed countries. Therefore, when there is a death of a CYP in a school community, there can be a significant sense of shock for peers and the wider setting, with a reverberating impact on affected individuals (Balk et al., 2011). Given this, it is surprising that there is little research regarding peer-bereavement and relevant provision required for those who face this unique experience of grief.

While there has been some progress in research on BSP in UK schools, much of the existing literature is limited to the context of provision for parentally bereaved pupils (McLaughlin et al., 2019). Some studies of BSP in UK schools do not specify the context of bereavement (Tracey & Holland, 2008; Holland & Wilkinson, 2016) or conflate cases of peer-bereavement with parental bereavement (Holland & McLennan, 2015). Consequently, these studies do not explicitly address the unique context of peer-bereavement, resulting in uncertainty about the effective implementation of BSP in UK schools following such losses. This is particularly noteworthy, considering that the death of a pupil may potentially have a broader impact on the school community compared to the death of a pupil's parent. This inference is drawn from the reasonable assumption that individuals within the school community are more likely to be familiar with a pupil who died.

Research on peer-bereavement has gradually begun to develop in countries outside of the UK. Some studies have explored the effects of unanticipated peer-bereavement for pupils (Hart & Gaza, 2012; Papadatou et al., 2018; Mirick & Berkowitz, 2023). Others have explored teachers' experiences following the violent death of a pupil (Arksey & Greidanus, 2022) and following varied causes of death (Levkovich & Duvshan, 2020). Interestingly, these studies have all focused on the deaths of adolescent pupils. This emphasis may be due to the important role of peer relationships during this developmental stage. As adolescents mature and work towards developing independence from their parents, peers play an increasingly important role (Balk, 2011). Additionally, research on peer-bereavement may focus on adolescents as there is increased likelihood they will have experienced a peer-bereavement compared to a younger child with less life experience.

In Greece, Papadatou et al. (2018) conducted a longitudinal study over 34 months, using a mixed-method approach to explore adolescents' grief trajectories following exposure to their peers' accidental deaths on a school trip. This research highlighted the development of new skills and a revised sense of belonging among participants, which was related to concepts of growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Hogan & Schmidt, 2002). In particular, the research highlights the Grief to Growth model (Hogan & Schmidt, 2002). Papadatou et al. (2018) proposes that the growth of the bereaved adolescents may have been aided by the role of a strong school support network, which was facilitated by psychologists. This suggests that support systems in schools play a crucial role in helping pupils to cope and grow following a peer-bereavement, with psychologists potentially holding a pivotal role in supporting the establishment and effectiveness of these systems.

In the USA, Mirick & Berkowitz (2023) conducted a study focusing on the perspectives of pupils, exploring their experiences following the death of a peer by suicide. Findings were made regarding the importance of sense-making (understanding why the death happened), which occurred at a community level due the collective nature of pupils' grief. The importance of meaning-making (finding significance in an adverse experience) following a peers' death was also considered important. The study further highlighted that pupils, with and without a personal relationship to the person who died, were vulnerable to long-term symptoms and negative meaning making. Notably, participants described schools as lacking empathy, particularly for marginalised students, with staff perceived as moving quickly past the death. This highlights the

importance of identifying all impacted pupils and ensuring that their grief is met with empathy by staff, as well as ensuring that the death is acknowledged.

In contrast, Hart & Garza (2012) explored teachers' perspectives supporting pupils in USA high schools, following the unanticipated death of a peer. The study noted that teachers experienced many bereaved pupils expressing initial shock and confusion, as well as difficulty processing the death. Honouring the memory of the peer who had died was found to be a way of coping and coming to terms with the death for many of the pupils. However, the study also highlighted that many teachers feel unequipped to support pupils and believed it was the role of counsellors to provide BSP. Many teachers also focused on lost academic time and highlighted the importance of returning to academic tasks.

A study from Canada (Arksey & Greidanus, 2022) regarding pupil deaths, provided a slightly different research emphasis. This study focused on teachers' bereavement experiences rather than emphasising support that was offered to pupils. However, important and relevant themes relating to BSP for pupils emerged from this, including the finding that the routine and normalcy of school could be helpful for some. Furthermore, the study highlighted that teachers felt there was a training gap for bereavement support. The study also highlighted important findings relating to staff wellbeing, identifying that teachers may experience barriers when seeking help following the death of a pupil and would benefit from mentorship programs between teachers to support them.

Levkovich & Duvshan's (2020) study from Israel similarly focused on exploring teachers' experiences, However, this was in the context of both anticipated and unanticipated deaths of pupils. This presented similar findings to pre-existing reports, including the impact on staff wellbeing and the importance of establishing ways to remember the pupil who died.

In a non-empirical article, Balk et al. (2011) offer an important and unique exploration of peer-bereavement in the context of adolescence, using a holistic framework (Balk et al., 2009) to consider appropriate BSP. Drawing on Erikson's (1968) Stages of Psychosocial Development, Balk et al's. holistic framework, (2009) emphasises the impetus for adolescents to form an identity, sense of purpose and direction, which develop through developmental tasks. The framework suggests that six dimensions encompass what it means to be human and includes categories to understand how they manifest for adolescents:

(a) Material or physical dimension (Adolescent development involves sexual maturation and a growth spurt.)

(b) Cognitive dimension (Adolescent development involves radical shifts in thinking, manifested in perspective-taking, abstract thinking, and changes in brain activity.)

(c) Behavioural dimension (As adolescents mature, they assume increasing responsibilities, such as driving a vehicle.)

(d) Emotional dimension (Adolescents become increasingly adept with understanding empathically what someone else is feeling.)

(e) Interpersonal dimension (Adolescents increasingly gravitate to friendships.)

(f) Spiritual dimension (Adolescents begin asking questions about their assumptive worlds and question the meaning of their existence.)

Balk et al. (2011) suggest that grief impacts each of these dimensions and that BSP for peer-bereaved adolescents should address each area accordingly.

Additionally, Balk et al. (2011) emphasised that adults may overlook the impact of peer-bereavement on adolescents, potentially leaving them vulnerable to experiencing disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1989). Disenfranchised grief occurs when an individual's grief is unrecognised and socially undervalued, potentially leading to trauma and instances of complex grief or postponed grief. Complex grief refers to an intense, ongoing grief reaction (Horowitz et al., 1997) whereas postponed grief (Dyregrov, 2015) refers to grieving that is delayed and emerges later. Adolescents may also be susceptible to disenfranchised grief if they are unable to communicate their needs with others (Doka, 1989). This is significant, given that peer-bereaved adolescents may also initially struggle to share their emotions with others following a bereavement (Rosen, 1984 cited by Jessops and McCarthy; 2007).

While international research on peer-bereavement offers valuable insights, it is essential to recognise the specific needs and contexts of UK pupils and schools. Conducting a UK-specific study would help to provide an understanding of how cultural, social, and educational factors that are unique to the UK influence grief experiences and the support that is provided in schools. This could help to inform the development of tailored interventions, policies, and support systems that are more

effective in addressing the needs of peer-bereaved pupils and within the UK education system.

2.2.7 The role of Educational Psychologists

While there are currently no existing studies of BSP in UK schools for peer-bereavement, there is a developing body of research for CI support, which is offered by EP teams for schools. Beeke (2013) defines CIs as serious and distressing incidents that disrupt the functioning of a school and may result from a sudden death, accident, suicide, criminal act, or natural disaster that affects members of the school community. Therefore, while a CI may include the sudden or violent death of a pupil, it would not include deaths that were anticipated or due to illness (Aucott & Soni, 2015).

Lockhart & Woods (2016), provided a literature review of CI practice in the UK, highlighting that most EP services offer the following: telephone advice, individual or group support, signposting to specialist services, consultations with staff and advice on trauma, bereavement and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Psychological First Aid (PFA) is also a recommended strategy for EPs in the context of CIs (Aucott & Soni, 2006). PFA is an evidence-informed approach that aims to provide non-intrusive and practical support for people who have experienced a potentially traumatic event. For example, by providing contact, a sense of safety, comfort, practical assistance, signposting and information. This aligns with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1969), by addressing immediate psychological needs, like safety and security, during crises. PFA aims to encourage a supportive and safe environment to promote adaptive functioning and coping, with an emphasis on resilience (Aucott & Soni, 2016). However, Aucott & Soni (2006) highlight that the effectiveness of psychological first

aid for EP responses to CIs has not been evaluated and there is a lack of direct empirical evidence for its efficacy.

While research on CI explores the role of EP practices, there is a lack of literature on how CI work is utilised to aid schools in the context of supporting peer-bereaved pupils. Additionally, there is a lack of literature on the perspectives of service users following EP involvement in CI support. Furthermore, there is uncertainty as to how many schools are aware of CI support that EPs offer and how much uptake there is by schools for this service. Holland & Wilkinson (2015) suggest that some schools may not be aware that EP services can support bereaved pupils, with less than 10% of surveyed schools contacting EP services to support bereavement. However, this research was limited to schools in North Suffolk and Hull and did not have a direct focus on CI support. This suggests there is a broader need for investigation into the awareness and utilisation of CI support services among schools nationwide.

More recent research on CI work (Beeke, 2021) emphasises the need for coordinated support from multiple agencies to support schools. Beeke (2021) proposes a COPE model (Consultation, Organisation, Preparation, Evaluation) to provide a structured approach for CI response teams to manage the immediate aftermath of a crisis, integrating use of evidence-based psychological principles. This is particularly relevant given the current lack of guidance or policy for bereavement needs at both a national and local level.

While CI support is an established offering from EP services, little is known about EP support for bereavements that do not require a CI response, such as anticipated deaths or deaths that occur due to illness. Some EP services engage in the Emotional

Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme, which provides training and supervision for teaching assistant staff in schools to enable them to practice as ELSAs. ELSAs provide social and emotional support to CYP (ELSA, 2017), with bereavement and loss included in the training. There is currently no research exploring the effectiveness of this or how it contributes to the BSP offered in schools.

2.3 Research Rationale

Death is an inevitable part of life and the majority of people will experience bereavement. This can be a difficult and impactful experience for CYP which can affect their educational outcomes (Abdelnoor & Hollins, 2002). It is crucial for wider support systems, such as education, to consider CYP's grief experiences and determine the most effective means of support.

While there are some studies of BSP for pupils following a parental bereavement, there is a distinct lack of research into BSP in schools in the UK following the death of a peer. Furthermore, the literature review for this study highlighted that there is no study that specifically explores the perspectives of pastoral staff who support bereaved pupils. The existing research tends to focus on the perspectives of teachers or senior management, leaving the unique insights and experiences of pastoral staff underexplored. While a more recent study (Costelloe et al., 2020) had included pastoral staff with ELSA roles, they were part of a diverse participant group that included teachers, SENCOs and senior management roles. Staff in pastoral roles may be more likely to provide direct bereavement support to pupils due to the nature of their responsibilities. For instance, those trained as Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA) receive specific training in supporting pupils through bereavement and loss (McEwen, 2019). Pastoral staff play an important role in the emotional and

social well-being of students. Unlike other school staff members, pastoral staff are specifically tasked with providing emotional support and addressing mental health concerns. Subsequently, they are likely to encounter such situations more frequently, including working directly with pupils who are experiencing grief or other emotional challenges. This may be especially relevant for pastoral staff working in secondary education settings, as pupils may be less likely to receive pastoral support from their teachers compared to their primary school counterparts. This is due to the larger number of pupils that secondary school teachers are responsible for which limits their capacity for individualised support. This makes pastoral staff uniquely positioned to offer insights into how grief is recognised and supported within the school setting.

In the UK, the role of pastoral staff has also expanded to include close collaboration with Educational Psychologists, particularly through initiatives like the ELSA program. This involves pastoral staff working alongside Educational Psychologists to support students' emotional literacy and mental health. The program also includes training regarding supporting bereaved pupils (McEwen, 2019). This highlights the importance of pastoral staff in addressing complex emotional issues within schools, making their perspectives highly relevant to studies focused on grief and emotional support.

However, it is important to note that there are currently no formal qualifications, standardised training programs, or clear professional pathways for pastoral staff. This lack of formalisation is particularly concerning given that these staff members often work with some of the most vulnerable children in the school system. By addressing the gap in the current research and concentrating on pastoral staff, this study is able to gather data from those who are most directly involved in the care and

emotional support of grieving pupils, ensuring that the findings are both relevant and informed by direct and practical experience. This focus also allows for a targeted analysis of the strategies and challenges employed by pastoral staff, which may differ from the broader experiences of other school staff. This focus also ensures that the findings are informed by the practical realities of those who may be most directly involved in the emotional care of bereaved pupils, making the study highly relevant to EPs and other professionals working to support vulnerable children in educational settings.

This research aims to address several gaps in the literature. Specifically, within the context of the death of a peer, it seeks to explore pastoral staff's understanding of adolescent grief, the BSP they offer, and what they perceive to be the challenges and supportive factors for providing BSP in this context.

Grief is by nature a personal experience and the topic arguably lends itself to qualitative approaches, which are the typical methodologies of choice in research regarding human experiences (Braun & Clark, 2021). Therefore, this research adopts a qualitative methodology using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to explore school staff's understanding. Qualitative methods are well-suited to underexplored fields, as they enable the development of new insights and frameworks (Creswell, 2013). Given the limited research in this area, a qualitative approach that facilitates theory generation is especially appropriate

Aims of Present Study

This study sought to gather the perspectives of pastoral staff in secondary education settings on supporting peer-bereaved pupils. Specifically, the study aimed to gather insight into the understanding and practices of pastoral staff when providing BSP in this context.

The study was underpinned by two primary research aims:

Aim 1: To explore secondary school pastoral staff's understandings of adolescent grief following the death of a peer and how this guides their practice.

Aim 2: To explore how secondary school pastoral teams support peer-bereaved pupils.

The following four research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How is adolescent grief understood by secondary school pastoral staff?

RQ2: How do the understandings of secondary school pastoral staff guide their BSP for peer-bereaved pupils?

RQ 3: How do secondary school pastoral staff support bereaved peer-bereaved pupils?

RQ4: What challenges and facilitating factors do secondary school pastoral staff experience when providing BSP for peer-bereaved pupils?

It is hoped the outcomes of this study may help to inform EPs in contexts where they are supporting schools to develop their understanding and provision for peer-bereaved pupils. Furthermore, the outcomes of the study may contribute towards broadening understanding in the research area of BSP in schools.

2.4 Methodology

2.4.1 Ontological and Epistemological Position

This research adopts a critical realist perspective to address the identified research questions. While the concept of critical realism can be interpreted in different ways, one conceptualisation considers critical realism as a paradigm (Braun & Clark, 2021), incorporating ontological realism (the notion that something is real) with epistemological relativism (the notion that what is true for a group depends on what a group believes is true). Critical realism acknowledges principles of objectivist ontology; that there is a physical reality that exists independently from humans' perspectives of it (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016). However, critical realism recognises that while there is a reality that is independent of humans, it is both transformed and reproduced by human constructions (Price & Martin, 2018), suggesting that social structures are created by the combined actions of individual humans. These social structures in turn influence the actions of individuals (Price & Martin, 2018). Therefore, while there is a complex reality that exists independently of our ideas of it, human knowledge of this reality is fallible, impartial and imperfect (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016).

Pilgrim (2014) suggests that critical realism provides an advantageous role for social science research as it acknowledges that the qualitative researcher cannot stand outside of the human and social reality they observe and are trying to understand

through their research. Thus, critical realism encourages reflexivity about the relationship between knowledge and evidence generated by chosen research methods and the researcher's role within this. Critical realism is therefore an appropriate epistemology to underpin the current research as the researcher has prior personal experiences with pupil bereavement, both as a former pupil and during their previous role as a teacher, about which they needed to be critically reflective. The researcher therefore acknowledges that their perspectives and positioning may impact how the data has been interpreted.

Critical realism situates accounts in the materiality that participants have to negotiate and manage (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021). This approach is also well aligned with the current study's research questions related to the context of staff supporting bereaved pupils within a school system. This epistemology fits with the current study's aims of considering objectivity and subjectivity. It investigates the 'objective' by considering what provision BSP staff offer to pupils experiencing peer-bereavement. The research also explores the 'subjective' by exploring individual's experiences and perceptions of adolescent grief and considers how this may impact the implementation of BSP.

2.4.3 Research Design

This research adopted a qualitative design. To gain qualitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants to explore their understanding and experiences of supporting bereaved pupils following the death of a peer.

Data was analysed using an inductive and iterative reflexive thematic analysis (TA) approach.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the perspectives of participants. Semi-structured interviews were used as they are recognised as a suitable method for eliciting responses centred on perceptions (Braun and Clarke, 2021) and facilitate the exploration of individual's experiences and feelings. Furthermore, semi-structured interview questions provide flexibility to explore discussion points that may naturally arise in the individual interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) and allow space for participants' individual expressions.

As bereavement and grief experiences are sensitive and nuanced by nature, the research required an interview guide that allowed for important research questions to be addressed, but also facilitated a flexible format so that important discussion points that naturally arose could be sensitively explored to better understand participants' experiences.

The interview guide (Appendix B) was developed using approaches by Rubin and Rubin (2012), beginning with general questions before moving on to more sensitive questions.

The interviews were conducted online and recorded using MS Teams. Participants were given the option to be on screen or not, depending on what they felt most comfortable doing. The interviews lasted between 39 minutes to 67 minutes. Participants' interviews were transcribed verbatim. A debrief document was sent at the end of the semi-structured interviews, including appropriate signposting for participants (Appendix C).

Participants

Participants included eight members of pastoral staff from eight different education settings situated in different local authorities (LA) across England. All participants had experience in the last five years of supporting a peer-bereaved pupil aged between 11-16. All participants identified as having a pastoral role in the settings they worked in. Three participants had dual roles and were also teachers. No data regarding ethnicity, age or sex was collected. Table 1 presents an overview of the roles of the participants, and the type of secondary education settings they were based in.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were self-selecting and required to meet the following inclusion criteria:

- A member of staff employed by a school or education setting in the UK that provides secondary education for pupils.
- Considered part of the pastoral team of the school or education setting.
- Experience within the past five years of providing BSP for peer-bereaved YP aged between 11-16.

Pastoral support staff have varied titles and their responsibilities and status vary across schools. There are also no clear national guidelines or qualifications required for this role. Therefore, no exclusion criteria were made regarding specific role titles. The recruitment material specified participants would need to be considered as pastoral staff within their schools. Participants included SENCOs, Pastoral Support Managers, Pastoral Support Workers, Heads of Year, and School Counsellors. An exclusion criterion was made for participants with personal experience of bereavement

within the last year. This was to ensure their emotional well-being and to prevent any potential distress that discussing a recent bereavement might cause.

The researcher contacted headteachers from all secondary schools in the LA and neighbouring LA via email (Appendix D), to outline the purpose of the research and invite them to be gatekeepers for the research (Appendix E). Both the original and follow-up emails included links to a Microsoft Forms (MS Forms) document where pastoral staff could express interest by leaving their name and contact email (Appendix F).

To improve recruitment, research posters (Appendix G) were distributed on Facebook in private groups for UK pastoral staff and UK secondary school staff, with group admins acting as gatekeepers. Social media posts contained a link to the Microsoft Forms document, where interested pastoral staff could express interest by leaving their name and contact email.

Pastoral staff who had expressed interest via the Microsoft Forms document were contacted by email. The email included attachments to an information sheet, consent form (Appendix H) and a document outlining the semi-structured interview questions (Appendix B). The information sheet also outlined the aims of the research and the requirements for the participants. The semi-structured interview questions were provided to ensure participants were aware of what to anticipate in the interviews, and to further inform their decision as to whether they would like to participate in the research. Participants provided their consent to participate by signing and returning the consent form by email.

Table 1- Summary of Participants

Participant ID	Role	School ID	Type of Secondary Education Setting
Participant A	Pastoral Manager	School 1	Mainstream Secondary School
Participant B	Head of House	School 2	Mainstream Secondary School
Participant C	Head of Year Pastoral Leader	School 3	Middle School (Years, 5, 6, 7, 8)
Participant D	Head of Year Pastoral Leader	School 4	Mainstream Secondary School
Participant E	SENCO/Assistant Principal	School 5	Specialist Provision for pupils with SEMH needs
Participant F	School Counsellor	School 6	All Girls Comprehensive Secondary School
Participant G	Pastoral Support Worker	School 7	Alternative Provision Academy for pupils with medical referrals
Participant H	Head of Year Pastoral Leader	School 8	Mainstream Secondary School

Data Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis was used. Reflexive thematic analysis has been identified as an appropriate method for interpreting qualitative data that explores the subjective understandings and experiences of participants (Braun & Clark, 2022). The theoretical position of Critical Realism is commonly adopted alongside reflexive TA as it is a methodology that aims to reflect reality and the related concepts, events and processes involved (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Therefore, a reflexive TA method of data analysis was well aligned with the studies' ontological and epistemological positioning.

The reflexive TA followed the six stages of Braun and Clarkes' (2021) methodology, following a systematic process of identification, analysis, organisation, description, and reporting of themes within the qualitative dataset. This process was completed

for each research question across all interview transcripts and also informed the development of cross-themes (See 'Identification of Cross Themes').

The reflexive TA used an inductive approach, meaning that themes and patterns were identified from the observations of the data. An iterative approach was also used to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the data.

Coding

To address the various research questions, a combination of both latent and semantic coding was used during the analysis. Latent-level analysis was especially appropriate for coding related to participants' understanding of adolescent grief, as it allowed for the conceptualisation of the semantic content (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

During the initial wave, the researcher did not strictly apply codes to remain receptive to new possibilities for coding during further stages of the process. Subsequently, parts of the data were frequently re-coded throughout the process as new codes were constructed.

Identification of Cross Themes

Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) and Bazeley (2013) both highlight the importance of synthesising themes across different areas within qualitative research to achieve a more cohesive understanding of complex topics. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña discuss cross-case analysis as a method for identifying broader 'meta-themes' or 'superordinate themes' that unify insights from separate cases within a dataset. Similarly, Bazeley emphasises the value of creating coherence in findings by integrating themes or concepts that emerge from different sections of the data.

Together, these approaches support the development of overarching themes that capture shared patterns across areas of focus and provide a comprehensive narrative.

Given the interconnected nature of the research questions for this study, cross-theme analysis offered an effective way to synthesise findings across questions. This provided an integrated perspective on pastoral staff's understandings and experiences of supporting peer-bereaved pupils in school settings. A structured, multi-stage approach was used to develop the cross-themes, which was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. This approach was selected to ensure that each theme was both rigorous and representative of the data. The following steps were undertaken to achieve this:

1) Individual Thematic Analyses

Each research question was first analysed independently using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach. This involved familiarising with the data, generating initial codes, and developing and refining themes. Treating each question as a distinct area of inquiry allowed for an in-depth exploration of specific insights relevant to each question. This stage ensured that the themes were grounded in the distinct aspects of each question.

2) Identifying Patterns Across Analyses

After completing the thematic analysis for each question, the next step involved examining the resulting themes to identify broader patterns and connections spanning across the different analyses. This approach was inspired by Skene's thesis (2023), which demonstrated the value of cross-themes for creating cohesion across related areas of inquiry. By comparing themes from each question, recurring patterns and

overlapping insights were identified. This laid the foundation for the initial cross-themes.

3) Revisiting Data

To ensure that the cross-themes accurately represented the original data, each cross-theme was reviewed against participants' responses, in line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendations. Revisiting the data confirmed that each cross-theme authentically captured patterns across questions without losing the nuances of individual responses. This step was important given the interconnected nature of the research questions, as it ensured that the cross-themes aligned with the overlap between the different areas of inquiry. Grounding the cross-themes in the original data strengthened the reliability and validity of the findings.

4) Collaborative Review

During this process, each cross-theme was discussed and refined to ensure it accurately reflected the data and provided meaningful insights. This collaborative review helped ensure the cross-themes aligned with the research questions and overall goals of the study. Feedback from the supervisor clarified any ambiguities, ensuring the cross-themes formed a unified set of findings.

5) Finalising Cross-Themes

The final stage brought together the refined cross-themes into a clear set of overarching insights that connected the findings across all research questions. This showed some consistent patterns in pastoral staff's experiences with bereavement support. This reflected the connections between the study's questions. By combining

themes from each question, the cross-themes provided a deeper and broader understanding of bereavement support in educational settings.

In summary, while each thematic analysis provided detailed insights into specific areas of each research question, the cross-themes combined these findings into a clear and cohesive overall understanding. This aligned with the study's aim to provide a view of how pastoral staff understand and support peer-bereaved pupils. By capturing the multi-faceted nature of BSP within schools, this approach allowed for a more comprehensive perspective which is suited to the complex reality of providing school-based support.

Reflexive practice

The researcher has prior personal experiences with peer-bereavement, both as a former pupil and during their previous role as a teacher. The researcher has a dual role as a trainee EP and has been educated about bereavement and CI work in the profession. Throughout the research process, the researcher has actively assessed how their worldview may influence interpretation of the data. To maintain awareness of their values, experiences, and beliefs during analysis, the researcher used a reflective diary and supervision (Oxley, 2016).

Ethical considerations

This research was conducted following guidance from the British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics. Ethical approval was gained through the Research Ethical Board of the University of East Anglia (See Appendix I).

To ensure participants gave informed consent, the researcher provided information about the research using the information sheet and consent form (Appendix H). The sensitive nature of the topic was communicated and an opt-in sampling method was also used to ensure participants felt able to discuss the content. Participants were also provided with the questions that would be asked in the semi-structured interview no less than 48 hours before the interview and were invited to ask the researcher any questions or clarification. Participants were invited to specify any questions they did not want to be asked and any topics they preferred not to discuss during the interview. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point, up to the point of data analysis. Due to the sensitive nature of the interview, appropriate signposting was made in the Semi-Structured Interview Question document (Appendix B) and Debrief document (Appendix C).

To ensure confidentiality, MSTeams recordings, anonymised transcripts and signed consent forms were stored on a password-protected account with additional security via an authentication app. Participants were informed that the data would be anonymised and stored securely according to criteria outlined in UEA's data protection policy and statutory guidance (Data Protection Act, 2018).

2.4.4 Ensuring Quality and Rigour

To ensure the quality and rigour of this research, Yardley's (2011) criteria for qualitative studies were applied. Yardley's (2011) criteria for qualitative research includes four main principles: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. These principles were used in every stage of the study and their application are described as follows:

Sensitivity to Context

This study examines the experiences of pastoral staff supporting peer-bereaved pupils in secondary schools, acknowledging both the unique developmental needs of adolescents and the structured nature of the school environment. Adolescence is a time when peer relationships are central to identity formation, so the loss of a peer can have a profound impact on a young person's emotional well-being. However, schools often prioritise academic outcomes over pastoral support and may lack formal policies on bereavement (Abraham-Steele & Edmonds, 2021), making grief support more complex.

Following Yardley's (2011) principle of sensitivity to context, the study was designed to consider both these developmental and environmental factors from the perspectives of pastoral staff working within this structured setting. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to provide pastoral staff with the opportunity to share their experiences openly. This enabled an in-depth exploration of their understandings of adolescent grief and how they approach their roles in supporting peer-bereaved pupils. This approach aligned with Yardley's emphasis on creating research that is responsive to participants' social and professional contexts, ensuring that their insights and challenges were fully represented.

Given the sensitivity of the topic, ethical integrity was significantly important. Yardley (2011) suggests that researcher roles can affect participant openness. Therefore, a neutral, supportive interview environment was established, and participants were informed that there were no "right" or "wrong" answers (Appendix A, Interview Guide). Confidentiality was maintained with pseudonyms and anonymisation of data, to ensure participants felt safe to discuss personal experiences. Informed consent was obtained

through a comprehensive information sheet, and participants were encouraged to ask questions. A follow-up email offered additional support, reinforcing a respectful, participant-centred approach to data collection.

Commitment and Rigour

Following Yardley's (2011) guidance on respecting participants' perspectives, the semi-structured interviews were designed to allow pastoral staff talk freely about their roles and experiences. This approach allowed for an exploration and understanding of the specific challenges they face, rather than restricting them to predefined topics.

Thematic analysis was then applied to identify key themes across the interviews. This method provided a structured way to explore patterns in the data, while remaining open to deeper insights. Yardley (2011) emphasises that good qualitative research should aim for both breadth and depth. Thematic analysis allowed for this balance, as it enabled common themes to emerge across participants while also presenting unique, personal experiences. Reflexivity was an important part of this process. The researcher consistently reflected on how their own perspectives might influence the analysis, ensuring that the focus remained on the authentic experiences of the participants (Please see Reflective chapter).

Achieving rigour was a priority. Yardley (2011) highlights that rigorous qualitative research requires a detailed and thoughtful approach. To ensure the findings were genuinely reflective of participants' views, the researcher engaged closely with the data at every stage, revisiting and refining themes to keep them grounded in what participants actually expressed. The researcher applied thematic analysis techniques

thoroughly and systematically, reviewing each transcript multiple times to refine themes and check for consistency.

Reflexivity was consistently practiced, with the researcher keeping notes on how personal beliefs or assumptions could influence the analysis, helping to maintain focus on participants' authentic views (see Reflective Chapter)

Transparency and Coherence

The coherence of this study was achieved by ensuring that each part of the research process aligned with the research question as well as the underpinning critical realist epistemology. Following Yardley's (2011) guidance on coherence, the study maintained a clear link between the epistemology, methods, and data interpretation. This approach allowed the research to consider both the individual experiences of pastoral staff and the broader systemic influences on their roles.

Transparency was also central to the study. Each step in the research process was documented, from recruitment and ethics consideration to data collection and analysis. Direct quotes from participants are included in the analysis to provide clear examples of how key themes were derived, making the connection between data and findings visible.

To minimise the impact of researcher bias, regular reflections were undertaken on how personal background and assumptions might shape the interpretation of the data. Reflexive notes were kept throughout to ensure that participants' perspectives were consistently prioritised throughout (See Reflective Chapter).

Following Yardley's guidance on choosing methods that suit the study's aims, inter-rater reliability checks, which are commonly used in quantitative research to assess objectivity, were not applied. Instead, the focus remained on close, rigorous engagement with the data.

Impact and Importance

This study addresses a significant gap in the existing research area by examining how secondary schools peer-bereaved pupils. This is an area that has previously received limited attention. According to Yardley (2011), impactful research builds on existing knowledge to address questions that matter. By focusing on peer-bereaved pupils and the experiences and needs of pastoral staff, this study contributes valuable insights that can inform guidance on bereavement support in schools across different contexts.

Yardley (2011) also highlights that research should aim to make a real-world difference, either through direct application or by reshaping how we understand a topic. This study's focus on peer bereavement support in schools aligns with this principle, as it has the potential to influence how educational psychology can be used to help schools build structured support systems for peer-bereaved pupils and the staff who support them.

3. Findings

Data from the semi-structures interviews was analysed using reflective thematic analysis for each research question. Figure 2 shows the identified themes for each research question. From these themes, cross-themes were derived. This chapter

presents the cross-themes, highlighting distinctions and similarities that were identifies across participants. Figure 3 illustrates these cross-themes.

