



Bereavement Policy

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| Status | Supporting- Non curriculum |
| Review Cycle | Annual |
| Date written/ last review | September 2020 |
| Date of next review | September 2021 |

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and rationale

We fully recognise our moral and statutory responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of all pupils. As an inclusive school we strive to ensure all children feel safe when in our care. This Bereavement Policy is one of a range of documents which set out the responsibilities of our school as we aim to create a safe, vigilant, welcoming, caring and supportive environment for children where they feel valued and are respected. Our values focus on and include openness, honesty and trust alongside valuing the strengths of each individual child ensuring they achieve to the best of their abilities.

This policy seeks to set out the principles and procedures we operate to support families, children, staff and the wider community through providing information regarding our responsibilities and details how these responsibilities should be carried out.

Around 41,000 children are bereaved of a parent every year in the UK. That's nearly two children under 16 every hour. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person¹.

Experiencing a bereavement can make children more vulnerable. Bereavement, whether it is an expected death because of illness or a sudden and unexpected death or suicide, is something that can impact on members of our school community at any time.

Our school is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and pupils. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos and environment that prepares pupils for coping with bereavement.

This policy is for all staff, pupils, parents and carers, governors, visitors and partner agencies working within the school. It provides guidelines and procedures as to how our school can best prepare for, and respond to, bereavement in the school community.

We recognise that members of the school community will be affected by a range of losses including separation and divorce. Some aspects of this policy may also be helpful in these cases.

This policy was based on an exemplar developed by the national charity Winston's Wish.

1.2 Policy links

This policy also links to the following other policies we hold in school:

- Safeguarding policy
- Coping with a school emergency / Critical Incident Policy

¹ Winston's Wish <https://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/facts-and-figures/>

1.3 Purpose of the policy

This bereavement policy supports us to provide effective support to pupils and staff before and after bereavement. It covers both expected and unexpected deaths.

Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children and staff require. However, we also need to be prepared to call on more specialist support where there is a sudden and unexpected death, or where the impact of a bereavement is complex.

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Support pupils and or staff before (where applicable), during and after bereavement
- enhance effective communication at a difficult time
- clarify the pathway of support between school, family, community and services
- make best use of the support available in school, the Local Authority, and the wider community services.

2 Our charter for bereaved children and young people

To help us meet the objectives of this policy we have adopted the Winston Wishes charter of:

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| B | Bereavement support Bereaved children need to receive support from their family, from their school and from important people around them. We will signpost them to specialist support if needed. |
| E | Express feelings and thoughts We will help bereaved children to find appropriate ways to express all their feelings and thoughts associated with grief, such as sadness, anxiety, confusion, anger and guilt. |
| R | Remember the person who has died We understand that bereaved children have the right to remember the person who has died for the rest of their lives. We will support them to share special and difficult memories in the most appropriate way. |
| E | Education and information All children, particularly bereaved children, are entitled to receive answers to their questions. They need information that clearly explains what has happened, why it has happened and what will be happening. We will strive to enable children to have their questions answered on an individual basis, working with parents and carers or through additional support services. |

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| A | Appropriate response from schools and colleges Bereaved children need understanding and support from their teachers and fellow students without having to ask for it. We will provide relevant resources to ensure this happens. |
| V | Voice in important decisions Where appropriate we will work with families to encourage them to involve bereaved children in important decisions that have an impact on their lives such as planning the funeral and remembering anniversaries. |
| E | Enjoyment We will support the bereaved child's right to enjoy their lives even though someone important has died. |
| M | Meet others We will try where possible and if appropriate to do so, to enable bereaved children to benefit from the opportunity to meet other children who have had similar experiences. |
| E | Established routines We will endeavour, whenever possible, to enable bereaved children to continue activities and interests so that parts of their lives can still feel 'normal'. |
| N | Not to blame We will help bereaved children to understand that they are not responsible, and not to blame, for the death. |
| T | Tell the story We will encourage bereaved children to tell an accurate and coherent story of what has happened in a supportive and appropriate manner to the school environment, as we know this is helpful to them. |

3 Safeguarding, confidentiality and recording

We follow our school's safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure that the welfare of the child remains paramount throughout, and that all children are protected from harm.

It is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure. However, pupils will need to be made aware that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

To retain the trust of pupils and parents and carers, we will ensure that the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. Sensitive information will only be disclosed internally or

externally with careful attention to the rights and needs of individuals and in line with general data protection regulation.

