



Bereavement Policy

Lead person: Deputy Head (Safeguarding, Inclusion and Wellbeing)
Support persons: SLT, School Counsellor, Pastoral Support Workers.
Governing Body Committee: Pupil Welfare Committee

Rationale

We understand that members of our school community face bereavement at different times and that, when the loss is of a member of our school community, such as a child or staff member, it can be particularly difficult. Pupils need to be supported when they experience family bereavements and other significant losses during their lives while they are at school. This policy provides guidelines to be followed after a bereavement.

1. Policy

This policy outlines our commitment to supporting pupils and their families who have been suddenly bereaved. There is evidence that it helps suddenly bereaved people to have early and ongoing support. Every death and the circumstances in which it occurs is different and this policy has been constructed to guide us on how to deal professionally, sensitively and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances.

Aim

This policy aims to support the emotional and physical wellbeing of suddenly-bereaved pupils and their families, from the early days of an unexpected bereavement onwards. The aim is to be supportive to both pupils and adults, and for staff to have greater confidence and be better equipped to cope when bereavement happens. It can be shared with bereaved families, to help explain what our school is trying to do to help, and how we will do that.

Objectives

We will have robust procedures that enable us to communicate with, and support, suddenly-bereaved pupils and their families, both before, and after, a pupil's return to our school. Our procedures will help suddenly-bereaved children and young people:

- Be safe – with their welfare supported
- Be involved – be given information and choices
- Feel connected – with support from people they trust and can help
- Understand, and be understood – particularly regarding their reactions, feelings and thoughts
- Be respected – have their identity and family context acknowledged

- Thrive – within our supportive education setting.

All sudden bereavements, in all families, matter to our school equally. Every sudden bereavement is unique, and results in different challenges. Sometimes, more than one person dies suddenly in a family, or a family faces other difficult challenges, such as injury, or another life challenge. Every family is unique, and their needs deserve to be understood and met.

The Impact of Death on Young People

The impact of death upon children should not be underestimated. While it is true that their understanding of death develops over a prolonged period of time, it is clear that:

- Young children can suffer deeply as a result of the death of a member of their family.
- This suffering is more intense when they do not have opportunities to talk or to grieve openly, and do not feel that those close to them recognise their feelings - even though they themselves may not yet have the words to express them.
- In particular, for teenagers, there may be a tendency not to talk about how they feel as they do not wish to place an extra burden on for example the remaining parent if one has died. They in effect try to manage on their own, which can be very difficult for them.

Reactions to bereavement can include:

- Withdrawal
- Open distress
- Tears
- Panic
- Aggression
- Anxiety
- Fear or other signs of stress.

Bereaved children may act out this stress in unexpected ways, such as:

- Nervous giggling
- Stoical bravery
- Untypical aggression
- Becoming the class clown
- Or denial

They may also become extremely tired, to the point of exhaustion, as so much emotional energy goes into dealing with the loss and the stress of the changes in the family. For some children, there may be additional terrors; if the death has been referred to as 'falling asleep' or 'being taken', then it is sometimes the case that children become afraid of sleep; words like 'loss' or 'lost' can put fear into a young child's mind, too, and they are afraid of losing other family members. Children can become particularly clinging and attached to the members of the family who remain.

This school is committed to the emotional health and wellbeing of its staff and pupils. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that support and prepare pupils for coping with the loss of a loved one. The policy is based on practice that has grown over time as the school has previously experienced bereavements, and provides a resource as a working document to support our community.

2. Following a Bereavement:

We believe that children and adults alike have the right to:

- be given space and time to grieve
- be given support from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate – if possible, of their own

choice.

- encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement.

We recognise that:

- Grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real.
- Differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment.
- The death of a child has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/support staff and every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with any adult or child who may be impacted.

3. The Management of Bereavement in School

A universally accepted procedure outline will, in itself, not enable everyone to feel comfortable in dealing with the practicalities of death and bereavement. Each bereavement is unique and comes with its own specific challenges; however, it is helpful to have a framework on which to build. One of our main concerns must be the immediate family of the deceased and as a school we state our commitment to any family that may need practical, emotional and ongoing support.