Figure 1. Thematic map representing themes for each research question

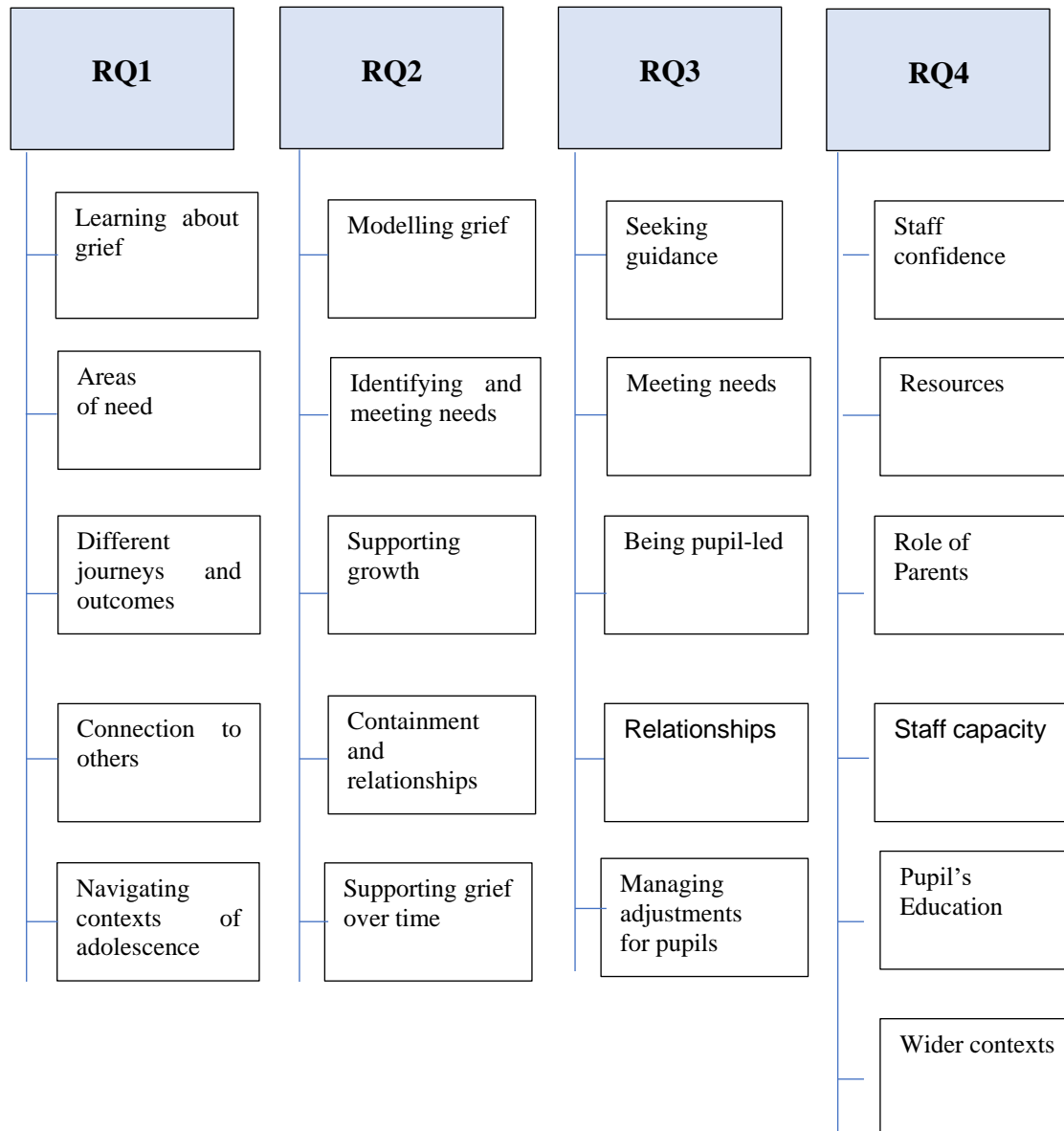
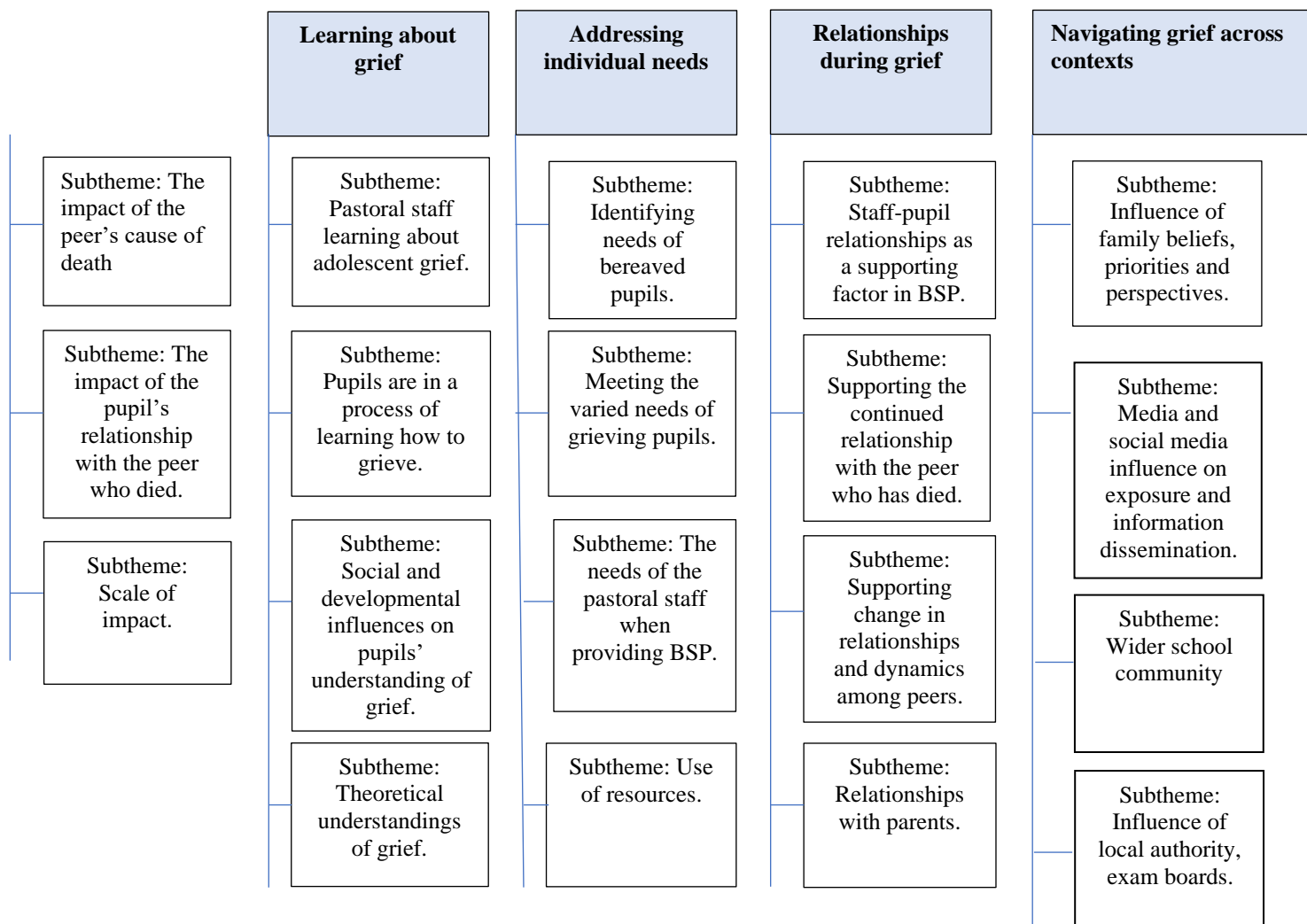


Figure 2. Thematic map representing cross-analysis of themes

Overarching theme
 Guiding adolescents through grief: Navigating a shared bereavement journey across varied contexts and challenges following the death of a peer.

Different circumstances of death



3.1 Overarching theme

A key overarching theme was identified across participants: Guiding adolescents through grief and sharing a bereavement journey with them across varied contexts and challenges following the death of a peer.

This included an emphasis on the variation in the individual experience of grief.

'Everyone, every situation is very, very different.' (Participant B)

There was also an acknowledgement of how pupils' grief can evolve and change over time and across important transitions, with the role of staff also considered during the pupils' grief journeys.

'They needed support to understand their own feelings, to accept their own feelings on good and bad days and to understand the idea that grief is a journey. I think it was understanding how there isn't a right or wrong time to feel it as well. We move forward, past exams and the months later. We had a prom like two months ago and just...it's OK to be happy with your mates. That's OK. So, coaching them through the good and the bad sides of it.' (Participant B)

Staff acknowledged their own grief whilst supporting pupils and the interdependent nature of this.

'We felt it you know. That sadness affected us as well because we had lost that person too, you know, and just very sad for them.' (Participant H)

The themes encompassed within this overarching concept are described below.

3.2 Theme 1: Diverse experiences across different contexts of death

Summary

Participants identified several contextual factors that influenced peer-bereaved pupils' experience of grief. The identified contextual factors are presented through the following three subthemes: 'Impact of the peer's cause of death,' 'Impact of the young person's relationship with the person who died' and 'Scale of Impact.'

3.2.1 Subtheme: Impact of the peer's cause of death

The contexts of the deaths that participants experienced when supporting bereaved pupils varied widely. Causes of death described by participants included death due to COVID and pre-existing respiratory illness (n=1), cancer (n=1), long-term illness (n=1), Diabetes (n=1), accidental drug overdose (n=1), violence (n=1), and suicide (n=2).

There was an understanding that the circumstances of the death were likely to impact the pupil's experience of grief.

'I think the circumstance makes a big difference as well, like what they died of. We've had experiences of students, not our students, but other people in the age group, who have taken their own lives. That brings up a completely different set of issues than our own student who had a serious medical condition and passed away.' (Participant A)

Sudden deaths were understood to elicit shock.

'It was a sudden death. So, a shock.' (Participant B)

Fear was identified as a factor in pupils' responses following violent death.

'I think they were frightened because it was a gang thing. They were frightened of repercussions and the people turning up at the gates here. Very worried, very nervous.' (Participant H)

Deaths that were sudden and considered to be influenced by others (such as violence, suicide, accidental drug overdose) resulted in particularly angry responses from pupils.

'There was a lot more anger. There was anger directed at the two students who knew about it. Almost aggressive. There was a lot of fighting.' (Participant E)

Violent deaths were also understood to significantly impact pupils who were directly exposed to the death or were within proximity when the death occurred.

'Children from this school witnessed it. So, they were really affected by it and children at the other school.' (Participant H)

Death by suicide was seen as a potential factor for contagion, with concerns about the impact on surviving peers with mental health needs.

'The young person that took their own life in the local community, there were people that didn't know that person at all. But it brought up issues around them that exacerbated that need to do that because it became almost more socially acceptable that it was going to happen.' (Participant B)

For anticipated deaths or deaths due to illness, participants (n=4), identified that young people are still shocked by the deaths.

'You can't anticipate how these children are going to react. It is going to be a shock to them when it happens.' (Participant C)

However, for anticipated deaths, there appeared to be an opportunity for staff to prepare by engaging in bereavement training.

'I had training from Winston's wish because we anticipated when we found out about the diagnosis, we anticipated that this would happen.' (Participant C)

3.2.2 Subtheme: The impact of the pupils' relationship with the peer who died.

Pupils who were in relationships with the person who died were considered to be especially vulnerable.

'The young man's girlfriend was under our care as well so needed incredibly intensive support.' (Participant B)

Those who had a close friendship with the person who died were also considered to be vulnerable.

'There will obviously be a nucleus of students that are more directly affected because they were a close friend.' (Participant A)

Pupils who had complex relationships with the person who died were identified to be impacted, with their presentation of grief understood to be related to feelings of guilt.

'He was incredibly loud and very, very public with his crying and with his sobbing and his weeping. But actually, when she passed away, they weren't talking. They'd had an argument, and he actually, I would say at one point been close to bullying her. You know the kind of guilt that goes with that.' (Participant A)

There was also an understanding that pupils who did not know the pupil who died may also be impacted for other predisposing reasons.

'They might not have even met that person. For some of them, it still brought up emotions. They were upset. They could sense that in the school community.'
(Participant B)

3.2.3 Scale of impact

The death of a pupil was recognised to have a much wider impact than other bereavements, such as the death of a parent.

'It's the scale with a peer-bereavement. If it's a parent, the scale is generally smaller. There's that student or that student's family. Some wider friendship, you know. But this was a whole school community.' (Participant B)

A large number of pupils were recognised to be very emotional following a death of a peer.

'Mostly what we see is kind of a mass hysteria.' (Participant A)

This was especially noted to occur in the initial few days following a death of a peer.

'Certainly, with all the students, there was this first few sort of shocking days, very emotional days, a lot of crying and inability to concentrate, a lot of anger.'

(Participant B)

In instances where there had been sudden deaths, such as by suicide, the impact was understood to reach other schools within the community

'There was somebody locally who had taken their own life by hanging and that affected our cohort of students. I think they were year nines at the time. There were loads of them were coming into school crying upset.' (Participant A)

The shock of a violent death was also noted to have a wide impact

'Just sad, very sad for the family and all of his friends and the school. You know and the school community. It shocked everybody.' (Participant H)

A wide scale of impact was also noted in contexts where pupils had died due to illness. Some participants attributed this to popularity.

'It grows within the school community and there'll obviously be a nucleus of students that are more directly affected because they were a close friend or have got more experience with that person and then it grows out from there to those that have been acquainted to them, have heard of them (...) It might affect an entire year group. It certainly did when one of our students passed away. It couldn't not have affected

everybody in his year group really, with such a popular character. It was emotional for a lot of students because he was a very well-liked boy and a real character.'

(Participant A)

Sudden deaths were understood to impact the wider community

'It impacted pretty much the whole community.' (Participant B)

One participant also found that a pupil's death due to an illness impacted the wider community.

'A lot of the pupils knew this pupil, so it was very much a case of every single pupil was affected in some way. I'd say the village and the local area too. It was quite a quite big thing really.' (Participant C)

3.3 Theme 2 "Learning about grief"

Summary:

This theme explores how pastoral staff understand adolescent grief, highlighting personal, social, and theoretical influences. It also considers pupils' experiences of learning about grief, from the perspectives of pastoral staff. The theme includes the following four subthemes: 'Pastoral staff learning about adolescent grief'; 'Pupils are in a process of learning how to grieve'; 'Social and developmental influences on pupils' understanding of grief'; 'Theoretical understandings of grief.'

3.3.1 Subtheme 1: Pastoral Staff learning about adolescent grief

Staff acknowledged that their experiences contradicted their pre-existing understandings of what grief would present like for adolescents.

'I think also that you anticipate what a student's going to do. I thought they would grieve, but this is the process they'll follow. Absolutely not. That was the biggest shock for me because I was like, oh this is not it.' (Participant G)

Nearly all staff identified a need for more proactive responses to support understanding of adolescent's grief.

'We as a school needed to go and do more work around grief. Rather than wait for something to happen, we should have had a better idea and a better understanding.' (Participant B)

Some participants received training before the death of a pupil (n=2), some received training after the death (n=2) and others received no training at all (n=4). The participants who had received training found it helpful.

'I've had training from Winston's Wish and because we anticipated when we found out about the diagnosis, we anticipated that this would happen. We also had some training from CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) and CHUMS (Bereavement service). They sent out lots of webinars and everything for the school, for us to be aware of. That was really, really helpful.' (Participant C)

Participants who received training after the death highlighted that training was needed sooner.

'I remember being sat there thinking when they talked to the class team, we could have done with this back then. I didn't feel prepared or trained.' (Participant E)

While all participants who received training found it helpful, it was also felt that the training was not enough to fully prepare them to understand and support pupils, due to the varied nature of grief.

'I think with the pastoral staff, training is difficult across the board because you see so many different situations, so many differences, so many examples. We could train all day, every day on our training days and still not cover every scenario.' (Participant A)

The majority of staff acknowledged that they instead drew understandings from their own beliefs and values.

'It was just purely based on what we are, who we are.' (Participant E)

Staff also drew from their own experiences of grief.

'I could link a little bit more because I was in a similar situation when I was a kid. Two of my peers in my year group lost their lives.' (Participant G)

3.3.2 Subtheme 2: Pupils are in a process of learning how to grieve

Participants identified that pupils' developmental age and inexperience with grief can make bereavement especially difficult.

'I think there's an expectation that kids will just get over it in some way, but adults, process their bereavement however they've been taught. They don't necessarily realise that young people don't necessarily know, they haven't learnt how to process it yet.' (Participant F)

It was acknowledged that this can cause pupils to have lots of questions about the grieving process.

'Not having any expectations, rules, whatever around their grief. As much as it was very raw, it also left them with a lot of questions about how to handle it.' (Participant B)

There was an understanding that pupils are subsequently in a process of learning how to grieve.

'There was a lot of learning that that took place.' (Participant F)

Some participants noted that pupils could often feel uncertain as to what to expect, regarding societal practices and procedures following a death, such as funerals.

'This young person became very worried about the funeral. They hadn't been to a funeral before, they didn't know what it was going to be like.' (Participant C)

Pupils were often found to require reassurance of this from staff.

'There is a lot of, "I should be feeling like this and I don't." Emotionally, they need support to understand their own feelings, to accept their own feelings on good and bad days and to understand the idea that grief is a journey.' (Participant D)

There was also an understanding that pupils are learning about different responses to grief.

'That idea that grief is different for everyone. For teenagers, that's incredibly difficult to navigate because each one starts to feel guilty about who's doing the right thing and not letting them understand how to explore that, still be there for each other, without having to grieve in the same way.' (Participant B)

3.3.3 Subtheme: Recognising social and developmental influences on pupils' understanding of grief

Some participants felt that young people may find it harder to adjust and adapt compared to adults due to their developmental age.

'I think it takes longer to kind of adjust. But that I believe is hormonal. I believe it's to do with their ages.' (Participant E)

There was an understanding from some participants that the developmental stage of adolescence can cause a longer grieving process for some.

'I feel as if in an adolescent it's almost as if this process is drawn out massively. For instance, whereas some adults they feel like can talk about this quicker, I feel that in certain adolescents the process is drawn out.' (Participant C)

Staff felt that the death of a young person can disrupt pupils' view of the world.

'Young people really struggle to understand that it's someone their age, that someone who should have their whole life in front of them, doesn't. That all their hopes, their dreams, everything, are gone.' (Participant B)

There was also an understanding that it can be difficult for pupils to comprehend the permanence of death.

'I think they just can't believe that person's gone, that they're never going to see them again. They find that really hard to come to terms with.' (Participant H)

Differences between younger adolescents (approximately 11-13 years old) and middle adolescents (approximately 14-16 years old) were also recognised by some participants. From the participants who differentiated responses between ages, there was a consensus that older year groups may be more expressive with their grief and have a greater sense and need for autonomy compared to younger year groups.

'There's this real need to get that emotion out right now and they don't care who is doing it and if they want to leave now, they're going to do it. Because they're older,

those thoughts are more prevalent in them. They can just walk out if they want, they don't have to be in a classroom. Whereas I think a year seven (...) They're sort of more quietly sad I think. They might cry in a classroom. Or they might completely mask that they're upset at all.' (Participant A)

Younger adolescents were also viewed to have less understanding.

'I'd say that when they're older, it would be a different response. When they're still quite young I don't think they understand.' (Participant A)

This was linked to an understanding of postponed grief.

'Year seven, they're just more, 'Alright then, what's first lesson?' It has less of an effect on them. I mean, it probably hits them a little bit later on.' (Participant D)

Postponed grief was also understood to occur for pupils with additional needs including SEMH and social and communication needs.

'They were, to start with, like, "yeah, it's fine." We didn't really see any kind of upset or that emotional side of things for a good chunk of time after.' (Participant E)

Notably, only specialist provisions and one mainstream school recognised that there may be differences in grief experiences for pupils with social and communication needs. These participants highlighted that the presentation of grief can be very different

'But I'm just more conscious, that when you look at a grief process and how a grief process follows, there is absolutely no way that it formulates or moulds with our students. We have to kind of go, is this the anger part? The mould is really skewed.'

(Participant G)

It was understood that there can be an expectation that all pupils will experience grief in a typical way.

'Some of these students were neurodiverse as well. So, I think it can be very easy, and this is in any sort of bereavement, very easy for adults to try and get students and young people to sort of follow the same pattern that they would follow themselves in grieving.' (Participant F)

Some participants understood pupils with additional needs may be more vulnerable to facing difficulties during the grieving process.

'From our perspective, it's quite difficult because we know they're already vulnerable.'

(Participant E)

Staff also identified differences for pupils with low attendance.

'Someone that may have attendance issues or something. That would have a different impact. So, there are definitely differences.' (Participant F)

3.3.4 Subtheme 4: Theoretical understandings of grief

Staff had varied understandings of adolescent grief, with only a small number identifying specific theoretical models that they drew from. While the majority of participants were unable to identify particular grief models, their perspectives generally aligned with those found in existing frameworks.

The majority of participants shared understandings that related to Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), with the understanding that pupils often looked to adults for modelling of grief.

'They were looking to the adults to model it for them...Having adults to model it for them is really important.' (Participant C)

Participants felt pupils also looked to each other for the modelling of grief.

'I think a lot of our students shadowed each other and took their lead from each other.'
(Participant B)

All participants demonstrated understandings related to the continuing bond model, emphasising the need to acknowledge the death of a pupil and support pupils' relationship with the peer who died.

'Earlier on in my career, it wasn't even mentioned that they had died. It was just that they just disappeared from the class and weren't ever spoken of again. I think it

probably took those students a lot longer to deal with it, to deal with their emotions. And I think I was determined that actually that we should still talk about her. Keeping the memories alive for everyone, I think is probably the main thing you know. Not sweeping it under the carpet, I think that's important. Doing the memorial, a couple of months later, was very useful as part of this, the healing process.' (Participant D)

All staff presented understandings that aligned with theories of attachment when describing pupil-staff relationships following the bereavement.

'The students just become quite attached to a member of staff in a lot of ways.'
(Participant A)

The majority of participants expressed understandings that aligned with the Dual Process Model of grief.

'They constantly go from being quite calm to then having a very high level of sadness about this. So it's peaking and troughing.' (Participant C)

Participants also presented understandings that aligned with Bion's model of containment.

'Having one main point of contact for the affected students and being the trusted adult is useful. I was lucky in that I could dedicate some time to that. I think that is important to give that space for them.' (Participant E)

Staff identified that pupils' physical and safety needs must be met for them to feel equipped to work towards other things, aligning with concepts from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model (1943). Impact on physical needs were particularly noted in cases where pupils had experienced a sudden death, such as through violence or risk-taking.

'We'll give them that lift home if they're anxious. When they've got no food, they come to us, we feed them, we hear all their problems. Let's give him the hot chocolate. Give him the cookie. Give him the hot dinner. You know, you've got to get that brain fed so you're ready for that lesson.' (Participant H)

Some staff acknowledged the importance of belonging and connection.

'They need to be part of a group through this. A group of their peers, but also that wider community. They need school at that point. They need to belong to something.' (Participant B)

There was also some retrospective understanding that bereavement could impact self-esteem and self-actualisation.

'His self-esteem became rock bottom. And then when I unpick it, I think it was related to the death of his peer.' (Participant E)

The majority of participants did not express any understanding relating to pupils' spiritual or religious development. However, participants retrospectively

acknowledged some spiritual or religious needs for pupils, which aligns with Balk's (2011) holistic framework for bereaved adolescents.

'I remember he said, is it bad that I now think there's a God? He wouldn't really talk about it, but occasionally he would drop that in. I think that's where he wanted to kind of explore and go. But I think he was nervous about other people's perceptions.'

(Participant G)

Some participants related their understandings to the PACE model and trauma-informed practice.

'We use a lot of PACE and a lot of trauma-informed processes. So, we used things like that to kind of underpin what we were doing.' (Participant G)

All staff understood that communication was very important for pupils, which further aligns with Bion's (1983) model of containment.

'They want is to know that somebody's there. Somebody's going to listen. Being able to talk about it is really important.' (Participant A)

Person-centred practices were also considered important.

'We are very person-centred anyway. You have to be led by them.' (Participant F)

There was some understanding from staff that pupils can develop positive changes as a result of the bereavement, aligning with the Grief to Growth model (Hogan & Schmidt, 2002).

'They want to do well. They've got goals. They've got hopes. They're in a position where they want to try and do better. When this happened, that wasn't where they were. At the moment, he's trying to do extra revision, he wants to be a mentor for younger students who potentially could go down a path they shouldn't.' (Participant H)

There was also an understanding that some pupils can find it challenging to find meaning and purpose in a positive way following a bereavement, suggesting an understanding of prolonged or complicated grief. This was particularly noted in cases where pupils were social disadvantaged or had social and communication or SEMH needs.

'In terms of actual making progress and academic levels, it all dropped off. It was almost like he didn't really care for it anymore. It was almost like when the rest of the class was moving on and when they were making progress and doing different things, he couldn't.' (Participant E)

It was also recognised that unresolved grief can result in negative outcomes for pupils.

'I just felt for this boy, who before the death of his best friend, was engaged and progressing. Now we can look back over the three years since it happened. Unfortunately, this boy doesn't attend school. I've seen him maybe four or five times

this year, because every time you go round, he's out. He was arrested for attempted murder. I do think, if you would look back at his life, those crossroads where all this behaviour began, it was that. It was really around the death of his best friend. It's really sad.' (Participant E)

3.4 Theme 3: Addressing the individual needs of bereaved pupils

Summary

The theme focuses on the process of identifying and addressing the unique needs of both bereaved pupils and pastoral staff. It considers strategies used by participants at an individual, team and whole school level to support pupils' needs, while acknowledging the challenges participants also shared. The theme includes the following four subthemes: 'Identifying needs of bereaved pupils'; 'meeting the varied needs of pupils': 'the needs of the pastoral staff when providing BSP' and 'use of resources.'

3.4.1 Subtheme 1: Identifying needs of bereaved pupils

Some staff identified which pupils had close relationships with the person who had died through liaison with parents and the family of the deceased.

'Their parents obviously identified, once it had happened, that they were good friends. Even the family of the boy that passed away had mentioned him as being a particular friend.' (Participant A)

There were also examples of pupils self-identifying their needs.

'They self-identified. Mostly they were sort of bringing each other like, you need to talk this one as well now.' (Participant H)

Others identified need based on their observations.

'I just think it was an impression that we got that we knew that he needed more.'
(Participant A)

One participant requested EP involvement to assist with identifying whether a pupil required further bereavement support or whether their increased needs were related to their pre-existing social communication needs.

'He would come in and have a look at the kids and see if there was anything because obviously some of the behaviours massively changed. He was unpicking what this could be related to that and explaining some of the behaviours we hadn't seen.'
(Participant G)

In summary, the majority of staff identified level of need on whether there was a close relationship to the person who died, or if pupils or parents of pupils identified that there was a need for further BSP. No participants identified using any systematic procedure for identifying or prioritising the need for BSP.

3.4.2 Subtheme 2: Meeting the varied needs of grieving pupils

Participants expressed that they lacked confidence in knowing how to provide appropriate support.

'Because every child is different, every student that we have is going to want a different experience from us and it's very difficult to know what the right thing to do is because there is no one-size-fits-all.' (Participant C)

Participants reported particular challenges with meeting the needs of socially disadvantaged pupils or pupils with SEMH or Social communication difficulties.

'We've had students completely lock themselves away, barricade themselves in. And you can't get through and we've had students that have gone off and unfortunately tried to seek that emotional support from elsewhere. So, with the groups, which have then taken them down into vulnerabilities like county lines. So, it's quite it's quite a difficult thing.' (Participant E)

The scale of bereavement was also highlighted as a barrier to meeting the needs of all impacted pupils.

'This was a whole school community just blindsided. That's different. Someone's parents, that's very different, because you can contain the bereavement of a parent.' (Participant B)

Staff described using 'ad-hoc' approaches.

'We had no plan about what to do with this, unfortunately. I guess most schools don't until they need to have it. I think it was almost make it up as you go along.' (Participant E)

Some participants highlighted using pupil-led approaches.

'We were very led by them and led by their feelings. You just have to do what you felt was right for those kids in that moment.' (Participant D)

All participants identified that they provided pupils with time to talk about their feelings.

'It was a lot of one-to-one sessions to start with, just talking.' (Participant E)

To support pupils who may fluctuate between wanting to talk and not wanting to talk, open-door policies were adopted by some participants.

'We had an open-door policy. They might not want to talk at the time. You say, right? I can see you at 10:00 AM. They might not want to talk at 10:00 AM. They might want to talk about it in the afternoon, so it's making sure that there are people who can support them at that time.' (Participant C)

'Check-ins' also emerged as a strategy to provide pupils with opportunities to talk and for staff to monitor the well-being of pupils.

'We called them nurture check-ins. It was just this well-being check-in.' (Participant E)

The majority of participants provided space for the pupils to talk in school.

'They had a room where they could go and talk about him. I think that was helpful.'

(Participant A)

Opportunities to spend time with staff were also provided.

'We spent a lot of time with them (the pupils) and this went on for weeks.' (Participant

B)

Pastoral staff identified a barrier of lacking confidence in knowing how to communicate with bereaved pupils.

'Where we'd just speak to him like if he was our son, our child, going through it and it might not be the right thing. We're not counsellors. We don't know if we're saying the right or wrong thing.' (Participant H)

One participant described directing pupils to think of positives.

'The guidance was given by the deputy head to focus on those positive times and let's talk about happy memories and all of those things.' (Participant A)

Others found that pupils benefitted from hearing staff's own life experiences.

'A lot of them said hearing that it's something to deal with, that you do get through this and then like having the benefit of our life experience, they said that was helpful because we have unfortunately come across it before.' (Participant C)

Pupils were offered counselling.

'They had five counsellors that came in to speak directly to friends of this young boy.'
(Participant A)

For some, this included a wider counselling offer for the initial few days, due to the mass scale of emotional response.

'They had like an emergency counselling service that came in and was able to give quite a quick response to what had happened.' (Participant A)

Some had longer bereavement workshops with an external service that pupils could self-select to join.

We gave pupils an opportunity and said "There will be this work at this location between this time and this time" and they had to come and speak to us and we would say yes. We would escort them down and they were supported.' (Participant C)

However, it was recognised that many pupils did not engage in the counselling that was offered.

'So getting grief counselling professionals in, that was an absolute no. Full blown, no. Because he wants to talk about it with staff who have gone through it. He'll wait and wait and be like can I talk to you?' (Participant G)

Spiritual or religious needs were not considered by the majority of schools, although one faith school provided the option of support from the chaplaincy teams, with resources to support prayer.

'We set up a prayer tree and I think students that had never done that before, came and put a ribbon out.' (Participant B)

When participants observed that pupils were not eating, they provided food.

'Making sure that there's food available for them and anything we could get our hands on, from fruit to chocolate to cereal bars. Just checking in. Have you eaten today? Got to eat, you know? Just literally getting them to eat and drink and taking care of their general well-being.' (Participant B)

In specialist provisions, there were also times when pupils were permitted to sleep if needed.

'There is a sensory corner with blankets and stuff like that. So there were times he'd often just take himself off and just nap. Have half an hour, an hour.' (Participant E)

Those who identified as having difficulties with substance abuse were given extra support in this area.

'He was very quickly like, I need you to get me some help. So we reached out to an agency that we work with that does a lot around substances and we got them in.'

(Participant E)

Pupils who were experiencing fear following traumatic exposure were supported to feel safe by escorting them home.

'My colleague and I took them home. We would take him to a bus stop where step-mum was waiting and he'd transfer from our car into her car.' (Participant H)

Flexibility also emerged as an important strategy for supporting pupils who were struggling to be in lessons, allowing for personalised adjustments and adapted timetables.

'It might be that they sat next to this kid in maths and now they can't walk into the maths class without thinking of a kid, you know. We can offer solutions to things like that, but it all depends on what they come out with at the time as to what their particular need.' (Participant B)

Several participants (n=4) noted that some pupils began to develop (or further experience) emotional-based school avoidance and/or eventually leave the school. This was noted in cases where pupils had social and communication needs, SEMH

needs or experienced social disadvantage. Two participants described making regular home visits to maintain contact, which for one participant, resulted in the pupil subsequently re-engaging with school.

'If we see a pattern, we'll go out and we'll quite often be the annoying people, 'Oh, you're here again.' But what that does is, eventually, whether it's weeks or months, they're like, "Oh, do you want a cup of tea?" We're there once a week. We might up it a little bit. For them it's annoying. But actually, it works. It benefits. Then like a year down the line, when we've chatted to him, he's like, I quite like the fact that you came around, he was like it showed that you care. He's doing really well at the moment, but it's took a year and we've gone from kind of 4% to I think he's about 82% now.'
(Participant G)

Where pupils showed little interest in their education and future, participants tried to motivate them to engage in schoolwork through encouragement and talking.

'It was a lot of talking to him to try and get him to see that it's going to be worth it in the end, just to keep going. Just keep persevering and turn up to school. Some days he just wasn't going to do it. Then, the days when he was ready, that's when we would pounce on it. And think, right, today's a good day. Let's get him in the lesson. Let's motivate him.' (Participant H)

Some pupils were also paired to work with younger pupils, to support development of meaning-making and growth.

'He'd say, I want to be a good role model for my brother. I don't want my brother to follow our path. Because he's made poor choices. At the moment, what we've managed to do is buddy him up. So, there's a student who's a year younger than him. But we've established he needs quite a neutral but calming individual. He sits down with him and talks to him regularly. And we've noticed that that is a positive thing because now he started talking to another student in his class. But it has been a slow process.' (Participant G)

3.4.3 Subtheme: Needs of staff

Participants expressed retrospective understanding that policies may have helped support them in coping with the initial mass scale of bereavement.

'I think what there probably could have been and what there wasn't...Well, I've looked at policies since and you see something written on paper about what needs to happen.'
(Participant B)

A need for more or earlier training also emerged.

'The second time around when the EP came and gave recommendations and talked to staff(...) I wish I'd had that before. You know, what to do and what to look for.'
(Participant E)

Most of the participants (n=7) mentioned that they were personally impacted by the death of the pupil, which was challenging to manage whilst also supporting pupils.

'It was a tough time. Because we obviously lost that kid. But we were just supporting them. Yeah, it's tricky.' (Participant E)

Some participants noted there was an impact on their own world beliefs.

'I wasn't prepared. I suppose because my beliefs, my experience of death was quite... I'd only ever known people who'd gotten old and died. Which is quite natural, isn't it?'
(Participant A)

Some identified feeling unequipped to support others due to needing to manage their own emotional needs.

'To begin with, I didn't feel equipped. Because I was trying to grieve myself(...)At the time I was like, we need someone external to come in because we're too close to this.'
(Participant G)

Initial counselling responses for staff were considered helpful.

'The staff were given a counsellor as well for them to attend to meet with and they just had, like, a drop-down day to express their grief and to talk about it. I think that was a really good thing at the other school that they did, they were very quick in getting help in school for the following day.' (Participant H)

Some participants (n=2) had access to supervision internally or externally with Educational Psychology or CAMHs. Another participant received informal advice and

check-ins from a friend who was an Educational Psychologist. All participants who received this support highlighted it to be particularly helpful.

'I'd say make sure you have supervision because I didn't get it as much at the start. Having someone else to have those talks with and offload it to. Someone who can offer that support and advice.' (Participant E)

Supportive pastoral teams were also considered to be a containing factor for staff.

'It was helpful being able to talk about it as a group, as a team... We're very lucky the way that we're set up. Having that moment to yourself in an office and knowing that someone absolutely understands you and what you're going through and being there for colleagues. There was a very tight team of us who were able to do that for each other and that was hugely helpful.' (Participant B)

Buddy systems were outlined as helpful for staff.

'We're in pairs and it's just having someone there for us that we knew as a colleague and being able to go into our office and have that moment after you've shouldered a burden and managed to deal with that young person.' (Participant B)

Good leadership within the pastoral team was also considered helpful for staff.

'Our deputy at the time for pastoral was just outstanding. Her door was always open.'
(Participant A)

It also arose that participants with smaller pastoral teams experienced difficulty due to not having a colleague to speak with.

'There wasn't anyone to speak to. It was a tough time.' (Participant E)

There was an understanding that this can lead to staff being able to support pupils as effectively.

'If we would do that on our own, that's where you end up making the wrong decision because once you're overburdened and that bucket's full, if you can't release it anywhere, then there's going to come a point where you can't support the young people well. It's vital that the adults supporting them are given that chance to unburden, decompress, whatever we want to call it. To make sure that they're doing the right thing.' (Participant B)

Some participants identified that bereavement support for pupils is mostly placed on the pastoral team.

'We shouldered the majority of the burden.' (Participant B)

For participants who felt there was less distribution of work there was an identified risk of burnout.

'I came very close to burning myself out by being so available. I've had to be a lot stricter because the waiting list is too long.' (Participant F)

One participant also identified that some staff left, which they attributed to being a result of their experiences with bereavement

'We hit the ground running and just carried on. Consequently, out of the team of twelve, only two of us are left that went through that experience. Within a year, people just left.' (Participant G)

3.4.4 Subtheme 4: Resources

Drawing from resources both internally and externally emerged as a theme across all participants. However, there were variations in the resources used. This was influenced by differences in schools awareness and accessibility of resources, based in their location and availability.

There was a prominent understanding that providing a range of resources was important.

'We were using as many resources as possible' (Participant A)

Providing support for pupils was difficult due to challenges with time constraints and limited spaces in school to speak privately.

'Ultimately the right thing to do is just listen. But there's not always that opportunity within our school day to be able to do that or to do it with the immediacy that a student needs or with the privacy.' (Participant A)

Internal school counsellors were highlighted as a resource that lots of schools drew on. However, it was highlighted that there was too much demand for this to be managed, necessitating additional support from external counsellors.

'They've got one school counsellor, but one person wouldn't have been able to deal with all of that. So, they've got people in.' (Participant H)

Counselling services were sourced from different providers including emergency counselling.

'There was an emergency counselling service that came in and was able to give quite a quick response to what had happened.' (Participant A)

Local counselling offers were also provided.

