



Bereavement Policy

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09.07.21	2.0	Scheduled Board review	Ratified	

Bereavement Practice Guidance and Policy

Rationale:

Every 22 minutes in the UK a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 41,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, and, sadly, around 12,000 children die in the UK each year. 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

- Different cultures and beliefs
- Looking after yourself (staff)
- Pupils with special needs
- Pre-bereavement - when a family member is not expected to live
- Pupils with a life-threatening illness
- Suicide
- Forces' families
- Social media and young people's views
- Supporting children and young people bereaved by murder or manslaughter
- Responding to frightening events
- Grief and bereavement in Gypsy and Traveller families
- Books and resources - early years
- Books and resources - Key Stage 1 / P1-2 / 5-7 years
- Books and resources - Key Stage 2 / P3-7 / 7-11 years
- Books and resources - Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND)
- Books and resources for staff
- Helpful organisations

Policy Objectives:

The core intentions of the policy are:

- 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, Trust and LA, and clarify the pathway of support.
- The Children 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.

The role of the Board of Directors

- To approve policy and ensure its implementation, to be reviewed in three years.

The role of the CEO and Head Teachers

- To monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.
- To respond to media enquiries.
- To be the first point of contact for family/child concerned.
- To keep the governing body fully informed.

The role of staff

- To ensure that they have read the policy and are familiar with procedures within it and best practice.

Policy contents:

– **What to do immediately after a death that affects the school community**

– **Breaking sad news**

– **Supporting a bereaved child**

- **Looking after yourself and other staff**

- **Support organisations**

- **Assembly wording guidance**

- Letter examples to parents following a death in the school community

In the event of a death of someone within the school community:

What to do in the first 30 minutes – Head Teacher/Teacher in charge in their absence

It is likely that you will be feeling shocked yourself so give yourself time to process the information you have received.

1. Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the Headteacher 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.
2. Arrange a staff briefing, remembering absentees and part-timers - Staff should be informed before pupils and be prepared to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.
 - Identify any vulnerable staff members or pupils
 - Identify a team to support you.
3. Pupils who are directly affected should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them.
4. A letter to all school families affected should be composed at the earliest opportunity and a decision made as to whom, and how, it should be distributed. (Example letter at end of document)
5. All staff 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 so setting up an identified area of the school that is off timetable with a member of staff to talk to would be an option.
6. Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate.
7. In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance may be clarified, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances.
8. Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the CEO.
9. 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.
 - Birthdays / Anniversary of death
 - Similar situations/events in the news or in the local community

- Time of year

Breaking sad news - a death in the school community or when a teacher dies

When someone within a school community has died, it is often difficult to know how to break the news. School communities have very active grapevines and it is better to explain sensitively what has happened rather than saying nothing.

Guidelines for Breaking Sad News

Whoever is giving the news should prepare what to say. Staff should be offered help with this.

- If a pupil dies by suicide Samaritans provide step-by-step personal programme to support schools in explaining this to pupils. They can be contacted on: 020 8394 8300
- Don't be afraid to show emotion - this just shows that you are human, but can throw you if you are not expecting to react in this way.
- 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, explain where and when the death occurred. **Only include how with the consent of the family.**
- 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.
- Talk briefly about the person who has died without eulogising them.
- Mention any arrangements already in place
- Close by acknowledging that not everyone will be feeling sad and that is OK.
- Give pupils something practical and positive to do, such as making cards or writing something.

Other families

It is a good idea to let other parents know, certainly the ones whose children are likely to be directly affected. Initially, the basic information is all that should be given out. Once you have checked with the bereaved family, more details can be given if felt necessary. You may wish to let them know about the fact sheet “Guidance for Parents and Carers” (included at the end of this policy). This will help them answer questions from their children and understand any possible reactions.

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.

Supporting a bereaved child

People are often at a loss as to know what to say or do to help a child or young person who has been bereaved by the death of someone important to them. Every situation is different and children will be affected to a greater or lesser degree, dependent on the circumstances of the death and the nature of the relationship they had with the person who has died. The following are brief guidelines based on what the children and young people Child Bereavement UK support tell us they want from school.

Try not to judge - Grief is a very personal experience, every child and young person will do it their way, even if from the same family. Teenagers in particular resent assumptions being made as to how they should be feeling and what they should be doing.

Check out the facts - Familiarise yourself with the circumstances surrounding the death.

Communicate with the family and make sure that what you say will not conflict with the family’s wishes. Different information from home and school will confuse a child and complicate their grief.

Acknowledge what has happened - Do not be afraid to use the word ‘death’, ‘I was very sorry to hear of the death of your ...’. If you find words difficult you can discreetly give the pupil a card expressing your care and concern. A card to a bereaved child from his/her class is usually appreciated and helps to keep up contact with school if they are not attending.

Responses will vary - Don’t assume that a lack of reaction means that they do not care. Initially, the full reality may not have sunk in. Young people can feel that they have to be seen to be coping as a sign of maturity. Allow them to express emotion and feelings and do not be afraid to share your own feelings of sadness if you have any.

