



BEREAVEMENT POLICY

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This policy was based on an exemplar developed by the national charity Winston's Wish.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

Around 41,000 children are bereaved of a parent every year in the UK. That's nearly two children under 16 every hour. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person.

Experiencing a bereavement can make children more vulnerable. Bereavement, whether it is an expected death because of illness or a sudden and unexpected death or suicide, is something that can impact on members of our school community at any time.

Our school is committed to the emotional health and well-being 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 prepares pupils for coping with bereavement.

This policy is for all staff, pupils, parents and carers, governors, visitors and partner agencies working within the school. It provides guidelines and procedures as to how our school can best prepare for, and respond to, bereavement in the school community.

We recognise that members of the school community will be affected by a range of losses including separation and divorce. Some aspects of this policy may also be helpful in these cases.

1.2 Policy links

This policy also links to the following other policies we hold in school:

- Child Protection policy
- RHE policy
- Anti-bullying policy
- Equality information and objectives
- Health and safety policy
- Attendance management policy (staff)

1.3 Purpose of the policy

This bereavement policy supports us to provide effective support to pupils and staff before and after bereavement. It covers both expected and unexpected deaths.

Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children and staff require. However, we also need to be prepared to call

on more specialist support where there is a sudden and unexpected death, or where the impact of a bereavement is complex.

The objectives of this policy are to:

- enhance effective communication at a difficult time
- clarify the pathway of support between school, family, community and services
- make best use of the support available in school, the council's families, children and learning department and the wider community.

2 Safeguarding, confidentiality and recording

We follow our school's safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure that the welfare of the child remains paramount throughout, and that all children are protected from harm.

It is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure. However, pupils will need to be made aware that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

To retain the trust of pupils and parents and carers, we will ensure that the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. Sensitive information will only be disclosed internally or externally with careful attention to the rights and needs of individuals and in line with general data protection regulation.

If a child is suffering from trauma, we will share this as appropriate with staff, but not necessarily the details of their experience.

We will discuss with the bereaved child and their family which adults in the school community they would like made aware of the experiences impacting on the child.

We will use our CPOMS system to record when a child has experienced a close bereavement, is at risk of suicide or has made a suicide attempt

3 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The role of the governing body is to:

- approve the bereavement policy and ensure its implementation
- ensure the policy is reviewed every three years or when national or local policy directs a change

- ensure that appropriate attention is given to how bereavement issues are addressed within the curriculum
- ensure that approaches to bereavement are respectful of religious and cultural values and beliefs
- ensure that staff are given appropriate opportunities for training, reflection and access to support if they need it.

The role of the Head Teacher and senior leadership team is to:

- lead a whole-school approach to the effective management of loss and bereavement including ensuring appropriate training and support provided for staff
- contact the Sefton LA in the case of a sudden and unexpected death or suicide – key professionals would be expected to be involved – e.g. link Educational Psychologist and Primary Mental Health Worker, alongside relevant colleagues and managers
- be the first point of contact for family/child/staff directly affected by a bereavement
- record bereavements affecting children
- designate liaison and support to other trained members of staff when appropriate
- monitor progress in supporting those impacted by a bereavement and liaise with external agencies
- keep the governing body appropriately informed
- deal with media enquiries in liaison with Sefton LA.

The role of all staff in our school is to:

- access bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff if appropriate
- know how to access support for themselves, for other staff and for the family, if advice or information is needed
- know how to report a concern if the bereavement or sudden and unexpected death has placed a child at significant risk of harm
- know how to support a child when they are distressed and how to refer to specialist support if needed
- have a basic understanding of a child's needs when facing loss and change

- provide individual support as and when needed and in consultation with the head teacher and pastoral team
- teach about loss and bereavement as part of the planned curriculum (teachers only)
- inform the Head Teacher at the earliest possibility if they hear about a death of someone in the school community

Our Pastoral Support Lead Kim Taylor has had more advanced training about bereavement. They can offer professional support to other members of staff.

4 Procedures

4.1 Pre-bereavement

In some situations, it is known in advance that a death is going to occur. This is usually because of a long illness.