'We have a counselling service here, for up to 19 years of age and they can access it. They can refer themselves. Do it a lot through school here and they can do it online and answer the questions themselves.' (Participant H)

Remote counselling services were also provided.

'We have students that have phone calls in school. Once a week, we'll book a room and they'll have their counselling over the phone or a FaceTime call.' (Participant H)

Charitable services offering specialist bereavement support were also utilised.

'We used Saint Luke's Bereavement Counselling Service.' (Participant A)

Virtual support from charities was used.

'The apps and text have been quite helpful and they've used that. Quite often they'll go, because they're not allowed their phones, and he'll come and see me. And he'll be like oh can I text? And I know that it is some form of volunteer or counsellor-based as part of these chats that he'll go and chat to.' (Participant H)

Some participants had links to several services that provided specialised support.

'The SENCO has also got a link with a company that provides therapeutic support through poetry and he used that. We've had a company that's provided it through equine therapy. We were lucky enough to be able to put all of these resources together.' (Participant G)

Others used bereavement charities to support their understanding of how to meet pupil's needs and provide resources such training.

'I and some of the other pastoral team have had Winston's Wish training.' (Participant C)

Bereavement charities were also used for consultation services.

'With Young Minds, I was meeting with a caseworker - this is what they labelled themselves as. What would happen is she'd kind of do a little consultancy kind of thing in terms of, if we were talking about grief or mental health and the impact, but we weren't sure which way to take it. She would then turn around and say, well, have you tried this?' (Participant G)

Participants highlighted long waits for support from external services.

'Everything just takes so long to organise for kids and they need to help straight away. That's that is our biggest challenge across any of the issues.' (Participant A)

The majority of participants did not access support from EPs and were unaware that they can provide support for bereavement.

'I don't think it was thought about. It was never mentioned to us. If it had been suggested to us by somebody, then we would have probably would have done. We just never thought of that.' (Participant A)

Others expressed that support from EPs is inaccessible.

'That's impossible to come across as well. I think the waiting lists for that are huge as well. We don't have much luck with educational psychology.' (Participant C)

Participants who did use EPs as a resource (n=3) found supervision and training helpful, particularly in how to communicate with pupils.

'He came in and helped how we communicated as staff around students. So that we could regulate ourselves, but also support around our conversations.' (Participant E)

One participant acknowledged that EPs helped support access to other external support services.

'They would turn around, say, well, it's going to take 6-7 weeks. There was nothing that you could ring up and go and need help. I need you guys to come in. I need you to this has happened. This is massive for us. That wasn't there. We were only lucky because we have an EP, who worked with us throughout that. That's the only reason why we got the support as quickly as we did.' (Participant G)

3.5 Theme 4: Relationships during grief

Summary

A prominent theme was an understanding of the importance of relationships for pupils during bereavement.

'What their friendships actually mean to them, sometimes we don't see it. But the links that those kids have forged and years on, they still catch us out. We have a place in

work and there will be a set of flowers there and I'll go over and I'll go and have a look at it. How they remember and how they became adults.... And just the levels of respect they had for each other, for staff and the family. As awful as moments like that are, it just shows what these young people are capable of and the depth of feeling, the depth of relationships that they form.' (Participant B)

This theme 'Relationships during grief' considers staff understanding of the influence of relationships when providing BSP, as well as how these relationships were supported by staff, and the challenges and supportive factors within this. The theme encompasses four subthemes: 'Staff-pupil relationships as a supporting factor in BSP'; 'Supporting the continued relationship with the peer who has died'; 'Supporting change in relationships and dynamics among peers; and 'Relationships with parents.'

3.5.1 Subtheme 1: Staff-pupil relationships as a supporting factor in BSP

Staff relationships emerged as an important factor in providing BSP. Staff described the importance of being alongside pupils and showing care and support.

'Letting him know that we are here and we understand how in a way how he was feeling.' (Participant H)

It was acknowledged that pupils were more likely to speak to staff that they knew and felt had a similar experience to them.

'He was like, "You get it. You were in the same position as me, you understand it.'"

(Participant G)

A focus on building relationships and trust was seen as an important factor in encouraging pupils to engage in support.

'That's the only thing that's getting them into that room, that level of trust in you.'

(Participant B)

There was an emphasis on ensuring good communication and opportunities to talk with pupils.

'I think the main thing for me that I did was, as I mentioned before, keep talking about it.' (Participant C)

Staff modelling grief and showing their emotional response to the loss of the pupil also emerged as important.

'Sometimes it meant being very raw with them as well. Going, no we're upset, we're struggling.' (Participant B)

Allowing for a continued rapport was also viewed as important for pupils.

'As time goes on, there are still those that touch bases. They'll still occasionally come back to school. They've left now but will come back to touch base. I think that it

becomes a little bit of a bond, they know which staff know why they're there, what they've been through.' (Participant B)

One participant described a rupture in relationships with staff and the subsequent difficulty in repairing this, which eventually led to the pupil experiencing emotional-based school avoidance and very low attendance. This rupture was due to a new pupil joining the class.

'He saw it like a replacement (the new pupil), almost like a betrayal. And he sort of turned against staff then. It was like, how could we let this person into the class? In fact, that September his attendance rapidly decreased.' (Participant E)

Due to experiencing the bereavement themselves, some felt at times that it may not be appropriate to have the role of providing BSP.

'At the time I was like, we need someone external to come in because we're too close to this.' (Participant G)

Relationships with teaching staff were also considered an important factor by some, with one participant suggesting that pupils may be more likely to engage in lessons with teachers they had a better rapport with.

'When you support a young person, talking about which lessons they felt they could cope with on a day-to-day basis, often depended on the relationships with the teacher. When you're trying to encourage them to go to a lesson because they're struggling,

they're having a day where they just can't they're upset, it's like a case of which lessons can we do? Are we going to be OK with this one? Where do we need a break? So, for those young people, it affected their education because I would say they definitely focused on some subjects more than others.' (Participant B)

However, concerns about rapport with teachers were expressed, including the need for honest communication and expression of feelings.

'They needed to actually see their class teachers, their subject teachers...show that vulnerability. Their subject teachers weren't doing that, for the absolute right reasons. But they needed them to go, 'No we're upset, we're struggling. We don't know what's right or wrong. We're tired. We're this,' because it helped them to understand that what they were feeling was just human.' (Participant B)

It was also identified that teaching staff may not have the capacity to provide BSP.

'We had that time to be able to say, "Come with us, come sit with us with a cup of tea or coffee and tell us what's gone on." Teaching staff don't have that time always to do that.' (Participant H)

3.5.2 Subtheme 2: The relationship with the peer who died

A prominent finding was that all participants identified ways that they acknowledged the pupil's death and found ways to facilitate a continuing bond with the person who died for pupils. This was met in several ways across schools.

Wider acknowledgement of the peer's death was made through assemblies,

'We did year group assemblies.' (Participant A)

memorials,

'We've got a tree at the front of the school with a plaque on it that is still looked after every day.' (Participant B)

naming awards after the person who died,

'Our graduation ceremony is named after her and her dad comes in to present it and it's like we are keeping it alive.' (Participant G)

books of condolences,

'This room would be available, there'd be a book of condolence.' (Participant A)

and creative outlets.

'They wrote stories, drawings...They did a lot of social media edits and photos.'
(Participant H)

Some identified the need for pupils to be included in the development of these plans.

'What do we want to do in school? How do we want to remember her? We were very led by them.' (Participant A)

Communication with the family of the peer who died was also understood to be important.

'Their entire thoughts were not around what their own loss was, but the loss of the family that he was involved in and how they could show that family how appreciated he was.' (Participant A)

Participants described facilitating communication with the family of the pupil who died.

'Her form were given cards to write little messages. And in DT she had been making a box. They were all put in the box, which then was given to the family.'

(Participant F)

3.5.3 Subtheme 3: Relationships with peers:

Relationships with peers emerged as a prominent theme. The majority of participants understood peer relationships to be very meaningful for pupils and an important source of support following bereavement.

'It brought them together as a group, I think. They supported each other...I just remember they would sort of sit all around. But some would go off and cry in the corner and someone else go and sit with them and then they come back 10 minutes later.'

(Participant C)

It was understood by some that supporting each other could have an emotional toll on young people.

'Teenagers, sometimes people call them selfish, but it's actually rarely that. Sometimes they will over-support each other.' (Participant B)

Participants identified that pupils required a sense of belonging following a peer-bereavement, which was often found through their peer-groups.

'They needed to be part of a group through this. A group of their peers. They were typical teenagers but they were never someone who was a big school fan, but they needed school at that point. They needed to belong to something.' (Participant B)

This need for belonging and meaning could sometimes lead to vulnerable pupils socialising with groups which were otherwise not a positive influence for them.

'The group of individuals that they hung around were not positive influences. From our perspective, adult perspectives. But in a social bubble, that is what they both went to because their home lives were not great. Their attachment was purely this kind of social youth group, and then there were hierarchies above them. And obviously, those people made them feel loved, made them feel wanted, make them feel supported. So, they didn't just have a friendship, but they had a bond over their backgrounds were not rate and this this this group of individuals were their kind of family.' (Participant E)

The majority of participants reported some disruption in peer dynamics. Some pupils were found to disconnect from peer groups and want to spend time with adults more.

'I think having that access to somebody whenever was very good for them. We never got any work done, but for somebody like him, that some days just would sit and work with us, he'd get a laptop and do it and we'd get the work and he would sit away from everybody else. Because some days he didn't want to talk to anybody. Didn't want to be around the other kids. Didn't want to listen to them. Talk to them.' (Participant H)

This change was attributed to peers' experiences of personal growth and their desire to distance themselves from social groups they no longer wished to be associated with. This reflection followed the death of a peer, leading them to seek out peers who shared their new values.

'It focused her a little bit I think, like I said, she changed her friendship group. She changed her approach to school and I think it probably did contribute to her success in the end. It's a hard thing to say. But I think moving away from the dramas and settling with the friendship groups, I think academically it probably did her good, yeah.' (Participant D)

It was also linked to pupils feeling overwhelmed by their peers' responses to grief.

'We understood that for some they would need that sense of normality and that caused ruptures in friendships because some of the kids just needed a break. They're going, "I just can't cope with them talking about it all the time."' (Participant B)

Some participants identified that peers' responses to grief and understanding of what grief should look like, could be unhelpful for some young people:

'I think she wanted to grieve in her way without them influencing her, and without them telling her how she should be feeling.' (Participant D)

The majority of participants also reported ruptures in peer dynamics. Ruptures were typically related to peers struggling to understand different responses.

'For some, they would need that sense of normality and that caused ruptures in friendships. That idea that grief is different for everyone. For teenagers, that's incredibly difficult to navigate.' (Participant B)

Young people with social communication needs were identified to be particularly vulnerable to this.

'I remember one particular student, possibly on the autism spectrum, but not diagnosed. But I remember him being really, really victimised because he didn't want to join in the kind of very public memorial with the very public show of grief, I guess.'
(Participant F)

There were also examples of peers not seeing a pupil's grief as valid, due to the perceived relationship with the person who died.

'I guess, she was snubbed a little bit by the others because they didn't see that she was as important a griever. 'Well, she wasn't one of her best friends, she doesn't even spend as much time with her, why are you trying? Why are you doing this?' Yeah, it was quite, quite difficult...you know, she felt quite pushed out by some of the other friends, I think.' (Participant D)

To support peer relationships, the majority of staff provided social spaces for pupils to spend time together.

'We gave them different spaces that we maybe wouldn't have usually. Let them make you know, maybe mix in in ways. I remember we set out a specific area of the school that they could go to at breaks or lunch times, and we kept that to a certain friendship group.' (Participant A)

Some reported providing mentoring roles for pupils who were struggling to spend time with pupils their own age.

'We'll give them jobs. Go and do things with the younger kids.' (Participant E)

Group sessions were also used to build relationships.

'So we started with maybe two or three kids, including him, doing a lot of interventions. We've got a lot of sensory rooms and intervention rooms around school. So doing that and doing little mini-games in there and just trying to build those peer relationships back up, you know.' (Participant E)

Restorative sessions were described (n=2) where there were ruptures.

'I did do restoratives. I did do a couple to try and sort of get things cleared a little bit within the friend issues.' (Participant E)

Some also supported pupils to understand different experiences of grief through conversations as they arose.

'It's that, remember what I've told you, there's no right or wrong (way to grieve), that extends to everyone.' (Participant B)

It was considered important for pupils to understand that staff held the responsibility for supporting their peers' emotional wellbeing in school.

'Let us as adults deal with it. Let's get that person the right support. Let's give them another outlet. It doesn't all have to be on you.' (Participant B)

3.5.4 Subtheme 4: Relationships with parents

Relationships with parents and schools were considered important by the majority of participants in supporting bereavement.

'Our biggest tool in our toolbox is deferring to parents.' (Participant B)

Communication with parents was used to identify pupils' needs.

'Being led by their parents, informing their parents, keeping the two-way communication with parents. Them telling us it's a bad day today and so on.'

(Participant A)

However, it was also understood that support from home varied.

'How it was dealt with at home was hugely variable for our students, even those close to him.' (Participant D)

It was understood that a pupil's grief could also be seen as less valid by parents if they did not appear to have a close relationship with the peer who died.

'Some of them, their parents didn't understand why they were so upset because they didn't really know that they were someone that they were friends with. They couldn't understand why it distressed them so much. Because they didn't think that this person was someone that was connected to them.' (Participant H)

With some difficulty communicating with parents about their child's needs.

'Trying to work with the family as well. It was very hard because his Mother was a recovering drug addict. So, they're in and out of care and have sort of care orders and spent time living with Grandma. So, it was a real, real complex affair.' (Participant E)

To support relationships with parents, staff described engaging in lots of communication.

'We speak to the families regularly. I think when you invest your time you form that relationship.' (Participant A)

Having a good understanding of families was also considered helpful.

'A lot of them, it was knowing the family history, which is a benefit of when we have the system that by the time they get to this point in the year, we know them really well.'
(Participant C)

3.6 Theme 5: Navigating grief across exosystemic contexts

Supporting pupils' grief at school was considered to present numerous challenges across various exosystemic contexts. Despite these challenges, participants also noted some supportive factors. This theme considers the following four subthemes: 'Influence of family beliefs, priorities and perspectives.'; 'Wider school community'; 'Influence of local authority and exam boards; 'Media and social media influence on exposure and information dissemination.'

3.6.1 Subtheme 1: Influence of family and social beliefs, priorities and perspectives

Participants expressed an understanding of differences in response between pupils with different social backgrounds. This included pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds being more vulnerable to negative outcomes.

'What we saw from him, he's then completely going off the rails, being even more involved with the police, hanging around with a different group of students because he wasn't hanging around with people from our school anymore...The influence of those other friends that were around him and the fact he was already involved in those kinds of scenarios in the 1st place meant it just got worse and worse and worse...The other boy I mentioned, would never have been in those same circles...I don't think any of his friends would ever have reacted in that way because he wasn't in those same social circles.' (Participant A)

Only one participant demonstrated an understanding that similarity in socio-economic backgrounds may enhance the sense of belonging and connection to the person who died.

'The group of individuals that they hung around were not positive influences. From our perspective, adult perspectives. But in a social bubble, that is what they both went to because their home lives were not great. Their attachment was purely this kind of social youth group, and then there were hierarchies above them. And obviously those people made them feel loved, made them feel wanted, made them feel supported. So, they didn't just have a friendship, but they had a bond over their backgrounds and this group of individuals were their kind of family.' (Participant. E)

One participant suggested that cultural differences may impact pupils' experiences of grief.

'Some cultures it will be, you're allowed to grieve for 30 days, then you have 30 days of, "We don't talk about that person anymore." That sort of thing. So, all of that is playing out in, in, in this sort of dynamic, the different cultures.' (Participant F)

The same participant also considered how pupils' gender and/or sexual identities may impact their bereavement experience.

'This group as well all mostly identified as gender or sexual nonconforming, so some nonbinary, some lesbian. So, their experience of being able to talk to adults about their grief may be quite limited in some ways.' (Participant F)

While some family religious views were identified, pupils' own religious or spiritual beliefs were not a prominent consideration.

'The families were involved with the Baptist Church. They were quite heavily involved in organising the funeral and everything. I don't think either boy went to church, but their families did.' (Participant H)

Some identified that parent views could be a barrier for pupils receiving support from school. This included challenges where parents did not provide consent for their children to engage in BSP.

'Some parents did not want their children to have this support.' (Participant C)

In other instances, parents wanted pupils to focus on education.

'Some parents just wanted...not to ignore it, but they were still focusing on their young person. You've got exams and we're not going to talk about it as much at home.'

(Participant B)

Overall considerations of family beliefs, priorities and cultural background were only considered by some and data regarding how this understanding informed participants' practice was limited.

3.6.2 Subtheme 2: Wider school community

It was recognised that pupils are having to grieve within the context of education and related transitional events, which could serve as a trigger for pupils. Identified triggers included:

Curriculum triggers.

'When you actually start to unpick the curriculum, there are significant parts of it that for students that are experiencing varying types of trauma, but definitely grief, is incredibly traumatic for them to access. They've got to write about things that are difficult for them, so it really sharpened our look at that...we needed to look at those triggers really, really carefully, because that was huge for our young people going into it. So definitely in terms of that obviously it impacted on their ability to revise and focus and across all the year groups as well is that impact in lessons.' (Participant B)

New peers.

'We ended up getting a new a new kid in class and then this boy, who we're talking about, took like a real dislike to this new starter. Because it was thought of almost like a replacement I think...he just could not let it go. Could not let it go at all. He saw it as a replacement, almost like a betrayal. And he sort of turned almost turned against staff then. It was like, how could we let this person to the class and that September his attendance rapidly decreased.' (Participant E)

Anniversaries.

'I guess around, you know, anniversary times and all that kind of thing. Emotions were kind of piled, piling on, piling up. So I think that was probably a trigger as well.'
(Participant A)

Environmental reminders of the person and/or event were also considered to be a trigger.

'They moved rooms to where they would have started as primary. I said it at the time and it has, I think it's been a trigger and it's sort of brought it back. Unfortunately, that kid now doesn't come to school and he's explicitly said, you know, it's over that, he's upset about this boy who died.' (Participant E)

Times of transition events were understood to be a trigger for some pupils, such as year group changes and proms.

'Especially when it was things like changing year groups or changing schools. That was a big... That was when we started to notice it more. Because they were saying, 'Well, this pupil isn't here, this pupil isn't here to see this.' I think as they then started to experience these things without their friend, things like the change in schools they're turning 12, they're turning 13, 'my friend isn't there.' And I think that their feeling was that kind of cements the missing feeling of someone not being there.' (Participant D)

Adaptations and negotiation around lessons were found to be helpful with this.

'It's a case of which lessons can we do? Are we going to be OK with this one? Where do we need a break?' (Participant B)

Providing adaptations to lessons was found to support curriculum triggers.

'Our English team were brilliant because the day after there was a scheduled revision session on Romeo and Juliet and they flipped it on a switch.' (Participant B)

Some participants described memorials and events to acknowledge anniversaries. One participant from a specialist provision noted that pupils often experienced dysregulation during memorial events.

'We put on like a football event for the memory of this kid. The lead-up to that was crisis behaviour. It happened in Year 8, now they're in Year 11. And every time it comes to that time of year it's hard. This class still went into crisis over the event.' (Participant E)

3.6.3 Subtheme 3: Local authority and exam boards

It was recognised that pupils' grief is impacted by wider systems related to their education. Participants expressed frustrations with contradictions between what they felt was appropriate for pupils' grief and wellbeing, and the wider systemic pressures such as limited resources within the local authority.

'It felt like, having said to the young people there's no time frame for grief, there's no right or wrong way to grieve, that wasn't the message that came through from the local authority. Because it was, you can have support for this long and then it's gone. And that wasn't long. It wasn't like anyone checked in on us three months down the line or six months down the line on the anniversary or birthdays. No one. We felt that as a school, we observed all of those moments, but we didn't get that from the LA. So while as human you go, there's no time scale for grief. That's not the other side of it. There is, apparently.' (Participant B)

Participants also highlighted the need to balance BSP with the pressures of pupil's educational attainment.

'In terms of education, it becomes counterproductive because you give them lots of time and then actually you need to start withdrawing that. If they're spending all their time with us, they're not in their lessons. If they're not in their lessons, they're not learning, they've become more behind, and then, we're back to square one with them being anxious.' (Participant A)

One participant highlighted particular complexities relating to needing to provide evidence to exam boards on how they had identified pupils who had been most affected.

'We had ridiculous situations where we had to put into the exam board ranking lists of who had been affected and how. How close they were to this young person. So, that the exam board could decide how many dispensations each group got. So we had to look really closely at relationships between the students and the young person.'
(Participant B)

3.6.4 Subtheme 4: Media and social media influence on exposure and information dissemination

Social media and traditional media were considered to be challenging in the context of BSP by some participants. It was understood to make controlling information incredibly difficult, making containment harder to achieve. Staff also often learnt of the death through social media.

'The deputy head had found out from a member of staff from social media. So, we weren't in control of the knowledge that was out there. The news was out there. So, we were very much flying by the seat of our pants.' (Participant B)

One participant described differences in access to social media impacting pupils' responses.

'She hadn't seen it on social media. She came to school completely unknowing that this had happened. So, she was really upset I think because she couldn't believe it. She thought it was a wind-up.' (Participant F)

Social media was considered to increase the exposure of bereavement to pupils, with several participants also discussing how the deaths of pupils from other schools impacted their own cohort of pupils (n=3).

'Now none of us knew this young person and I think a lot of the students that came into us, you would argue that they probably didn't know him either. But because of social-media being what it is, they were aware of him, they knew.' (Participant A)

One participant also highlighted particular difficulties relating to reporting in the media, which subsequently meant staff were unable to discuss the death, which had an impact on their emotional well-being.

'The other hard aspect was, it was in the media, which had a massive impact on staff...To begin with, until it hit the headlines, we weren't allowed to talk about it. So I was told, and then I was told you can't tell anyone. So, I can't tell my family, I can't tell my friends. I was actually on holiday with one of my friends when I got told and I was in tears and she was like, why are you crying? I was like, well, I can't tell you. So, the first couple of weeks were hard.' (Participant G)

Social media was also seen to be a facilitative tool to support pupils' connection to the person who died.

'They did a lot of social media edits and photos. I would let them show me all these photos.' (Participant F)

Participants provided limited descriptions of how social media/media concerns were addressed. Some held assemblies to formally deliver the news and acknowledge the death.

'I had to tell each year group. I was leading the assemblies with the principal. We'd sort of tag-teamed it.' (Participant C)

Others provided retrospective reflection regarding roles and procedures.

'There's the logistics like what the head needs to do. We got very little support as staff as to knowing what to do.' (Participant B)

3.7 Summary of findings

In summary, five key themes emerged from the data which are encapsulated by an overarching concept of pastoral staff guiding pupils through their shared grief across different contexts and challenges. Participants recognised varied grief experiences for peer-bereaved pupils. These experiences were understood to be influenced by contextual factors such as the context of the death and the relationship with the person who died. Participants also identified several intrapersonal factors that may impact grief responses, including the pupils' limited experiences of grief, adolescent development, neurodevelopmental or mental health differences and social

disadvantage. The supportive role of relationships was considered to be important. A number of strategies to support peer-bereaved pupils and bereaved staff were also presented. A particular strength was staff's understandings of the importance of continuing bonds with the peer who died, with all staff describing ways that this was facilitated. Staff confidence, staff capacity and resource limitations were identified as particular challenges in meeting needs. Challenges and supportive factors when providing BSP were considered, including family dynamics, school environment, local authorities, exam boards, media and social media. Furthermore, a lack of systematic procedure for identifying and addressing bereavement needs was identified. These findings are explored further within the discussion chapter.

4. Discussion

4.1 Introduction

While schools have a pivotal role in supporting bereaved pupils (McLaughlin et al., 2019), there is a lack of comprehensive research on staffs' understandings of pupils' grief and their current BSP practices. Existing studies primarily focus on teachers' roles in supporting parentally bereaved pupils, leading to significant gaps in this area of research regarding other forms of bereavement. In particular, there is limited understanding of the perspectives and practices of pastoral staff, the implementation of BSP in secondary schools and the BSP for peer-bereaved pupils. This study explored how secondary school pastoral staff understand and respond to adolescent grief following a peer's death, including both challenges and supportive factors in providing BSP in this context. The discussion addresses the research questions using the BTHD model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) as the conceptual framework. Additionally, the discussion considers how the study's findings relate to and expand upon existing research on BSP in UK schools. Implications for EPs are also explored, followed by consideration of the study's strengths and limitations. The chapter concludes with suggestions for future research directions.

4.2 Summary of main findings

Significant variability was identified in the understandings and practices of pastoral staff, which was influenced by their diverse experiences, training and access to resources. Despite this variability, several consistent understandings emerged. One important finding was that participants recognised pupils often looked to school staff to model appropriate responses. This was attributed to the pupils' developmental stage and their limited experience with grief.

While supportive relationships were considered to be valuable for peer-bereaved pupils, staff expressed uncertainty about their ability to provide adequate support and felt a subsequent need for the involvement of external services. Peer support was also considered to be important, though disruptions in peer dynamics following a bereavement were noted.

Additionally, some participants acknowledged their limited understandings of social and communication needs in the context of peer-bereavement. Cultural, religious, and spiritual needs of pupils were often overlooked by pastoral staff. Furthermore, managing mass emotional reactions was especially challenging and overwhelming for staff, particularly as they were also experiencing the bereavement. Pupils who had SEMH needs or who experienced social disadvantage were also found to be particularly vulnerable to negative outcomes, with participants reporting differing levels of effectiveness in meeting their needs.

The findings are discussed further below in relation to each research question. Given the limited research in this area, comparisons are made with international studies of BSP for peer-bereaved pupils, as well as UK studies on BSP for parentally bereaved pupils.

4.3 RQ1: How is adolescent grief understood by secondary school pastoral staff?

The findings indicated that most pastoral staff lack formal training on adolescent grief, supporting prior studies that have demonstrated there is insufficient bereavement training for UK schools (Akerman and Statham, 2011; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015; Lynam et al., 2019). In the absence of comprehensive bereavement training, participants were found to draw on personal bereavement experiences and their roles as parents to support peer-bereaved pupils. Studies have highlighted that staff's personal bereavement experiences can enhance their empathy for bereaved pupils, making them better equipped to provide BSP (Holland, 2008; Lowton & Higginson, 2003; Dimery and Templeton, 2021). However, while such practices may support staff efficacy, they also have potential implications, including impact on staff wellbeing, concerns about professional boundaries and the capacity for staff to consider the diverse experiences of pupils. This could lead to inadequate support for pupils.

Participants demonstrated some differences in their understandings of adolescent grief, reflecting the diversity in training, backgrounds, and experiences. Various insights expressed by participants aligned with established grief models. Notably, some participants highlighted that grieving pupils may experience positive changes, such as adopting new values, changing social groups, recovering from addiction, focusing on studies, or aiming to become positive role models. These understandings

align with growth concepts and related models such as Post-Traumatic Growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) and Grief to Growth (Hogan & Schmidt, 2002), and echo findings from the Papadatou et al.'s (2018) study of adolescents' peer-bereavement experiences.

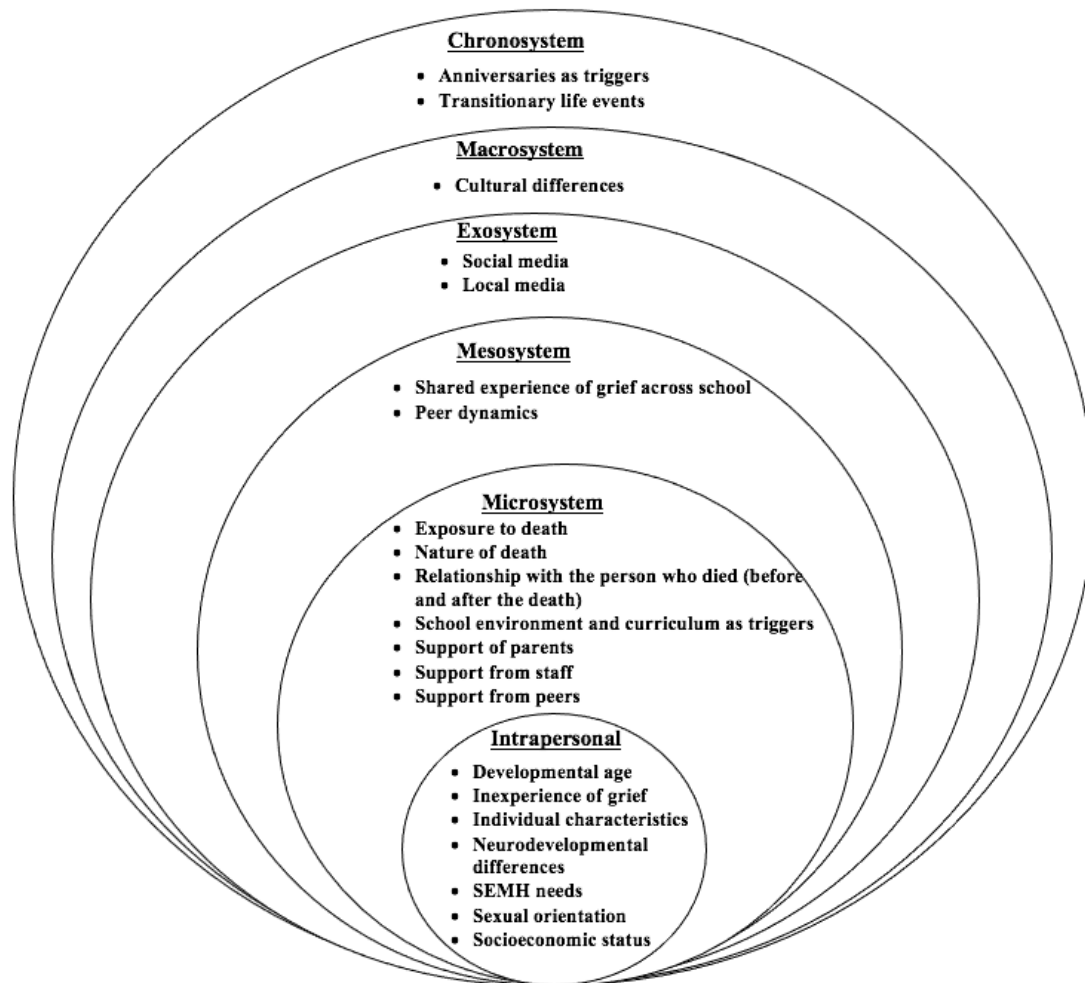
Participants also recognised that pupils may oscillate between appearing calm or avoiding their grief and being very emotional. This grief response can be conceptualised by the Dual Process Model of Grief (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). A similar finding was made by Lane et al. (2014) who found that teachers often adjust their responses according to the fluctuating needs of parentally bereaved pupils. Furthermore, participants identified broader frameworks such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1987) recognising that sudden or violent deaths can affect some pupils' physical needs and potentially impair their ability to engage in schoolwork and social interactions.

Additionally, participants recognised pupils may have overwhelming emotional responses, highlighting the role of staff in providing a trusting relationship to contain and support this, consistent with concepts of Bion's Model of Containment (1983) and the findings of research from Costelloe et al., (2019).

The recognition that pupils benefit from finding ways to honour and remember the person who died reflects concepts within the Continuing Bonds Theory (Klass et al., 1996), which highlights the importance of individuals maintaining connections with the person who died as part of the grieving process. Research by Hart & Garza (2013) also supports that school staff have some understanding of the importance of continuous bonds.

Consistent with prior studies (Costelloe et al.,2020; Dimery & Templeton, 2021; Arsksey & Greidanus, 2022), participants recognised experiences of grief to be unique and context dependent. Notably, variations across pupils' contexts were understood by some participants to contribute to differing grief trajectories, with pupils with strong social connections found to experience more positive outcomes than others. This further aligns with the Grief to Growth model (Hogan & Schmidt, 2002), which highlights the role of relationships in supporting pupils' growth following a bereavement. Participants' understandings of the contextual factors that may impact pupils' grief are further considered across the intrapersonal (within the individual), microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and chronosystem of the BTHD framework (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). (See Figure 4).

Figure 3. Pastoral staff understandings of the contextual factors that may impact adolescent grief across the BTHD



4.3.1 Intrapersonal system understandings

Pastoral staff recognised that the age and developmental stage of an individual impacts their comprehension of death and grief responses. Similar findings are echoed by Dimery and Templeton (2010) who noted that primary school teachers' BSP responses were influenced by the developmental stages of the parentally bereaved children they supported. The present study expands on this by highlighting pastoral staff's awareness of developmental age differences across older year groups, with particular recognition of variances among early and middle adolescence. Younger

pupils (Year 7-9) were understood to take longer to process the finality of death, leading to potential 'postponed grief,' while older pupils (Year 10-11) were understood to be more expressive and seek autonomy in their responses. These observations align with existing discussions of adolescent grief (Balk et al., 2011; Dyregrov et al., 2015; Ribbens McCarthy, 2007).

Additionally, a significant finding was that pastoral staff understood that pupils were in a state of 'learning to grieve,' with associated concerns as to whether their feelings and responses are typical. Participants linked pupils' uncertainty with their developmental stage and lack of grief experiences. Interestingly, this contrasts with Ribbens McCarthy's (2007) article regarding adolescent bereavement, which suggested that confusion about grief processes often arises when the young person's bereavement is not acknowledged. The discrepancy in findings could potentially be due to the evolving understanding and educational approaches to grief over the 16-year gap between the studies. The findings of the present study suggest that adolescents' confusion about grief extends beyond situations where grief is not acknowledged and is rooted in their lack of prior experiences.

Grief was also retrospectively understood to be a non-linear process for pupils, with long-lasting impacts and varied emotional expressions, dependent on the pupil's individual experience. Participants also recognised pupils may move between actively expressing their grief to avoiding exploration of it, as expressed in the Dual Process Model of Grief (Stroebe & Schut, 1999) and noted by Lane et al., (2014). This contrasted with some participants' initial expectations that grief would be experienced in distinct phases, such as the Kübler-Ross (1969) five stages of grief theory.

