



Bereavement Policy (Pupils, Families and Community Committee)

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TYPE OF POLICY	Statutory	APPROVAL LEVEL	Board level

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1. Overall Statement

A whole Academy approach to bereavement can include a variety of provision including one to one support, peer support, books and resources in the library, a safe environment, support for staff and

the inclusion of loss and bereavement in the curriculum in PSHCE and other subject areas. Since everyone experiences bereavement in different ways, it is important to recognise that this policy aims only to put in place a useful framework to help staff at Parallel Learning trust respond compassionately and effectively to the bereaved within the Academy community.

2. Purpose of a Whole Academy Bereavement Policy:

- To have a clear and robust policy that all members of the Academy community are aware of
- To provide a framework for Academy staff members to address death and the consequences of death
- The policy should enable staff members to feel more confident when working with bereaved pupils so that they will be able to support them more effectively
- The policy will also include concise guidelines for those staff members supporting a bereaved child or young person and help support staff to deal with a sensitive and often difficult subject

3. Roles

a) Bereavement Support within each Academy:

Each of our five academies organises the required support in a manner that suits their catchment and the individual student's needs:

At both SHA/VPA, bereavement support is in place through the welfare team.

Within Ramsden Hall and Evolve Academies, the support would be a role that a member of SLT with close links to the student, or the Head Teacher would be undertaken.

Within Wandle Valley Academy, the Head Teacher or the Head Teacher's Personal Assistant, would meet with the staff and then look at a plan of support, using health etc. With regards to a pupil, then support is via the DSL and therapeutic support. Various agencies would then be accessed if necessary and for any student death, there is a system of support from Sutton Local Authority.

The important, commonality within this work is that the support would be identified and put in place on a case-by-case basis.

- b) **Tutors** - would provide primary support and liaise with Pastoral Leaders and Pastoral Team
- c) **Pastoral Leaders** - would provide support to the Tutor (the primary support) and liaise with the DSL and the Pastoral Team where necessary

4. Raising awareness of availability of bereavement support at the Academy

- a) Pupils should be made fully aware of the support that will be offered in the event of bereavement. Pupils should be encouraged to inform the Academy if they have been bereaved.
- b) Staff also need to be made more aware of bereavement support available to pupils and for themselves. This may include:
 - Staff bereavement training sessions
 - Notes in Tutor Handbook
 - Information about support available to staff who are bereaved (CRUSE 0808 808 1677)
 - Access to appropriate resources, including books and websites
 - Staff briefings

5. Staff Training and Support

- a. **Training** - One of the key areas for staff training is how to recognise common symptoms and behaviours associated with grief and advice on how to respond appropriately. Information on Bereavement is included in the tutor handbook.
- b. **Expectations and degree of involvement** - Staff need to be aware of just how vulnerable bereaved pupils may be. This can put staff at risk of engaging in actions which could later be misconstrued or put them at risk of being over involved.
- c. **Self-Care and Awareness of their own bereavement history** – Staff should be provided with some training opportunities to enable them to understand their own losses and vulnerabilities as part of Whole Academy Safeguarding Training.

6. Pupil Support

- a. **Contact point/drop-in** – When/if required, a clearly nominated space in the Academy should be established as the contact point for bereavement support. If required by a pupil, this space should be a well-publicised place to go if a pupil feels that they cannot speak to their Tutor or if they are feeling overwhelmed and need immediate support.
- b. **Immediately after the death** – Head of Year to get in touch with bereaved family if appropriate
- c. **Cultural issues** – Information to be made available to Tutors and Heads of Year about relevant cultural issues e.g. funeral and mourning rituals. Note that some cultures require the deceased to be buried within a short period of time after death.
- d. **Bereavement plan** – A bereavement plan should be completed where appropriate in conjunction with the pupil and their family and a copy placed in the pupil's file.
- e. **Feeling Safe at the Academy** – Bereavement support cards and time-out cards offered to the pupil.
- f. **Academic workloads** – Managing academic workloads can be difficult for some pupils after a death in the family. Teachers to be consulted on possible ways to reduce workload in weeks immediately following the bereavement.
- g. **Bullying** – Recently bereaved pupils are more likely to be bullied or to bully. Staff need to be vigilant, especially over the longer term.
- h. **Guidance on difficult behaviours** – some bereaved pupils are so angry they behave in uncharacteristic ways. Staff need to be made aware of the possibility of such behaviour and take the bereavement into consideration when using the rewards/consequences system
- i. **Neglect** – Staff to be aware that bereaved pupils are more likely to suffer neglect or abuse
- j. **Bereavement Groups** - Provision should be made for a weekly drop-in group(s) where pupils who have been bereaved can talk to others who have had similar experiences. Consideration should be given to setting up a support group run in the evening for Parents and Carers.