If a child is suffering from trauma, we will share this as appropriate with staff, but not necessarily the details of their experience.

We will discuss with the bereaved child and their family which adults in the school community they would like made aware of the experiences impacting on the child.

We will use our usual school systems safeguarding and emotional health support systems to record when a child has experienced a close bereavement, is at risk of suicide or has made a suicide attempt.

4 Roles and responsibilities in dealing with bereavement

4.1 The role of the governing body is to:

- approve the bereavement policy and ensure its implementation
- ensure the policy is reviewed every three years or when national or local policy directs a change

4.2 The role of the head teacher and senior leadership team is to:

- lead a whole-school approach to the effective management of loss and bereavement including ensuring appropriate training and support provided for staff
- contact the appropriate professionals such as the local authority in the case of a sudden and unexpected death or suicide – key professionals would be expected to be involved – e.g. Educational Psychologist, Primary Mental Health Worker and other relevant professionals.
- be the first point of contact for family/child/staff directly affected by a bereavement
- record bereavements affecting children
- designate liaison and support to other trained members of staff when appropriate
- monitor progress in supporting those impacted by a bereavement and liaise with external agencies
- keep the governing body appropriately informed
- deal with media enquiries

4.3 The role of staff in our school is to:

- Pastoral staff/lead on emotional health to access bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff if appropriate
- know how to access support for themselves, for other staff and for the family, if advice or information is needed
- know how to report a concern if the bereavement or sudden and unexpected death has placed a child at significant risk of harm
- know how to support a child when they are distressed and how to refer to specialist support if needed
- have a basic understanding of a child's needs when facing loss and change
- inform the head teacher at the earliest possibility if they hear about a death of someone in the school community

Our Family Support Worker has had more advanced training about bereavement and can offer support and resources to other members of staff if needed.

4.4 The role of the local authority

To advise and support staff, consult on referral pathways and identification of complex grief

5 Procedures

5.1 Pre-bereavement

In some situations, it is known in advance that a death is going to occur. This is usually because of a long illness.

In cases where this is an adult within the school community, individual conversations will be held with the head teacher in terms of support, information exchange and practical considerations.

When the expected death is of a child or a member of a child's family we will:

- contact the family to confirm factual information and explore what support could be provided to them
- identify the key point of contact as the Head Teacher or Family Support Worker in school in terms of information exchange and to update information when necessary

- ensure that all relevant adults are clear about what information has and needs to be shared with the pupil
- keep lines of communication open to ensure that all information is received in a timely fashion
- explore the possibility of signposting to other organisations such as a local hospice or support service
- look to involve faith or community leaders when appropriate and with the agreement of the family
- explore what support for the pupils affected might look like in practice
- support members of staff to ensure all involved are confident in their ability to support the pupil
- if appropriate, consider and reflect on how to communicate with the wider school community for example the pupil's class mates
- if appropriate, begin conversations around practical considerations in the events leading up to the death and following the death

5.2 Following a bereavement

We will consider each individual situation carefully to ensure that the response from the school is sensitive, accurately reflects the gravity of the situation, and involves those affected as appropriate.

As an immediate response we will:

- contact the deceased's family with the aim to establish the facts and avoid rumours (head teacher)
- find out, if possible, how the family would like the information to be managed by the school
- allocate Family Support Worker or other appropriate member of staff as support for the affected child / young person or children / young people and ensure there is support in place for the staff members if required
- consider any religious beliefs that may affect the timing of the funeral or impact on other aspects of the bereavement process
- send letters or cards of condolence to families or individuals directly affected
- inform staff of the death before pupils are informed, recognising that some pupils may have found out through other means. Where possible, staff will be supported to share information in age-appropriate ways and to make sure all staff have the same version of the

event.

- inform the wider school community in line with the wishes of the family. We would normally do this through letters to parents if appropriate to do so.
- will prepare a press statement, with support from the council's communications team if required and with due regard to the family affected (head teacher)
- make small changes to the school timetable to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of the child or children affected by the situation. However, we will aim for minimal disruption to the timetable as this can offer a sense of security and familiarity.

For the funeral we will:

- find out the family's wishes and follow these in terms of the involvement of members of the school community (or not)
- identify which staff may want to attend if invited by the family and the practicalities of issues such as risk assessment, staff cover and transport. In some rare circumstances it may be appropriate to close the school
- be sensitive to religious and cultural issues.

