



## Bereavement Policy

### This Policy

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 person<sup>1</sup>.

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 students. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that prepares students for coping with bereavement.

This policy is for all staff, students, 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.

### Purpose of the Policy

This bereavement policy supports us to provide effective support to students 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:

- To support pupils and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and community
- To identify key staff within school and clarify the pathway of support.

## Safeguarding

We follow our School's Child Protection and Safeguarding policy 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, students will need to be made aware that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

To retain the trust of students 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 *e.g. CPOMS, Sims, vulnerability register* to record when a child has experienced a close bereavement, is at risk of suicide or has made a suicide attempt.

## Roles and Responsibilities

### Headteacher

The Headteacher has overall responsibility for the policy and its implementation, for liaison with the governing body, parents/carers, the Local Authority and other relevant outside agencies. The Headteacher will:

- monitor progress with external agencies e.g. local authority in the case of sudden death, unexpected death or suicide
- respond to media enquiries
- keep the governing body fully informed
- be first point of contact for family/child concerned
- designate liaison and support to other trained members of staff when appropriate.

## **Designated Safeguarding Lead**

The DSL will:

- lead a whole-school approach to the effective management of loss and bereavement including ensuring appropriate training and support is provided for staff
- record bereavements affecting children on the relevant systems e.g. CPOMS, Sims and Vulnerability register
- monitor progress in supporting those impacted by a bereavement and liaise/coordinate with external agencies

## **All Staff**

- inform the head teacher or DSL at the earliest possibility if they hear about a death of someone in the school community.
- know how to report a concern if the bereavement or sudden and unexpected death has placed a child at significant risk of harm e.g. Pink Slip, DSL
- 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
- have a basic understanding of a child's needs when facing loss and change
- know how to support a child when they are distressed and how to refer to specialist support if needed
- teach about loss and bereavement as part of the planned PSHE curriculum.

## **General Procedures**

### **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 headteacher 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 a key point of contact in school in terms of information exchange and to update when things change
- ensure that all relevant adults are clear about what information has and needs to be shared with the student
- 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 Winston's Wish or a local hospice
- look to involve faith or community leaders when appropriate and with the agreement of the family
- explore what support for the student affected might look like in practice
- arrange training for specific members of staff to ensure all involved are confident in their ability to support the student
- if appropriate, consider and reflect on how to communicate with the wider school community for example the students class mates
- if appropriate, begin conversations around practical considerations in the events leading up to the death and following the death

## **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, avoid rumours and offer condolences (headteacher)
- consider any religious beliefs that may affect the timing of the funeral or impact on other aspects of the bereavement process
- find out, if possible, how the family would like the information to be managed by the School
- allocate member(s) of staff to be the key point(s) of support for the affected child / young person or children / young people and ensure there is support in place for the staff members if required
- inform staff of the death before students are informed, recognising that some students may have found out through other means. Where possible, staff will be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways to
- make sure all staff have the same version of the event. Where this has not been possible, staff will be supported to share the information.
- inform students who are most directly affected (such as a friendship group), preferably in small groups, by someone known to them.
- inform the wider school community in line with the wishes of the family. We would normally do this through assemblies and / or letters to parents.
- 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
- discuss the bereavement support plan and further ways the child/family can be supported

#### **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 and students may want to attend if invited by the family and the practicalities of issues such as risk assessment, staff cover, agreement from parents and transport. In some rare circumstances it may be appropriate to close the school fully or partially
- organise tributes such as flowers or a collection in line with family wishes and the wishes of staff and students
- be sensitive to religious and cultural issues. The school should ensure that they do not deny young people the opportunity to grieve and mourn within the traditions of their own culture and religious beliefs.

#### **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
- continue regular contact with the family and show we still care about them and their child over time
- consider practical issues and make thoughtful and sensitive updates to parental and other contact details when needed, ensure friendships are secure – peer support can be particularly important for a bereaved child or young person
- monitor the emotional needs of staff and students and provide listening time and ongoing appropriate support
- 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. (Creation of Pupil Information File)
- signpost families to bereavement support e.g. Winston's Wish
- ensure that learning about loss and bereavement is embedded into appropriate curriculum areas including PSHEE curriculum. When teaching about loss and bereavement we will give careful thought as to how to support those directly affected by loss and bereavement

- consider appropriate ways to remember the individual

#### **Reintegration back to school after a bereavement**

- a key member of staff will have contacted the student/family and discussed their wishes regarding coming back to school. The bereavement plan may or may not be discussed at this time
- discussion with DSL or Deputy DSL will take place to discuss bereavement plan, students' needs and support that can be offered to the student and their family
- student has a return to school meeting with a named person to determine any change to support they require on their return. Create or revisit the bereavement plan
- on the day of the return the student is met by a named member of staff to determine if they still want to go ahead with the support agreed in the previous meetings
- teaching staff informed of the student return. Relevant strategies on the bereavement plan cascaded down to staff.
- key staff to check in with students at regular intervals. Discuss effectiveness of bereavement plan at panel.

