



Bereavement Policy

Date 2022, review 2024
Next review: autumn 2027

School ethos: Ferndale Primary School is openly inclusive, welcoming all children from the whole community to a caring and happy environment where they can achieve to the very best of their abilities. At Ferndale we believe that all children are unique and we encourage them to develop their strengths and creativity as individuals. We emphasise the importance of our values of equality, respect, honesty and teamwork.

Rationale: The Childhood Bereavement Network analyses data from sources like the Office for National Statistics and uses its own research to estimate that 1 in 29 five to 16-year-olds has been bereaved of a parent or sibling – equating to a child in every average school class. A study has shown that 78% of children in the UK say they have experienced a 'significant bereavement,' showing that our children are very aware and affected by the mortality of those around them."

Within our school community there will almost always be some recently bereaved children who are struggling with their own situation – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil. We would hope to not encounter such circumstances, but the statistical inevitability of such an occurrence implies the necessity of having a Bereavement Policy in place in order that we might be proactive, rather than reactive, when responding to these sensitive situations.

Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children – or staff – require, though referral to more specialist support should be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex. Additional information and resources can be accessed at www.childbereavement.org.uk

Linked policy: Emergency Planning Document

Objectives

The core intentions of the policy are:

- A framework for all staff to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with the bereavement.

To have clear expectations about the way school will respond to a death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.

- 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 LA.
- The Children's Act 1989 aimed to ensure that the welfare of the child was paramount, working in partnership with parents to protect the child from harm (http://www.careandthelaw.org.uk/eng/b_section2). All intentions of this policy endorse that aim as we endeavour to counter any adverse effects of bereavement and maintain pupils' emotional well-being.

Roles and Responsibilities- see appendix for additional support

The role of the governing body

- To approve policy and ensure its implementation, to be reviewed in three years.
- To support school staff in the implementation of the policy.

The role of the head teacher

- To monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.
- To respond to media enquiries.

- To ensure a first point of contact for family/child concerned is signposted.
- To keep the governing body fully informed.

The role of the LA

- To advise and support staff. Consult on referral pathways and identification of complex grief.

The role of pastoral staff (eg Parent Support Advisor, mentors)

- To have bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff.

Procedures:

Sharing the news:

Some families may want to share information with the school community while others may not. A simple confirmation of the death may be required until more details are available, and/or the family consulted. The school can help to prevent speculation and rumours, as well as be a source of support for the family and the school community.

It helps to feel prepared when delivering sad news, so a script will be particularly useful. Do not be afraid or surprised to show emotion, this is a human reaction. Suggestions for writing a script:

- Start by acknowledging you have some sad news to give.
- Be honest. Give the news stating simple facts, use the words dead/died.
- If known, and with the family's permission, explain briefly where and when the death occurred.
- If not known, say so, and that you will endeavour to find out. If rumours are rife, say which of these are definitely not correct, if known. Where appropriate, remind pupils of their responsibilities and the impact when posting on social media.
- Talk briefly and positively about the person who died without eulogising them.
- Mention any arrangements already in place, including for those needing support.
- Acknowledge that not everyone will be feeling sad and that is OK.
- Allow a break in the timetable for pupils to process the news and take a little time-out.

Guided support from Child Bereavement UK's Helpline on 0800 02 888 40 or Live Chat on the website, available 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

Section 1:

The first few days:

Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the nominated staff member and their wishes respected in communicating with others. Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion, whilst being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations.

Staff should be informed before pupils and be prepared (through prior training or discussion) to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.

Although school can provide stability and normality for staff and pupils, some flexibility may be necessary. Bereaved young people may need time to grieve and manage overwhelming feelings, being able to leave a classroom and take time out in a safe space can be very welcome. The location for a temporary tribute/book of condolence needs to be safe, accessible and ideally where pupils can be supervised. Offer the family the opportunity to visit, if they wish to, or take photographs to share with them later. Consult with staff and pupils before removing any temporary tribute, giving notice to prepare them beforehand.

Support for staff:

Staff should be informed before pupils and be prepared (through prior training or discussion) to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.

Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate.

Supporting bereaved pupils can be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions. At certain points in time, some members of staff may be more vulnerable due to circumstances in their own lives. Further information about training can be found at childbereavementuk.org or contact Child Bereavement UK's Helpline on 0800 02 888 40 or Live Chat on the website, available 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

Support for pupils:

Pupils who are affected should be informed, preferably in small or familiar groups, by someone known to them.

A letter to all school families affected could be composed at the earliest opportunity and a decision made as to whom, and how, it should be distributed in line with any wishes from the family.

The school should be aware that the school timetable may need a degree of flexibility to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of children affected by the situation. However, minimal disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security and familiarity.

Supporting a bereaved pupil- see appendix for additional notes

The funeral:

Rather than making assumptions, consult the family to find out whether members of staff and/or pupils are welcome to attend. • Can/will pupils be involved in choosing flowers or organising a collection? • Identify the practicalities of issues such as staff cover to allow all those wishing to attend the funeral to do so. (For some circumstances, it may be appropriate to close the school, for others, it may not). • Consider any arrangements for pupils attending the funeral, and how they will be supported/supervised.

Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Head Teacher.

Remembering:

School should be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life so information should be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points.

Consult the family of the person who died about any plans for a memorial, assembly or other tribute. A more permanent memorial (a tree, a special garden, a piece of artwork, a bench) may be appropriate, but in future the removal, relocation or replacement will need to be managed sensitively.

Section 2- Suggested templates for letter to parents

Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the child's parents.

The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the parents and school

Sample letter on death of a pupil:

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher/form tutor/had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>.

<Name> died from an illness called cancer. As you may be aware, many children who have cancer get better but sadly <Name> had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday.

He/She was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try to answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we would be more than happy to help you.

We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating <Name..>'s life.

Yours sincerely <Name> Head Teacher

Sample letter to bereaved parents:

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear of xxx death. There are no words to express the sadness of losing a child and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through.

Clearly, as a school community, we will miss *him* very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to *his* friends and classmates. *He* was a much loved member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help as you plan *Toby's* funeral service or other memorial opportunities, please let us know. In time, we will also ensure that anything of *Toby's* that remains in school is returned to you, including photographs we may have on the school system.

Be assured that you are in our thoughts at this very sad time and do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of support in any way.

With sympathy,

Headteacher

Sample letter on death of a staff member:

Dear parents

I am sorry to have to tell you that a much-loved member of our staff [name] has died. The children were told today and many will have been quite distressed at the news. No-one wants to see children sad, but we are very aware that factual information and emotional support are the best means of helping children deal with bereavement. I am sure there will be many parents who are also saddened by the news. Children respond in different ways so may dip in and out of sadness, and questions, whilst alternately playing or participating in their usual activities. This is normal and healthy. You may find your child has questions to ask which we will answer in an age- appropriate way in school, but if you feel you would like more support and advice yourself, please do not hesitate to contact the school office. You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at

www.childbereavement.org.uk.

We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Children who wish to attend will be welcome to do so, though it will not be compulsory. It is likely that school will be closed on the morning or afternoon of the funeral as staff will, of course, wish to pay their respects to a very popular colleague.

I am sorry to be the bearer of sad news, but I appreciate an occurrence like this impacts the whole school community. I am so grateful for the thriving partnership we have with parents and trust that we, together, will be able to guide and support the children through what may be, for many, a very new experience in their lives.

Yours.....

Appendix points:

Roles at the time:

If the head will take charge, how might this impact the day to day running of the school? Who will deputise if the head is not available? In the case of sudden or traumatic death of a pupil, the school may be called upon to be a part of a multi-agency review. If this were to be the case, who would you appoint as representative?

The best person to liaise with the family may depend on the specific situation, relationship with the pupil/family and experience of the member of staff. The policy can reflect this and cite Headteacher/Deputy/Class Teacher/SENCO/Head of Year/Pastoral Support depending on circumstances.