A further unique finding of this study is that some participants acknowledged a gap in understanding how grief manifests for pupils with SEMH or social and communication needs. This gap included challenges in distinguishing whether emerging needs were related to the bereavement or to pre-existing needs and/or neurodevelopmental differences. Some participants expressed frustration at their subsequent inability to effectively support these pupils, feeling that this limitation had a negative impact on outcomes. This finding corresponds with Mirick & Berkowitz's (2023) study, which found that peer-bereaved pupils perceived school staff to lack empathy for marginalised pupils, suggesting that such pupils do not receive sufficient support. Although the study does not offer a definition of marginalised pupils, it can be reasonably assumed that pupils with social and communication needs or SEMH needs could be considered marginalised. While it is recognised that adolescents with less developed social skills may experience loneliness and isolation during bereavement (Balk, 2011), there is currently a dearth of research on how to meet these needs in the context of UK schools. Subsequently, pupils with SEMH or social communication needs may be at particular risk of not receiving appropriate BSP following a peer-bereavement.

4.3.2 Microsystem understandings

Several contextual factors were understood to influence pupils' grief responses, including the circumstances of the death and their exposure to this. This finding aligns with Dimery & Templeton's (2021) study on teachers' BSP for parentally bereaved pupils. The effect of the nature of the death on peer-bereaved pupils is also evident in Hart & Garza's (2022) study, where teaching staff acknowledged a significant impact

on school communities following the sudden death of a pupil. In contrast, the present study uniquely considers both anticipated and sudden pupil deaths, revealing that both types of death can shock pupils and trigger reactions throughout the school community. However, grief responses and outcomes were also understood to vary between anticipated and sudden deaths. For example, pastoral staff noted physical manifestations of grief for some pupils following a sudden or violent death. This could be linked to the increased risk of traumatic grief following sudden deaths (Doka, 2016) and the potential for more severe and enduring effects following exposure to such an event (Greenway, 2005). These findings align with Dyregrov's (2009) suggestion that sudden deaths of peers or parents can lead to sleep disturbances, reduced appetite and physical illness among bereaved pupils.

Participants acknowledged the school environment may act as a 'trigger' for pupils, reminding them of their loss. Although previous studies have acknowledged environmental triggers within schools (Costelloe et al., 2020; Arksey & Greidanus, 2022), they have not considered this in the specific contexts of adolescent grief and peer-bereavement. For instance, Costelloe et al. (2020) found that primary school teachers recognised school environments as potentially triggering for parentally bereaved pupils. The present study identifies distinct secondary school triggers including GCSE curriculum topics and transitional milestones, such as exams and proms, that directly remind pupils of the loss of their peer. This is significant as an awareness of the unique triggers for secondary school contexts could contribute to creating more compassionate and understanding school environments for peer-bereaved adolescents.

Environmental triggers have also been identified by Arksey & Greidanus (2022), who found that teachers perceive their schools to be a place of loss when supporting peer-bereaved pupils. However, this finding pertains to teacher's experiences of school as their workplace, not the pupils' experiences of school as their place of study. In contrast, the present study found that pastoral staff consider these triggers within the context of the pupils' experiences. This difference in findings may be due to variations in the research designs of the studies. The present study aimed to explore pastoral staff's understandings of peer-bereaved pupils' grief, whereas Arksey & Greidanus' (2022) study focused on teachers' experiences following the violent death of one of their pupils, with less emphasis placed on their understandings of the pupils' grief. This disparity further highlights the need to expand research on bereavement in schools to encompass various perspectives and contexts experiences by those affected by a death in a school community.

While grief was understood to be influenced by many contextual and environmental factors, the majority of participants overlooked cultural or religious aspects of pupils' grief. Similar findings are also presented in Abraham-Steele & Edmonds's (2021) study, which provided an exploration of staff perspectives on providing BSP for parentally bereaved primary school pupils. However, a key difference in the present study is its focus on peer-bereavement. This distinction is important because cultural and religious values may influence how pupils relate to the peer who has died, thereby affecting their subsequent grief responses. Neglecting to consider these religious and spiritual beliefs could also affect pupils' ability to find meaning following a death. Balk (2011) emphasises that grieving adolescents often reflect on their beliefs over time, with many reporting that religion and spiritual development play an important role in

their adaptation and healing. Research indicates that meaning-making can lead positive outcomes for peer-bereaved adolescents, including experiences of post-traumatic growth (Papadatou et al., 2018; Mirick & Berkowitz, 2023), with engagement in religious and spiritual beliefs supporting this process (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). To adequately facilitate pupil's growth, it is essential that school staff are able to understand and identify factors that may support meaning-making for pupils and provide support accordingly. The finding that pastoral staff may overlook cultural or religious factors in peer-bereaved pupils' grief highlights the need to address these particular gaps in schools' BSP practices.

4.3.3 Mesosystem understandings

Pastoral staff recognised the supportive role of relationships for bereaved pupils, with consideration of relationships with school staff, parents and peers. While previous research has highlighted the importance of parental support for peer-bereaved adolescents (Papadatou et al., 2018), a novel insight from this study is that pastoral staff identified challenges within this area. It was noted that some parents may struggle to recognise the relevance of a peer's death for their child or view it as a distraction from their academic work, potentially leading to disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1989).

The importance of relationships with staff was also acknowledged and understood through the lens of attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1969). Participants descriptions also resonated with Bion's containment model (1983) and the principles of PFA (Aucott & Soni, 2006), which propose a need for non-intrusive support and a safe environment for those who have experienced a traumatic event. These findings are also consistent

with Costelloe et al.'s (2019) study, which emphasised the importance of attuned and trusting relationships between school staff and parentally bereaved pupils.

Furthermore, this study reinforces previous research findings that highlight the significance of supportive peer relationships for bereaved pupils (Holland,2001; Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Papadatou et al., 2018; Mirick & Berkowitz, 2023). Uniquely, this study found that staff observe pupils assuming responsibility for caring for their bereaved peers emotional needs, which can be overwhelm them. Pastoral staff emphasised the importance of clarifying to pupils that this is the responsibility of the supporting adults. This finding differs from Dimery and Templeton's (2021) suggestions in their study of parentally bereaved pupils, where encouraging and guiding pupils to support their bereaved peers was proposed. The findings of the presents study indicate that this suggestion is less feasible and ethical in the context of a collective peer-bereavement. This further reiterates the importance of researching BSP across varied contexts.

This study also presents staff perspectives of disruption in peer dynamics, as pupils may struggle to accept some peer's grief responses, due to their limited understanding of the different ways this could present. This can place pupils at risk of experiencing disenfranchised grief (Doka,1989). Additionally, participants' recognised instances of peer withdrawal, which aligns with findings from Papadatou et al. (2018) and Mirick & Berkowitz (2023).

A unique finding from this study is that the majority of pastoral staff noted that bereaved pupils may view both staff and peers as models for grieving, as they are

engaged in a process of learning about grief. While one finding in Hart and Garza's (2012) study suggested that teachers could have a potential role as models for grieving, this was mentioned by only one participant and does not feature within the discussion of the study. Moreover, no other study highlights peers as potential models for grieving. This unique insight can likely be attributed to this study being the only exploration of pastoral staff perspectives on supporting peer-bereaved pupils in UK secondary schools. This is significant because, unlike parentally bereaved pupils who experience individual losses, peer-bereaved pupils face shared grief collectively. This shared experience increases their exposure to various bereavement responses from both peers and staff, potentially leading pupils to look to these responses as models for their own grieving process.

4.3.4 Macrosystem, Exosystem and Chronosystem understandings

Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, (2021) noted that schools often overlook the influence of culture on children and adolescents' grief experiences. Their study found that teachers showed differing levels of awareness and consideration of cultural and social differences when supporting bereaved children. Similarly, in the present study, while some staff acknowledged the significance of these factors, the majority did not, particularly regarding cultural differences.

Moreover, Abraham-Steele and Edmonds (2021) found socio-economic disparities in accessing bereavement services, with teachers recognising that low-income families face barriers compared to fee-paying schools, who had continuous support available. Children from lower- income families were found to experience longer wait times and received less proactive support. Social differences were also acknowledged in the

present study, with staff noting that socially disadvantaged pupils, such as those with social care involvement, may be especially prone to social withdrawal following peer-bereavement. While prior research acknowledges social withdrawal among peer-bereaved pupils (Papadatou et al., 2018), it does not provide insights into the perspectives and practices of supporting adults within schools. Furthermore, participants in the present study observed that pupils from socially-disadvantaged backgrounds may be more susceptible to experiencing negative outcomes, which was often associated with social withdrawal or seeking belonging within social groups that were not considered to be positive influences. In the context of the Grief to Growth model (Hogan & Schmidt, 2002) social withdrawal could impede pupil's ability to engage in healthy coping mechanisms that are understood to support growth, including receiving necessary social support to construct positive meaning from their loss. The subsequent isolation from social withdrawal could prolong pupils grieving process and increase the risk of developing complicated grief.

Within the exosystem, societal influence through social media was found to increase bereavement exposure, meaning that those who were not close to the person who died were still affected by their death. The role of social media in this context is also recognised in research by Mirick & Berkowitz (2023) and is discussed further in the relevant sections of this paper.

At a chronosystemic level, pastoral staff acknowledged the lasting impact of grief, particularly on anniversaries, which may increase the need for support. This echoes similar findings from Abraham-Steele & Edmonds, (2021).

4.3.5 Summary

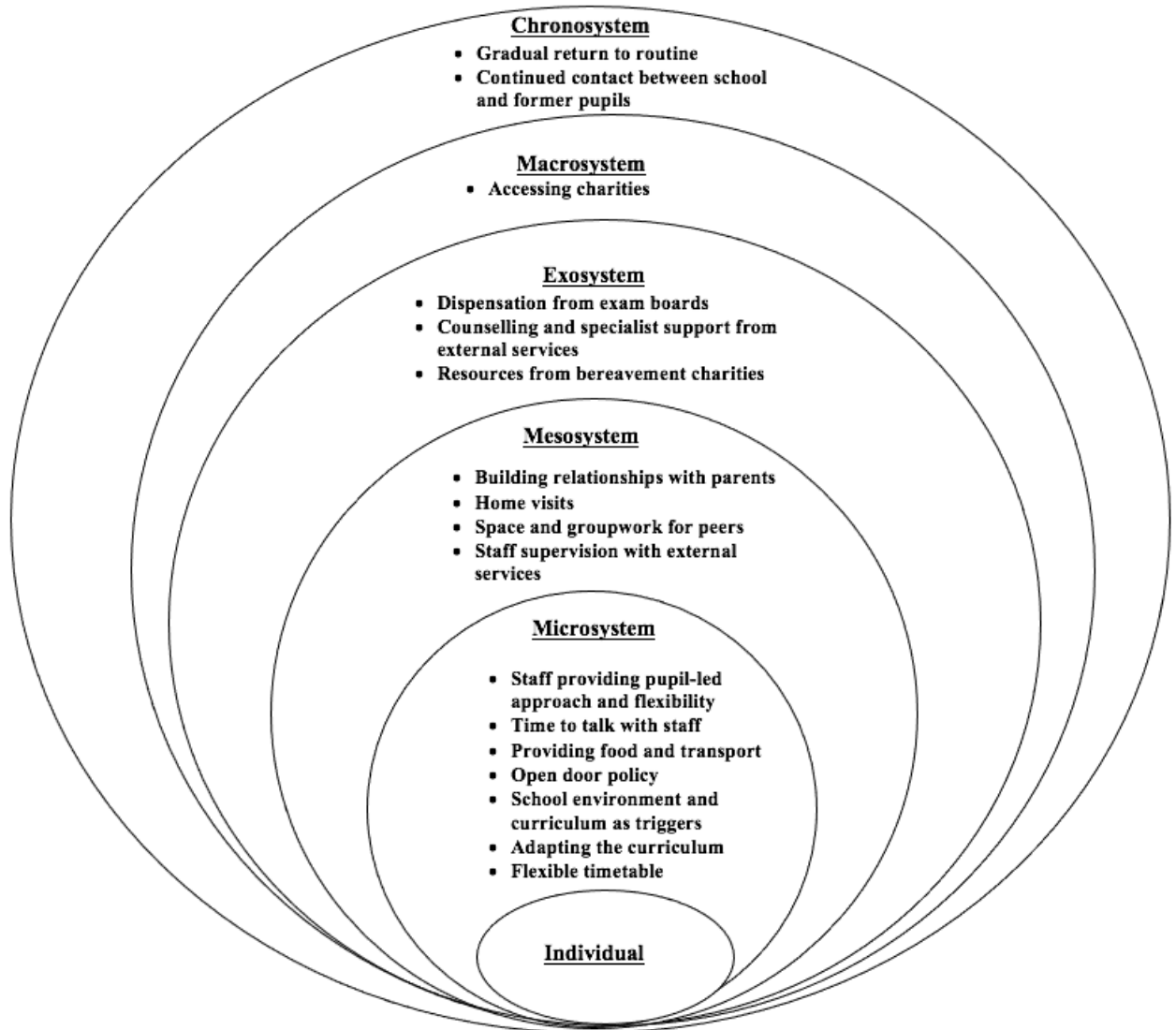
This is the first study to explore perceptions of adolescent grief among pastoral staff in UK secondary schools. Findings reveal that staff have varied understandings and beliefs about bereavement, dependent on personal and professional experiences. Notably, pastoral staff recognise peer-bereaved pupils' inexperience in grief may lead them to look to others as models for grieving. Pupils were perceived to be particularly vulnerable to postponed grief (due to their developmental understanding of death) and disenfranchised grief (from parents' or peers' reactions). However, gaps were identified in pastoral staff's knowledge of the grief responses of pupils with SEMH needs and social communication needs, such as Autism or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and cultural and religious differences were also overlooked. This gap may also place pupils at risk of experiencing disenfranchised grief, where their grief and individual experiences may go unrecognised, potentially leading to unresolved grief (Doka, 1989). This is pertinent, as unresolved grief can result in traumatic experiences for pupils (Hart and Garza, 2012; Mirick & Greidanus, 2023). Consequently, there is a need for staff to have a comprehensive understanding of adolescent grief across contexts to ensure appropriate BSP is offered in schools.

4.4 RQ2 How do the understandings of secondary school pastoral staff guide their BSP for peer-bereaved pupils?; RQ3 How do secondary school pastoral staff support bereaved pupils following the death of a peer?

RQ2 and RQ3 have been synthesised in this discussion due to their related nature. RQ2 addresses the ways in which the espoused understandings of staff were operationalised to support pupils. RQ3 covers broader BSP practices beyond staff understandings.

Although the majority of pastoral staff did not cite specific grief and psychological models, related concepts emerged in their responses and were identified by the researcher. The following provides a discussion of the implementation of BSP by pastoral staff based on their understandings. Comparisons are drawn from research that have explored staff understanding of grief or their BSP practices. This discussion contextualises findings with the BTHD (Bronfrenbrenner, 2005), (See Figure 5).

Figure 4. Provision to support pupils bereavement needs across the BTHD



4.4.1 Individual System

Understanding and identifying needs

Participants demonstrated an understanding of the diverse needs of peer-bereaved pupils, recognising variations in social and developmental needs, as well as individual experiences related to the death and the relationship with the person who died. However, when discussing their BSP practices, most participants focused on ways they had supported pupils who had close friendships with the person who died, suggest this may be a prioritised criterion for identifying need. Additionally, the

majority of participants described assessing the closeness of the pupil's relationship with the peer who died, to determine the level of support required.

Furthermore, pastoral staff demonstrated understanding that some bereaved pupils may struggle to communicate their needs. This reinforces findings from a much earlier study of peer-bereavement (Rosen, 1984) as referenced by McCarthy & Jessop, 2005 (2005). However, in the present study, pastoral staff primarily relied on self-identification by pupils, parental input, and their own knowledge of pupils. Notably, there were no outlined methods for identifying the needs of bereaved students who may struggle to communicate their need for support. Pastoral staff also reported using ad-hoc approaches without a systematic plan to identify the needs of pupils, a finding congruent with previous research (Holland, 2003; Holland, 2008; Tracey & Holland, 2008; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015; Holland & McLennan, 2015). A lack of proactive planning risks vulnerable pupils in need of BSP being overlooked.

Research on how schools identify bereaved pupils and their need for BSP is limited and there is no established approach in the UK. Existing studies suggest that teachers may lack clarity on identifying bereaved pupils in need of support (Costelloe et al., 2022). The present study's findings differ somewhat. While pastoral staff understood factors that may influence bereavement needs, they did not consistently apply this knowledge when identifying pupils requiring support. This inconsistency may be due to the retrospective awareness demonstrated by some staff, as noted by Participant E, who expressed a desire for earlier training to aid in identification of need.

Despite school staff being well positioned to recognise if pupils are struggling to cope

following a bereavement (Dyregrov et al., 2015), findings from this study suggest they lack adequate support and that processes for identifying these needs are limited. This is concerning as there is evidence to suggest that identifying bereaved pupils can enable school staff to adapt their interactions and BSP to meet needs accordingly (Costelloe et al., 2020).

The findings of this study further highlight that pastoral staff require prior training and resources to effectively identify the bereavement needs of pupils. There is a breadth of research to suggest that school staff benefit from proactive measures through bereavement support policies (Holland, 1993, 2008, 2016; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015; Lytje, 2017; McLaughlin et al. 2019; Abraham-Steele; 2019) and such policies could be utilised to include guidelines for identifying need. Such guidelines would need to be informed by the varying factors that are known to affect pupils' bereavement responses. For example, the developmental age of the CYP (Ribbens McCarthy, 2007), cultural context (McLaughlin et al. 2019), locality and socio-economic circumstances (Ribbens McCarthy, 2007), the relationship with the deceased and the nature of their death (Dowdney, 2008) and protective and risk factors before the death such as the CYP's personality and gender (Holland, 2008).

Diverse, varying needs and pupil-led approaches

Recognising the diverse needs of pupils informed the implementation of person-centred approaches in providing BSP. This was also observed in Arksey and Greidanus' study (2023), which emphasised a need for teachers to demonstrate flexibility when providing BSP. The present study found that pastoral staff adapt their practices to accommodate pupils' fluctuating needs, such as implementing open-door

policies and offering regular check-ins for pupils to talk as needed. Communication with parents also enabled pastoral staff to make accommodations based on the evolving needs of pupils, reflecting Lane et al.'s (2013) findings that teachers adapt BSP strategies to support the varying grief responses of parentally bereaved pupils.

As previously explored, challenges were identified in understanding and supporting the bereavement needs of pupils with social communication and SEMH needs. Nevertheless, some participants recognised instances where pupils with SEMH, social communication needs or social disadvantage experienced emotional-based school avoidance (EBSA) following a bereavement. This vulnerability to EBSA during a peer-bereavement aligns with Papadatou et al.'s. (2018) observation that peer-bereaved pupils tend to withdraw socially. This emphasises the importance of schools developing interventions to minimise social isolation following a significant bereavement for pupils. In addressing EBSA needs after a peer-bereavement, participants from this study found some success in maintaining connections with the pupil and their parents through regular home visits.

Learning to grieve and staff as models

A significant finding of the study was that pastoral staff perceive pupils as engaged in a process of 'learning to grieve' following the death of a peer, with recognition that pupils may subsequently look to staff as models for grieving. To address this learning need, pastoral staff implemented several strategies. They acknowledged that pupils' may view them as role models, so prioritised communicating openly about their own grief experiences, demonstrating honesty and transparency to normalise the grieving experience. This approach aligns with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which

emphasises the influence of learning through observation and the importance of role models in shaping behaviours. This finding highlights the importance of school staff recognising and addressing this aspect of social learning during young people's bereavement experiences, to support them to navigate their grief.

Offering pupils reassurance, answering questions, and sharing personal experiences of bereavement were also considered important strategies by pastoral staff. These strategies align with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978), by providing scaffolding to help pupils bridge the gap between their current understanding and new insights in relation to bereavement, an area in which they have limited experience. The findings suggest that pastoral staff perceive self-disclosure as a helpful strategy for supporting bereaved pupils. However, consideration is needed of both the benefits and risks associated with self-disclosure. For instance, while pupils may value shared personal experiences, staff could feel distress through this process, particularly if they have not yet processed their own experiences of grief (Lynam et al., 2019). A further risk is that an inappropriate disclosure of highly personal information could be made by pastoral staff, which could negatively impact pupils. Additionally, staff risk inadvertently projecting their experiences on to pupils, potentially limiting their ability to acknowledge pupils' diverse experiences. Consequently, this may hinder the normalisation of grief that pastoral staff aim to achieve. As there is no formal therapeutic training for pastoral staff, understanding of the issue of self-disclosure is likely limited. Therefore, support from professionals trained in therapeutic approaches would support pastoral staff in determining when to use self-disclosure and in separating their own feeling from those of pupils, allowing for healthy processing of emotions and experiences.

Understanding and addressing the impact on pupil's needs

Pastoral staff recognised that some pupils' physical needs were impacted by grief and this was supported through providing food, rest, and ensuring that pupils felt safe in school. Communication with parents was also considered important in ensuring that the physical needs of pupils were understood. Some participants also supported pupils' addiction issues by facilitating referrals for specialised support. Furthermore, strategies to support educational, emotional and social needs were also described. While these concepts are related to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) they also related to Balk's holistic framework (2011), which directly highlights the importance of meeting six dimensions of need for peer-bereaved pupils: physical, cognitive, behavioural, emotional, interpersonal and spiritual.

The findings suggest that participants tended to observe and provide support for physical needs in cases of sudden or violent deaths and subsequent trauma. This supports Papadatou et al's. (2016) findings that pupils may struggle with sleep disturbances and insecurity following the sudden deaths of peers. In the present study, staff were found to provide their own resources to support pupils. Subsequently, supporting staff to meet these needs is important. For example, free school meals or transport subsidisation as part of co-ordinated critical incident support for schools may help to promote overall health and wellbeing of pupils following a bereavement. This may be particularly relevant for socio-economically disadvantaged pupils.

Addressing the physical needs of pupils lacked a systematic approach, as described by participants, who provided self-initiated support based on their observations of pupils' physical needs. Inconsistencies across staff members' capacity to offer this

may affect pupils BSP experiences. This further emphasises the need for proactive development of school bereavement plans and policies to identify strategies to meet pupils' bereavement needs, as highlighted in the literature (Holland, 2003; Holland, 2008; Tracey & Holland, 2008; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015; Holland & McLennan, 2015).

Understanding and supporting growth and meaning-making

Some participants described the experience of pupils making meaning of the bereavement event as well as other aspects relating to concepts of growth (Hogan & Schmidt, 2002). Pupils who expressed to staff that they wished to improve their lives and be better roles models were supported through the implementation of buddy systems and mentoring younger pupils. Additionally, where appropriate, staff supported and encouraged pupils' academic success (See '4.4.4. Exosystem' for further discussion). While one participant also advocated for pupils to be encouraged to focus on positives, research by Papadatou et al. (2018) suggests that pressure to 'move on' can trigger anger for peer-bereaved adolescents, highlighting the importance in allowing growth to occur organically at a pace led by pupils. A nuanced approach is needed, as perceived pressure to adopt positive outlooks could prove upsetting and counterproductive for pupils. This highlights the necessity for pastoral staff to receive psychoeducation on meaning-making and concepts of growth (Hogan and Schmidt, 2002) to ensure they are equipped to support pupils effectively with this process.

While religious and spiritual beliefs are recognised to support some people with the development of meaning-making and growth following a bereavement (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Papadatou et al., 2018), the influence of these beliefs were overlooked

in schools. Although some participants recognised certain religious differences for pupils, these beliefs did not significantly affect their BSP practice. Similarly, Abraham and Steele (2019) noted that teachers acknowledged the role of religious differences in coping with death but did not give an indication as to how these differences may affect their BSP responses. Furthermore, the findings of the present study suggest pastoral staff may struggle with emerging religious or spiritual beliefs for bereaved pupils. Notably, understanding and support for religious or spiritual beliefs were underreported by participants. Where some participants did recognise pupils' emerging spiritual beliefs, responses varied with staff providing reassurance, sharing their own views or providing no response. Possible approaches could follow the advice of Dyregrov et al. (2020), who propose that schools communicate with families to understand their beliefs, allowing for exploration of this with pupils. Additionally, it is suggested that school staff redirect questions about beliefs back to pupils, rather than imposing their own beliefs.

These findings are significant as they highlight a potentially overlooked and under-supported aspect of adolescent grief. Given the cultural diversity in the UK, with various religious beliefs and a significant portion of the population holding none, there may be less familiarity with individual's beliefs and a lack of awareness in how to provide related support. This highlights the need for staff to be supported to develop confidence to sensitively address this area of bereavement.

4.4.2 Microsystem

Environmental triggers and demonstrating flexibility

To support environmental triggers for grieving pupils, pastoral staff emphasised adaptable and flexible practice, echoing principles found in Dyregov et al's. (2015) study from Norway of school staff perspectives of BSP for bereaved pupils. Similar practices identified in the research were found in the present study, including adjustments to timetables, lesson content and spaces to withdraw to.

Some participants described experiences where environmental triggers had been overlooked. This included new pupils joining the school, who may be seen as 'replacing' those that had died, as well as working in classrooms that held emotional significance for pupils. These identified triggers are consistent with environmental challenges outlined by Balk et al. (2011) and Costelloe et al. (2020). It is important to note that certain environmental triggers may be beyond the control of pastoral staff, with the responsibility lying with other stakeholders. This further emphasises the necessity for comprehensive BSP plans (Tracey & Holland, 2008; Holland & McLennan, 2015; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015; McGovern & Tracey, 2010), including clear communication among staff on identifying and addressing environmental triggers as well as clarifying staff roles. Including pupil and parent perspectives when developing adaptations could also help to identify and address triggers.

Understanding and developing staff-pupil relationships

Participants recognised that they had an important role in creating a supportive environment for pupils to express their grief and emotions. To meet this need, pastoral staff were found to prioritise establishing pupils' trust, providing regular time to talk and spending time with the pupils. Costelloe et al. (2020) found similar results, emphasising the interactions between parentally bereaved children and teachers

through Bion's model of containment (1985). This study expands upon these findings by highlighting that staff roles may extend beyond providing containment for bereaved pupils. Specifically, it has identified the role of staff in modelling grief responses for pupils, as previously discussed (Please see '4.4.1 Individual System' for further discussion).

Maintaining connections with pupils who were experiencing social withdrawal and EBSA was also considered by some to be an especially protective factor during BSP, echoing findings in existing bereavement literature (Hogan & Schmidt, 2002; Papadatou, 2018). Interestingly, although pastoral staff acknowledged their role in containing the emotional needs of bereaved pupils and understood that pupils respond best to support from staff with whom they have a good rapport, the majority of participants mentioned referring pupils for counselling and support services. This is discussed further in the relevant section of this study (See 4.5 Research Question 4: What barriers and facilitating factors do secondary school pastoral staff experience when providing Bereavement Support Provision for pupils bereaved by the death of a peer?).

4.4.3 Mesosystem

How the pupil's relationships were understood and supported

The importance of parent relationships for bereaved pupils is recognised by pastoral staff, who ensure their involvement through home visits and phone calls. However, participants identified challenges in connecting with some parents, especially when families had social care involvement or were hesitant to consent to BSP for their children. This aligns with Lynam et al. (2019), where teachers reported experiences of parents fearing stigma and repercussions if they were to involve school and outside services to support their child with loss. This suggests that schools need to develop

strategies to overcome barriers to parental engagement within the context of bereavement, to ensure that all bereaved pupils receive the support they need to cope with loss.

In terms of peer relationships, there is limited guidance in the literature regarding how peer dynamics can be supported through BSP. While Dimery & Templeton (2021) provided some exploration of peer relationships, these approaches were limited to the context of parentally bereaved pupils. Subsequently, there is a current gap in the literature for guidance in cases where pupils are collectively grieving the loss of a peer. The present study highlighted the ways in which pastoral staff support pupils' connections in the context of a shared peer-bereavement. Pastoral staff were found to support peer groups by creating spaces for remembering the pupil who died and facilitating group activities. When peer dynamics were disrupted, pastoral staff intervened by mediating and discussing with pupils the various ways that grief can manifest. Some also employed restorative practices, which aim to resolve conflicts by promoting understanding and accountability (Morrison, 2002). Not all participants described practices to support peer dynamics in this context, suggesting that there is inconsistent knowledge in this area across schools.

The pupils' relationship with the person who died was also considered by participants. Previous research by Papadatou et al., (2018) highlighted how teachers supported pupils' continued bonds with the peer who died. However, it was noted that this was largely facilitated through psychologist involvement. In contrast, the findings of the present study suggest that maintaining connections with the pupil who died is a strength of the BSP provided by UK secondary schools. Pastoral staff were found to

demonstrate a strong understanding and implementation of strategies to maintain continued bonds and were able to do so without external involvement. They engaged pupils in creating memorials and facilitated communication between pupils and the family of peer who died. These practices reflect Hart and Garza's (2012) findings that teachers felt it was important to honour her memory of the peer who had died in order to support pupils to cope. This implies that when staff have a solid understanding of an area of bereavement support, they can effectively aid pupils independently, potentially reducing reliance on external professional intervention. This further highlights the importance of providing comprehensive training or supervision for staff to ensure they possess the necessary skills and knowledge to support pupils in other areas of bereavement where they may not feel as confident or knowledgeable.

4.4.4 Macrosystem

Overlooking religious and cultural differences

The macrosystemic level was found to be particularly overlooked by participants, with consideration of religious and cultural differences found to be very limited. This echoes findings from Abraham-Steele and Edmonds (2021) who found that, while teachers want to consider cultural and religious differences, they were unsure exactly how to support these. This implies a need for comprehensive training that equips staff with the knowledge to effectively address cultural and religious considerations as part of bereavement support.

Socio-economic considerations

Many participants were found to rely on charitable services to provide bereavement support for pupils where access to resources was scarce. Additionally, findings highlighted that pastoral staff provided transport and food for some bereaved pupils at

their own expense. This reliance on charitable and personal funds emphasises the lack of systemic support available to schools, leading to inconsistent and inequitable bereavement care.

Abraham-Steele & Edmonds (2021) propose that a national bereavement policy would help to equalise the quality of support available and act as a protective factor for bereaved children, increasing equality of outcomes regardless of socio-economic background. However, the problem with this approach is the potential for bureaucratic delays and 'one-size-fits-all' nature of national policies, which may not adequately address local needs. An alternative or additional solution could be to implement localised funding that allows schools to allocate resources for bereavement support based on the specific needs within the community. This approach could facilitate more tailored support, ensuring bereaved pupils receive necessary care.

4.4.5 Exosystem

Understanding and responding to academic pressures

According to Balk (2011), peer-bereaved pupils may face academic challenges. However, Papadatou et al., (2018) found that for some, bereavement may lead to changes in perspectives, leading to increased academic engagement and preparation for higher education. In the present study, participants recognised that peer-bereaved pupils may either withdraw from their studies or become more engaged, depending on their individual experiences and responses to grief. Subsequently, participants adopted pupil-led approaches and encouraged academic focus where it felt appropriate to do so. A notable finding varied support provided by pastoral staff to support the academic needs of peer-bereaved pupils. Some participants collaborated with teaching staff to modify sensitive topics in the curriculum where feasible.

Additionally, pastoral staff liaised with exam boards to advocate for necessary adjustments for pupils, providing supporting evidence as needed. These experiences highlight the importance of cooperation between different systems, with an emphasis on flexible approaches to support the academic attainment of pupils.

4.4.6 Chronosystem

Grief over time and the gradual return to normal

Over time, pupils' grief responses evolve and schools can play an important role in supporting this process (Lane et al., 2014). Rolls (2009) and Adams (2011), as cited by Dimery & Templeton (2021), emphasise schools' role in providing routine, normality and respite for bereaved pupils. This finding is also presented in Arskey & Greidanus's (2022) study of teacher perspectives following the death of a pupil. However, re-establishing routine and normalcy must be done sensitively as it may cause some pupils to feel ignored, isolated or uncertain, leading them to reject support to maintain normality (Holland, 2004). Within the present study, participants demonstrated understanding of the balance required to reintroduce normality for pupils while also acknowledging and validating pupils' grief experiences.

A novel insight from this study was the value that staff placed on maintaining a connection with the school for bereaved pupils after they had finished their secondary education. This emphasises the school's role as part of a community and support network for young people that extends beyond the duration of their enrolment at the school. This may provide a sense of continuity and belonging during important life transitions, which are likely triggering for peer-bereaved pupils due to the absence of the person who died.

4.4.7 Summary

Pastoral staff recognised that many different contextual factors could impact the needs of peer-bereaved pupils but lacked systematic methods for identifying the needs of all bereaved pupils. A reliance on ad-hoc to identification of need risks overlooking vulnerable students. Flexibility and person-centred approaches, such as open-door policies and regular check-ins were found to be implemented by most pastoral staff. However, proactive planning and comprehensive training are needed to address the needs of bereaved pupils more effectively. Additionally, pastoral staff recognise that pupils are learning to grieve and subsequently may rely upon staff and peers as role models in this process. While pastoral staff identified that openly sharing their own grief experiences could be valuable for pupils, this also carries risks, highlighting the need for professional support and supervision to manage staff's grief experiences and ensure appropriate self-disclosure.

Responding to environmental triggers with flexible practices was emphasised as important with adjustments made to timetables and lesson content to support grieving pupils. Parental involvement and peer support were also considered significant in supporting pupils, although challenges in engaging parents and managing peer dynamics were found to exist. Pastoral staff were found to demonstrate good understanding and practice in facilitating continued bonds with between pupils and the peer who died. Maintaining connections with the school community beyond secondary education also proved to provide support during significant life transitions.

Notably, the study highlighted there was limited consideration of cultural and religious factors, suggesting a need for comprehensive training to support this, particularly as

these factors are closely linked with meaning-making and growth balancing routine reintroduction with acknowledgment of pupils' grief. Potential implications include the development of systematic identification methods, comprehensive bereavement training for staff, and tailored bereavement policies and guidance from the local authority, addressing cultural, religious, and socio-economic factors to ensure equitable and effective bereavement care.

4.5 RQ4 What barriers and facilitating factors do secondary school pastoral staff experience when providing BSP for pupils bereaved by the death of a peer?

The findings for RQ4 are discussed separately from the BTHD framework (1979) as they focus on challenges and supportive factors specific to schools' internal systems. Since schools operate as their own system, it is more appropriate to analyse these findings based on relevant themes rather than within the BTHD framework, to ensure clarity and relevance. The following eight subthemes were considered to be especially relevant as key findings relating to this research question: 'Scale of impact'; 'needs of pastoral staff when providing BSP'; 'use of resources'; 'relationships with parents'; 'influence of family beliefs', 'priorities and perspectives'; 'media and social media influence on exposure and information dissemination'; and 'wider school system and exam boards.'