7. Support for Parents and Carers

Young people who have been bereaved are likely to be more resilient following the death of their Parent or Carer. Research has shown overwhelmingly that the coping ability of the Parent is a major factor influencing young people.

- a. **Contact with Parent or Carers prior to the funeral** – Headteacher or relevant senior pastoral leader/s to contact family if appropriate. Exact details of death and circumstances to be established. The family should be consulted on communicating information to the Academy community, returning to Academy and memorial activities.
- b. **Funeral arrangements** – Pastoral Leaders to liaise with family and agree what Academy representation might be appropriate.
- c. **Ongoing contact after the funeral** – Tutor and/or Heads of Year to maintain contact with family and to be aware that the family may have some additional challenges in getting pupils to and from Academy.
- d. **Academy to be able to signpost individuals and families to key bereavement support information:**

- i. Leaflets, booklets and websites
 - ii. Local bereavement agency details
- e. **Academy to hold larger parent and carer support meetings if appropriate** – In cases where large numbers of pupils are bereaved parent and carer support meetings could be arranged after school.
- f. **Signpost the parents'/carers' to Cruse Bereavement Support services:** - The best support for families experiencing bereavement is to signpost them to specialist support. The most effective route for this would be through CRUSE. 0808 808 1677.
- g. **For instances involving the death of a baby during pregnancy or closely after birth,** - signposting to the charity Petals is recommended as they provide free counselling for those affected by this type of loss. (www.petalscharity.org)

8. Appropriate language when talking to the bereaved

Staff should be encouraged to use the word 'dead or died' rather than any other word when talking to bereaved pupils. 'Passed away', 'gone to sleep' or 'lost' are not always helpful. In cases of suicide staff need to use the phrase 'took their own life' and NOT the phrase 'committed suicide'. Other language issues need to be included in staff training.

As a general rule it is best to be open and honest with pupils, listening, when possible, rather than giving advice. Always feel free to say 'I don't know' if a pupil asks a challenging question for which you do not have an answer, e.g. 'Will Mum meet Gran in Heaven?'

9. Communications and the Media

- a. **Dissemination of information** - It is important that the Academy is recognised as a source of information which can be trusted. It is inevitable that there will be gossip, so it is important that the Academy is seen as somewhere that can be referred to for accurate information.
 - Ensure that all facts are accurate (as far as is possible) before speaking to Staff, Pupils, Parents and Carers.
 - Regular briefings to Staff and Pupils, and regular letters home to Parents and Carers. These are likely to be daily initially.
 - Whilst our schools are within PLT, we would always use our chosen media support provider, PLMR (oliver.lane@plmr.co.uk) if there is a need for communications with the press and wider media.
 - Nominate one staff member as spokesperson – normally the Head
 - No staff to post messages about deceased on websites or any type of social media, as these can be accessed by the Press and may be quoted out of context.
 - Make sure there is another telephone line for outgoing calls at a time of crisis
- b. **The Press**
 - Where events can be anticipated, the relevant Head Teacher must contact Ollie Lane at PLMR for Ollie to make the approach to the press in advance to negotiate appropriate reporting.
 - Any other member of staff who is approached by the Press must refer them to the nominated spokesperson, who is Ollie Lane via the Head Teacher.

Example: The Coroner's Report into a suicide may contain details relating to the way an individual took their own life. It might be inappropriate to publish these details as this could encourage copy-cat suicides.

10. Proposals for dealing with different types of Bereavement

- a. **Major Incident**

Support of Staff and Pupils

It is impossible to predict who will be affected by a 'high profile' event. It is likely that those affected will extend well beyond those who were directly involved with the deceased, so everyone needs to have access to support if they feel they need it.

- The School Crisis Team and MAPS – (Multi-Agency Psychology Services) should be contacted at the earliest opportunity if appropriate
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- Establish a list of vulnerable individuals – staff or pupils
- Establish which, if any pupils/staff need to be told first
- It may be appropriate to open up the Academy premises at the weekend to provide a focus for pupils to meet and talk.
- All offers of help should be considered together before deciding which to accept.
- County can provide funding for MAPS counsellors to supplement provision already available in the Academy.
- Establish a safe space where anyone can come if they need support i.e. one room where counselling and other support is available.
- Signposting to CRUSE bereavement support (cruse.org.uk)

Longer term, it may be helpful to establish weekly drop-in sessions where those most affected can gain support from each other. Such sessions would need to run by a qualified counsellor.