The indiscriminate spread of news via social media may mean that some members of the school community hear the news before others. How will your school let members of staff know about the death? What method of communication would be most appropriate for staff in your school? Telephone 'pyramid' (out of hours), staff meeting, text, email, school social media. Consider the impact of hearing the news via text message/social media/email.

When delivering news to pupils, some schools prefer to do this in smaller groups with a familiar adult, while others choose a whole school assembly. If a pupil has died, it may be more appropriate to share the news with their class/year group first. Can school provide a safe place and time to grieve? What pastoral support is available? Can you include details of external bereavement support organisations?

Support and information can be found on the Child Bereavement UK website childbereavementuk.org If a pupil dies by suicide, Samaritans provide a Step-by-Step programme to support schools. They can be contacted on: 0808 168 2528

Supporting a bereaved pupil:

Returning to school after a bereavement	<p>Who will meet with the pupil and their family/carers to discuss their return to school or upon their return to school following a bereavement?</p>	<p>Most grieving pupils do not need a 'bereavement expert', they need the support of familiar and trusted adults. School, with its familiar environment and routines, can be a place of comfort for a bereaved young person.</p> <p>It can be helpful to meet with the pupil and their family/carers to establish what has happened and to discuss their return to school. This could be a familiar adult, such as the class teacher, form tutor, SENCO, a member of the pastoral support team or it could be the head of year, Deputy or Headteacher.</p> <p>The purpose of this meeting should be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge the death. • Find out how the pupil would like to share their news. • Organise a safe space for the bereaved pupil to go if they feel overwhelmed by their grief and need a 'time-out'. How will they inform staff of this? For example, a 'time-out' card, a non-verbal signal or message. How will this be communicated to all staff? • Consider whether to provide 'time-out' activities – journals, art and craft, books, screen time, memory boxes etc. • Set guidelines for communication – with the pupil, between members of staff and between home and school. • Consider providing support for peers when they have a bereaved friend. <p>A short film is available on the Child Bereavement UK website: childbereavementuk.org/for-teachers-when-a-pupil-returns-to-school-after-being-bereaved</p>
Longer term support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a method within school to record significant dates for the bereaved young person? • Who will communicate with the family/carers and pupil? • How will communication with pupils, members of staff, the family/carers and the wider community be managed and reviewed? • How will the progress (both in learning and emotional wellbeing) of the pupil be monitored? • Who will be responsible for passing on details of the bereavement at transition points? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The pupil will continue to grieve for the rest of their life and may require ongoing support. Significant dates or anniversaries, Mother's/Father's Day, etc. may be particularly difficult. Regular contact with the family/carers and reviews with the pupil will help to build up an overall picture of how the pupil is coping. • The grief may impact the pupil's progress. Some pupils work really hard and may put themselves under extra pressure to succeed, while others may find it difficult to focus in class and on their work. There may be changes in their behaviour, how will these be managed? • Bereaved young people can find change difficult, so preparing them in advance (where possible) may help them to voice their worries and ease the process. • Consider vulnerable pupils as they may need additional support, particularly on transition.

<p>Death, grief and bereavement in the curriculum</p>	<p>How could death, grief and bereavement be included in the curriculum?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching the topic of death, grief and bereavement will help pupils to understand feelings of grief and prepare them for the future. Informing parents and carers in advance will help to gather information about previous bereavements so that vulnerable pupils can be prepared for the lesson. Recently bereaved pupils may find it helpful if they are given the option to work elsewhere or step outside, if they think it would be too painful to attend. • See Elephant's Tea Party resource on Child Bereavement UK's website
<p>Support for staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will staff be trained and supported? What process is in place to identify vulnerable members of staff? • How will staff welfare be reviewed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being alongside anyone experiencing a loss can be emotionally draining, and supporting a bereaved pupil particularly so. At certain points in time, some members of staff may be more vulnerable due to circumstances in their own lives. Consider how school can support these members of staff and whether there is capacity to utilise other staff members to help share the load. • Provide details of support agencies for staff. • Further information about training can be found at childbereavementuk.org Or contact Child Bereavement UK's Helpline on 0800 02 888 40 or Live Chat on the website, available 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.