In cases where this is an adult within the school community, individual conversations will be held with the head teacher in terms of support, information exchange and practical considerations.

When the expected death is of a child or a member of a child's family we will:

- contact the family to confirm factual information and explore what support could be provided to them
- identify a key point of contact Pastoral Support Lead Kim Taylor in school in terms of information exchange and to update when things change
- ensure that all relevant adults are clear about what information has and needs to be shared with the pupil
- keep lines of communication open to ensure that all information is received in a timely fashion
- explore the possibility of signposting to other organisations such as Winston's Wish or a local hospice
- look to involve faith or community leaders when appropriate and with the agreement of the family
- explore what support for the pupils affected might look like in practice

- arrange training for specific members of staff to ensure all involved are confident in their ability to support the pupil
- if appropriate, consider and reflect on how to communicate with the wider school community for example the pupil's class mates
- if appropriate, begin conversations around practical considerations in the events leading up to the death and following the death

4.2 Following a bereavement

We will consider each individual situation carefully to ensure that the response from the school is sensitive, accurately reflects the gravity of the situation, and involves those affected as appropriate.

As an immediate response we will:

- contact the deceased's family with the aim to establish the facts and avoid rumours (Head Teacher)
- consider any religious beliefs that may affect the timing of the funeral or impact on other aspects of the bereavement process
- find out, if possible, how the family would like the information to be managed by the school
- allocate member(s) of staff to be the key point(s) of support for the affected child / young person or children / young people and ensure there is support in place for the staff members if required
- send letters or cards of condolence to families or individuals directly affected
- will prepare a press statement, with support from the council's communications team if required and with due regard to the family affected (Head Teacher)
- inform staff of the death before pupils are informed, recognising that some pupils may have found out through other means. Where possible, staff will be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways to make sure all staff have the same version of the event. Where this has not been possible, staff will be supported to share the information.
- inform pupils who are most directly affected (such as a friendship group), preferably in small groups, by someone known to them and in keeping with the wishes of the family and expertise of the school

- inform the wider school community in line with the wishes of the family. We would normally do this through assemblies and / or letters to parents.
- make small changes to the school timetable to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of the child or children affected by the situation. However, we will aim for minimal disruption to the timetable as this can offer a sense of security and familiarity.

For the funeral we will:

- find out the family's wishes and follow these in terms of the involvement of members of the school community (or not)
- identify which staff and pupils may want to attend if invited by the family and the practicalities of issues such as risk assessment, staff cover and transport. In some rare circumstances it may be appropriate to close the school
- organise tributes such as flowers or a collection in line with family wishes and the wishes of staff and pupils
- be sensitive to religious and cultural issues.

After the funeral we will:

- consider whether it is appropriate to visit the child and family affected at home and plan a return to school
- ensure friendships are secure – peer support can be particularly important for a bereaved child or young person
- continue regular contact with the family and show we still care about them and their child over time
- monitor the emotional needs of staff and pupils and provide listening time and ongoing appropriate support
- consider practical issues and make thoughtful and sensitive updates to parental and other contact details when needed
- continue to assess the needs of children most affected, and record and plan for support accordingly.

Longer term we will:

- be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life. So, we will record information and share with relevant people, particularly at transition points. This could include ensuring significant dates and events for the child are recorded and shared with appropriate staff for future reference.
- signpost families to bereavement support including that provided by Winston's Wish <https://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/>
- ensure that learning about loss and bereavement is embedded into appropriate curriculum areas including PSHE education. When teaching about loss and bereavement we will give careful thought as to how to support those directly affected by loss and bereavement.

4.3 Following a sudden and unexpected death – suicide

Suicide is not just a really difficult event to deal with, it also presents the unique risk of potentially being the trigger for another suicide.

As a school community we will make a response to a sudden death within two school days

It is necessary to maintain the structure and order of the school routine, while facilitating the expression of grief, and reducing the risk of imitative suicide.

In the case of suicide, we will refer to The Samaritans Step by Step Guide.