4.5.1 Scale of impact and School Response

Pastoral staff were found to face challenges in managing the initial mass response from pupils following the death of a peer. This is echoed in other research on staff perspectives following pupil-deaths. For example, Hart and Garza (2013) highlighted

the profound impact of pupil deaths across the school community. Additionally, Arksey and Griedanus (2023) suggested that unanticipated deaths can place school staff in crisis management roles similar to emergency services or counsellors, often without adequate recognition or training. The results of this study further emphasise the need for better support and preparation for school staff to enable them effectively handle collective responses to pupil deaths.

Following the death of a pupil, Balk (2011) highlights the importance of school staff in containing pupils' emotions and providing factual information to reduce rumours, while also modelling appropriate emotional responses. However, the present study found that staff face challenges with this, due in part to social media increasing exposure to the pupil's death beyond the school's control. Subsequently, even pupils unfamiliar with the person who died may be impacted, including those from other schools. The role of social media has also emerged in other research. In a study of pupils' perspectives following the death of a peer by suicide, Mirick & Berkowitz (2023) found that social media can lead to the spread of gossip and speculation over factual information.

The local media was also found to be a barrier for some participants, preventing communication of their personal feelings of grief. This echoes Arksey & Greidanus' (2023) suggestions that the local media's involvement can prevent open discussion of a peer's death, preventing pupils from seeking support. This study expands the present study on this observation by acknowledging the impact this also has for staff. This highlights the need for strategies to address both social and local media influences following the death of a pupil. One approach to support this is the

establishment of Critical Incident Response Teams (CIRT), made up of a range of professionals including EPs and Clinical Psychologists. Beeke's (2021) research provides a framework for organising and co-ordinating such multi-agency support for school communities. Providing some protection from media/social media is noted as one way to promote a sense of safety in schools

It is important to note that peer-bereavements that are related to critical incidents present unique challenges and risks of trauma for pupils, which will require specialised responses and support. However, the present study highlights that collective pupil reactions and the influence of social media are also observed across various contexts of death, including anticipated deaths or deaths due to illness, which can present challenges for staff. Therefore, schools may benefit from relevant and comprehensive training and support for supporting peer-bereaved pupils, that extends beyond the context of CIs.

Pastoral staff described ad hoc and reactive approaches in response to a pupil's death, echoing consistent trends across existing research on BSP for parentally bereaved pupils (Holland, 2003; Holland, 2008; Tracey & Holland, 2008; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015; Holland & McLennan, 2015). An absence of proactive approaches may lead to a lack of direction and uncertainty among staff about their roles. For example, whilst pastoral staff acknowledged the significance of strong staff-pupil relationships in delivering BSP, the majority had not received bereavement training and questioned their capabilities in this context, feeling that bereavement support should fall under the remit of counsellors or specialists. Similar challenges have been raised in studies focusing on teacher perspectives on supporting parentally bereaved

pupils. McLaughlin et al. (2019) noted that teachers felt ill-equipped to provide pastoral care and did not tend to view BSP as part of their role, instead directing bereaved students to seek support from other professionals (Lane et al., 2014). Furthermore, Lynam et al. (2019) found that teachers assumed external support was necessary and considered BSP to be a specialised area. However, specialised support is not always necessary or helpful for bereaved CYP (Currier et al., 2007). Holland & Wilkinson (2015) proposed that schools require increased awareness of their role and support to effectively fulfil this responsibility. The uncertainty among pastoral staff regarding their roles in providing BSP further emphasises this, suggesting that there is a need for comprehensive training, planning and clarification of roles to ensure all school staff are equipped with the necessary skills and guidance to effectively support grieving pupils.

A further notable finding of the present study is that pastoral staff acknowledge an unequal distribution of responsibility across the school team. This finding has not been noted in previous research and this may be because this is the first study to exclusively explore pastoral staff perspectives, contrasting with prior research that has amalgamated pastoral staff participants with those in teaching and management roles (Abraham-Steele & Edmonds, 2021). This is particularly significant given that current research exploring pupil views suggests bereaved pupils benefit most from support offered by staff they feel most connected to, often including teachers (Abraham-Steele, Unpublished). It is important that schools address uneven distributions of responsibilities among staff following a bereavement to ensure that grieving pupils receive adequate support from the most suitable sources.

4.5.2 Staff capacity and the needs of staff

Participants reported challenges in meeting the needs of pupils following a peer-bereavement due to the limited time and the emotional impact that providing BSP had on them. Studies of parentally bereaved pupils also echo these challenges (Lane et al., 2012; Abraham-Steele & Edmonds, 2019; Costelloe et al., 2020). However, this study further expands upon these findings by highlighting that pastoral staff who support peer-bereaved pupils face a high level of demand due to the scale of impact and collective nature of the bereavement. Furthermore, staff's own grief following the pupil's death was found to impact their capacity to provide BSP for pupils. Levkovich & Duvschan's (2020) study exploring teachers' experiences in this area found that the death of pupils causes staff profound grief, resulting in some leaving the teaching profession. While the present study did not directly explore the personal impact for pastoral staff, participants reported being bereaved and affected by the deaths, with other staff members noted to have left the school.

Pastoral staff were found to identify colleagues as an important source of support to contain and manage their emotional response to providing BSP. Conversely, those without a strong pastoral team reported feeling isolated and experienced difficulties in having the emotional capacity to provide BSP. Similar findings emerged in prior research on BSP for parentally bereaved pupils in both primary (Costelloe et al., 2019) and secondary settings (Lane et al., 2014), where support from senior management and experienced staff members was considered valuable. Additionally, this study supported findings from prior research (Costelloe et al., 2019) that external services such as EPs (where they could be accessed) are also a supportive factor for school staff providing BSP. There is a recognised need for schools to collaborate with other

stakeholders, such as EPs, to promote the wellbeing and mental health of all members of the school communities (Cefai et al., 2021). The findings of this study further strengthen the argument for systemic support systems to be implemented to address the emotional needs of staff within the context of bereavement.

4.5.3 Staff confidence

Pastoral staff's confidence in supporting bereaved pupils' needs emerged as a prominent concern, consistent with findings from previous research (Holland & Wilkinson, 2016; Dimery & Templeton 2021; Costelloe et al., 2019). In particular, staff felt unsure about what to say to bereaved pupils, echoing findings from other studies (Lane et al., 2012; McLaughlin et al., 2019; Abraham and Steele, 2020). While research suggests that bereavement response plans and training may enhance teacher's confidence (Lytge, 2016), the present study found that pastoral staff perceive training as insufficient in addressing the diverse contexts of death, leaving them feeling unprepared despite their prior experiences. This finding is also echoed in other similar research on peer-bereavement (Hart and Garza, 2016). However, this study's findings contrast with research on parentally bereaved pupils, where prior experiences were found to enhance staff confidence (Costelloe et al., 2019). This further emphasises the need for tailored support to address the unique experiences of staff and pupils across different contexts of bereavement.

Costelloe et al. (2019) suggested that supervision should be included alongside staff training for BSP. This is further supported by the findings of this study, as pastoral staff who had access to supervision from an EP or other external service identified that this was especially helpful in supporting them to meet the needs of peer-bereaved pupils.

These findings emphasise the need for a combination of training and supervision provided by external professionals, such as EPs, to support staff to navigate the complexities of delivering effective BSP for peer-bereaved pupils.

4.5.4 Resources

Availability of resources emerged as an important factor for pastoral staff when supporting the bereavement needs of pupils. Participants' experiences of accessing resources were highly variable and dependent on factors such as the local authority in which the school was situated, school type (specialist provision or mainstream), and connections with external practitioners. This inconsistency aligns with Abraham and Steele's (2019) research for parentally bereaved pupils, which highlighted similar gaps in resources for staff. These findings lead to concerns about inconsistency and inequity across schools and local authorities, resembling a 'local lottery' scenario for appropriate bereavement support.

Limited access to external resources was perceived to impact staff's capacity to address pupils' needs, with long wait times and complex referral systems leading to delayed support for pupils. Additionally, participants perceived a need for temporary counselling support to extend beyond the days following a pupil's death. Hart and Garza (2013) found similar frustrations among teachers, emphasising the need for additional resources, including more counsellors and psychologists during crises. Furthermore, the present study found that external support for staff's own bereavement needs and mental health was also considered to be lacking. This is also reflected in Arksey and Greidanus' (2023) research, which identified barriers to accessing mental health services for teachers.

Where participants experienced difficulty accessing resources, bereavement charities were predominantly cited as sources of information and support. A novel finding that emerged from this study was the role of mobile applications and online video calls in facilitating communication between bereaved pupils and trained volunteers from charities or other practitioners. These resources were found to be valuable communication tools for pupils. These findings highlight the role of charitable services in broadening schools' resource access and capacity to support bereaved pupils. Additionally, the findings highlight the role of technological tools in facilitating wider support for grieving pupils. Schools and critical response teams may benefit from integrating the use of such tools in bereavement support plans and policies, particularly where resources are scarce.

Beeke (2011) proposed a need for clearer pathways to accessing services and suggested that EPs are well positioned to signpost schools to appropriate resources and services. The findings of this study reinforce this need, as many pastoral staff identified struggling to access services and relying on bereavement charities. Awareness of EPs' roles varied among participants. Some participants from specialist provisions accessed EP supervision and found it beneficial. However, a common perception among pastoral staff was that EPs were difficult to reach, with the majority not accessing support from an EP for bereavement support. Many staff members were unaware of EPs' role in supporting bereavement and critical incidents. Overall, EPs were considered inaccessible and the majority of staff did not access support. This highlights a critical need for improved awareness and clearer pathways to EP

services, to ensure that all staff are aware of the valuable support and resources they can provide for critical incidents and bereavement support.

4.5.5 Wider school system and exam boards

Supporting pupils' bereavement needs was perceived to have notable challenges due to systemic pressures for pupils to meet academic attainment expectations. While pastoral staff recognised the importance of pupils' educational needs and took measures to support this, they personally felt the priority should be supporting pupils' emotional needs following their bereavement. In contrast, teaching staff have been found to prioritise redirecting pupils back to the curriculum (Hart & Garza, 2013). This difference is likely attributable to this being the first study to explore the perspectives of pastoral staff only, reflecting that their roles have less emphasis on academic attainment. This further highlights the importance of gathering the perspectives of all relevant stakeholders in BSP, to ensure there is a comprehensive understanding of practice in schools.

A unique finding from this present study is that pastoral staff highlighted challenges in communicating with exam boards to secure accommodations for bereaved pupils, resulting in complex administrative tasks to evidence need for a large number of pupils. Beeke (2011) has suggested that EPs could offer curricular advice following critical incidents in schools. Extending this role to support communication with external systems, such as exam boards, would lead to a more integrated and effective response to critical incidents and bereavement support.

4.5.6 Summary

This research question provided an exploration of the challenges and supportive factors for pastoral staff in meeting the needs of peer-bereaved pupils. In particular, challenges were highlighted in managing mass bereavement responses from pupils, which was perceived to be further exacerbated by social media. Pastoral staff lacked direction from senior management and faced an unequal distribution of responsibility to manage BSP for a large body of pupils, causing them to become overwhelmed. In alignment with other research (Abraham and Steele, 2019), access to resources varied significantly between local authorities, with bereavement charities playing an important role as a resource for both staff and pupils. Further systemic limitations were also identified in relation to the pressure of academic attainment and communication with exam boards. Overall, improving staff access to services and enhancing awareness of available resources will be essential for improving BSP for peer-bereaved pupils in schools.

4.6 Implications

This study has expanded the literature on BSP by further developing understanding of the nuanced contexts of bereavement that schools may experience. Specifically, this research has explored peer-bereavement for adolescents and the understandings and practices of pastoral staff directly involved in implementing BSP. Despite a growing body of literature on BSP, there is still a significant gap regarding support for peer-bereaved pupils, particularly in cases of anticipated or illness-induced deaths. Current literature tends to conflate peer-bereavement with other forms of loss, such as parental death. Subsequently, the unique challenges faced by peer-bereaved pupils and the staff who support them are not well understood. Additionally, pastoral staff's roles in providing BSP to secondary school pupils have been overlooked, despite their direct

involvement in this. By highlighting the distinct experiences of peer-bereaved pupils and the role of pastoral staff, the present study helps to bridge some of the identified gaps in the literature.

This study reinforces previous recommendations for bereavement support in schools by further highlighting a need for proactive approaches in both BSP and CI planning. Additionally, it validates findings from previous research that staff are emotionally impacted when providing BSP for pupils (Abraham and Steele, 2019). This was found to extend to the context of peer-bereavement, highlighting that there is a significant emotional impact for staff when they are personally affected by the death of a pupil. Furthermore, this study supports Costelloe et al's. (2019) suggestions that staff would benefit from receiving supervision alongside training, as pastoral staff identified a need for both.

The study has also presented several unique findings regarding BSP for peer-bereaved adolescents, including those affected by anticipated, sudden or violent deaths. Subsequently, these findings have implications for bereavement literature and related practices, such as CI responses, BSP delivery in schools and the ELSA programme

The findings of this study have important implications for educational psychology, especially in guiding schools and supporting pastoral staff in responding effectively to peer-bereaved pupils. A key outcome of this research is the development of the PEERS model (Please see Appendix K for a full description of the model) which has been created in direct response to the study's findings. The PEERS model offers a practical framework that addresses gaps in bereavement support by helping schools to provide compassionate, consistent, and developmentally appropriate care for

peer-bereaved pupils. It offers insights to supplement existing models, guidance and policies for both BSP and CI support in schools. Specifically, it could be used to support EPs in guiding schools to implement sensitive and structured approaches for effectively supporting peer-bereaved pupils. The PEERS approach encompasses five interconnected components for supporting the needs of peer-bereaved adolescents within a school environment.

P- Peer relationships and connections.

E- Educating about grief

E- Establishing and addressing individual needs

R- Roles and responsibilities

S- Supporting meaning making

Each component reflects specific themes highlighted by the study and offers solutions which are grounded in the current studies findings as well as existing literature on BSP. bereaved pupils often feel isolated and may benefit from opportunities to engage with peers. This component encourages schools to create peer-support initiatives. For example, mentoring programs or grief discussion groups, where bereaved pupils can share their experiences and feel less alone. Research from the Literature Review, such as Balk et al (2011), highlights the role of peer interactions in fostering a sense of belonging and sense of self for bereaved adolescents.

Moreover, the model recognises that bereavement support is not a single event but a continuous and interconnected process. For example, the components of Peer Relationships and Connections and Roles and Responsibilities illustrate how broader systems (family, school, and society) interact to shape the experiences of bereaved

pupils. This approach also aligns with the BTHD (2006), which emphasises the influence of interconnected systems (such as the interplay between mesosystems of school policies and community resources, and exosystems, including external agencies and cultural attitudes) on individual well-being. By considering these broader contexts, the PEERS model provides a holistic framework that addresses bereavement support at multiple levels, ensuring that pupils are supported holistically within the wider context of their social and educational environment

The PEERS model provides EPs with a practical framework with specific strategies to support peer-bereaved pupils and the school staff who care for them. It can be applied in a number of ways to enhance bereavement support in schools. This could include the following:

Staff Training

EPs can utilise the PEERS model to develop training programs for schools staff that address the five components. For example, workshops might focus on recognising grief responses, practical strategies for building peer support networks or techniques for staff to engage empathetically with grieving pupils. This structured training could help to ensure that staff feel prepared and confident in their roles.

Policy Development

The PEERS model could also be used to guide EP to support schools in the development of school-wide bereavement policies that take into account specific context of supporting peer-bereaved pupils, providing a clear framework for school staff to follow. By supporting policy development, EPs can help schools create a compassionate culture where bereavement needs and related support are well understood and embedded as part of pupil welfare. This would support schools to

ensure that BSP is an integral part of school practice, rather than an ad-hoc and unplanned response to individual pupils and cases.

Consultation with Leadership

The model provides a foundation for EPs to work closely with school leadership and consult on the importance of developing support structures for bereaved pupils and staff. The "Roles and Responsibilities" component particularly encourages a collaborative approach with an emphasis on distributing responsibility and reducing the pressure on individual staff members. By guiding schools in setting up these structures, EPs can help schools to create networks that include pastoral staff, wider school staff members, counsellors, and external agencies, ensuring a sustainable and unified approach to supporting pupils through bereavement.

Individual Interventions

The emphasis on "Establishing and Addressing Individual Needs" allows EPs to work directly with bereaved pupils. These interventions can be customised to reflect the pupil's developmental stage and personal grief journey, addressing both the immediate and long-term needs of bereaved pupils. The model's flexibility allows EPs to tailor these strategies to the specific needs of each pupil, recognising that each bereavement experience is unique.

Supervision for Staff

The PEERS model also highlights the importance of supporting staff who are directly involved in providing bereavement support. This aligns with findings from the study and the literature, such as Costelloe et al. (2019), which identified that supervision not only reduces emotional burnout but also enhances the quality of support provided to bereaved pupils. Supervision sessions could provide staff with a safe

space to reflect, share strategies, and build resilience. EPs can also use the components of the PEERS model to structure regular supervision sessions, ensuring they address specific aspects of staff needs. For example:

Peer Relationships and Connections: Create opportunities for staff to share experiences and strategies with colleagues, fostering collaboration and support.

Educating About Grief: Provide space for staff to deepen their understanding of grief and build confidence in their ability to support pupils.

Establishing and Addressing Individual Needs: Tailor discussions to the specific challenges staff face, ensuring their emotional and professional needs are met.

Roles and Responsibilities: Help staff clarify their roles and manage responsibilities to prevent them from becoming overwhelmed.

Supporting Meaning-Making: Encourage reflection, helping staff process their own responses to bereavement and maintain their resilience.

By grounding supervision in these components, staff may feel supported and better equipped to provide high-quality, compassionate support to bereaved pupils.

4.7 Limitations

Due to the sensitive nature of the research, participant recruitment was challenging, resulting in a limited sample size of eight participants. As participants self-selected, there is a likelihood they may have held pre-existing interests in bereavement or

related practices, potentially introducing bias into the sample. This may impact the generalisability of the findings.

Participants were recruited from across the country, leading to variability in the support and resources provided by different LAs. This diversity may have created disparities in participants experiences and perspectives, impacting the generalisability of the findings for certain LAs. Furthermore, the inclusion of staff from several specialist schools may have limited the applicability of certain findings to mainstream settings.

Furthermore, the retrospective nature of the semi-structured interview questions presented limitations. It is unclear whether staff's understanding of adolescent grief were acquired before or after engaging in BSP practices which may explain discrepancies between understanding and implementation identified in the research.

The study did not explicitly explore how BSP needs are identified in schools, although this emerged as an important subtheme during analysis. How schools identify pupils' bereavement need has not been comprehensively explored in the context of peer-bereavement. Additionally, the proposed Identification of Need checklist that has been developed by the researcher has not been tested for reliability or effectiveness by school staff. Therefore, the tools reliability in identifying bereavement support needs within school environments is currently undetermined.

It is also important to acknowledge the absence of demographic data as a limitation. Demographic variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, education, and socioeconomic status are important for understanding the diversity of sample

populations as these variables. Demographic variables such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status often play an integral role in shaping individuals' perceptions and responses to various experiences. Such demographic information offers additional context within research for interpreting results and understanding how different groups might interact within the variables studied.

The lack of demographic information within this study limits the ability to explore whether the observed responses observed are influenced by variables such as cultural and religious factors. Without this demographic knowledge, it is also challenging to determine whether the sample is representative of the broader population or if the findings may be impacted by overrepresentation or underrepresentation of particular groups. The inclusion of demographic data could have further enriched the analysis as it would have allowed for a more detailed exploration of the potential variations in perceptions and responses of pastoral staff across different populations.

The decision not to collect demographic data was made in order to focus on the primary research objectives and streamline data collection. However future studies would benefit from incorporating this data to provide a more comprehensive view as it would enable researchers to assess whether the observed trends are consistent across various groups and how different cultural backgrounds and demographic factors might influence the ways individuals respond to others' grief.

4.8 Future Research

This was the first study in the UK to explore BSP for peer-bereaved pupils. A number of varied contexts for peer-bereaved pupils were highlighted and it may be beneficial

for future research to explore more nuanced contexts of peer-bereavement and how this is supported within schools. For example, by exploring how the nature of a peer's death may impact pupils' bereavement needs. Furthermore, this research has highlighted gaps in staff understandings of the needs of vulnerable pupils, such as those with SEMH or social and communication needs. Future research could therefore explore the bereavement needs of vulnerable pupils, including those who may be more likely to experience the death of a peer. For example, it may be beneficial to explore how the grief responses of peer-bereaved young offenders are understood and supported in education settings. Furthermore, given the differences in grief presentations across developmental ages, future research could explore related BSP practice for peer-bereaved pupils supported in primary schools.

A further potential implication for research is the exploration of the applicability of the PEERS model to a larger and broader sample, as well as across more nuanced contexts of peer-bereavement. Within this, the Identification of Need checklist could also be used to identify how effective it is in supporting staff to identify and meet need.

5. Reflective Chapter

5.1 Introduction

This reflective chapter is written in the first person to directly highlight my personal perspective of the research process. Using a first-person perspective allows me to acknowledge the subjectivity of my position and emphasises ownership and accountability for my insights, experiences and actions.

The role of the EP requires both reflective and reflexive practice, which are critical for ensuring ethical and professional competence, as outlined by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2018) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2023). Reflective practice requires the EP to critically reflect and evaluate their experiences and actions and provide wider critique of observed systemic and societal practices. Reflexive practice also allows the EP to acknowledge their own biases and recognise how these may influence their practice. In the context of research, these practices ensure that critical evaluation is employed throughout the process, informing necessary adaptations and allowing the EP to acknowledge the role of their perspective and biases, thereby improving the integrity of the research.

On this understanding, one key personal reflection that is relevant to disclose is the challenge I face in recognising my strengths, which can naturally hinder my progress in my practice. With that in mind, it seems necessary to address this within the context of this reflective chapter by highlighting a relevant strength. I have consistently received feedback throughout my professional journey that I demonstrate highly reflective practice. However, translating these reflective abilities into the context of research presented a unique and challenging process which has been pivotal in further developing these skills.

Throughout the research process, recognising and confronting my biases felt especially paramount, as the topic I have explored is linked to my personal experiences and interests. Undertaking this research required me to evaluate my strengths and weaknesses, enabling me to utilise this self-awareness to adopt the

most effective approaches for my research and refine my skills. It was essential to prioritise how the approaches and research design I adopted aligned with the research content and ensure that the chosen methods provided an apt exploration of the topic. This highlighted the necessity to consistently practice reflexivity throughout the research.

This chapter provides my reflections throughout the research process, including developing the project idea and clarifying research questions, epistemological and ethical considerations, participant recruitment and the process of data analysis. It also includes considerations of how the research will be disseminated and reflections on future directions.

5.2 Deciding on the research subject

Before joining the doctorate programme, I knew that I wanted to explore bereavement provision or critical incidents for my research, due to my interest in the subject area spanning a couple of decades. Having previously worked as a teacher, I experienced several instances of supporting CYP following the death of a parent or sibling. Providing support for CYP in this context highlighted the impact that grief can have on the social, emotional and mental health needs of CYP and the subsequent impact on their enjoyment of school and attainment outcomes. I was also aware of the emotional impact this had for me. I recall making uninformed decisions due to being unaware of some of the cultural values of the children I was supporting. I was mindful that, although I worked with the bereaved pupils on a day-to-day basis, I had received no internal or external guidance, training, supervision or support to do so. I knew of several teachers from schools within the LA who expressed similar challenges they were facing while supporting CYP following the traumatic death of a pupil. These

experiences collectively presented concerns regarding the lack of training, preparation, supervision and support that is available to school staff in these circumstances. It led me to wonder about the voices of those who are employed in 'frontline' positions (working directly with the child) when providing BSP for bereaved pupils and how these could be captured.

I also experienced the death of two peers in my year group when I was at secondary school. For my peers and I, a cultural silence around death and lack of flexibility from staff pervaded our experience of this. The deaths were alluded to the following month in an assembly by a senior member of school staff, in which they expressed disapproval of the increased societal interest in counselling and the 'hysteria' that had occurred around the death of Princess Diana, encouraging us to be 'British' when faced with these challenges. I recall this assembly upsetting several pupils. Reflecting on this experience and the lack of related training and support I had later received as a practising teacher I was curious about the relevant research that existed about the understandings of school staff and how this was being transferred into BSP practice. Through the lens of educational psychology, I was interested to know how bereavement support had progressed over the last few decades and how discussions around grief could be further opened to support impacted CYP in schools.

While I had a general area of research in mind, I struggled to pinpoint what my contribution to the literature could be. I was particularly interested in peer-bereavement due to my previous experiences and wanted to explore contexts where this may impact vulnerable groups of pupils who may be more likely to receive EP involvement. For example, the peers of pupils with medical needs or the peers of pupils who have been

young offenders. However, through my literature review, I found that there was very limited research regarding the provision for peer-bereaved pupils and no studies in the UK that exclusively considered the bereavement support that pastoral staff provided pupils. Because research regarding peer-bereavement had not yet occurred at a wider level, I could not hone in on a specific context within peer-bereavement. I needed to scale back and consider peer-bereavement more widely.

When considering which aspect of peer-bereavement to explore, it felt important to consider the voices of either the impacted pupils or the staff supporting them, as I am particularly drawn to the voices of those most impacted or at the centre of any given topic. I noticed that studies on critical incidents, while highlighting the key role of EPs, tended to focus on training and self-efficacy among EPs (Bennett et al., 2021) or consider perspectives at a wider systemic level with an aim to integrate services to create effective frameworks for responding to CIs (Beeke, 2021). While this is valuable, it does not include the views of school staff who directly work with and support bereaved pupils.

Furthermore, I noticed that much of the existing research in the related field of BSP in schools focused on operational procedures (Holland, 1993; Holland & McLennan, 2015; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015). The bulk of this research again did not tend to include the views of those at the centre and on the front line, although some more recent studies of BSP have begun to explore teacher's views.

When first exploring the existing research, I was particularly struck by the scarcity of pupil voices, with only one recent study from Norway, (Dyregrov et al., 2020)

addressing this gap. This is likely due to the sensitive nature of such research. While I considered exploring this area, potentially through university pupils retrospectively reflecting on their adolescent experiences, I ultimately decided that the ethical challenges and potential difficulties in participant recruitment made this approach unfeasible. I therefore decided that staff perspectives would be most appropriate to gather.

While there is currently no other UK-based study that explicitly explores staff perspectives of providing BSP for peer-bereaved pupils, there are some studies that explore these themes in the US, Canada and Israel (Arksey & Greidanus, 2022; Hart & Gara, 2012; Levkovich, & Duvshan, 2021). Given that peers play a particularly significant role in adolescents' formation of identity (Balk, 2011), it felt important to explore BSP for peer-bereaved pupils at a secondary education level. Furthermore, the literature research showed there was a significant gap regarding the views of pastoral staff, particularly in secondary schools. This is significant, given there is evidence to suggest teaching staff may be reluctant to consider pastoral care for bereaved pupils as part of their role (McLaughlin et al., 2019). This made me curious about the perspectives of other key staff members, who may be more typically expected to provide pastoral care. Therefore, I decided to explore pastoral staff perspectives of BSP for peer-bereaved pupils.

5.3 Developing Research Questions

A thematic literature review was conducted to consider existing studies and support the development of my research questions. My review of the literature on peer-bereaved pupils identified studies exploring teacher's bereavement experiences

following the death of a pupil (Arksey & Greidanus, 2022) as well as other research examining teacher practices, coping strategies and level of perceived support when meeting the needs of peer-bereaved pupils (Hart & Garza, 2013). In the UK, research on staff views focused on their experiences when providing BSP for parentally bereaved pupils (Abraham and Steele, 2019) and their understandings of children's grief as well as their practices to support pupils (Costelloe et al., 2020).

To expand upon the literature in the UK, I decided to explore similar questions that had been identified in the UK-based studies, but within the context of peer-bereavement. Additionally, I included questions informed by research on staff perspectives regarding BSP in the context of peer-bereaved pupils, as explored in studies conducted in other countries (Hart & Garza 2013; Arksey & Greidanus, 2022). These sources informed the creation of my research questions. Initially, I formulated three research questions to explore pastoral staff's understanding of adolescent grief, their practices for supporting peer-bereaved pupils, and the challenges or supportive factors they experienced when providing BSP. Through supervision, I was encouraged to consider how to incorporate higher-order questions, resulting in an additional 'bridging' question: how do staff understandings of adolescents' grief inform their practice of BSP? I subsequently revised my ethics application to include this.

The 'bridging' question was a prominent discussion in supervision sessions, as I struggled to visualise how I could adequately write this up in the discussion, due to the likely overlap between the questions. I often oscillated between whether to include the 'bridging' question or not. However, through the process of thematic analysis, I found that the bridging question became integral to the 'story' that was forming within my

research. This is because it emerged that staff practices did not always align with the understandings that they had demonstrated. Supervision also provided a helpful space to explore how these questions could be addressed in the research discussion. It was agreed to combine the two questions within the discussion to address the overlap between them.

During data analysis, I considered whether further revisions to the research questions were needed. This is suggested by Braun and Clarke (2022), as part of reflexive thematic analysis, to ensure that the analysis addresses the research questions. The analysis revealed that some understandings appeared to be developed retrospectively through staff experiences of providing BSP, rather than being initial understandings. This prompted me to consider revising the research questions to encompass both staff 'experiences' and their 'understandings.' However, after discussing this with my supervisor, it was concluded that participants attaching 'meaning' to their experiences demonstrated a form 'understanding,' rather than merely recounting an experience or event. For example, data from one of the participants highlighted an observation that younger pupils did not seem impacted by peer bereavement. However, this was attached to an interpretation that younger pupils may experience postponed grief. This is illustrated in the following quote:

'Year seven, are just more 'alright then', you know, 'what's first lesson?' It has less of an effect on them. I mean, it probably hits them a little bit later on.' (Participant D)

Therefore, I applied this reasoning to the coding process and the research questions remained unchanged.

5.4 Ethical considerations

The research was conducted following ethical approval from the UEA School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Committee (Appendix J) and was completed in accordance with the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2021) and the HCPC standards (HCPC, 2023). When planning my ethical considerations, I was mindful that there could be potential challenges in researching a sensitive subject area and I initially felt uncertain about how to approach it. This uncertainty was reflected in the feedback from my initial research proposal, which outlined a lack of thorough planning regarding the ethical requirements of the study. This feedback prompted me to prioritise ethical considerations in my research planning. I dedicated significant time to exploring how similar studies addressed ethical studies and developing my initial ethics submission to ensure thorough consideration of the participants' needs and ways to minimise risk of psychological harm. This included ensuring participants were well informed of what to expect from the research via the participant information sheet. Participants were provided with the semi-structured interview guide several days before the interview, to ensure they were prepared for questions that would be asked. Participants were also provided with the option to communicate any words or questions that they did not want to be used in the interview. Furthermore, signposting to mental health and bereavement support was provided before and after the interviews and staff were reminded that they could stop the interviews at any point. These considerations were acknowledged in the feedback from my ethics application and it was highlighted that the application was a strong and well-considered one. This helped to ameliorate the initial knock of confidence I had experienced following the feedback on my research proposal and helped to rebuild my

belief in the research idea. My initial ethics submission required some minor amendments, which involved ensuring the participant information sheet was shorter and clearer for participants and ensuring participants were aware they could receive a copy of the research once completed. Following this, I also made some approved adjustments to my ethics submission to include the revised research questions and related changes to the semi-structured interview guidance, as well as changes to participant recruitment approaches.

The ethics review process proved to be a valuable learning experience for me. By endeavouring to incorporate and learn from the feedback I had received from my research proposal, I was able to transform what was initially a weakness of the research into a strength. This process also helped me to develop my research skills, which I had struggled to have confidence in.

5.5 Research Designs

5.5.1 Epistemology

Determining a theoretical position can help to inform how we acquire and analyse knowledge of social behaviour (Petty et al., 2012). I was mindful of how the epistemological position might frame the research and impact interpretations. As several different epistemological positions would be appropriate for this research, I found it difficult to establish which one to adopt. I was ultimately unsure whether to use a Critical Realist (CR) or a Social Constructionist (SC) position. CR aligned most with my own ontological and epistemological beliefs. However, I was mindful that I needed to select a positioning that was best aligned with the research rather than my views.

Since I was exploring staff perspectives, SC seemed a good fit, as it is based on a constructivist ontology, which holds that all knowledge of reality is subjective; what is 'real' and 'true' depends on each individual's perception. SC could have been particularly helpful for this research, as it highlights that individuals' perceptions are impacted by their societal and cultural contexts. This position doubts what knowledge of reality can truly be known and proposes that knowledge is sustained by social processes (Johnstone & Dallos, 2006).

Ultimately, I decided to use a CR position. CR is founded on the idea that the reality of the world should not be mistaken with our knowledge of it (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016). It acknowledges principles of objectivist ontology; that there is a physical reality that exists independently from humans' perspectives of it. CR also recognises that while reality is independent of humans, it is both transformed and reproduced by human constructions of it (Price & Martin, 2018). Therefore, CR seemed appropriate for exploring the multiple realities of staff who provided BSP across different contexts. Additionally, CR suggests that social structures are created by the combined actions of individual humans, with these social structures in turn influencing the actions of individuals (Price & Martin, 2018). I felt that this understanding would allow consideration of some of the underpinning physical realities associated with bereavement, such as the impact of pupils' developmental age on their understanding of death. Furthermore, Pilgrim (2014) suggests that CR provides an advantageous role for social science research as it acknowledges that the qualitative researcher cannot stand outside of the human and social reality they observe. CR encourages reflexivity about the relationship between knowledge and evidence generated by research methods and the researcher's role within this. Given my prior personal

experiences with peer-bereavement, CR felt like an appropriate epistemology to underpin the research as it facilitates critical reflection.

While CR provided a useful position to explore the objective and subjective aspects of bereavement with participants, I wondered if adopting a SC focus might have better supported interpretations of how varying cultural and social contexts shaped individuals of bereavement. Although this was explored in the context of the pupils who were discussed, a SC focus would have potentially placed more emphasis on the participants themselves and their own cultural and social perspectives. This may have impacted the implications and practical recommendations derived from the findings of the research. Additionally, I wondered if a SC perspective might have led to a greater focus on the role of language and discourse in constructing meanings around death and bereavement and how this may have impacted the interpretations of the findings. In future research, I'd consider using a pragmatist approach. Pragmatism allows for flexibility through a 'what works best' approach for the question at hand, rather than adhering to one philosophical position. Such an approach would enable me to use both CR and SC approaches where appropriate and allow for a more balanced analysis.