Transition

It is vitally important to ensure that, if a child has experienced bereavement, this information is passed on to the relevant staff for example Head of Year, Pastoral Support Worker and Form Tutor, or a new school for example a new Sixth Form setting

The death of a pupil

The school may be notified in a number of ways. Upon notification of the death of a pupil:

- Past experience has shown that, if death occurs, parents usually let the school know directly and the person answering the phone will put them through to the most senior member of staff on site.
- Where death occurs in the holidays or at weekends, the parents will contact whoever they can.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead can be contacted outside of school hours via safeguarding@crypt.gloucs.sch.uk

- In that instance the member of staff who takes the call will immediately contact the most senior member of the school team possible and that person will then assume responsibility for the dissemination of the information. An emergency response team will be set up and clear roles for senior colleagues will be designated.

Sharing information

Information will be shared once agreed with the parent(s) or carer(s). There can be no definitive list of people to contact and, therefore, it will be different for each child. The school should ensure that all people who are close to the child are told in a sensitive and supportive manner. The school will ensure all affected feel supported and included.

The following people should be considered:

- Current school staff not in school that day
- Previous school staff who worked closely with the child
- Social Work team if applicable
- SEN team
- Medical team - the school nurse for example

- Chair of Governors
- Other professionals who work with the child – e.g. Educational Psychology team, and/or School counsellor
- Other parents – if children have been informed, the school needs to send a note to parents informing them of the loss, and they may need to support or comfort their children. Some parents may need to be telephoned if their relationship is close, but they may not have been informed by the family.

The process for telling the other pupils will be decided by the Headmaster following consultation with the teaching staff. For example, with different aged pupils there will be different decisions made and the Head of Year or Deputy Headteacher (Safeguarding, Wellbeing and Inclusion) will usually be the best person to tell the rest of the children in that year. It is important that staff avoid adding worry – for example, if the child died in hospital, we do not want to give children a fear of hospitals. Although the finality of death cannot be diminished, if there are mitigating circumstances that may help - such as that the child was in pain and now is free of pain - this can be used to help alleviate sorrow. Children must be told that, while they may feel sad, they do not have to feel guilty if they go on to have fun and pleasure in their day ahead. They must not feel obliged to assume a burden of grief. Children must be allowed to ask questions at this time or at any point in the following days or weeks. Staff must answer sensitively and honestly and to the best of their knowledge.

The funeral

- It is essential to listen to the family's wishes. The family may well welcome involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to keep things private.
- The Headmaster and/or the Senior Deputy Headteacher will make arrangements for the school to be represented at the funeral, and identify which staff and pupils may want to attend, together with the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport. Decisions will be made around school closure, if required, or authorising absence for the funeral.
- Flowers will be sent and/or a donation made. Staff and pupils would be involved in the decision.
- Cultural and religious implications will be considered.

Memory assemblies

It may be appropriate to hold a memory assembly for the child. Staff need to be able to show pupils that it is perfectly normal to feel upset at the loss of a friend and that helpful rituals, prayers, and remembering can be shared in a respectful way together.

If a child dies in school:

- If any member of staff has concerns regarding a child's health they will contact a first aider and ideally the Headmaster or Senior Deputy Headteacher.
- In the case of serious concern, the school will call for an ambulance. Due to the seriousness of the situation, this decision can be taken by the first aider or a member of the Senior Leadership Team.
- Immediately inform the Headmaster or, in his absence, the most senior member of staff on site.
- The Headmaster will then ensure that the parents are contacted and seek their agreement to meet the ambulance at the hospital.
- If the child stops breathing a trained school staff member will administer CPR. In some cases, parents may have given the school a protocol to be followed in the event of a serious health

incident. In rare cases, this may include a request that mechanical resuscitation is not administered. However, whilst the school respects the parents' preference in this matter, due to the statutory responsibility imposed on the school regarding "duty of care", the need for school staff to administer manual CPR overrides such preference. Once the ambulance has arrived at school, the child is given over to their care and it is the ambulance team's decision as to where the child is taken or which form of treatment is administered.

- Where the parents have given the school a protocol to be followed in the event of an emergency medical issue occurring - e.g. no resuscitation - this protocol will be handed to the paramedics.
- Any change in circumstance following the first call to parents should be reported to them as soon as possible. NB: Staff must not impart shocking or worrying news to a parent if they are travelling in a car alone.
- Once the child is placed in the ambulance a member of staff will be appointed to travel to the hospital either in the ambulance or in their own transport. The purpose of this is to be a familiar face to the child's family on their arrival at the hospital. This person will remain in regular contact with Headmaster and/or the Senior Deputy Headteacher.
- The school will notify the Local Authority if there is a death in school at the earliest opportunity. Any press enquiries are to be directed via the Headmaster and Gloucestershire County Council Communications Team.