<https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/step-step/>

Information provided to the school community in the immediate aftermath of a sudden and unexpected death will depend on the age of the pupils but should be based on and reinforce:

- facts (not rumours)
- an understanding that death is permanent
- an exploration of normal and wide-ranging reactions to sudden and unexpected death – expressions of anger and guilt are entirely normal
- an understanding that, with support, people can cope
- an understanding that fleeting thoughts of suicide are not unusual
- an awareness of suicidal warning signs and resources available to help
- an understanding of expectations around funerals.

When discussing any suicide that has occurred, we will ensure that the information given is age appropriate and:

- is factually correct but does not include detail of the suicidal act itself does not romanticise, glorify or vilify the death
- does not include details of any suicide note
- does not include speculation over the motive for suicide
- takes care with the language used – for example using phrases such as ‘died by suicide’ or ‘ended his / her life’ rather than ‘committed suicide’ or ‘successful suicide’, and saying ‘attempted to end his / her life’ rather than ‘unsuccessful suicide’ or ‘failed attempt at suicide’.

4.4 Following a sudden and unexpected death – homicide

The Childhood Bereavement Network and Winston’s Wish estimate that around one child every day is bereaved of a parent or sibling through murder or manslaughter in Great Britain.

Children may experience profound and lasting shock, enormous anger at what has happened, rage at the person who caused their relative to die, deep fear at the perceived insecurity of the world around them. Sadly, in many cases, the person who caused the death is also known to the child, resulting in great confusion and a double loss, for example, if one parent kills the other and is then imprisoned. In some families, the child may have to move to a new house, school, area – away from familiar and comforting places and routines.

Winston’s Wish recommend taking an honest and consistent age appropriate approach to talking with children about what has happened. It is not possible to shield them from what has happened completely. Winston’s Wish can provide support to families bereaved in this way and further information can be found on their website: <https://www.winstonswish.org/death-through-homicide/>

5 Equality and inclusion, values and beliefs

We recognise that there is a range of cultural and religious beliefs, customs and procedures concerning death. It follows that bereaved children and families may have differing expectations.

Some of these may affect matters of school organisation. We will source training and guidance to develop our understanding of the range of beliefs to best support pupils.

We will present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. We will make pupils aware of differing responses to bereavement, and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

6 Young asylum seekers and refugees

Many young asylum seekers and refugees have experienced the death of family members or friends, often in traumatic circumstances. This, and further traumatic experiences and losses, can have a devastating effect on their emotional and physical health, behaviour, learning and relationships.

Sudden traumatic death complicates the process of grief and mourning, as usual ways of coping may be overwhelmed. We will consult specialist mental health services where appropriate.

7 Supporting staff

7.1 Support for bereaved staff

We are aware that staff also experience bereavement. When this happens, we will ensure they are provided with support to take care of themselves, and to know where they can go for additional help should they need it.

This could include: their GP; Cruse Bereavement Care <http://www.cruse.org.uk/>; or Able Futures is for those aged 16 or over, in work and who live in England, Scotland or Wales. 0800 321 3137 Lines are open 8am to 10.30pm, Monday to Friday

We will work within our attendance management policy and if necessary, with the council's occupational health team to ensure staff are provided with appropriate leave and support at a time of bereavement.

Teachers who are dealing with their own bereavement are encouraged to speak with their line manager about any areas of the curriculum which they feel uncomfortable to teach or want support to teach.

7.2 Staff training

We will ensure that regular training is provided to staff to support staff in meeting their roles and responsibilities as identified in this policy. Winston's Wish offers [training courses](#) and also a [free online training course for school staff](#).

8 Curriculum

Children and young people explore the concept of loss, bereavement, and grief as part of the statutory elements of our RHE curriculum. It is also addressed through cross-curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles, as well as through art, literacy, and religious education.

We also use assemblies to address aspects of death – such as Remembrance Day or commemorative occasions. We also observe national minutes of silence and explain the purpose of this. When appropriate, we respond to a tragedy or serious incident by discussing this in class having discussed as a staff team the language we will use to respond to the incident.