5.5.2 Rationale for the chosen methodology

I initially had planned to use a mixed method approach similar to the research conducted by Costelloe et al. (2020). However, given that my primary interest was gathering the perspectives and lived experiences of people who directly support bereaved pupils, I decided that the mixed method approach was not necessarily appropriate. I was also mindful that there may be difficulties with participant

recruitment given the sensitive subject of the research and wanted to make sure the research was achievable and feasible.

The research questions focus on individuals' perceptions of their understanding and experiences in providing BSP. Therefore, a qualitative methodology was considered the most suitable approach, as it is recognised as appropriate for researching human experiences (Braun & Clark, 2021). A qualitative approach facilitated situating the research within a social context and provided further contribution towards the initiative to broaden the research base for BSP in schools.

Epistemologically, reflexive thematic analysis seemed to be an appropriate qualitative approach to adopt as Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight that TA can be considered from various epistemological perspectives, such as realist, social constructionist, phenomenological, and others. This made the approach compatible with my epistemological positioning of CR.

Reflexive thematic analysis acknowledges that researchers contribute to generating knowledge. It stresses the significance of having a researcher who is subjective, aware, and critical. Within this approach, researcher reflexivity is deeply integrated (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This is especially appropriate for my research practice given that I had prior experiences in both experiencing bereavement whilst in education and providing BSP whilst positioned as a teacher. By positioning myself as a reflexive researcher throughout the process, I was able to critically reflect on my role as a researcher and my research practice, allowing me to identify any researcher biases that could potentially impact the outcomes of the research.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was considered as an alternative method to explore individuals' subjective experiences. This involves a detailed examination and analysis of individual cases and identifying overall themes across participants that connect their experiences. However, given that participants for the research were self-selecting and recruited from across the UK, there could potentially have been a very diverse range of participants and experiences. This diversity could have posed some challenges to the in-depth interpretation of individual experiences inherent in IPA. In contrast, TA prioritises broader themes and trends, which enabled collective experiences to be more easily identified, ensuring that subsequent implications could be relevant for EPs across all local authorities. Subsequently, I considered TA to be a more suitable method to describe themes across the dataset, rather than deeply interpreting individual experiences in the method of IPA.

5.5.3 Developing and implementing semi-structured interviews

I used semi-structured interviews when gathering data. Due to the sensitive and nuanced nature of bereavement and grief, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews on a one-to-one basis rather than in groups. Given the nuanced context of bereavement experiences, the research required an interview guide that allowed for important research questions to be addressed, but also facilitated a flexible format so that important discussion points that naturally arose could be sensitively explored to better understand participants' experiences. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed exploration of the subjective nature of understandings of grief, while also providing flexibility to investigate participant's wider experiences and practices in relation to BSP where appropriate.

The structure of the semi-structured interviews was developed based on the 5-step procedure suggested by Kallio et al. (2016). The steps and how they were actioned are as follows:

- 1) Identifying prerequisites to use a semi-structured interview: I considered the semi-structured interview method to be suitable in relation to the research questions as it was exploring participants' perceptions of emotionally sensitive issues on a topic that they may not be used to talking about. This aligned with Kallio et al's. research findings (2016).
- 2) Retrieving and utilising the previous knowledge: Previous knowledge should create a conceptual bias for the interview (Astedt-Kurki & Heikkinen 1994, as cited in Kallio et al. (2016). A critical appraisal of the relevant literature (see literature review) informed the framework for the interview. The guide was based on pre-interview preparations from similar research such as Costelloe et al. (2020) and some prompting questions regarding understandings of adolescent grief, which were informed by Balk et al's. (2011) holistic framework for understanding adolescent grief.
- 3) Formulating of the preliminary interview guide: The interview guide (see Appendix B) was developed using approaches by Rubin and Rubin (2012).
- 4) Pilot testing: Based on Kallio et al's. (2016) analysis, the pilot test of the interview guide could be conducted using several techniques, including internal testing, expert assessment and field testing. The sensitive nature of the research meant that participant recruitment was challenging. Therefore, the

researcher opted to use internal testing for the pilot. Internal testing includes evaluation with other members of the research team. Evaluation was conducted with two supervisory members of the research team to remove ambiguities and leading questions in the interview guide.

- 5) Presenting the complete guide: The final guide was presented to participants. This was sent to participants ahead of the interview. Due to the sensitive nature of the research, participants were invited to share if there were any questions or keywords that they would prefer not to be mentioned.

While I was able to review the interview guide through supervision, I think it would have been helpful to pilot the interview guide through external testing. This would have allowed me to better estimate the interview duration and assess its effectiveness. The interviews varied in length, from 36 to 72 minutes, with longer interviews sometimes causing me to feel rushed. As a result, some semi-structured interview questions felt hurried. Additionally, even though participants were aware I was exploring how their understandings informed their practices, I wondered if it would have been helpful to emphasise this more through the prompting questions. For example, when I asked questions such as, 'Can you tell me more about BSP you put in place for educational needs?', it would have been beneficial to reiterate the connection between their understanding and their actions.

5.5.4 Participant recruitment

Recruiting participants proved to be particularly challenging, which is perhaps unsurprising given the sensitive nature of the research and the cultural taboo surrounding discussions of death and bereavement in the UK (McLaughlin et al.,

2019). Additionally, the limited time and capacity of school staff may also have impacted recruitment. I also felt that there were problems with my original recruitment method. Initially, I sent email invitations to schools in the LA and a neighbouring LA, asking headteachers to act as gatekeepers and share the invitations with pastoral staff. However, these emails may have been overlooked or not forwarded due to headteachers' busy schedules.

Reflecting on this, I revised the email to include a bold, highlighted header stating that it would only take 2 minutes to read and act on. This revised method resulted in the recruitment of one participant. Realising the need for a different approach, I applied for an amendment to my ethics application and changed my recruitment strategy. With EPs from my placement service as gatekeepers, the research invitation was communicated with ELSA staff during supervision. Unfortunately, this face-to-face method also failed. I wondered whether the face-to-face element of this method was too confronting. Alternatively, there may simply not have been staff who had the required experience or who felt comfortable participating.

I then extended the recruitment nationally via social media groups, which proved much more successful. I wondered if this may have been successful due to using a visual format, which allowed participants to directly see and process the information without a gatekeeper's explanation. Additionally, this method also broadened the pool of potential participants as it was extended beyond the LA, increasing the likelihood of finding suitable participants who met the criteria. Teachers and primary school staff also expressed interest, suggesting that this topic might be of interest to other staff groups, highlighting areas for future research.

A total of 36 pastoral staff expressed interest in participating. However, even with increased interest in participation, only a small number took part in research interviews. This is because the majority of the participants did not respond to initial communication or eventually stopped communicating. Several pastoral staff agreed to interviews but then did not attend. I think this likely reflects the sensitive nature of the research; while staff may have been interested or felt the research was important, they may have ultimately realised that they would feel uncomfortable participating and discussing their experiences.

The recruitment difficulties that I had delayed my research timeline. This highlighted to me the importance of extensive consideration of participant recruitment when planning research and the need to proactively consider several alternative options. I found that my initial consideration of this did not suffice. This is something I would consider in future research to reduce the likelihood of setbacks.

Initially, I aimed to recruit 12 participants. On several occasions, I thought I had met this goal. Ultimately, I recruited 8 participants. This was enough to proceed with the planned thematic analysis approach. Of the participants I recruited, 3 had experienced childhood bereavement of a peer, with two describing this as traumatic and the third not recalling their experience until our conversation. This made me wonder about the personal experiences of the pastoral staff and how much these might have influenced their decision to participate and share their perspectives. This reflection was necessary to understand some of the limitations of the research, as the self-selecting nature of participants would have impacted what was shared and the subsequent results.

5.6 Analysis of data

Braun and Clark (2022) note that TA is not a passive technique applied to research but a methodological approach aimed at facilitating the development of patterned meaning. Therefore, the reflections presented at each stage of the analysis aim to offer a depiction of my analytical approach for the research, focusing on illustrating the practice rather than simply listing procedural steps.

5.6.1 Familiarisation with the data

Phase one of reflexive thematic analysis involves deep familiarisation with the content of the data. Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest familiarisation of data through transcription, re-reading the data, listening to the audio recordings at least once, actively reading the data and noting initial ideas relevant to the research. Furthermore, they emphasise balancing immersion in the dataset with critical distance and questioning.

I found the process of familiarisation interesting. It reminded me of how listening to a song repeatedly reveals different instruments, features and an overall 'feeling' of the music that wasn't apparent initially. I familiarised myself with the data in the following ways:

- Listening to the audio recordings
- Reading and editing the grammar of the auto generated-transcriptions
- Listening to the recordings once again while reading the edited transcriptions to ensure accuracy.
- Actively reading the data and making notes (Please see Appendix N).

Conducting the interviews was an interesting process. Due to previous experiences across my professional roles, I felt relatively comfortable discussing this sensitive topic and I did not find it emotionally overwhelming. However, while discussing death during interviews was manageable, deeply immersing myself in the material became emotionally challenging. This immersion prompted deeper reflection of my own thoughts and concepts, influenced by my personal experiences and investment in the topic. This encouraged me to be mindful of my concepts during my critical questioning of the data and I aimed to not place undue emphasis on any areas that felt relevant to my own experiences or interests. Supervision was valuable in supporting this process, as we discussed and explored strategies for managing familiarisation such as taking reflective breaks before re-engaging with the data.

As I wrote down my initial thoughts, I noticed that I often used question marks. I think this highlights the natural questioning nature of this part of the familiarisation process. Any patterns or things that I had noticed were questionable and potential, rather than definitive.

5.6.2 Coding

A significant amount of data emerged from the interviews and I was initially overwhelmed by it, particularly as I was unfamiliar with thematic analysis. To manage this, I decided to code the transcripts for each research question individually. This approach ensured that my coding was directly relevant to the research questions and focused on pertinent information. Braun and Clarke (2022) note that it is appropriate to reanalyse datasets to address different research questions. Although this approach to coding was time-consuming, it helped to deepen my understanding of data that was

relevant to the research questions. This prepared me well for when it came to generating the initial themes.

I was initially unsure how to code research question 2 (How do pastoral staff understandings of adolescent grief inform their BSP?), which served as a bridging question between research questions 1 and 3. This uncertainty stemmed from participants not always explicitly explaining how their understandings informed their practice. As previously mentioned, in hindsight, I would have utilised the prompting questions more to reiterate this to participants. However, my familiarisation with the data and the related codes from RQ1 and RQ3 indicated that there was sufficient data to support this research question.

For example, the code 'Bereaved pupils need someone to talk to' emerged from analysis for RQ1. This related to the code 'Listening to pupils' from the analysis for RQ3. Therefore, where a participant had presented information that met each of these codes, it could inform the combined code 'Bereaved pupils need to talk / staff listen to pupils' for RQ3. Through discussion with my supervisor, it was agreed that it would be appropriate to analyse the data for codes for RQ 2, as well as look at the related codes between RQ1 and RQ3 to inform this.

Due to the nature of the research questions, an important aspect of the coding process involved recognising the distinction between the participants' 'espoused theory' (what they say they do and the reasons for this) and their 'theory in use' (what they actually do) (Argyris & Schön, 1974). As an EP, I was able to name and label examples of both espoused theory and theory in use, which required a deeper

level of engagement with the data. Participants often lacked the precise language to define these concepts themselves. Subsequently, I utilised latent coding (identifying underlying assumptions, ideas, ideologies or conceptual meanings that may shape or inform the descriptive or semantic content of the data) alongside semantic coding (the surface, obvious or explicit meanings in data) to identify and categorise these theories within their narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2012). For example, the following data was coded as 'postponed grief.'

'Year seven, they're just more, 'Alright then, what's first lesson?' It has less of an effect on them. I mean, it probably hits them a little bit later on.' (Participant D)

The use of latent coding was supported by my professional knowledge, which allowed me to interpret underlying patterns that might not have been explicitly articulated by the participants. This presented a potential implication of imposing my assumptions on the data, which could lead to biased interpretations. However, Braun and Clarke (2022) emphasise that employing both semantic and latent coding is a valid and rigorous approach to thematic analysis. By using both, I was able to capture a richer, more nuanced understanding of the data. To mitigate the potential for bias, I engaged in regular reflective practice to ensure that my interpretations were continually checked and grounded in the participants' actual words and experiences. I ensured that my latent coding was closely linked to the participants' semantic expressions. I felt that a combination of latent and semantic coding also helped to capture a more comprehensive picture of the data. Combining semantic and latent coding also felt consistent with the critical realist positioning, as it acknowledges both the observable aspects of reality (relating to semantic coding) and the deeper structures that influence

our understanding of that reality (relating to latent coding). Implementing latent coding with semantic coding helped to support this process.

Supervision played a particularly important role in this coding process, helping to ensure that my interpretations were robust and grounded in the data rather than shaped by my own biases. Through supervision, I was able to cross-check my identification of espoused theory and theory in use and the psychological theories they aligned with. This process helped maintain the objectivity, credibility and rigour of the analysis while also providing a richer, more nuanced understanding of the participants' perspectives. Please see '5.6.2 Reflexive Practice' for further information about the reflexive processes that supported the coding process.

Practical organisation of the coding process proved to be really important for research efficiency. I initially organised codes through EXCEL. However, this proved to be inefficient and disruptive to the workflow due to frequent program crashes. Although time-consuming, I decided instead to transfer the data and organise the codes using tables in Microsoft Word (Please see Appendix O). This added an extra layer of complexity to the research journey and was a reminder of the need to meticulously plan research timetables to account for potential obstacles.

5.6.3 Generating initial themes

To begin generating initial themes, I colour-coordinated, printed and cut out the codes for each research question. This physical and visual presentation helped me to organise the codes with more clarity, allowing me to refine them as I noticed there were some that were synonymous and could be conflated.

While transcribing and coding the data proved to be very challenging. I found that generating initial themes came more naturally and was surprisingly enjoyable, contrasting with the difficult and time-consuming processes of familiarisation and coding.

Reflecting on this, I realised I was drawing upon previous skills developed during my undergraduate studies in English Literature, which involves regular analysis of narrative themes. This background has equipped me to discern patterns in stories. I was mindful not to impose any of my preconceived assumptions or to force codes to fit into any predetermined narrative. Perhaps due to the influence of collaborating with staff from secondary schools, I found myself drawing on content from my GCSE art lessons to keep my subjectivity in check during this part of the analysis. I recalled learning about Georgia O'Keefe's insistence that her flower paintings solely represented flowers, despite others' interpretations. This formed an analogy that helped me to remember to refrain from attributing meaning where it may not inherently exist and to remain conscious of my subjectivity.

5.6.4 Developing, reviewing and refining themes

At first, I outlined themes for each research question (Appendix Q) using mind maps which I then refined and typed up (Appendix R). Reviewing the data, I looked for connections between concepts and ideas, being careful to ensure there were not any internal contradictions within themes. This part of the analysis involved revisiting the information shared by participants, ensuring that the themes accurately capture the essence of their stories (Braun & Clarke, 2022). To support this, I contemplated

amending my ethics application to seek feedback from participants on the themes and whether they felt reflective. However, I decided against this as I was unsure how ethical it would be to ask a participant to revisit the project, given that they may feel a sense of obligation to do so and that it may be difficult to revisit the sensitive subject a second time. However, I felt uncertain about defining themes independently. Evaluation through supervision sessions provided a reflective space to refine the theme definitions and ensure they accurately reflected and aligned with the emerging narrative.

As the number of subthemes expanded significantly during this part of the process, I realised it could be challenging to present them coherently. Supervision sessions proved invaluable once again and prompted me to explore how other researchers handle similar challenges, such as providing cross-analysis of themes. Recognising that there were consistent patterns across the research questions, I created cross-themes, with consideration of distinctions and similarities across participants' stories. From this, an overarching theme also emerged.

Reflexive practice

My personal experiences with bereavement as a former pupil and during my previous role as a teacher have inevitably shaped my understandings and beliefs regarding grief and loss. These experiences, combined with my current role as a trainee EP where I have received formal education about bereavement and CI work, provided me with a unique lens through which I approached this research. As highlighted by Braun and Clarke (2022) subjectivity can be a strength and support the process of thematic

analysis. My past experiences both as a young person who experienced peers' deaths and as a teacher who supported bereaved pupils, likely helped me to notice aspects of the data that may have been overlooked by others who had not had similar experiences. However, I was also aware that these factors could lead me to misinterpret participants' responses to align with my experiences or professional training. It was essential to ensure that my interpretations of the data remained as objective and unbiased as possible to ensure that the conclusions drawn were genuinely reflective of the participants' experiences and to uphold the integrity of the research findings.

To address this, a process of 'bracketing' (Tufford & Newman, 2012), was used to mitigate the influence of my pre-existing knowledge. This involved consciously setting aside my own beliefs, experiences, and knowledge to view the data as objectively as possible (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Bracketing was achieved through my engagement in an ongoing process of reflexivity throughout the study. This included self-reflexivity, acknowledging my role in the construction of the research problem, the research setting, and research findings (Pillow, 2003). Subsequently, I engaged in continuous and critical self-examination of how my personal experiences, beliefs, and pre-existing knowledge could implicate the research. One of the strategies I employed was the use of a reflective diary. I used this to regularly document my thoughts and reactions throughout the research process. This practice enabled me to continuously assess how my prior experiences, values, and beliefs might be impacting my analysis and interpretation of the data.

Supervision also played an important role in my reflexive practice. Through regular discussions with my supervisor, I was able to explore any biases or assumptions that may have surfaced during the research process. These supervisory sessions provided an external perspective, helping to identify areas where my personal experiences or professional background might have influenced the direction of the analysis. Engaging in supervision allowed me to gain valuable feedback and ensure that my interpretations remained balanced and were not unduly influenced by my worldview.

The process of identifying espoused theory and theory in use (Argyris & Schon, 1974) during the coding process required me to draw on my expertise (Please see 5.62 Coding).

This was because the participants did not always have the language or theoretical frameworks to articulate these distinctions themselves. Therefore, rather than entirely setting aside my knowledge, I used it selectively to support a more accurate interpretation of the data. I was mindful that this could introduce bias by influencing how I understood and coded the data. To address this, I extended my use of bracketing to elements of the process where my professional knowledge was required, including identifying conceptual meaning in the data through latent coding. This involved the following steps. First, I made sure that my deeper interpretations were always connected to what the participants actually said, ensuring that the latent coding was grounded in their words. Second, I regularly discussed my interpretations in supervision sessions, where my research supervisor could help me spot any biases or misinterpretations. Lastly, I kept a reflective diary throughout the research,

which helped me stay aware of how my background might affect my analysis. This way, I could actively work to keep the focus on the participants' perspectives.

I was mindful that my role and knowledge of psychological theory could also influence the way participants responded to my questions. To ameliorate the impact of this, I made a conscious effort to create an open and non-judgmental space where participants felt comfortable sharing their beliefs and experiences freely, without feeling the need to align their responses with what they perceived to be my expectations. I did this by explaining to participants at the beginning of the interviews that there were 'no right or wrong answers' and that I was just interested in their understandings and experiences.

During the research, I reflected that much of my reflexive practice had predominantly focused on how my experiences made me more familiar with the research, rather than considering differences. Pillow (2003) highlights that, when practicing reflexivity, researchers often base their biases and understandings on the similar personal experiences they share with their subjects, subsequently identifying how they are more familiar to each other. However, by identifying how the researcher has similar experiences to the subject, differences in experiences can be overlooked. This includes those based on gender, race, nationality economic or social positions. This is problematic, as it may not always allow for deeper issues of power and representation to be addressed. I considered ways to address this discrepancy in my own research and wondered if it may be helpful to include demographic data. However, I ultimately chose not to collect demographic data because the research was already focused on a specific and relatively niche topic, being the

understandings and perspectives of pastoral staff when supporting peer-bereaved pupils in secondary schools. Given the specialised nature of the participant group, I was concerned that including demographic variables might overly complicate the study and detract from the primary focus on their professional experiences.

Additionally, considering the already limited pool of participants in such a specialised area, I wanted to keep the study manageable and focused.

Such data would have been especially valuable for understanding how diverse demographic factors might have influenced the participants' responses.

Demographic data would have been valuable not only for identifying differences in experiences that might challenge my assumptions but also for ensuring that the findings more accurately represented the varied backgrounds of the participants.

Collecting this data could have enriched the analysis by revealing how different cultural, economic, and social contexts shape the experience and expression of grief. This would have provided a more nuanced understanding that goes beyond shared personal experiences. For this purpose, I would include demographic variables in future research.

Overall, reflexivity was an ongoing process that I practised, which required constant attention throughout the study. By actively engaging in reflexivity, I aimed to ensure that the research was as transparent and credible as possible, acknowledging my own influence while striving to keep the participants' voices at the forefront of the analysis. This approach supported me in developing a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between researcher knowledge and data interpretation in qualitative research (Berger, 2015).

5.7 Dissemination

I have organised for the findings of the research to be shared with my placement EP service at the end of July 2024, during a planned CPD day. The service spans across four quadrants within a large county and will reach a relatively wide audience. Each quadrant has a critical incident team and I hope that this presentation may encourage discussions on how staff who are directly supporting bereaved pupils can receive better guidance, particularly concerning peer-bereavement.

A summary of the findings will also be provided to the participants who requested it. Additionally, I have received inquiries from others who are interested in accessing the research, after seeing my research recruitment poster. This includes a small bereavement team providing training for schools in the north of England and a trainee from another university who is also conducting research on BSP in collaborating with bereavement charities.

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Appendix A. Interview guide for semi-structured research question

Script:

Thank you for taking part in today's discussion. For this research, I am interested in your experiences regarding supporting bereaved young people following the death of a peer.

I am really interested in your views and experiences. This is not a test of your knowledge and there are no right or wrong answers.

The topic is one of a sensitive nature and talking about death and bereavement can be upsetting. If at any time you would like to stop, please just let me know. If I notice that you are becoming upset, I may ask you if you would like to stop the discussion. I will give you my contact details and the contact details for my research supervisor in case you have any questions after the session. I will also give you a list of support services that you may wish to use if you become upset following the discussion.

Is that OK? Are you still willing to take part in this discussion?

Semi structured interview guide:

Please carefully read the questions below, as these will be asked in our semi-structured interview. If there are any questions, topics or words that you do **not** want to discuss, please put these in the box below and return this to me via email at c.hone@uea.ac.uk. I will not mention anything that you put in the box. If you decide you do not want to discuss certain questions or topics on the day of the interview, you can let me know before we start and during the interview. You can also stop the interview at any time. If you have any questions, you can also email me.

Questions/Topics/Words I do **not** want to discuss:

Aim: This qualitative study aims to explore how secondary school pastoral teams support young people following the death of a peer.

It also aims to explore secondary school pastoral staff's understanding of adolescent grief and how this guides their practice when supporting bereaved pupils following the death of a peer.

This research is exploring the following questions:

RQ1: How is adolescent grief understood by secondary school pastoral staff

RQ2: How do the understandings of secondary school pastoral staff guide their BSP for peer-bereaved pupils?

RQ 3: How do secondary school pastoral staff support peer-bereaved pupils?

RQ4: What barriers and supportive factors do secondary school pastoral staff experience when providing BSP for peer-bereaved pupils?

Semi Structured Interview questions:

1. Can you tell me about your role in the school?
2. How many young people have you supported who have been bereaved by the death of a peer?
3. What is your understanding of how adolescents experience bereavement following the death of a peer.
4. Focusing on the most recent pupil you supported who lost a friend: Can you tell me a little bit about what the pupil is like?
- 4) Can you tell me about the relationship between the young person you supported and their peer?
- 5) Can you tell me about your understanding of their experience of grief? How did you then respond to this pupil following their peer-bereavement (Initial response and in long term practice).

(Prompts to encourage the staff member to consider the following contexts)

- Physical needs. How were these understood and supported?
 - Emotional needs/ SEMH skills. How were these understood and supported?
 - Friendship groups/social skills. How were these understood and supported?
 - Behavioural changes (if you observed any). How were these understood and supported?
 - Religious/ spiritual changes and development. How were these understood and supported?
 - Educational needs. How were these understood and supported?
- 6) What key understanding/practice did you draw from? How did you develop these understandings/practice? What resources did you use? Where did you access these resources?
 - 7) Were there other factors that influenced your response to the pupil? (e.g., life experiences/ personal beliefs)
 - 8) How equipped did you feel to support the pupil?
 - 9) Did you have access to any services or resources to help you? Had you received any bereavement training or supervision?
 - 10) Were there any challenges or barriers when supporting pupil's experiencing a peer-bereavement?
 - 11) Was there anything that you found helpful/supportive?
 - 12) What did you learn from supporting this pupil?
 - 13) What advice would you give to other pastoral staff?
 - 14) Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Helpful resources:

In special cases, such as this, in which studies include sensitive material, potentially useful numbers include the following:

- Child Bereavement UK

Tel: **0800 02 888 40**

Email: helpline@childbereavementuk.org

Website: <https://www.childbereavementuk.org>

- CRUSE Bereavement Care:
Tel: 0808 808 1677
Email: helpline@cruse.org.uk
Website: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-support/supporting-children-and-young-people/>
- At A Loss
Tel: 07736 949869
Website: <https://www.ataloss.org/Pages/FAQs/Category/organisations-that-can-help?Take=24>

Appendix B. Debrief Information Sheet

What are we trying to learn in this research?

We are exploring pastoral staff members experiences of supporting young people who have been bereaved by the death of a peer.

Why is this important to educational psychologists or the general public?

This is important as research shows that many young people who experience bereavements face educational difficulties. Several factors can increase this risk, including the young person's relationship with the person who has died (Elsner et al., 2022).

Where can I learn more?

You can contact the researcher at c.hone@uea.ac.uk if you would like to have a list of appropriate references/ academic papers

What if I have questions later?

As you may have questions about the research or ethical concerns later, the following information maybe helpful:

- Research Personnel: Cristi Hone (Trainee Educational Psychologist
Contact: cristi.hone@uea.ac.uk
- Supervisor: Dr Matt Beeke, School of Lifelong Education, University of East Anglia
Contact: m.beeke@uea.ac.uk
- Head of School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Yann Lebeau.
Contact: mailto:y.lebeau@uea.ac.uk

Is there anything that I can do if I found this experience has caused me discomfort or emotional distress?

In special cases, such as this, in which studies include sensitive material, potentially useful numbers include the following:

- Child Bereavement UK
Tel: **0800 02 888 40**
Email: helpline@childbereavementuk.org
Website: <https://www.childbereavementuk.org>
- CRUSE Bereavement Care:
Tel: 0808 808 1677
Email: helpline@cruse.org.uk
Website: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-support/supporting-children-and-young-people/>
- At A Loss
Tel: 07736 949869
Website: <https://www.ataloss.org/Pages/FAQs/Category/organisations-that-can-help?Take=24>

Confidentiality

All the information you provide is strictly confidential, and you will be identified only by a number. This information will be protected by the Data Protection Act (2018).

Appendix A. Recruitment Email

This email and related actions should take less than 5 mins to complete

Dear

I am a third-year Trainee Educational Psychologist at UEA. I am on placement at the Essex Educational Psychology Service. I think it is important to add pastoral role views to the research on bereavement provision for pupils. I am looking for participants for my research about this. I was wondering if you could share information about my research with your staff, to see if they would like to participate. To do this, I require a **headteacher or assistant/deputy headteacher** to be a 'research gatekeeper.'

- For more information about what a gatekeeper is and to give consent, please complete this MSforms:
<https://forms.office.com/e/bJK8DMyZja> (1 min to complete)
- If you choose to complete the above form, please can you share the attached poster and following link to staff:

<https://forms.office.com/e/EWAakJkYbS> (1 min to complete). Please could you accompany this with a message from yourself, assuring staff that they are under no obligation to take part.

I have also attached a participant information form about the research. Thank you for taking the time to read this and I hope to hear from you soon.

Yours sincerely,
Cristi Hone

Appendix B. Gatekeeper Invitation

Gatekeeper information and opt-in

My name is Cristi Hone and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist and Postgraduate Researcher on the Doctorate in Educational Psychology at the University of East Anglia.

You have been invited to be a 'research gatekeeper' for my research project. This is a completely voluntary and you are under no obligation to take on this role. Please read the following information as it may help you to decide if you would like to take the role.

Aim of the research project

This research project aims to explore how secondary school pastoral staff support young people who have been bereaved by the death of a peer.

What is a 'research gatekeeper' and what will the role include?

Gatekeepers have a key role in helping researchers to gain access to potential participants and settings for their research. As Gatekeeper, you will be asked to distribute information about the study with your pastoral staff, or group members. This would include an initial email/post with a follow up 'reminder' email/post two weeks later. It will also include distributing a poster with details about the research.

Who will be suitable research participants?

I am hoping to recruit participants who are employed as staff in Pastoral Teams in secondary schools. These participants will have had experience within the last 5 years of supporting a young person (aged between 11-18) who has been bereaved by the death of a peer. As Pastoral staff have varied titles which vary across schools, potential participants may include SENDCOs, Pastoral Support Managers, Pastoral Support Assistants, ELSAs.

How will information from this form be stored?

Only I will access to the information you complete in this form. Your information will only be used for this study. Any use of your data will adhere to guidance set by the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018), UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the University of East Anglia's Research Data Management Policy. Data management will follow the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the University of East Anglia's Research Data Management Policy. Information you provide will be anonymised and stored securely. Study findings may be published, but you will not be identified in these publications. Study data may be deposited with a repository for educational purposes. The data will be kept for at least 10 years beyond the last date the data were accessed.

* Required

1. Please enter your name and school, service or social media group below: *

2. I hereby accept the invitation to act as 'Research Gatekeeper' in the research project outlined above *

- Yes, I accept
- No, I do not accept

3. My preferred email address is: *

Appendix C. MS forms questionnaire to express interest in participation

How will information from this form be stored?

Only I will access to the information you complete in this form. Your information will only be used for this study. Any use of your data will adhere to guidance set by the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018), UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the University of East Anglia's Research Data Management Policy. Data management will follow the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the University of East Anglia's Research Data Management Policy. Information you provide will be anonymised and stored securely. Study findings may be published, but you will not be identified in these publications. Study data may be deposited with a repository for educational purposes. The data will be kept for at least 10 years beyond the last date the data were accessed.

* Required

1. Full name

2. Email

3. Job title

4. Have you supported a young person aged between 11-18 who was bereaved by the death of a peer?

Yes

No

5. When did you last support a young person aged between 11-18 who was bereaved by the death of a peer? (Please enter year e.g., 2020) *

6. I am interested in participating and am happy to be contacted by the researcher for further information about the research *

Yes

No

Appendix D. Recruitment Poster

Pastoral Staff URGENTLY needed



I am interested in your views and experiences

Who am I?



I am Cristi Hone, a trainee educational psychologist and doctoral student at the University of East Anglia. I am aspiring to have pastoral staff views included in the research about bereavement provision.

If you have any questions or would like to take part please contact me via email :

✉ c.hone@uea.ac.uk

This research has been approved by the ethical committee of the University of East Anglia

Made with PosterMyWall.com

What is the research about?

I am exploring the views and experiences of pastoral staff who have supported bereaved young people (aged 11-18) following the death of a peer.

What will happen?

If you would like to take part, you will be asked to have a one-to-one virtual interview (around 35-40 minutes) with me at a convenient time for you. This will be confidential and any data will be anonymous.

SCAN ME!

Please scan for more information:



Mrs Cristi Hone
Trainee Educational Psychologist

27 June 2023

Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Education and Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich NR4 7TJ
United Kingdom

Email: c.hone@uea.ac.uk
Tel: 07891696076
Web: www.uea.ac.uk

An exploration of how secondary school pastoral staff support young people following the death of a peer.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(1) What is this study about?

This research will explore the understanding and experiences of pastoral staff who have supported young people bereaved by the death of a peer. You have been invited to participate in this study because you have provided pastoral support for a young person who was bereaved by the death of a peer. Your opinions and insights could help to highlight how educational psychologists and secondary school staff can best support young people experiencing bereavement from the death of a peer. This Participant Information Sheet tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved may help you decide if you want to take part in the study. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.
- ✓ You have received a copy of this Participant Information Sheet to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by the following researcher(s): Mrs Cristi Hone.

This will take place under the supervision of Mrs Sophia Wareham (s.wareham@uea.ac.uk).

Whilst I am conducting doctoral research, I am also a Trainee Educational Psychologist on placement at the Essex Educational Psychology Service.

(3) What will the study involve for me?

You can opt-in to be part of this study and volunteer to be interviewed by me (Cristi).

The interviews will take place at a time that is convenient to you. The interview will take place remotely using Microsoft Teams. The interview will contain questions about your experience of providing pastoral support for a young person (aged between 11-18) who was bereaved by the death of a peer. If you volunteer and consent to participate in this study, I will email the interview questions to you beforehand. This can help you to decide if you would still like to participate. If you would still like to participate, but do not want to answer some of the questions, you can let me know via email or before the interview starts.

Only you and I will be present for the interview. The interview be recorded using the function within Microsoft Teams and/or a dictaphone. You will not need to have your video on for this and only your voice will be recorded.

Once I have written up your interview, you will have the option to view the transcript from our interview. This will be emailed to you and you will have the option to amend or add comments (within seven calendar days). If you would like to receive the transcript, please tick the relevant box on the Consent Request.

After the interview, the information you gave me will be stored using a pseudonym name to anonymise the data. This is to ensure that you will not be identified by anyone outside of the interview. Any references to specific people, situations, events or places will also be anonymised (or redacted) to ensure your anonymity.

You will have the opportunity to review information generated about you prior to publication.

(4) How much of my time will the study take?

If you decide to participate in this study, the subsequent interview will take approximately 35-40 minutes. However, this can be extended to 60 minutes, if this time is needed.

You will have a choice to review your transcript after the interview. If you choose to do this, it will take a little more of your time to do so.

(5) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I have started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part.

Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia (or Essex Educational Psychology Service) now or in the future.

If you decide to take part in the study, you can withdraw your consent up to the point that your data is fully anonymised. You can do this by emailing me to confirm that you would like to withdraw from the study. You can withdraw from the study at any point, up until data analysis (Sunday 31st December 2023).

(6) What are the consequences if I withdraw from the study?

You are free to stop the interview at any time. Unless you say that you want us to keep them, any recordings will be erased. You can also withdraw your comments from the transcript (either in part, or the whole transcript) at any point up until Sunday 31st December 2023. Your information will be removed from our records and will not be included in any results. Following this date, the formal data analysis will begin. This means that participants will no longer be able to withdraw their comments from the study.

(7) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

The topic of this study is very sensitive by nature. There is a risk that you may experience distress, due to discussing a pupil's bereavement.