Memorials

An important part of the grieving process for many people will be the need to have some sort of memorial. It may not be appropriate or possible for everyone affected to attend the funeral. Decisions about who should attend (if anyone) must be made in conjunction with the family of the deceased.

As far as possible, pupils should be encouraged to decide for themselves how they would like to remember the deceased.

Possible ideas might include:

- A memorial assembly
- Visiting a place that was special to the deceased
- Creating a memory box or book
- Raising money for a particular charity
- Buying something to retain on the Academy premises e.g. a memorial bench or memorial tree

Long Term Impact

Some Staff and Pupils who appeared unaffected at the time of the incident may experience problems later on. This is especially the case if individuals witness a death or if the death itself was sudden, violent or was by suicide. It is important that this is recognised and appropriate help and support is given.

The anniversary of the incident may give rise to problems for some Staff and Pupils. (See section 10(e).

b. Death of a Serving Member of Staff

Dissemination of information

Ensure that all facts are accurate (as far as is possible) before speaking to Staff, Pupils and Parents and Carers. Clear and accurate information will be particularly important should a member of Staff die suddenly and unexpectedly (particularly if they are taken ill, or suffer an accident at the Academy).

Staff and pupils should be informed as soon as possible to reduce rumours. It is helpful if staff are informed first giving them time to react to the news of a death before talking to pupils.

For a teaching member of staff – regular letters sent to all pupils normally taught by the deceased to keep them informed of cover provision. This will be particularly important for pupils approaching exams. Keep Parents and Carers informed also - Academy to consider advice to Parents and Carers on how to break the bad news of the death of a serving member of staff to their children.

Consider also longer term follow up for staff.

Support of Staff and Pupils

It is likely that there will be a greater need for support for staff members:

- CRISIS team (MAPS) to be consulted if appropriate
- SABN should be contacted
- Identify vulnerable individuals
- Encourage staff members to come forward if they feel in need of support. It may be necessary to provide a confidential service in some cases.
- It may be appropriate to open up the Academy premises at the weekend to provide a focus for pupils to meet and talk.
- County can provide funding for MAPS counsellors to supplement provision already available in the Academy.
- Establish a safe space where anyone can come if they need support i.e. one room where counselling and other support is available.

Practical considerations

- Need to cover lessons
- Possible Health and Safety Investigation
- Sensitivity when recruiting a replacement – It may be preferable from the Academy's point of view to appoint a replacement as soon as possible, but this may result to some people feeling that the deceased is being 'forgotten'

Memorials

An important part of the grieving process for many people will be the need to have some sort of memorial. It may not be appropriate or possible for everyone affected to attend the funeral. Decisions about who should attend (if anyone) must be made in conjunction with the family of the deceased.

The family of the deceased should be consulted concerning any permanent memorial.

c. Death of a Pupil

The impact of the death of a pupil will depend on a variety of factors e.g.

- Was the death anticipated?
- Had the pupil been off sick for some time?
- Was the death traumatic?
- Did the pupil take their own life?
- Was the death witnessed by others at the Academy?

Dissemination of information

Ensure that all facts are accurate (as far as is possible) before speaking to Staff, Pupils and Parents and Carers.

Inform all Staff and Pupils as soon as possible. Consider informing those closest to the pupil who died in a separate small group.

Support of Staff and Pupils

It is likely that there will be a greater need for support for staff members.

- CRISIS team, MAPS should be contacted if appropriate
- SABN should be contacted for additional support
- County can provide funding for MAPS counsellors to supplement provision already available in the Academy.
- Establish a safe space where anyone can come if they need support i.e. one room where counselling and other support is available.
- Arrange appropriate memorial activity in conjunction with pupils
- Arrange parent support group if needed
- Providing information to pupils and staff in written form – e.g. leaflets

Practical considerations

Ensure that the pupil's name is removed from registers as soon as possible.

Each of the deceased pupil's classes should be consulted as to whether they want the pupil's place left empty, or if they want the seating plan to be changed

d. Death of a Parent

One member of staff nominated as lead (normally Form Tutor)

Dissemination of information

Ensure that all facts are accurate (as far as is possible) before speaking to Staff, Pupils and Parents and Carers.

Discuss with pupil and their remaining carers who should be told about the death. The Pupil may wish their Tutor and Teachers to be informed in confidence.