After the funeral we will:

- consider whether it is appropriate to visit the child and family affected at home and plan a return to school
- ensure friendships are secure – peer support can be particularly important for a bereaved child or young person
- continue regular contact with the family and show we still care about them and their child over time
- monitor the emotional needs of staff and pupils and provide listening time and ongoing appropriate support
- consider practical issues and make thoughtful and sensitive updates to parental and other contact details when needed
- continue to assess the needs of children most affected, and record and plan for support accordingly.

Longer term we will:

- be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life. So, we will record information and share with relevant people, particularly at transition points. This could include ensuring significant dates and events for the child are recorded and shared with appropriate staff for future reference.
- signpost families to bereavement support

5.3 Following a sudden and unexpected death – suicide

Suicide is not just a really difficult event to deal with, it also presents the unique risk of potentially being the trigger for another suicide. We will seek advice from professional services and organizations

As a school community we will make a response to a sudden death within an appropriate and efficient time scale.

It is necessary to maintain the structure and order of the school routine, while facilitating the expression of grief, and reducing the risk of imitative suicide.

Information provided to the school community in the immediate aftermath of a sudden and unexpected death will depend on the age of the pupils but should be based on and reinforce:

- facts (not rumours)
- an understanding that death is permanent
- an exploration of normal and wide-ranging reactions to sudden and unexpected death – expressions of anger and guilt are entirely normal
- an understanding that, with support, people can cope
- an understanding that fleeting thoughts of suicide are not unusual
- an awareness of suicidal warning signs and resources available to help
- an understanding of expectations around funerals.

When discussing any suicide that has occurred, we will ensure that the information given is age appropriate and:

- is factually correct but does not include detail of the suicidal act itself does not romanticise, glorify or vilify the death

- does not include details of any suicide note
- does not include speculation over the motive for suicide
- takes care with the language used – for example using phrases such as ‘died by suicide’ or ‘ended his / her life’ rather than ‘committed suicide’ or ‘successful suicide’, and saying ‘attempted to end his / her life’ rather than ‘unsuccessful suicide’ or ‘failed attempt at suicide’.

5.4 Following a sudden and unexpected death – homicide

The Childhood Bereavement Network and Winston’s Wish estimate that around one child every day is bereaved of a parent or sibling through murder or manslaughter in Great Britain.

Children may experience profound and lasting shock, enormous anger at what has happened, rage at the person who caused their relative to die, deep fear at the perceived insecurity of the world around them. Sadly, in many cases, the person who caused the death is also known to the child, resulting in great confusion and a double loss, for example, if one parent kills the other and is then imprisoned. In some families, the child may have to move to a new house, school, area – away from familiar and comforting places and routines.

If appropriate and with the support and advice of professionals, we aim to take an honest and consistent age appropriate approach to talking with children about what has happened. It is not possible to shield them from what has happened completely.

6 Equality and inclusion, values and beliefs

We recognise that there is a range of cultural and religious beliefs, customs and procedures concerning death. It follows that bereaved children and families may have differing expectations.

Some of these may affect matters of school organisation. We will source guidance to develop our understanding of the range of beliefs to best support pupils.

We will present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. We will make pupils aware of differing responses to bereavement, and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

7 Young asylum seekers and refugees

Many young asylum seekers and refugees have experienced the death of family members or friends, often in traumatic circumstances. This, and further traumatic experiences and losses, can have a devastating effect on their emotional and physical health, behaviour, learning and relationships.

Sudden traumatic death complicates the process of grief and mourning, as usual ways of coping may be overwhelmed. We will consult specialist mental health services where appropriate.

8 Supporting staff

We are aware that staff also experience bereavement. When this happens, we will ensure they are provided with support to take care of themselves, and to know where they can go for additional help should they need it including their GP or staff supervision, information and advice.

10 Additional support and links

Winston's Wish: www.winstonswish.org Support information and guidance for bereaved children, young people and for those caring for bereaved families.

Cruse Bereavement Care: www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk Support for anyone who has been bereaved.

Childhood Bereavement Network: <http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk> Find childhood bereavement support in your local area.

Hope Again: <http://hopeagain.org.uk/> A website for young people who have been bereaved.

Papyrus: <https://papyrus-uk.org/> Support and advice for young people struggling with thoughts of suicide, and anyone worried about a young person.

Samaritans: <http://www.samaritans.org/your-community/supporting-schools> A range of guidance and support for schools.

In the case of suicide -The Samaritans Step by Step Guide. <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/step-step/>