Honesty - Although sometimes difficult, it is better to answer questions truthfully. If you are faced with a difficult question, rather than answering straight away, ask the child what they think.

Be prepared to listen - Schools are busy places and your time may be limited but an offer to spend a bit of quiet time with a child who clearly wants to talk will be greatly appreciated. Some will welcome the opportunity to just sit with you but say nothing; for others it is enough to know that you are keeping a look out for them. If you are discussing something in class that will refer to the person who has died, don't be afraid to do so. Ignoring them might be perceived as a denial they ever existed. If not sure, check it out with the bereaved child first, letting them know your intention.

Give bereaved pupils time - It may be many months before they can fully cope with the pressures of school work again. Remember that they will be grieving for life and the loss will always be with them. Explain to other pupils how the bereaved child may be feeling and encourage them to be openly supportive.

Looking after yourself and other staff

Being alongside anyone experiencing a loss can be emotionally draining, but supporting a bereaved child, particularly so. The need for support for yourself is not a sign of an inability to cope or of professional incompetence, but a recognition that everyone needs help to carry out this demanding role. Below are some ideas for ways to look after yourself.

Share feelings - Use friends and colleagues to talk about how you are feeling and to share experiences. Just knowing that others are affected can help you to feel less alone and better-able to cope. Informal peer support in the staffroom can be a welcome opportunity to talk through issues and concerns and reduce feelings of inadequacy by jointly talking through strategies to help.

Anticipate that you may experience an emotional reaction - It is perfectly normal and OK to be emotionally affected. However, recognise that in order to help others, you need to feel reasonably strong yourself. You may become aware of previous losses in your own life that have resurfaced. If it all feels too close to home, do not be afraid to say so. This is not a sign of weakness but merely a recognition that we all have our limits.

Professional boundaries - When working in a school environment, it is very easy to let the carer in us take over and forget our professional boundaries. Getting over-involved is not helpful to either yourself or to the bereaved child or adult. Remember that you cannot carry their grief for them, but you can share their journey by being there for them and being aware.

Have information on resources and organisations - Sharing contact details of bereavement organisations will enable you to do something practical to support a grieving family. You will be

helping by putting them in touch with people who are qualified and experienced in offering the support they might need.

(See list of websites and organisations at the end of the policy)

Help others - If you become aware that a colleague is stressed or affected by a death in your school community, or know that they have experienced a bereavement themselves, try to find the time to ask how they are.

Spoil yourself - Make time to do something just for you, or give yourself a treat. Physical exercise can be a great stress buster.

Bereavement Organisations

www.childbereavementuk.org – lesson plans, support videos, school and staff guidance, leaflets for pupil/staff/families

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

www.childdeathhelpine.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care – www.cruse.org.uk

Macmillan Cancer Care – www.macmillan.org.uk

Young suicide prevention / Mental Health – www.papyrus-uk.org

Young people living after loss – www.hopeagain.org.uk

Support after Murder and Manslaughter - www.samm.org.uk

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS) - <https://uksobs.org/>

Assembly wording guidance:

A whole school assembly, usually delivered by a Headteacher, can be used for the situation involving the death of a pupil or a member of staff. The benefit is that the entire school receives the same news at the same time, keeping speculation and rumour at bay.

Follow the assembly with some classroom time for pupils to express any thoughts or feelings around the news that they have just been given. End with something practical to do such as writing cards.

Suggested words for school assembly

I have some very sad news to tell you. Jim Jones in Year 5 died on Saturday morning. He was crossing the road with his Mum on the way to the local shop. A car being driven too fast knocked him down. An ambulance was called and Jim was taken to hospital. The doctors and nurses did all they could to try to save his life but his injuries were too severe and tragically he died. His mum is not injured. Jim was well known throughout the school for being a very keen member of the football team. He was only nine years old and much too young to die but sadly, very occasionally accidents do sometimes happen. Some of you may be feeling shocked at this news, some of you might be feeling rather frightened, some of you might be feeling nothing at all. All of these feelings are OK. Our thoughts are with Jim's Mum, his Dad, and his little sister Mary who must wish with all their hearts that this terrible accident had never happened. When you go to your classes after this assembly, you can spend some time thinking about what I have just told you. Your teachers will try to answer any questions that you might have. We can all help Jim's family a little bit by drawing a picture of our favourite memory of Jim or just writing a card that we can send to let them know that we are thinking about them. The school will probably be holding a special assembly next week for Jim when we can spend more time thinking about him, remembering him, and say a special goodbye. When I have more details I will let you all know. If any of you have ideas for this or would like to take part, I would love to hear from you.

Sending letters to parents of the school informing them of a death

Sample letter examples from Child Bereavement UK.

Sample letter informing of the death of a pupil to parents :

Dear Parents

Today we have 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

Sample letter to bereaved parents:

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear of Toby’s 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.