If you feel that some questions or aspects of the study triggered distress, talking with a dedicated service may help. Please note that the research team are not responsible for any of the services suggested:

- Child Bereavement UK

Tel:0800 02 888 40

Email: helpline@childbereavementuk.org

Website: <https://www.childbereavementuk.org>

• CRUSE Bereavement Care:

Tel: 0808 808 1677

Email: helpline@cruse.org.uk

Website: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-support/supporting-children-and-young-people/>

• At A Loss

Tel: 07736 949869

Website: <https://www.ataloss.org/Pages/FAQs/Category/organisations-that-can-help?Take=24>

You may also wish to contact your GP. You can also withdraw from the study up until the point of data analysis on 31st July 2023.

(8) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

By discussing your experiences as a pastoral staff member, you may identify practice that has been particularly helpful when supporting bereaved young people.

By discussing your views as a pastoral staff member, you will help to increase understanding of ways in which schools and educational psychologists can support young people bereaved by the death of a peer in the future.

(9) What will happen to information provided by me and data collected during the study?

Only I will have access to any raw data that has not yet been anonymised. Your data will be stored securely in a password-protected file, in a password-protected folder, on a password-protected computer.

Your personal data and information will only be used as outlined in this Participant Information & Consent Request. Any use of your data will adhere to guidance set by the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018), UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the University of East Anglia's Research Data Management Policy.

Your personal data and information will only be used as outlined in this Participant Information Sheet, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the University of East Anglia's [Research Data Management Policy](#).

The information you provide will be stored securely and your identity will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published and may also be used for other scholarly and educational purposes such as in teaching, but you will not be identified if you decide to participate in this study. The data will be kept for at least 10 years beyond the last date the data were used. The study findings may be deposited in a repository to allow it to facilitate its reuse. The deposited data will not include your name or any identifiable information about you.

(10) What if I would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, Mrs Cristi Hone (cristi.hone@uea.ac.uk, 07891696076) will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have.

(11) Will I be told the results of the study?

You are not able to receive feedback about the overall results. has been completed and approved by those marking it.

(12) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

If there is a complaint or any concerns you can contact me or my supervisor (Dr Matt Beeke) via the University of East Anglia at the following addresses:

Mrs Cristi Hone
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ
c.hone@uea.ac.uk
07891696076

Dr Matt Beeke
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ
M.beeke@uea.ac.uk

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the Head of School of Education and Lifelong Learning: Imogen Gorman (I.gorman@uea.ac.uk,).

(13) How do I know that this study has been approved to take place?

To protect your safety, rights, wellbeing and dignity, all research in the University of East Anglia is reviewed by a Research Ethics Body. This research was approved by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee).

(14) What is the general data protection information I need to be informed about?

According to data protection legislation, we are required to inform you that the legal basis for processing your data as listed in Article 6(1) of the UK GDPR is because this allows us to process personal data when it is necessary to perform our public tasks as a University.

In addition to the specific information provided above about why your personal data is required and how it will be used, there is also some general information which needs to be provided for you:

- The data controller is the University of East Anglia.
- For further information, you can contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@uea.ac.uk
- You can also find out more about your data protection rights at the [Information Commissioner's Office \(ICO\)](#).
- If you are unhappy with how your personal data has been used, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@uea.ac.uk in the first instance.

(15) OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?

You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and If you want to take part, please complete the Consent Request in the following section. Please keep the letter, information sheet and the second copy of the consent form for your information.

(16) Further information

This information was last updated on 09 May 2023.

If there are changes to the information provided, you will be notified by If there are changes to the information provided, you will be notified by Cristi via email.

This information sheet is for you to keep

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (First Copy to Researcher)

I, [PRINT NAME], **am** willing to participate in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information Sheet, which I may keep, for my records, and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia (or Essex Educational Psychology Service) now or in the future.
- I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study results. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
- I understand that the results of this study will be used in the way described in the information sheet.
- I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

I consent to (Please tick or highlight):

Audio-recording YES NO

Audio-recording YES NO

.....
Signature

.....
PRINT name

.....
Date

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (Second Copy to Participant)

I, [PRINT NAME], **am** willing to participate in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information Sheet, which I may keep, for my records, and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia (or Essex Educational Psychology Service) now or in the future.
- I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study results. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
- I understand that the results of this study will be used in the way described in the information sheet.
- I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

I consent to:

Audio-recording YES NO

.....
Signature

.....
PRINT name

.....
Date

Appendix F. Ethical Approval and amendments

Ethics ETH2223-1916 : Mrs Cristi Hone

Date Created	03 Apr 2023
Date Submitted	09 May 2023
Date of last resubmission	27 Jun 2023
Date forwarded to	27 Jun 2023 committee
Researcher	Mrs Cristi Hone
Category	PGR
Supervisor	Mrs Sophia Wareham
Faculty	Faculty of Social Sciences
Current status	Approved after amendments made

Ethics application

Applicant and research team

Principal Applicant

Name of Principal Applicant

Mrs Cristi Hone

UEA account tfe21fhu@uea.ac.uk

School/Department

School of Education and Lifelong Learning

Category

PGR

Primary Supervisor

Name of Primary Supervisor

[Mrs Sophia Wareham](#)

Primary Supervisor's school/department

School of Education and Lifelong Learning

Project details

Project title

An exploration of how secondary school pastoral staff support young people following the death of a peer.

Project start date

01 Sept 2023

Project end date

31 May 2024

Describe the scope and aims of the project in language understandable by a non-technical audience. Include any other relevant background which will allow the reviewers to contextualise the research.

Background: Developmental research highlights peers play an important role during adolescence, helping to develop independence and foster a sense of belonging (Balk, 2009). Therefore, a peer's death can be especially impactful for adolescents. Bereavement can impact educational outcomes (Elsner et al., 2022), making it particularly pertinent for schools to ensure that young people experiencing a peer-bereavement are appropriately supported.

This is relevant to Educational

Psychologists as their role can place them in a position of guiding school support for bereaved peers.

Existing studies focus on children who have been bereaved by the death of a parent or sibling. There is currently no research which specifically focuses on schools' bereavement support for children bereaved by the death of a peer. Furthermore, there are no studies specifically focusing on the experiences of UK secondary school pastoral staff who support bereaved CYP.

Educational Psychologists often support schools when there is a bereavement in the community and this can include the death of a pupil (Bennett et al., 2021). This places EPs in a position of guiding school support for bereaved peers.

Aims: This qualitative research study aims to explore how secondary school pastoral teams support adolescents following the death of a peer.

Specific research questions:

- (1) How is adolescent grief understood by secondary school pastoral staff?
- (2) How do secondary school pastoral staff support YP bereaved by the death of a peer

Using semi structured interviews with secondary school pastoral staff, the researcher will ask questions exploring how adolescent grief is understood by pastoral staff, and how they support young people bereaved by the death of a peer, including any barriers and facilitating factors.

It is hoped that findings may inform the work of Educational Psychologists when supporting secondary schools in their responses to pupils following the death of a peer

Provide a brief explanation of the research design (e.g. interview, experimental, observational, survey), questions, methodology, and data gathered/analysis. If relevant, include what the participants will be expected to do/experience.

This study design aims to capture the experiences of pastoral staff who support adolescents bereaved by the death of a peer. Educational Psychologists(EP) support schools when there is a bereavement in the community and this can include the death of a pupil (Bennett et al.,

2021). By exploring the experiences of staff who work most closely with bereaved secondary school pupils, it is hoped findings from this research could inform the work of EPs in supporting secondary schools with their provision for pupils bereaved by the death of a peer. Participants will be recruited on an 'opt-in' basis and will complete a Participant Information and Consent Request form. This will include 8-12 participants with experience supporting young people aged between 11-18, who have been bereaved of a peer in the past five years. For data collection, semi-structured interviews will be conducted. Questions will explore how adolescent grief is understood by pastoral staff, and how they support young people bereaved by the death of a peer. These questions will be informed by Balk's (2009) holistic framework. This framework suggests there are six dimensions which incorporate what it means to be human and has been used to consider how adolescents may be impacted by bereavement (Balk et al., 2011).

Interviews will take place in-person or online using MSTeams. Interviews in person will take place on school sites, in a room that allows for confidentiality. Interviews conducted in-person will be recorded using a dictaphone. Interviews conducted remotely will be recorded using MSTeams and participants will be asked to keep the camera off. Interviews will not exceed one hour and will be anonymised for data protection. All data will be stored securely and destroyed according to UEA's data protection policy and statutory guidance. Reflexive Thematic Analysis will be used to analyse the data.

Detail how any adverse events arising in the course of the project will be reported in a timely manner.

Adverse events would be reported to the Researcher's Supervisor, and also EDU REC/UREC, as well as logged via Ethics Monitor according to UEA's Research Ethics process.

Any severe adverse events would be reported immediately to the head of School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Yann Lebeau. (For example, death or serious deterioration of the participant's state of mental health.)

Participants will receive the Researcher's email address prior to data collection. It will be communicated that participants can contact the researcher when needed, so that any adverse events or concerns can be voiced and addressed as soon as possible.

Participants will be made aware of relevant UEA research-based institutional protocols/procedures prior to their research involvement.

Relevant information will be detailed in the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.

Will you also be applying for Health Research Authority approval (HRA)?

No

Indicate if you are applying for approval for an experiment to be conducted in the School of Economics' Laboratory for Economic and Decision Research (LEDR).

No

Is the project?: none of the options listed

Does the project have external funding administered through the University's Research and Innovation Services (RIN)? No

Will the research take place outside of the UK?

No

Will any part of the project be carried out under the auspices of an external organisation, or involve collaboration between institutions? Yes

Do you require or have you already gained approval from an ethics review body external to

UEA?

Yes, approval to be obtained from inside the UK

Does this new project relate to a project which already has ethics approval from UEA?

No

Research categories

Will the project include primary data collection involving human participants? Yes

Will the project use secondary data involving human participants?

No

Will the project involve the use of live animals?

No

Will the project have the potential to affect the environment?

No

Will the project have the potential to affect culturally valuable, significant or sensitive objects or practices?

No

Will the project involve security sensitive research?

No

Will the project involve a generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool?

Human participants - selection and recruitment

How many Participant Groups are there who will receive tailored participant information?: One

Name of Participant Group 1.

Pastoral staff

How will the participants be selected/recruited?

A purposive sample of 8-12 pastoral staff members in secondary schools will be gained. Participants will have supported a young person bereaved by the death of a peer within the last 5 years. Pastoral staff have varied titles which vary across schools. Therefore, staff recruited may include SENDCOs, Pastoral Support Managers, Pastoral Support Assistants, ELSAs.

The following steps will occur in recruiting participants:

1) A full list of schools in the county is publicly available on the Local Authority's InfoLink website. This is presented via an Excel spreadsheet that enables the user to select filters. For example, pupil age range and by area in the county. The county is divided into the following quadrants: North East, Mid, South and West. The TEP will contact headteachers from secondary schools and special schools in the North East quadrant as this is where they are on placement. The North East has 25 schools that are appropriate for the study's participant recruitment.

2) Headteachers will then be contacted via email, using the contact details that are available on their school websites. Within the email, the headteachers will be invited to be gatekeepers for the research. If the headteachers consent, they will be asked to distribute information about the research to Pastoral Staff members, including a Participant Information Sheet and Consent form.

3) Staff members who meet the criteria and complete the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form will be contacted via email and asked to participate. They will be encouraged to contact the researcher if they have questions. The first 12 Participants who meet the criteria and consent to take part will be contacted directly by the researcher to negotiate interview dates and locations. Participants will have access to the researcher's contact details. Contact with the gatekeeper will commence 1-2 weeks after ethical approval is granted.

If appropriate, upload a copy of the proposed advertisement, including proposed recruitment emails, flyers, posters or invitation letter.

How and when will participants receive this recruitment material? After ethical approval has been granted, participants will be recruited via the gatekeeper (the headteachers of the schools). The gatekeepers will distribute a recruitment email to Pastoral Staff in the school, inviting them to be participants in the research (Please see 'Recruitment email' document attached). A follow-up reminder email will be sent two weeks later. The email will include an outline of the research aims and participant criteria. The email will include a link to a Participant Information Form and an attachment for a Consent Form. Pastoral staff will be asked to read the Participant Information Form and return the Consent Form by email to the researcher, if they would like to participate. The email will highlight the importance of reading the information, before consenting to participate.

In terms of UEA participants only, will you be advertising the opportunity to take part in this project to?:

None of the above (i.e. UEA's Student Insight Review Group (SIRG) does not need to be informed)

What are the characteristics of the participants?

Up to 12 participants will be selected to participate in the study. Participants will be pastoral staff employed in secondary schools within the North East of the Local Authority that the Researcher is currently placed in as a TEP. Participants can be from any secondary school or special school setting within this area (a total of 25 schools are appropriate for the research). Participants will have supported young people aged between 11-18, who were bereaved of a peer. This support will have been provided by staff within the last 5 years. If recruitment

proves difficult, inclusion criteria may extend to include staff from secondary schools in neighbouring quadrants. There are a total of 182 secondary education settings in the Local Authority. Therefore, it is anticipated that the researcher will be able to recruit enough participants. However, if this proves difficult, the research could also be extended to neighbouring counties.

Exclusion criteria will include staff members whose experiences of providing support for bereaved peers occurred longer than 5 years ago. It is felt that a period longer than 5 years could impact how accurately staff members may be able to recall their experiences and the support that was offered. Similar research which focused on primary school children bereaved by the death of a parent also used this exclusion criteria (Costelloe et al., 2020). The exclusion criteria will also include staff members who have not supported adolescents aged between 11-18 who were bereaved by the death of a peer. This is because the research is focused on adolescent experiences specifically. Exclusion criteria will also include teachers. This is because the majority of existing research focuses on teachers, rather than other important staff who offer pastoral services to bereaved adolescents in secondary schools. (This argument is also outlined by Costelloe et al., 2020.)

Will the project require the cooperation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the individuals/groups to be recruited? Yes

Who will be your gatekeeper for accessing participants?

The headteachers of the schools will act as gatekeepers for the research. Headteachers will be contacted via email, using the contact details that are available on their school websites. These emails will invite headteachers to be gatekeepers for the research and request permission for this.

Gatekeepers will only circulate recruitment information about the research study to their school pastoral teams, by forwarding a recruitment email. The recruitment email will include an attached Participant Information Form and an attached Consent Request Form (Word documents) for any interested participants who wish to opt-in to the research.

An example of the email that will be sent to headteachers is attached. (Please see Gatekeeper invitation attachment)

How and when will a gatekeeper permission be obtained?

Once the ethics application has been approved, the gatekeeper's permission will be formally obtained through an invitation letter sent by email within 1-2 weeks of ethics approval. The gatekeeper will be asked to demonstrate their permission by completing a form attached to the email. They will be asked to return it to the researcher via email. (Please see attached form)

Provide any relevant gatekeeper documentation (letters of invite, emails etc).

How will you record a gatekeeper's permission?

The gatekeeper's permission will be recorded on a Word document sent and returned by email. Email settings will include 'Sensitivity labels' to ensure that email messages labelled are automatically encrypted and not shareable outside of the intended list of recipients. The Word document will be stored in a password-protected file, in a password-protected folder, on a password-protected computer. The researcher will ensure UK GDPR compliance.

Is there any sense in which participants might be 'obliged' to participate?

Yes

If yes, provide details.

As the headteacher is a senior manager of the school, this could create a power imbalance with the Pastoral Staff in this context. Participants may therefore feel obliged to take part in the research, if it has been distributed by the headteacher.

It is possible that participants may also feel obliged to take part due to having a working relationship with the researcher, if they have previously met the researcher through their role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist.

What will you do to ensure participation is voluntary?

A self-selecting participant recruitment will be adopted, to limit risk of pastoral staff feeling uncomfortable with their participation.

The researcher will emphasise to the Gatekeeper that the research is completely voluntary, and staff do not have any obligation to participate. The gatekeeper will be asked to include a message from themselves communicating this, when distributing information about the research via email (Please see Gatekeeper Invitation document attached previously).

Within the Participation Information Sheet and Consent Form, participants will be asked to voluntarily participate and will be encouraged to contact the researcher if they have concerns or questions regarding this. The researcher's email address will be provided to accommodate this. The first 12 Participants who meet the criteria and consent to taking part will be contacted directly by the researcher to negotiate interview dates and locations.

During direct correspondence with the participants, the researcher will emphasise that their involvement is voluntary and they can withdraw at any time (up until the point of data analysis). This is to reduce any sense of obligation that may be felt by the participants. The dual role as both UEA doctoral student, and Local Authority Trainee Educational Psychologist will be highlighted. The research aims will be explained to participants as being linked to doctoral research priorities. Participants will be made aware that their relationship with the Educational Psychologist service will not be impacted should they choose to not participate. Appropriate signposting to helpful bereavement charities and services will be provided throughout, which have contact details for participants to use, should they wish to discuss their experience of supporting a bereaved pupil with an outside party for non-research purposes.

If the Researcher finds they know or have worked with any of the potential participants or the pupils they supported, the Researcher will politely decline the interview.

Will the project involve vulnerable groups?

No

Will payment or any other incentive be made to any participant?

No

Include any other ethical considerations regarding participation.

The researcher is mindful of staff capacity and confidentiality within a school building. Therefore, semi-structured interviews will be conducted at a time that is convenient to the participants. Any interviews conducted at a school site will occur in a room/location that allows confidentiality. Due to the sensitive nature of the research, participants will have been encouraged to schedule in some free time after the semi-structured interviews, if appropriate for them. Participants will be provided with a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form to sign. The Participant Information Sheet will inform participants of the research aims, freedom to withdraw at any point, right to anonymity and to refuse questions. The consent form will include approval for the interviews to be recorded via audiorecording software (if in person) or on MSTeams (if online). Participants will be asked not to name pupils they are discussing, to honour confidentiality. Pseudonyms will be used throughout, to ensure

anonymity. Additionally, any information about places or events will be anonymised or redacted to ensure participants' anonymity.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, participants will be shown questions that will be asked in the semi-structured interview, one week before it commences. Participants can identify any questions that they do not want to discuss and will be encouraged to share this with the Researcher before the interview begins. Additionally, participants will receive a debrief via email after the end of the interviews and will be given appropriate signposts (see attached).

Confidentiality will be discussed and reiterated at the beginning of the interviews and participants will be asked not to name or share any personal data (address, date of birth etc) about any pupils they discuss.

Human participants - consent options

By which method(s) will consent to participate in the research be obtained?:

Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

Online Participant Information and Consent

Human participants - information and consent

Participant Information and Consent

Will opt out consent for participation in the research be used?

No

You can generate a Participant Information Text and Consent Form for this application by completing information in the Participant Information Text and Consent Form Generator tab. Alternatively you can upload your Participant Information Text and Participant Consent Form which you have already prepared. Confirm below:

Generate automated Participant Information Text and Consent Form.

When will participants receive the participant information and consent request?

Once ethical approval has been granted, the headteachers of the schools will be contacted within 1-2 weeks, Once headteachers have consented to be gatekeepers, the researcher will request that the headteachers distribute the Participant Recruitment email within 10 days. The potential participants will receive 2 weeks to express that they would like to participate in the research, via email return of the consent form included in the recruitment email.

It will be made clear that participants must complete the consent form, if they want to opt-in to research.

How will you record a participant's decision to take part in the research?

This will be recorded by signed Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms which will be completed on a Word document and returned via email. These documents will be sent and returned by email. Email settings will include 'Sensitivity labels' to ensure that email messages labelled are automatically encrypted and not shareable outside of the intended list of recipients.

Once participants have opted in, their names and contact details will be securely stored on a password-protected spreadsheet, on the Researcher's password-protected One Drive account. Consent forms will be stored in a password-protected folder on the Researcher's password protected One Drive account.

Human participants - method

Which data collection methods will be used in the research?:

Interview

If your research involves any of the methods (including Other) listed above, upload supporting materials.

How have your characteristics, or those of the participants influenced the design of the study or how the research is experienced by participants?

The research could be impacted by the researcher's dual role as Researcher and Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). The researcher's role as a TEP may mean there is more interest in SEMH support for pupils, as this is an interest of theirs. This may influence research methods.

The researcher has personal experiences with peer-bereavement which will require them to practice consistent critical reflection on their role as a researcher to limit bias. Additionally, the researcher is mindful participants may have experienced grief in their personal lives, and these experiences may impact how they respond when supporting pupils.

Participants are likely to be female as approximately 75.5% of school staff are women. This may influence responses, as male or female participants may have different views of adolescent development. Their responses may be influenced by assumed gender roles. Additionally, research suggests men and women differ in how they discuss loss (Stelzer et al., 2019). This could impact data collection. Participants are likely to be white British, as the population in Essex is 90.4% white. The researcher is also white British. Discussion and study of grief will likely be impacted by this cultural perspective and related concepts/beliefs. Subsequently, participants and the researcher may hold a position of bias, as it may be assumed that our culturally influenced views of human nature, defines what is true about all humans (Rosenblatt, 2008). This is necessary to consider, as the UK is a multi-cultural society, and it is likely staff will support pupils with different cultural views and practices in relation to grief.

The approach of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2008) has been chosen to ensure these factors are considered and reflected upon throughout the research. Research questions have been based on findings and theory used in similar literature, to reduce researcher influence.

Will the project involve transcripts?

Yes

Select ONE option below:

By hand

If yes provide details.

The semi-structured interviews will be recorded on a dictaphone/or on MStears and transcribed by hand.

Provide an explanation if you are not offering the participant the opportunity to review their transcripts.

For research transparency, participants will be informed that they are able to review their transcripts should they choose to. Participants will be informed that any changes made to the transcript may disrupt the influence of the original collection of data. If participants choose to, they will be able to suggest corrections to specific details that were made incorrectly during the original data collection.

Any changes will be clearly reported and declared in the research.

Will you be capturing photographs or video footage (digital assets) of individuals taken for University business? No

Is this research using visual/vocal methods where respondents may be identified?

No

Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time? No

Will deception or incomplete disclosure be used? No

Will the participants be debriefed?

Yes

If yes, how will they be debriefed and what information will be provided?

A research debrief document will be provided.

If yes, upload a copy of the debrief information.

Will substances be administered to the participants?

No

Will involvement in the project result in, or the risk of, discomfort, physical harm, psychological harm or intrusive procedures?

Yes

If yes, provide details.

There is a slight risk that psychological harm for participants could be caused through re-traumatisation. This occurs when a person re-experiences a previously traumatic event. This may include flashbacks, strong reactions to triggers, intense negative emotions, feelings of anxiety. Retelling a traumatic experience can cause re-traumatisation. Guidance suggests it is important to consider the following to prevent re-traumatisation (Smith. C, 2014).

Measures taken by the Researcher to are included:

- Avoid extensive interviews that take several hours: The interviews will be 40-45 minutes long. However, to ensure participants do not feel rushed when sharing their experience (and to avoid risk of causing them to feel invalidated) this can be extended to 1 hour.
- Identify potential triggers: Participants will be sent the questions that will be asked in the interview, one week before it occurs. Participants will be asked to indicate any questions they do not want to be asked in the interview, and to identify any topics or words they may wish to avoid (Please see 'Semi

Structured Interview Outline' attachment. The participant can stop the interview at any time. The Researcher will use their discretion to stop the interview if they observe that the participant is becoming distressed

•Provide space for the participant to relax: Participants will also be asked to arrange the interview at a time when they are able to have some free time afterwards, in case they become upset.

Participants will be provided with the option to conduct the interview in person (on the school site) or online through MSTeams, so that the participant can select which context they will feel most comfortable in.

•Have helpful resources available, such as signposting to helpful charities: The 'Semi Structured Interview Outline' and 'Debrief' that is provided will include signposting to strategies to support the regulation of anxiety.

Will the project involve prolonged or repetitive testing?

No

Will the project involve potentially sensitive topics?

Yes

If yes, provide details.

Participants will be sharing sensitive information regarding their experiences of supporting bereaved young people following the death of a peer. Participants may have an emotional response, particularly if they knew the young person who died, or have had other personal experiences of grief. To support this, the participant has the right to withdraw from research up to the point of data analysis. The researcher will also provide relevant signposting to bereavement charities that support professionals who have experienced the loss of a young person. This information will be provided at the initial point of recruitment (once consent to participate has been provided) This information will also be provided verbally and in the form of a debrief document immediately after data collection.

A verbal brief will also be provided before the semi-structured interview takes place, in order to ensure participants are still okay to proceed. Additionally, as the researcher is also a Trainee Educational Psychologist, they will be developing skills in supporting the well-being of participants and navigating difficult conversations sensitively.

Will the project involve elite interviews?

No

Will the project involve any incitement to, encouragement of, or participation, in an illegal act (by participant or researcher)?

No

Will the research involve an investigation of people engaged in or supporting activities that compromise computer security or other activities that may normally be considered harmful or unlawful? No

Does the research involve members of the public in participatory research where they are actively involved in undertaking research tasks?

No

Does the research offer advice or guidance to people?

No

Is the research intended to benefit the participants, third parties or the local community? Yes

Provide an explanation.

This research will hopefully highlight the strengths and limitations experienced by secondary schools in supporting pupils bereaved by the death of a peer. This could help inform and enhance the bereavement support EP services and schools offer. Additionally, it may contribute to the evidence base calling for government guidance for bereavement provision in schools.

What procedures are in place for monitoring the research with respect to ethical compliance? The research project will be overseen by Sophia Wareham as Research Supervisor. The researcher will follow all relevant UEA compliance and GDPR compliance. If the researcher has any ethical concerns or uncertainties they will consult their Research Supervisor. The participant can also access support and guidance from the Course Directors, as well as submit any changes to the research to the committee for ethical standards and compliance procedures.

Does the study involve the use of a clinical or non-clinical scale, questionnaire or inventory which has specific copyright permissions, reproduction or distribution restrictions or training requirements? No

Include any other ethical considerations regarding data collection methods.

It is not intended that any additional materials will be used within this study. However, any changes to the data collection methods would first be submitted to the ethics committee and would not be actioned unless approved. All data will be anonymised within the research to prevent identification. The data collection focuses on the support that was provided to bereaved young people and the questions asked will reflect this focus. There will not be extensive questions regarding details of the death, to avoid identification of the young person and to limit any potential distress for the participant (please see semi-structured interview questions).

Due to the sensitive topic of the research, participants do not need to answer any questions they are uncomfortable with. Participants can also withdraw at any time, up until the point of analysis (31st Dec 2023).

All anonymised information will be stored as a password-protected document on a passwordprotected computer until it is no longer needed (or up to 10 years after thesis completion date). It will then be destroyed. The research will comply with UK GDPR guidance.

Health and safety - participants

Is there a possibility that the health and safety of any of the participants in this project including a support person (e.g. a care giver, school teaching assistant) may be in question? Yes

If yes, describe the nature of any health and safety concerns to the participants and the steps you will take to minimise these.

Participants may experience significant emotional distress, due to the sensitive nature of the bereavement. Participants may also feel pressured to participate. The researcher will minimise risk by taking measures to encourage participants to only volunteer if they are comfortable and emotionally able to do. This will occur across the following steps:

- 1) Sending a participant invitation to SENDCOs, to pass on to pastoral staff. This includes signposting to relevant charities and services that can provide support. Interested members of staff are asked to send confirmation that they would like to be contacted with more information about the research opportunity. This is to protect any pastoral staff who do not wish to engage in the sensitive topic or receive detailed information about the research.
- 2) Interested participants will be sent Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form, and can contact me for further information if they need it. This will also include relevant signposting and details of participants right to withdraw or stop discussions at any point.
- 3) Before the participants engage in a discussion, they will be provided with a verbal brief to confirm they are happy to proceed.
- 4) A debrief with appropriate signposting will be provided at the end of the interview.
- 5) Throughout the interview, the researcher will use their discretion to identify when to stop if it feels the participant is being negatively impacted by the interview experience. This will be outlined in the verbal brief.

Additionally, disclosures may be made by participants, particularly due to the topic of grief. For example, disclosure of self-harm or suicidal ideation. In these circumstances, safeguarding protocols will be followed by the researcher. Participants will be pre-informed in the verbal brief that any safeguarding concerns will be addressed by the researcher through the school's safeguarding protocol and UEA's safeguarding procedures.

What procedures have been established for the care and protection of participants?

The principles outlined in the Research Integrity section of the MyUEA webpages:

<https://www.uea.ac.uk/research/about-uea-research-and-impact/integrity> will be upheld by the researcher. The researcher will commit to the care and protection of participants involved in this research study, following UEA's 'Guidelines on Good Practice in Research', 'Health & Safety Policy' and 'Research Ethics Policy'.

Any face-to-face meetings will be conducted in school buildings and the researcher's DBS certificate will be provided to the school to ensure they are aware the researcher is a safe person to work with.

The researcher will also hold any interviews conducted online via MSTeams, using headphones and in a room where no other people are present so that confidentiality can be maintained. Participants will receive signposting to appropriate services and charities that can provide support for professionals experiencing bereavement (please see relevant documents for details). The researcher will also follow appropriate safeguarding procedures should a disclosure be made.

Describe your safeguarding protocol. What procedures are in place for the appropriate referral of a participant who discloses an emotional,

psychological, health, education or other issue during the course of the research or is identified by the researcher to have such a need?

The researcher will follow appropriate safeguarding procedures according to the host school's safeguarding policy and UEA's safeguarding procedures. The researcher will also comply with the HCPC 'Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics' (2016), as well as the BPS 'Code of Human Research Ethics' (2021).

Within the verbal brief (see attached document) the researcher will outline to the participant that if the researcher feels they or somebody they mention is at risk of harm, the researcher will follow UEA safeguarding procedures and make referrals to appropriate services/agencies where necessary. The researcher will also consult with their research supervisor regarding most appropriate next steps.

If it appears that the participant is becoming distressed during the interview, the interview will be paused and the participant will be asked if they would like to stop.

What is the possible harm to the wider community from their participation or from the project as a whole?

The researcher does not anticipate any harm to the wider community. However, the research may identify experience of poor school practice.

What precautions will you take to minimise any possible harm to the wider community?

Any disclosure of poor practice that raises a safeguarding concern would be reported according to UEA safeguarding procedures and according to government whistle blowing guidance. This might include if the Researcher was made aware that someone was covering up bad practice. The researcher would also consult with their research supervisor throughout to establish appropriate next steps. The Researcher will also ensure they are familiar with the school's safeguarding policy and procedure and would report any concerns to the school's designated safeguarding lead. Within the research, data will also be anonymised and confidential to ensure neither participants or schools are adversely impacted by the findings.

Health and safety - researcher(s)

Is there a possibility that the health and safety of any of the researcher(s) and that of any other people (as distinct from any participants) impacted by this project including research assistants/translators may be in question?

Yes

If yes, how have you addressed the health and safety concerns? Describe any safeguards included and relevant protocols.

The researcher may be impacted by the following:

1) Possible emotional distress caused to researcher from hearing experiences of death and bereavement. The researcher has identified relevant support services and can contact these if necessary if they experience emotional distress.

2) Lone working and associated risks to the researcher's safety during interviews with a participant they do not know. The researcher will follow lone-working procedures by notifying their Research Supervisor of planned interviews and when they will finish so that

the supervisor can contact the school if they are unable to confirm the Researcher has completed the interview. Participants will also be able to take part in an online interview instead, which could reduce any exposure to physical risk. There are currently no policies for online working at the Researcher's placement service. However, the Researcher will explore whether the schools have online working policies and respect the guidance outlined in them. The Researcher will not disclose their location or details that could identify where they are.

3) Risk of participants claiming ethical misconduct. To safeguard themselves the researcher will present their DBS documentation and follow high ethical standards according to the following documentation: UEA's 'Guidelines on Good Practice in Research', 'Health & Safety Policy' and 'Research Ethics Policy', the HCPC 'Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics' (2016), and the BPS 'Code of Human Research Ethics' (2021).

Risk assessment

Are there hazards associated with undertaking this project where a formal risk assessment will be required?

No

Work with external partners and collaborators

Provide details of the external organisation(s)/institution(s) involved with this project. The Researcher's dual role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist means that they also currently placed within the Educational Psychology service for the county. Although the service is not directly involved with this research project, the researcher's dual role and connection with the local authority educational psychology service should be acknowledged. This is especially the case as a member of the service will serve as a gatekeeper, and the Researcher's supervisor also works within the same service.

Has agreement to conduct research in, at or through another organisation/institution been obtained?

Not applicable

Upload the correspondence where relevant.

Does any external Co-applicant need to seek ethics approval in connection with this project?

No

Ethics approval external to UEA

Provide details of the external body who is considering or who has provided ethics approval, including their name, address and details of the responsible person there.

Shirley Mawer. SEND Inclusion and Psychology lead within the educational Psychology service.

Shirley.Mawer@essex.gov.uk

Provide details of UEA's contribution to the study if this is not explicitly clear in the ethics application submitted to the other UK HEI. Not applicable

If approval has already been obtained, state the date approval was obtained.

Upload documents related to this ethics approval.

Data management

Will the project involve any personal data (including pseudonymised data) not in the public domain? Yes

If yes, will any of the personal data be?:

Pseudonymised

If using anonymised and/or pseudonymised data, describe the measures that will be implemented to prevent de-anonymisation.

To ensure participant anonymity, all participants, schools, locations, and events will be pseudonymised or redacted. Information that may cause the potential identification of participants will be amended reduce risk of identification. The researcher will acknowledge these changes within the research.

Participants have the option to review their interview transcripts and any data they consider to pose a risk to their anonymity will be further anonymised. The Researcher may eliminate participant identification where appropriate if there is a risk that their information cannot be fully anonymised.

If not using anonymised or pseudonymised data, how will you maintain participant confidentiality and comply with data protection requirements?

Will any personal data be processed by another organisation(s)?

No

Will the project involve access to records of sensitive/confidential information?

No

Will the project involve access to confidential business data?

No

Will the project involve secure data that requires permission from the appropriate authorities before use? No

Will you be using publicly available data from the internet for your study?

No

Will the research data in this study be deposited in a repository to allow it to be made available for scholarly and educational purposes? No

Provide details.

Data that is collected is only to be used for this research, therefore it does not need to be deposited in a repository.

Who will have access to the data during and after the project?

The Researcher will be the only one able to access raw data and this will be stored securely on their One Drive account. Only the Researcher will access this. The Research Supervisor may view anonymised data during the data analysis if the Researcher requires feedback as part of supervision.

During the viva voce, other members of the research group may view or access anonymised data.

Where/how do you intend to store the data during and after the project?

