



Bereavement Policy

(Based on T&W model policy prepared by The Bereavement and Critical Response Team within the Educational Psychology Service)

Agreed by Governors: March 2024

To be reviewed: March 2027

Bereavement 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 whole school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil. Empathetic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children – and staff – require, though referral to more specialist support should be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex.

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 and LEA and other support agencies.

The role of the governing body:

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

The role of the head teacher:

- To be the first point of contact for any child/family/staff member concerned.
- To respond to media enquiries.
- To keep the governing body informed.

The role of pastoral staff:

- To have bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff.
- To provide support to staff and pupils as needed.

When the Whole School May be Affected by the Death of a Pupil or Member of Staff

- The Head Teacher should contact the family of the person who has died, either by phone or in person, to share condolences and to seek permission to inform staff, pupils and parents. Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion whilst still showing sensitivity to feelings, cultural and religious considerations.

- Staff should be informed before pupils and should be prepared to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.
- Inform the local authority and governors.
- Inform pupils of the death in classes, or if necessary, in assembly. Smaller groups are preferable and the younger the children, the smaller the group should be.
- Where necessary, prepare a brief personal tribute about the person who has died to pass to Corporate Communications (Public Relations) who can liaise with the press on behalf of the school.
- Prepare a letter to all school families affected to inform them of the death. The letter should be sent on the day that pupils are informed so parents/carers can support their children.
- Send a letter/card of condolence to the bereaved family from the school community.
- 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.

Useful contacts:

- The Educational Psychology Service 01952 382402
- Corporate Communications 01952 382402

It is important to be open and honest with all members of the community. Remember that grief is painful but normal and healthy. Children need to be allowed to grieve just as much as adults. **They are unlikely to need “experts” counselling them.** Rather they need **familiar and trusted adults** who can be sensitive to their feelings and offer a listening ear.

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, the particularly at transition.

Next Steps:

- Head teacher to visit the family if appropriate.
- Consider arranging a meeting for staff so that they can be advised on how best to support pupils and one another. The Educational Psychology Service can facilitate this.
- Ensure that pupils have the opportunity to talk about death with familiar, trusted adults with whom they have daily contact. For younger children this may be done in circle time. Pupils may talk to the Learning Mentor and ELSAs whenever they need to.
- Consider whether further support may be required for pupils/staff who have directly witnessed an incident.
- Maintain contact with the family prior to the funeral and for some time afterwards, depending on individual needs.

Further Steps:

- If not already done, establish the family’s wishes regarding funeral arrangements and find out if the family would like staff and individual pupils to attend.

- In consultation with the family, decide if the school should have a memorial service and/or a more lasting memorial.

When an Individual Pupil is Affected by a Bereavement Which May Not Impact the Whole School.

- Gather the facts and liaise with the family to find out what the pupil understands.
- Where appropriate, Head Teacher to send a card/letter of condolence when there has been a death of an immediate family member.
- In a sympathetic manner, let the pupil know that you are aware that someone close to them has died and that they are able to talk to any chosen staff member.
- Learning Mentor/ELSA to make regular contact with the child – initially daily – whilst allowing the child to seek support elsewhere.
- Maintain routines but adjust expectations.

Everyone of us will, at some point in our lives, experience a significant loss and have to suffer the grief and bereavement that ensues. It is helpful to understand the process both in terms of how we cope and also how children manage this kind of loss.

Grief is a normal, essential response to the death of a loved one. It can be short lived or last a long time depending on the personality involved, the closeness of the relationship, the circumstances of the death and previous losses suffered. In many cases, this grief can take the form of several clearly defined stages. This is not necessarily a linear process and difficulties may occur at any of the stages described.

1. Shock and disbelief
2. Denial
3. Growing awareness
4. Acceptance

1. Shock and disbelief

This is likely to happen whenever our model of the world is upset.

2. Denial

This generally occurs within the first 14 days and can last minutes, hours or weeks. In this stage the bereaved person behaves as if the dead person is still there, no loss acknowledged.

3. Growing awareness

Some or all of the following emotions may be experienced:

- **Yearning** – the urge to search; going over the circumstances of the death, trying to find a reason for the death or visiting where it happened

- **Anger** – this can be against any or all of the following: the medical services, the person who caused the death, the deceased for leaving.
- **Depression** – the bereaved person begins to feel the despair, the emptiness, the pain of the loss.
- **Guilt** – the emotion is felt for the real or imagined negligence or harm inflicted on the person who has just died. There is a tendency to idealise the person who has died.
- **Anxiety** – in extreme cases anxiety can even become panic – as the full realisation of the loss begins to come through.

4. Acceptance

This generally occurs in the second year after the death has been relived at the first anniversary. The bereaved person is able to adjust to life without the deceased and begins to invest energy elsewhere.

Reactions of children

In children, the stages of grief may manifest themselves in the following reactions:

1. Children, like adults, will enter a period of **shock** which will last for a few hours or up to a week. It can manifest itself by the child going through daily life mechanically, automatically smiling on cue or being apprehensive. They may have periods of panic. Alternatively, they may become withdrawn and gaze into space for long periods.

2. The death of a close relative heightens our sense of **vulnerability** and for children death and separation are synonymous. They may:

- Become very anxious about being separated from parents for any reason
- Be reluctant to go to school
- Be depressed
- Be prone to infection i.e. colds, ear infections and tummy upsets
- Bite nails or cuticles, pick themselves, twiddle with their hair
- Develop a fear of the dark (which may last for years)
- Have difficulty in going to sleep
- Possibly have nightmares
- Develop a phobia about hospitals, nurses and doctors

3. **Regression** to an earlier stage of development is common.

4. Children may **lose concentration** at school.

5. **Food** can become important. Some children will eat and eat to fill up the emptiness they feel inside. They may hoard food and hide it away. Others will lose interest in eating. The phase usually only lasts a comparatively short time.

6. **Sadness and anger** need to be expressed but children are often afraid and confused about venting their feelings as they do not know what is allowed.

7. Some children may be **frightened to ask questions** and will only talk to 'outsiders'.
8. The **duration** of the grief process for children is the same as adults – approximately two years.

School code of practice for answering children's questions

Children often hear words and use them without necessarily having full understanding of them so it is essential to find out why the child is asking the question and what the child knows. What a child is not told with regards to loss they will make up and fill in the gaps for themselves.

- Answer the question honestly, logically and at age and culturally appropriate level.
- Use proper biological terms.
- Accept what children say – don't make judgements – it's alright to ask questions.
- Avoid personal views.
- Grief and loss education is planned into the curriculum but if the child asks a question at other times, respond to the questioner only – individual response.
- Talk to parents about questions children have asked so that parents are well informed and able to support children's understanding.
- Avoid inappropriate level of detail. Answers should be age and culturally appropriate and should take account of the child's experience.

More specific support is available from:

Child Bereavement Support www.childbereavementuk.org

Winston's Wish www.winstonswish.org.uk 08452 030405 email ask@winstonswish.org.uk

Hope House Children's Hospice 01691 672618 email counselling@hopehouse.org.uk

CRUSE www.rd4u.org.uk CRUSE Youth Helpline 0808 808 1677 Mon-Fri 9.30pm-5pm

The Samaritans www.samaritans.org.uk 08457 909090

Death in the curriculum

Pupils are likely to cope better with bereavement if they have had natural opportunities to think about death within different areas of the curriculum such as in stories and role play, Drama, English, PSHE, RE and Assemblies. There are also specific resources which focus on bereavement, e.g., within PSHE. Recommendations of additional and current resources can be obtained from www.telford.gov.uk/libraries