If a child dies on a school trip

If a crisis situation occurs whilst a child is out on an educational trip, then the adult with the child - or the teacher in charge - should telephone for an ambulance first and then contact the school to inform the Headmaster/Senior Deputy Head. The school will then take the responsibility of contacting the parents. Once the ambulance team reaches the child, the child becomes the responsibility of the ambulance team and they will direct any subsequent actions. The off-site visits protocols give guidance for such situations and should be followed. The school will notify the LA, at the earliest opportunity, if there is a death out of school. The above procedures and protocols will then apply.

Responding to the media

Some deaths, particularly those in sudden or traumatic circumstances, attract media attention. All members of staff are advised not to respond to journalists and to refer all enquiries to the Headmaster, who will make a considered response after seeking assistance from the Gloucestershire County Council Communications Team

On-going support

For staff:

Following bereavement, it is only to be expected that some members of staff will be emotionally affected and would benefit from the provision of some time for reflection. The following support may be helpful:

- A specific room could be allocated when required to enable staff to meet and share their thoughts over a coffee or tea. It should be emphasised that anything shared on such occasions should be held as confidential
- Access to one-to-one time with a member of staff who is trained in bereavement support and/or a Mental Health First Aider.
- Access to our school-based counsellor.
- The Educational Support helpline offer counselling support and staff will be reminded

about this service.

- Availability of information about accessing bereavement support outside school, eg: CRUSE

For pupils:

Experience in many schools has shown that most pupils can be supported by the school staff.

- In most cases, each child will have a favoured member of staff to approach, if not then Head of Year/ Deputy Headteacher (Safeguarding, Wellbeing and Inclusion) will assign pastoral support if required.
- A range of books are available in the Pastoral Room to support pupils in processing grief children discuss death and come to terms with loss.
- The Educational Psychology Service can offer support to pupils who may need more help.
- Children impacted will be supported through any academic assessments that follow whilst they are coming to terms with their grief. Special Consideration will be sought from exam boards if available and applicable.
- The school-based counsellor may be employed for additional hours if required.

Useful online resources and information

www.winstonswish.org.uk – a useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community.

www.childbereavement.org.uk a bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

For the family

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support. Send a letter of condolence from the school.
- Give parents and family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died.
- Invite parents/family to any commemorative events held by the school, both at the time and in subsequent years.
- If memorial work has been completed, for example a remembrance wall or book, then this should be returned to the parents at an appropriate time, and pupils informed where it has gone.
- If the parents/ carers wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed.

Parents/carers will be told that they are welcome in the school and will be encouraged to come and visit. Past experience has shown that this can be helpful in their grieving. The first visit to the school is often difficult and will be arranged sensitively in accordance with the parents' wishes. It will then be for the parents to decide if they wish to maintain ongoing links. Each family will be different, with differing needs. Therefore, the school will always be there to act as a source of support and information. The School will pay particular heed to subsequent anniversaries of the bereavement and monitor all affected at those times.

The death of a member of staff

All the principles and procedures listed above apply to the death of a staff member.

In addition to the above, the school will notify the LA. Where appropriate to the wishes of the staff member's family, the Headmaster will seek permission from the Chair of Governors to close the school so that all members of staff are able to attend the funeral.

4. Responsibilities

The designated person within the school who has overall responsibility for support and liaison in event of a death or traumatic loss is the Headmaster. In the event that this person is absent then another Senior Leader will take responsibility.

Their responsibilities are:

- Implementing the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities.
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies.
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary schools, as required.
- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff.
- After the event: Policy review, involving pupils, staff, governors, parents/carers and relevant local agencies.

The nominated Governor with responsibility for bereavement is: **The Chair of Governors.**

Their responsibilities are:

- To contribute to generating and updating the policy.
- To support the Headteacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is managed.
- To support the Headteacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is tackled in the curriculum.
- To review practice.

Links to other policies:

- Special Educational Needs Policy
- Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Anti-Bullying and Hate Policy.

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