Learning experience 7: Showing empathy

**Theme: Identity and Belonging, Aim 4 and Learning goal 3**

**Age group: Young children**

**Setting: Home, childminding and infant class (primary school)**

Mike, a widower visits his daughter Saoirse’s school today to hear how she is getting on in senior infants. The school has a policy of giving parents a written mid-year report in February at the parent/teacher meetings and again towards the end of June. This is Mike’s first face-to-face meeting with Saoirse’s teacher. His wife Mary used to look after all contacts with the school. Saoirse’s childminder, Niamh, drops and collects Saoirse from school every day while Mike is at work and she fills Mike in about how things are going at school. She knows Saoirse’s teacher well and has an informal chat with her regularly, especially since Mike asked her to do this for him. The school has been very good about supporting Saoirse since her Mammy died five months ago. Miss Buckley, Saoirse’s teacher, has been in regular phone contact with Mike since then. However, Mike is still a bit nervous about the meeting.

Miss Buckley immediately puts Mike at ease and reassures him that Saoirse is doing very well. She goes through the report card in detail with him and regularly asks him if he has any questions. She also shows him samples of Saoirse’s work on display on the walls, in her books, and in her portfolio. She shares some photographs with him. Two of these show Saoirse minding two babies while playing with a friend. The caption beside the photographs reads, *Don’t worry Lucy, I’ll look after you.* Miss Buckley explains that Saoirse and her friend were pretending that Lucy’s mammy was sick and died. She asks Mike how Saoirse is getting on at home and he tells her about the things she enjoys and the things that she finds hard, now that her Mammy is gone. Miss Buckley gives Mike the report card to take home and tells him to call or to send in a note if he wants to talk to her about Saoirse. She reassures him that she will continue to keep a close eye on Saoirse and that she will give him a call in a few weeks to give him an update. She re-emphasises that Saoirse is doing well in her learning and is coping well at school after losing her Mammy.

**Reflection:** Do I give enough thought to the events and circumstances in families’ lives which can impact on children’s learning and development?