All data will be stored securely on the Researcher's One Drive account. This account is password protected and requires multi-factor authentication through the Authenticator app. All data will be stored securely on the Researcher's One Drive account. This account is password protected and requires multi-factor authentication through the Authenticator app. The researcher will ensure data follows UK GDPR compliance. Only the researcher will have access to the raw data from the interviews. Data will be destroyed once it is no longer needed, according to UK GDPR.

Any data that is exchanged via email (e.g., consent forms) will be sent and received on emails using sensitivity label settings. This enables emails to be automatically encrypted and not shareable outside of the intended list of recipients. Once this data has been received, it will be stored on the Researcher's One Drive account. The emails will be deleted once the research is completed and approved (Approximately July 2024).

How will you ensure the secure storage of the data during and after the project?

All data will be stored securely on the Researcher's One Drive account. This account is password protected and requires multi-factor authentication through the Authenticator app. Research will be UK GDPR compliant.

How long will research data be stored after the study has ended?

10 years.

How long will research data be accessible after the study has ended?

10 years

How are you intending to destroy the project data when it is no longer required?

The data will be permanently deleted from all platforms. Any information stored by the University of East Anglia will be destroyed by the university in 10 years time, according to their regulations.

Generate and upload files

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION TEXT AND CONSENT FORM

Upload the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.

Enter Participant Group number and name.

Pastoral Staff

Ethics ETH2324-0131 (Significant amendments): Mrs Cristi Hone

Date Created	01 Sep 2023
Date Submitted	01 Sep 2023
Date forwarded to committee	04 Sep 2023
Researcher	Mrs Cristi Hone
Category	PGR
Supervisor	Mrs Sophia Wareham
Faculty	Faculty of Social Sciences
Current status	Approved

Ethics application

Amendment type

Type of amendment

Change to research protocol

Is this amendment related to Covid-19?

No

Change research protocol

Describe changes

Fully describe any changes and upload revised documentation if there are wording changes. Following guidance from my research supervisor, I am slightly revising my research aims and research questions to make the direction of the research clearer and more explicit. I am subsequently also editing the semi-structured research questions
Revised aims:

Aim 1: To explore how secondary school pastoral teams provide bereavement support for pupils following the death of a peer.

RQ 1: How do secondary school pastoral staff support bereaved pupils following the death of a peer?

RQ2: What barriers and facilitating factors do secondary school pastoral staff experience when providing BS for pupils bereaved by the death of a peer?

Aim 2: To explore secondary school pastoral staff's understanding of adolescent grief and how this guides their practice when supporting bereaved pupils following the death of a peer.

RQ3: How is adolescent grief understood by secondary school pastoral staff in the context of bereavement from the death of a peer?

RQ4: How do the understandings of secondary school pastoral staff guide their BS for pupils bereaved by the death of a peer?

Revised Semi Structured interview questions:

1. Can you tell me about your role in the school?
2. How many young people have you supported who have been bereaved by the death of a peer?
3. What is your understanding of how adolescents experience bereavement following the death of a peer. (Do you think it differs to an adult's experience/response?)

Focusing on the most recent pupil you supported who lost a friend can you tell me:

- 4) Can you tell me a little bit about what the pupil is like?
- 5) Can you tell me about the relationship was between the young person you supported and their peer?
- 6) Can you tell me about their experience of grief? How did you respond to this pupil following their peer-bereavement (Initial response and in long term practice).

7)

(Prompts to encourage the staff member to consider the following contexts) o Can you tell me if you noticed any impact on the young person's physical needs (E.g., energy levels) and how these were supported? What did you use? Why? What helped , what didn't help? o Can you tell me if you noticed any impact on the young person's emotional needs/development of SEMH skills and how these were supported? What did you use? Why? What helped , what didn't help?

o Can you tell me if you noticed any impact on the young person's friendship groups/social skills and how these were supported/responded to? What did you use? Why? What helped , what didn't help?

o Can you tell me if you noticed any behavioural observations/developments. How was this supported? What did you use? Why? What helped , what didn't help?

o Can you tell me if you had any observations of religious/ spiritual changes and development. How was this supported? What did you use? Why? What helped , what didn't help? o Can you tell me if you observed any impact on the pupil's education?. How was this supported?

What did you use? Why? What helped , what didn't help?

- 8) What key understanding/practice did you draw from? How did you develop these understandings/practice? What resources did you use? Where did you access these resources?
- 9) What other factors influenced your response to the pupil impacted by a peer-bereavement? (e.g., life experiences/ personal beliefs)
- 10) How equipped did you feel to support the pupil who had experienced a peer-bereavement?
- 11) Did you have access to any services or resources to help you? Had you received any bereavement training or supervision?
- 12) Were there any challenges or barriers when supporting pupil's experiencing a peer-bereavement?
- 13) Was there anything that you found helpful/useful when supporting the young person?
- 14) What did you learn from supporting this pupil? What advice would you give to other pastoral staff?

Attach any documentation which relates to the changes described.

Appendix G. Identification of Need Checklist

Pupils bereaved by the death of a peer – Identification of Need Checklist

In the event of the death of a child or young individual within your school or neighbouring schools, this checklist is designed to aid in identifying pupils who may be impacted by the loss. This checklist should be completed following communication with key adults who know and support the pupil, including parents/carers and other staff members. Where appropriate, it should also be guided by information shared by the family of the pupil who died.

The relevant areas that are identified for the child or young person can be used to support staff to consider the level and form of bereavement support that is required. This checklist can be used in consultation with an Educational Psychologist to determine necessary actions to support the young person.

Area of need Checklist (✓)

Context of death

- Sudden or unexpected death
- Death caused by an accident
- Death caused by violence
- Death related to substance abuse

Exposure to death

- Pupil was with the person when they died
- Pupil witnessed the death
- Pupil witnessed the scene of the accident or violence
- Pupil was also harmed during the incident that led to the pupil's death
- Pupil was with pupil shortly before they died or due to meet pupil who died
- Pupil exposed to videos or images related to the death
- Pupil exposed to especially upsetting details or information about the death (through discussion, social media or media).

Relationship

- Close friend to pupil who died
- Girlfriend, boyfriend or previous relationship with pupil who died
- Complex relationship with pupil who died (e.g., frequent arguments, bullying)
- Sat next to pupil in lessons
- Knew the pupil who died
- Have a close relationship with someone who knew the pupil well

Prior Experiences

Has previous experiences of bereavement
Has previous bereavement experience of similar deaths e.g., death due to cancer, traffic accident.

How pupil relates to person who died

Pupil has a similar cultural background to person who died
Pupil is from the same religious community
Pupil is from a similar socio-economic background
Both pupil and person who died are identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community
Pupil has similar illnesses or physical disabilities to the person who died
Pupil also has neurodiverse needs similar to the pupil who died (e.g., diagnosis of autism, ADHD)
Pupil and person who died both identified to have mental health needs
Pupil and person who died both identified to have other similar needs.
Pupil is from other similar social groups to the person who died.

Previously existing needs

Social and communication needs
Social, emotional and mental health needs
Speech and language needs
Substance misuse and addiction
Looked after child or previously looked after child
Young offender
Emotional based school attendance
Low attendance
Child or young person is from a deprived area or disadvantaged home
Child or young person has a complex relationship with carers or parents
Child or young person has few or no friends

Appendix H. PEERS Model

P- Peer relationships and connections with others

This study has shown that pastoral staff observe disruption of peer dynamics and/or social isolation for some pupils following the death of a peer. This can often stem from pupils having limited understanding of the diverse nature of grief responses or experiencing a sense of disconnection from peers as part of their own grieving process. The following explores ways that EPs could support school staff to facilitate peer relationships and connections in these contexts.

Supporting relationships through training and systemic work:

EPs are well-placed to support schools with the relationships of bereaved pupils, as their understandings of psychological theory relating to social connectedness can be applied to loss and trauma. Ideally, school leadership should ensure that social connectedness and belonging is established with the school ethos, which could be supported through systemic initiatives in collaboration with EPs. EPs should also ensure that the relevance of social connectedness is well integrated into any bereavement or CI training for schools, as well as any guidance documents that they may develop and provide. It is important to acknowledge that such guidance and training is unlikely to fully address the nuanced nature of bereavement contexts and may not reflect the school's experiences of peer relationships. Therefore, EPs should also offer personalised strategies tailored to the unique circumstances of each context. Where possible this should be met by providing supervision for staff. EPs can identify key staff members who would best benefit from supervision, through collaboration with senior management.

Supervision of support for peer groups:

Within supervision, EPs should explore with staff how social connections are being supported in the school. Papadatou (2018) highlights that peer-bereaved pupils should develop informal and formal support networks within the school and local community. Findings from this study highlight that staff perceive the following as successful informal measures to support peer relationships:

- Space: providing protected spaces for peers to gather where needed
- Group activities: creating a designated time for pupils to gather to engage in discussion or activities to remember the person who died
- Acknowledgment and finding ways to remember: providing school-wide acknowledgment of the death of the pupil and involving pupils in plans to collectively commemorate and remember them within the school community.

Formal support networks could be established through evidence-informed interventions to support social interaction. EPs can provide guidance on interventions to support pupils at risk of social isolation such as the Circle of Friends intervention (Frederickson et al., 2005), as well as supporting staff to implement restorative approaches (Morrison, 2002) where there are peer disputes related to the loss. The findings of this study also highlighted that pupils may take on too much responsibility in supporting their peers. It is important to ensure through supervision that such groups are planned and led to ensure pupils are not taking on more ownership than they should.

Where pupils experience re-evaluation of their values and interests due to their grieving process, they may feel disconnected from their peer groups. In these

instances, school staff should be guided to support pupils to establish new connections. EPs are well informed on effective methods for engaging pupil voices, which can inform how they could be best supported in these instances. Additionally, EPs can advise staff on implementing other beneficial strategies highlighted in this study, such as pairing pupils to mentor younger peers (Please see 'S-Supporting Making Meaning' for further discussion).

Attendance

Peer-bereaved pupils with low attendance, SEMH needs or social and communication needs may be particularly susceptible to social isolation and disconnection, potentially increasing their vulnerability for EBSA. In such instances, early identification of need (Please see E-Establishing and Addressing Individual Needs) and preventative measures are essential. The findings of this study highlight the role of home visits and ensuring connection is maintained with the child and their family to encourage successful reintegration into school. EPs should utilise knowledge of PFA principles (Aucott & Soni, 2016) to support schools to develop an awareness of the need to foster feelings of safety and containment for pupils, in order to encourage a return to school as soon as possible. This should involve gradual returns, flexible timetabling of lessons and opportunities to leave the classroom when needed. Furthermore, EPs can provide psycho-education regarding EBSA and implement relevant approaches with their relevant local authorities

Vulnerable pupils

"This study shows that pupils who lack social connection following a bereavement may subsequently seek belonging with gangs and county lines. It will be important

for schools to establish who may be vulnerable to this (Please see '4.6.3: E- Establishing and addressing needs.') and work with relevant services to put preventative measures in place and support pupils accordingly. EPs could play an important role in ensuring that this context and need is recognised in coordinated critical incident responses with their respective Local Authority and CIRT. Furthermore, EPs have a valuable role in providing psychoeducation for schools on the importance of fostering a sense of belonging. This may be particularly important in contexts where pupils have lost a peer with whom they shared characteristics relating to their identity and perception of self.

Supporting pastoral staff need for connection

In this study, pastoral staff found connection with colleagues to be a valuable source of support following the death of a pupil. Implementing buddy systems or group supervision could be one way of cultivating connection between staff members. EPs hold an important role in ensuring bereavement support plans and CI policies explicitly address staff wellbeing, including measures to identify staff who may be especially impacted following the death of a pupil. EPs can directly supervise pastoral staff or other key adults, with a focus on containing staff's experiences and promoting wellbeing.

E- Educating about grief

This study highlighted that pastoral staff experience peer-bereaved pupils to be in a state of learning how to grieve. In this context, pupils may seek guidance and modelling from staff and peers, who may also be experiencing the bereavement. However, pastoral staff can lack confidence in their communication and guidance for

pupils. EPs could support staff with this need through tailored provision such as supervision, workshops, training and resources, offering strategies for facilitating conversations about grief, and supporting staff's ability to provide empathetic and effective guidance to bereaved pupils.

This study also highlighted that pupils' inexperience with grief can mean they can find it difficult to comprehend differences in grief response that they have not anticipated (please see 4.6.1: P-Peer Relationships and Connections with Others). While informal strategies such as one-to-one discussions may help address these challenges, structured interventions such as specialised assemblies or smaller group sessions that provide education on grief response would reach a wider range of pupils. Depending on the identified needs of pupils, schools may also wish to adopt educational programmes or evidence-based interventions aimed at helping pupils understand and cope with grief, such as the Seasons of Growth intervention (Riley, 2012). EP services could offer a role here by providing guidance and support in implementing these strategies, as well as providing tailored therapeutic interventions to develop pupils' understanding of their own and others' grief responses.

Furthermore, at an exosystemic level, EPs can play an important role as advocates for the needs of bereaved CYP, supporting the campaigns of bereavement charities and findings from psychological research that advocates for grief education to be better integrated into existing the curriculum for pupils (Holland, 2008).

E- Establishing and addressing individual needs

Establishing needs

School staff will need to be informed of the various factors that can impact bereavement experiences, in order to effectively identify bereaved pupils needs. EPS are well positioned to provide the necessary knowledge and guidance for staff and have the appropriate psychological knowledge to do so, with university programmes for the educational psychology doctorate including training on loss and bereavement support. Further research in the field of peer-bereaved CYP would help EPs deliver more nuanced guidance

EPs could also offer tailored training to support staff to identify more nuanced needs that may arise across unique bereavement contexts. For example, EPs can play an important role in ensuring staff understand and identify instances where pupils may be especially vulnerable to disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1989), or the unique challenges faced by bereaved pupils with additional needs. Furthermore, EP training could highlight the increased likelihood of EBSA for bereaved pupils.

Identifying Vulnerable Pupils following a Bereavement: A Resource

It is important that identification of need occurs in a systematic and comprehensive way to ensure that vulnerable pupils are not overlooked. This is more complex in the context of peer-bereavement due to the scale of impact in comparison to a parental bereavement. There are currently no formal resources that schools can utilise to identify factors that may impact the bereavement needs of pupils. An 'Identification of Need' checklist is therefore proposed as a (see Appendix J). This is informed by the findings of this study and related research which highlights key areas of vulnerability for bereaved pupils. These include: factors related to disenfranchised grief, (Doka 1989); the relationship with the deceased and the nature of their death (Dowdney,

2008); the developmental age of the CYP (McCarthy & Jessops, 2007; Dyregrov et al., 2015); cultural contexts (McLaughlin et al., 2019); locality and socio-economic circumstances (McCarthy & Jessops, 2007; Parsons, 2011); familial contexts (Dimery & Templeton, 2021); and risk factors before the death such as the CYP's personality and gender (Holland, 2008). Identified areas of need from this resource can be used to inform tailored support for pupils. This resource would be used in consultation with EPs for more effective outcomes and support

Identification of pupils' needs will require communication with parents, pupils, staff who know the pupils well and, where appropriate, the family of the pupil who died (who may have relevant contextual information regarding important peer-relationships). Furthermore, staff should be encouraged to provide different methods for pupils to self-identify their needs to support those who may struggle to communicate verbally. This may include non-verbal methods such as emails or letters.

The findings of this study also highlighted that reactive approaches and lack of policy or planning can lead to unclear and unestablished roles when supporting peer-bereaved pupils (see 4.6.4 R- Roles and Responsibilities for further discussion of related implications). Therefore, guidance for Bereavement Support Policies (BSP) or Critical Incident policy planning from Educational Psychology (EP) services and Local Authorities should include clear instructions for schools on how to manage and allocate the responsibility of identifying bereaved pupils' needs.

Schools would benefit from EP involvement to support them in the planning of this during policy development, including identifying how this should look in the context of

an anticipated death or death of a pupil with chronic illness, as well as in the context of CIs. Planning related to identifying pupils' needs should be developed across contexts, as findings from the present study suggest all forms of peer-bereavement can provoke mass reactions from pupils that school staff initially struggle to manage.

Meeting needs

This study highlighted that staff may observe some physical needs for pupils, particularly those who are bereaved following a violent or sudden death of peer. Physical needs were found to be met in a number of ways. For example, providing food, spaces to sleep, and driving pupils home to support their sense of safety. Driving pupils home may place staff at particular risk. For example, in instances where there is gang violence and the pupil is being targeted, as was the case in one of the examples from this present study. It is therefore proposed that risk assessments relating to home visits and providing transport for pupils are considered within CI policies. At an exosystemic level, it is proposed that schools may benefit from temporary funding from the LA in incidents of Critical Incidents, to support schools to provide resources (including food, transport and technology for pupils to access bereavement mobile applications) or support from external services based on individual pupil needs.

R- Roles and responsibilities

This is not the first study to highlight the need for schools to clarify roles and responsibilities following a bereavement (Dyregrov et al., 2015). However, roles and responsibilities may vary in the context of providing support for peer-bereaved pupils.

When assigning roles for BSP among staff, it is important to acknowledge that many staff members are also likely to be bereaved by the death of the pupil. Therefore, it is essential that especially impacted staff are identified and consulted with to determine what responsibilities they feel they can manage. The study's findings suggest that pastoral staff often feel solely responsible for BSP tasks. As pupils may seek support from teaching staff as well, teacher involvement in BSP provision and training is essential.

BSP implementation is likely to vary across roles. Therefore, it will be important for schools to boundary roles within the remits of each staff member's physical, emotional and professional capacities, ensuring that they do not work beyond the limits of their competence. Criteria and processes for referring pupils for external counselling support should also be clearly identified. To address potential misunderstandings about counselling support, EPs should provide schools with guidance and knowledge on this matter.

Given the varied nature of bereavement contexts, roles and responsibilities should be considered across anticipated and sudden pupil deaths and integrated into both BSP policies and CI policies accordingly. Such policies should be communicated across teams and reviewed over the course of implementation across various contexts to ensure it maintains relevance for the school.

Developing Critical Incident and BSP policies is a potentially challenging task for schools, particularly in contexts where school staff are inexperienced with providing BSP and do not have pre-existing knowledge of related systems and procedures within the LA. EPs could play an important role in supporting schools to develop a comprehensive policy and plan for BSP, providing relevant signposting.

Defining roles and responsibilities across LAs and establishing effective and consistent bereavement support schools is challenging without top-down guidance from a government level. Therefore, at a macrosystemic level, EPs should advocate for government policy and guidance to ensure BSP and CI support are consistently provided across all schools.

S- Supporting meaning-making

The findings of this study highlighted that, while pastoral staff understood pupils may demonstrate growth following a bereavement, the ways that growth may be supported were limited and not well understood. Subsequently, staff may benefit from psychoeducation training and supervision from EPs to help them apply theories and models of growth correctly, preventing misinterpretation and incorrect application (Hogan and Schmidt, 2002).

Meaning-making is an important factor in developing growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). According to Papadatou et al, (2010), positive meaning-making for peer-bereaved adolescents involves creating meaningful narratives that provide causal explanations (why this would happen) and establishing a sense of purpose in their own lives. EPs could support pupils at risk of experiencing complex grief by helping them to develop meaningful stories. Relevant interventions could be utilised to support this, including therapeutic approaches such as narrative therapy (Nelson et al., 2022) and person-centred planning tools such as PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope; Pearpoint et al., 1993) and MAPS (Making Action Plans; Forest et al., 1996) which may help individuals envision a positive future and plan steps to reach their goals.

Furthermore, findings from this study highlight that pastoral staff are not confident in supporting bereaved pupils emerging religious or spiritual beliefs. EPs can play a role in supervising staff with this and supporting their confidence in what to say to pupils, as well as encouraging staff to communicate with parents to explore how the cultural and religious identity of the pupils can be supported.

Appendix I. Example of transcript

CH Cristi Hone (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher)

Is it OK if you can tell me a little bit about your role in the school and a little bit about the context of school, if that's OK?

Participant D)

Yep. So we are a high school. I've been here since the school opened. So, 11 years and I'm a teacher. I teach music and performing arts and then pastoral, I'm also head of year seven. I'm permanent head of year seven. Our other year heads roll through, but I always stay with year seven. My specialism is the little ones and the settling in and things like that. I've been doing this role for a few years now.

CH

Cristi Hone (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher)

Okay, and I'm interested to know how many times you've needed to support young people who have been bereaved?

Participant D)

Quite a few, sadly really. Five times, across three different schools. All handled completely differently by the schools every time. Even though there were three within one school, they were dealt with completely differently. So yeah, five times.

CH Cristi Hone (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher) 1:48

Can you tell me what your understanding is of how adolescents experience grief, particularly in the context of when there's been a death of a peer.

Participant D)

I think age has got a massive, massive influence on it, hasn't it? The most recent, the one that stands in my mind so much. I think it was a girl who died very suddenly. We

Appendix J. Example of familiarisation process: Highlighting and making notes

CH **Cristi Hone (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher)**

And is it OK to know what your understanding of how adolescents experience grief, including following this particular context, following the death of a peer?

Participant G

I would struggle to compare it with students that are mainstream. Because the students that we have, because of their background. It could be that they've got a speech in language development delay or they've got like SEND or they've got trauma in their background. So, when we do work in terms of how it's impacted them or what we received back from them, actually a lot of them don't have emotional regulation, so they can not process. So how you would expect them to process grief is not how they process it at all. We've seen students that will go opposite, so if they're very explosive in their behavior, they might completely shut down and vice versa. We've had students completely lock themselves away, barricade themselves in. And you can't get through and we've had students that have gone off and unfortunately tried to seek that emotional support from elsewhere. So, with the groups, which have then took them down into vulnerabilities like county lines. So it's quite it's quite a difficult thing. From our perspective, it's quite difficult because they're already vulnerable. So, then when this is added on top, we have to try it and unpick it and also it takes time for them to understand that as adults we are also affected because obviously it affected us. Like not equally. We weren't friends with him. But we... I taught him for 2 1/2 years, so it's still affects us. And because they can't read facial animations in some cases, you get the comments, 'you don't care'. Whereas I think with adults, I mean it could be the same for adults if adults haven't had that process or that background and they could be very similar. But I'm just more conscious, that when you look at a grief process and how a grief process follows, there is absolutely no way that it formulates or moulds within our students. We have to kind of go, alright? Is this the anger part? The mould is really skewed.

Barry, Cristi R A
SHE needs

Barry, Cristi R A
SEMH needs

Barry, Cristi R A
Different responses

Barry, Cristi R A
Difficulty considering adults feelings?

Barry, Cristi R A
Social communication – difficulty reading emotions

Barry, Cristi R A
SEMH /Socio cultural- not following typical grief process

CH **Cristi Hone (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher)**

So the next few questions, I think it'd be helpful if you maybe think of a person you've supported in in this context. Can you tell me a little bit about what the person is like. their characteristics?

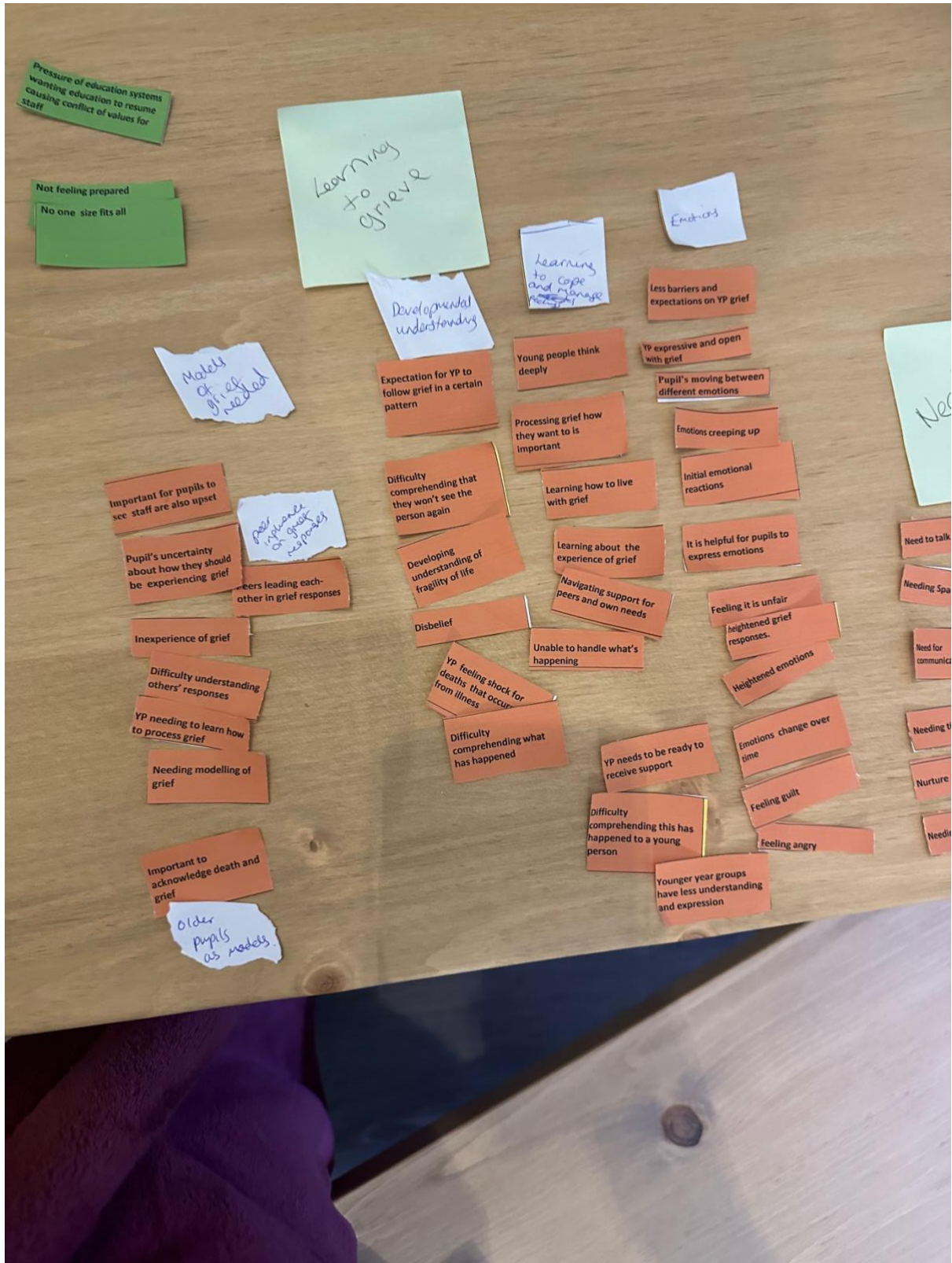
Appendix L. Example of Phase 2 coding

RQ3: Code	Evidence from data	Participants
1. Listening to pupils	<p>'We listen. They often just wanted someone <u>to listen</u> to them and to hear how they were feeling. So, I remember a particular morning having to go out of the school and meet a group, including this young person. (1)</p> <p>and I say 'OK, how do you feel' <u>and</u> they went, 'My next birthday, I'm going to be older than they were.' 'How do you feel about that?' (2)</p> <p>'Strange. Very strange. It's very sad. It's very sad.'</p> <p><u>So</u> in terms of supporting him, it was a lot of one to one sessions to start with, just talking. (5)</p> <p>equally if you took the time to listen to him and say alright, just come with me. Come and sit with me and tell me what's happened. If you give him the time, he <u>would</u> calm down (5)</p> <p>and I think just being that with them, they know. They know that you're fair and that you will listen (6)</p> <p>we hear all their problems. (8)</p>	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8
2. Making adjustments/ Flexibility	<p>if we can react to something then we do, if they say, 'I just can't do this.' We're <u>doing Macbeth</u> and somebody stabs himself and that's what happened with the child from another school for example. If they're covering a film or something that might have those sorts of things in them, we try and change alternatives or warn them in advance <u>(1)</u></p> <p>It might be that they sat next to this kid in maths and now they can't walk into the maths class without thinking of a kid, you know. We can offer solutions to things like that, but it all depends on what they come out with at the time as to what their particular need</p>	1, 2, 3, 6

	<p>When during that maths lesson that they're sitting with us and they're saying but I can never go into maths lesson again. Then we find a long-term <u>solution to</u> that. (2)</p> <p>Talking about which lessons they felt they could cope with on a day-to-day <u>basis</u>. (3)</p> <p>If you see them wobble, give them the opportunity to leave to come see this person to come see that person to give them some reflection time (6)</p>	
8. Space to be	<p>Sat in our medical base for a little while and <u>they were</u> given a conference room to use where they could just go in and chat about that and get it out what they wanted to say (1)</p> <p>So immediately <u>they could</u> go and have a room where they could go and if that's what they wanted to do is talk about him and they could. I think that was helpful <u>and</u> (1)</p> <p>we gave <u>them different</u> spaces that we maybe wouldn't have usually. Let them make you know, maybe mix in in ways. I remember we set out a specific area of the school that they could go to at breaks or lunch times, and we kept that to a certain <u>friendship group</u>. (2)</p> <p>The team were there just to <u>to</u> support just as an adult, that quiet <u>space</u>. (2)</p> <p>the students, we kind of had a bit of a little club after school and it was open to anyone, but it was actually her best friends that were there and they came along and they drew pictures and we looked at photos and we were like, ah, do you remember on this? (4)</p> <p>What happened is the two friends stayed with me and we sort of created a space for me and she then went round by year group, to announce it to every form (5)</p>	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8

Appendix M. Phase 3 Generating initial themes A





Pressure of education systems wanting education to resume causing conflict of values for staff

Not feeling prepared
No one size fits all

Learning to Grieve

Emotions

Learning to cope and manage

Developmental understanding

Less barriers and expectations on YP grief

Models of grief needed

Expectation for YP to follow grief in a certain pattern

Young people think deeply

YP expressive and open with grief

Pupil's moving between different emotions

Processing grief how they want to is important

Emotions creeping up

Important for pupils to see staff are also upset

Difficulty comprehending that they won't see the person again

Learning how to live with grief

Initial emotional reactions

peer influence of grief responses

Pupil's uncertainty about how they should be experiencing grief

peers leading each other in grief responses

Developing understanding of fragility of life

Learning about the experience of grief

It is helpful for pupils to express emotions

Navigating support for peers and own needs

Feeling it is unfair heightened grief responses.

Inexperience of grief

Disbelief

Unable to handle what's happening

Heightened emotions

Difficulty understanding others' responses

YP feeling shock for deaths that occur from illness

Difficulty comprehending what has happened

YP needs to be ready to receive support

Emotions change over time

YP needing to learn how to process grief

Needing modelling of grief

Important to acknowledge death and grief

Older pupils as models

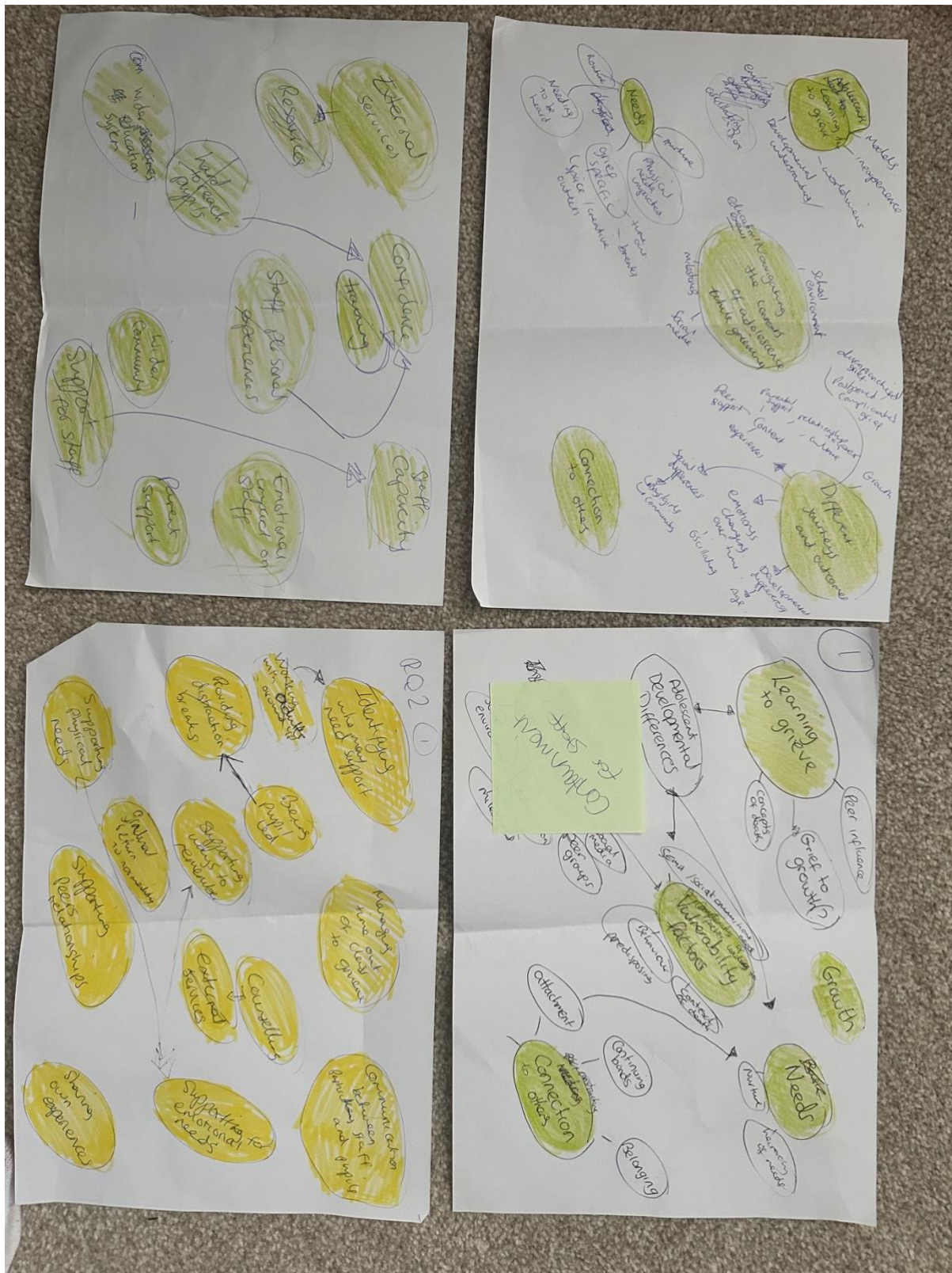
Difficulty comprehending this has happened to a young person

Feeling guilt

Feeling angry

Younger year groups have less understanding and expression

Appendix N. Phase 3 Generating initial themes B



Appendix O. Phase 4 Developing and reviewing themes

RQ1 How is adolescent grief understood by secondary school pastoral staff in the context of the death of a peer?