#### **Multiple Deaths and Death in School**

In the event of multiple deaths, additional support and resources will probably be required.

- a plan of action should be agreed by the senior leadership team
- one individual, pre-selected and briefed by the team, acts as spokesperson, relaying consistent information to the media (normally Headteacher)
- if appropriate ensure an emergency school hotline is set up and running
- retrieve the personal belongings of the deceased for their return to the next-of-kin
- information on the school's database, including references and addresses will probably need to be amended and updated.
- the school may decide to write to parents to allow them to explain to their children the meaning and implications of an event.

#### **4.4 Death of a Member of staff**

When such an event occurs it is usually extremely traumatic, especially for members of staff forced to deal with their own grief as well as comforting students. Planning how a school manages such an event is important. To avoid rumours, it is advisable that the news is broken as soon as possible.

- senior Leaders are gathered to be told the news by the headteacher
- close colleagues to the deceased are told privately
- staff to be gathered collectively and told, giving them privacy to grieve before announcing the news to the rest of the school
- classes of the deceased are informed before news is broken in assembly, in a space where everyone maybe told simultaneously
- students will be given the opportunity to express their grief individually with the support of the form/class tutor
- school mentors and counsellors are available to those who need it
- some students may have already experienced death and their way of coping with such events is sometimes observed in emotional outbursts. Some may express feelings of anger, panic or relief. It is important to try to remember that this is a time when everyone is hurting
- consideration should be placed on ways to remember the member of staff

#### **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.

As a School community we will make a response to a sudden death within two school days

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.

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

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’.

### **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.

Winston’s Wish recommend taking 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. Winston’s Wish can provide support to families bereaved in this way and further information can be found on their website: <https://www.winstonswish.org/death-through-homicide/>

## Public Health Pandemics

Bereavement during coronavirus presents a special set of challenges. Some aspects of the normal school bereavement strategy will be difficult to implement but will need to be complemented using virtual space.

On discovering a child or family experiencing a loss due to a public health pandemic e.g. COVID -19 we will:

- stay in regular contact with the bereaved child
- appoint 1 or 2 people to liaise with the child. (i.e. DSL, SSM, mentors, school counsellor)
- schedule regular points of contact during the week. The frequency depends on the needs of the child. If it's a vulnerable child, also schedule regular contact with the parents or carers.
- record support on CPOMS and discuss the needs of the child during pastoral meetings.
- discuss with the student prior to their return the plan on how their return to school will be managed. (Bereavement plan- optional)

On return to school:

- the students key people will acknowledge what has happened without making a fuss
- a 'time out' pass will be available and communicated with staff
- the student will be given simple choices, particularly with regard to managing their grief
- staff will be informed of the details of the bereavement plan
- continue to signpost to support e.g. Mentors, counsellors, Zumos, Kooth, Wellbeing page, Pause, Winston's Wish, books

## The Media

On some occasions there will be media interest.

- the Headteacher will liaise with the media and possibly the police as appropriate
- the Headteacher will prepare a press statement, with support from the council's communications team if required and with due regard to the family affected.

## **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 training and guidance to develop our understanding of the range of beliefs to best support students.

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

## **Support for bereaved 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.

This could include: their GP; Cruse Bereavement Care <http://www.cruse.org.uk/>; or BUPA

We will work within our leave of absence policy and if necessary, the occupational health team to ensure staff are provided with appropriate leave and support at a time of bereavement.

Teachers who are dealing with their own bereavement are encouraged to speak with their line manager about any areas of the curriculum which they feel uncomfortable to teach or want support to teach.

### **Staff training**

We will ensure that training is provided to staff to support staff in meeting their roles and responsibilities as identified in this policy.

### **Curriculum**

Children and young people explore the concept of loss, bereavement, and grief as part of the statutory elements of our PSHE curriculum. It is also addressed through cross-curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles, as well as through art, literacy, and religious education.

We also use assemblies to address aspects of death – such as Remembrance Day, Holocaust Memorial Day or commemorative occasions. We also observe national minutes of silence and explain the purpose of this.

When appropriate, we respond to a tragedy or serious incident by discussing this in class having discussed as a staff team the language we will use to respond to the incident.

We will answer any questions relating to loss or death in a sensitive, age-appropriate, honest and factual way. Children and young people will not be expected to disclose any personal experiences but will be signposted to support if they want it.

We give children opportunities to learn about and discuss cultural and religious issues around death and encourage them to express their own responses and feelings.

## Support

As part of PDP and our safeguarding work, we will also signpost to appropriate sources of support for pupils and adults in the school community.

**Winston's Wish:** [www.winstonswish.org](http://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](http://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.

<b>Reviewed by:</b>	Mr Evans - Deputy Head (Pastoral)		
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