Support of Pupil(s)

Primary support will go to the pupil(s) who have been bereaved, but staff should look out for signs that other pupils are also upset. This may include the friends of the bereaved pupil and other pupils for whom this death has reignited feelings associated with their own earlier bereavement.

Pupil and Carers should be offered information about available support, both in and outside the Academy. **NOTE:** The bereaved may not be able to take in information initially, so please give any information in written form as well as verbally so that they can look at it later.

Give the pupil(s) a time-out card so they can leave lessons if they feel overwhelmed.

Offer the pupil(s) 'I can... You can...' bereavement support cards to help them express what support they need from staff and friends. (Available from the Child Bereavement Network 25 packs of 4 postcards for £9) <https://childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/about-1/shop/bereavement-resources>

Practical considerations

Change contact details for family as soon as possible.

Discuss with remaining carers the arrangements for the funeral and decide who should attend.

For some pupils the death of a Parent may result on significant other changes e.g. if Parents and Carers were separated, the child may have to move to live with the remaining Parent.

Where the death occurs close to external exams, the Exams Officer should be consulted about whether the exam board should be informed. For pupils in Y13, contact should be made with the Admissions Officer at the Universities they hope to attend.

e. **Death by Suicide**

It is important for staff to be aware that suicide is likely to cause more difficulties both for the immediate family and for friends and relatives. Here are some key points:

- The violence or method of the death is usually horrific
- The fact that people find it hard to understand why it happened makes the acceptance of the death and bereavement journey more complex
- Those bereaved by a suicide often blame themselves for not doing more for the person who died
- Those closest to the person who died by suicide may feel intense feelings of shame
- Unhelpful press involvement can be damaging to family and the Academy
- Websites and social networking sites can spread gossip, rumours and unhelpful stories which can increase anxiety amongst pupils and Parents and Carers
- The importance of clear boundaries, getting back to routine as soon as possible and very clear information to all concerned needs to be understood
- There are legal processes at work and Police involvement which cause delays and increase pressures on the family involved
- Pupils or staff are more likely to need specialist help
- Those closest to the person who died by suicide have an increased risk of taking their own lives
- **The GP is usually the first port of call for the bereaved family or ANYONE ELSE AT RISK OF SUICIDE**

f. **Death by Road Traffic Accident (RTA)**

Staff need to be aware that Road Traffic Accidents can give rise to specific challenges:

- A pupil or member of staff who witnesses or survives a RTA may be suffering post-traumatic stress as a result. The GP should be the first port of call for these individuals.
- Police investigations may complicate or delay the grieving process of those bereaved by a road traffic accident
- Bereaved family and friends may want to visit the site of the accident
- There are in some cases specific bodies which can support those bereaved by an RTA including police family liaison workers and the BRAKE charity.

g. **Other Bereavements**

For some pupils the death of a significant person in their lives may cause more distress than seems appropriate to an outsider. Do not assume you know how a pupil feels. Their reaction will depend on many factors including the relationship they had with the deceased, their past experiences of bereavement and other events in their life at the time of the death. If a pupil experiencing bereavement seems to be finding it hard to cope it may be appropriate to offer the same level of support given to a pupil who has lost a parent.

h. **Other losses**

Staff also need to be aware that subsequent losses, such as moving house or the loss of or change of carer, new Step Mum or Dad can significantly impact the bereaved pupil. In other circumstances the loss of a family pet may also cause distress to pupils.

11. **Special times of Year**

- a. **Exam times** – Where the bereavement occurs during, or very close to external exams (GCSE, GCE etc) the Exams Officer should be informed immediately. For pupils at KS5 it may be necessary for the Head of Sixth Form to contact relevant Universities/Colleges to apprise them of the circumstances and ask for consideration to be given if final grades are lower than originally predicted.
- b. **Christmas** – Staff need to be aware that Christmas is a very difficult time for bereaved families especially in the first two years after the death.
- c. **Holidays** – Consideration to be given to offering alternative support to pupils over the holiday period (This may be particularly important over the long summer break)
- d. **Mother's or Father's Day** – If a bereaved pupil wishes to make a card or do something such as a piece of art work for Mother's or Father's Day, even though the parent has died, don't be surprised, let them do it.
- e. **Anniversary of the Death and other Significant Dates e.g. Birthdays** – Staff need to be aware that bereaved families often experience deep feelings of loss as the anniversary of the death approaches. Bereaved pupils may regress at this time or show renewed outbursts of grief or difficult behaviour.