

Rationale

We understand that bereavement is faced by members of our school community 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 in the course of their lives while they are at school.

This policy will provide guidelines to be followed after a bereavement. 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. 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.

This school is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and pupils. We are dedicated to the continual development of a 'healthy school'. 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 separation or loss of a loved one, either through death or divorce.

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.

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/care team of that child and every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far reaching contacts.

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 such family as may need practical, emotional and ongoing support.

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.
- 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.

Sharing information

It is important to agree, with the parent, before the school can take on the role of informing concerned parties within, or outside, the school community. 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 rather than risk them hearing it 'on the grapevine'. The school needs to ensure it does not add to the sorrow by leaving people feeling marginalised. The following people should be considered:

- Current school staff not in school that day
- Chair of Governors
- 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.

The process for telling the other pupils will be decided by the Headteacher following consultation with the teaching staff. For example, with different aged pupils there will be different decisions made and the class teacher of the class with the loss will usually be the best person to tell the rest of the children in that class. 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 honestly and to the best of their knowledge.

The funeral

- It is essential to sound out 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 Headteacher and/or the 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. For some schools it is appropriate to close, for others it is not, consequently difficult decisions will sometimes have to be made concerning attendance.
- Cultural and religious implications need consideration.
- If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed. Past experience has shown that this can be helpful in their grieving.

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 manageable 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 Headteacher or 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 SLT.
- Immediately inform the Headteacher or, in her absence, the most senior member of staff on site.
- The Head Teacher 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. 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.
- 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 Headteacher and/or the Deputy Headteacher.
- The school will notify the LA if there is a death in school at the earliest opportunity. All press enquiries are to be routed through the Headteacher, Chair of Governors and LA Media 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 Headteacher. 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 sites 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 Headteacher, who will make a considered response after seeking assistance from the Local Authority Press Office.

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 Headteacher. In the event that this person is absent then another Senior Leader will take responsibility.

His/Her responsibilities are:

- Policy development and review, involving pupils, staff, governors, parents/carers and relevant local agencies.
- 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.
- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff.

The nominated Governor with responsibility for bereavement is: **Penny Dent**

Her responsibilities are:

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