Teachers are provided with training on how to deliver this sensitive area of the curriculum within a safe, learning environment. We also point parents and carers towards appropriate advice on how to talk to their children about these events when necessary.

We will answer any questions relating to loss or death in a sensitive, age-appropriate, honest and factual way. Children and young people will not be expected to disclose any personal experiences but will be signposted to support if they want it.

We give children opportunities to learn about and discuss cultural and religious issues around death and encourage them to express their own responses and feelings.

9 Support Services

9.1 Local support

To assist your school in developing a strategy to respond to a death in the school community such as a member of staff or a pupil inform the following people

Primary:

Jonathan Jones, jonathan.jones2@liverpool.gov.uk

Judith Boyce, judith.boyce@si.liverpool.gov.uk

Sonia Cross, sonia.cross@si.liverpool.gov.uk

Steve Reddy, steve.reddy@liverpool.gov.uk

Phil Cooper and Nicola Noon, safeguarding@si.liverpool.gov.uk

and our School Improvement Partner as appropriate

Consider requesting bereavement support services in consultation with SIL Bereavement Support Officer Sonia Cross 077026680900 and LA support. If on-site support is required, consider who is needed. For advice, contact: Sonia Cross at sonia.cross@si.liverpool.gov.uk | 07702668900 or Judith Boyce at judith.boyce@si.liverpool.gov.uk | 07921941925

9.2 National support services and support resources

As part of RHE and our safeguarding work we will also signpost to appropriate sources of support for pupils and adults in the school community.

Winston's Wish:

www.winstonswish.org Support information and guidance for bereaved children, young people and for those caring for bereaved families.

Cruse Bereavement Care:

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk Support for anyone who has been bereaved.

Childhood Bereavement Network:

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk> Find childhood bereavement support in your local area.

Hope Again:

<http://hopeagain.org.uk/> A website for young people who have been bereaved.

Papyrus:

<https://papyrus-uk.org/> Support and advice for young people struggling with thoughts of suicide, and anyone worried about a young person.

Samaritans:

<http://www.samaritans.org/your-community/supporting-schools> A range of guidance and support for schools.

Child Bereavement UK

Child Bereavement UK supports families and educates professionals when a baby or child dies or is dying, or when a child is facing bereavement. Every year they support over 6000 professionals, helping them to better understand and meet the needs of grieving families.

Support and information line - We provide confidential support, information and guidance to families and professionals. Our professionally trained bereavement support workers are available to take calls 9am-5pm Monday-Friday 0800 0288840 | support@childbereavementuk.org

Grief Encounter

Support bereaved children and their families to help alleviate the pain caused by the death of someone close. Support includes a helpline, family programme specialist resources and e-counseling. www.griefencounter.org.uk

REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed at least every 3 years by the Safeguarding Team.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Informing the school community

The following guidelines may help when informing staff and governors

1. Meet with SLT prior to staff meeting and others as appropriate
2. **Arrange a staff meeting as soon as practicable. Who will lead it? Identify absent staff.**
3. **Give a factual explanation about the death and any other relevant information.**
4. Whatever you say will not make it worse.
5. **Be prepared for obvious upset and feeling of anger/guilt.** People may connect the incident to their own personal experience of bereavement, so feelings about past bereavements may need to be discussed. This is perfectly natural.
6. **Enable absent staff to feel part of a caring team.** Arrangements should be made to inform them over the telephone if a personal visit is impractical. Consider the relationship between the absent colleague and deceased. Invite staff into school if appropriate.
7. **Identify a nominated spokesperson** (e.g. Chair of Governors etc.) for a death that may attract media coverage (e.g. if the member of staff was a well-known personality or died tragically). Liaison with the individual's family is essential to obtain their permission.
8. **Establish a dedicated telephone line** maybe a mobile number if required to ensure free flow of accurate information to and from the school if this is appropriate.
9. **Arrange staff condolences** with collaborative agreement as appropriate. e.g. flowers, memorial table.
10. **Provide details of someone who can be available to talk things through** with a member of staff, parent or child if they are finding the situation particularly hard. This person could advise the family of support services available if required.
11. **Nominate staff to prepare a letter to parents and carers** to be given after school.
12. **Arrange a staff meeting** for the end of the day. Invite each person to recount his or her feelings and to describe what was good and bad about the day. Staff who will be alone that night could be identified and arrangements made for colleagues to contact them by phone.
13. **The Child Bereavement UK website** is also an excellent easily available resource. For information go to www.childbereavementuk.org.
14. **Visit your bereavement policy** to ensure contact details and information is updated and relevant
15. **Provide** staff with examples of how to inform children:

“I’ve got some really sad news to tell you today that might upset you. I know most of you will have heard of cancer, and know that sometimes people with cancer get better, but other times people die from it. Mrs Smith, the Geography teacher and Year 11 tutor, has been ill with cancer for a long time. I have to tell you that Mrs Smith died yesterday in hospital.”

“Sometimes people have accidents at work, at home, at school or on the road. People may be hurt or injured in the accident and they may have to go to hospital for treatment. Sadly, there are some accidents that cause people to die. I have some really sad news to tell you that might upset you. Yesterday Stephen, who is in Year 4, was in an accident and he was so badly injured that he died.”

Appendix 2

How School can help a Bereaved Pupil

- **Don’t assume** anything. Ask the pupil how they feel, rather than projecting feelings that you might expect them to have. Also, expect that other children in a class might be affected by a death in an immediate family other than their own.
- **Allow time** and space for pupils to digest the news, find out the facts and discover exactly how they feel. For some, this may be their first experience of someone they know dying.
- **Moving on** - expect children (especially younger ones) to ‘move on’ fairly quickly. As adults we tend to remain in a feeling or thought for a lot longer than children. If we are sad and reflective, we may be so for many hours. Children may be distraught one moment and then the next, need to ask what is for lunch, or express annoyance that it is raining outside. Although this sometimes shocks us, this is completely normal, so try not to punish it.
- **Act early** to prevent rumours from spreading, or gossip being spread around the school. Our response to death is often something that we mask when in public. Some people mask it with humour. Among children this humour can be less tempered by social graces and so can be very hurtful, as can rumours about a death or an individual. Try to prevent these at all times, but remember that nasty words are sometimes born out of fear. This does not, and should not excuse them, but may help us deal better with the pupils concerned.
- **Try to normalise** the feelings that a bereaved young person shares with you. They are probably very worried that they are the only person who has ever felt this way. Assure them that feelings of anger, fatigue, fear, worry, stress, sadness, exhaustion, guilt, anxiety, frustration, loneliness, lack of focus etc. are all a normal reaction to grief.
- **Acknowledge** that some days will be better than others. A bereaved pupil may arrive for registration one morning and seem totally fine. The next day, for an obvious reason, or for no apparent reason at all, they may seem completely different.

The time away from school will vary from pupil to pupil but when they do return to school, they may have some of the following concerns:

- o ***How will staff and peers react to the loss*** – who has been told, what do they know, what will be said, how much will they have to say to people?
- o ***Sense of being “different” and isolated.*** Important not to single pupil out for special attention, but to agree with them who, how and where they go to for support if needed.
- o Let classmates know how pupil wants to be received and supported.
- o ***Fear of sudden emotional outbursts*** – anger, crying and panic.
- o ***Fear of being behind with work and unable to catch up.*** Agree a catch-up plan together
- o ***Inability to concentrate and feel motivated or sit still.***
- o ***Family grief impacting on normal family functioning*** – e.g. meals sporadic, routines disrupted, bedtimes chaotic, etc. which may mean that the pupil is inadequately prepared for school, does not have the necessary equipment, and may be tired or hungry.
- o ***Unable to meet homework/project deadlines*** because of altered responsibilities within the family and home. Pressure or punishment may provoke out of character aggression or resentment, and lead to a breakdown in trust.
- o ***Forthcoming examinations, extra revision support may be needed***

Most grieving pupils do not need a ***“bereavement expert”*** but simply need the support of people who care. Teachers can make a real difference to bereaved pupils by offering opportunities for them to talk about their experiences if they want to and by listening and responding to the spoken and unspoken messages they send.