



RCFS Bereavement Policy

(This policy is based on a shared policy with the Uttoxeter Learning Trust)

Aims and Ethos

Our school bereavement policy is prepared and has plans in place to deal with death, grief and bereavement. This applies to supporting a bereaved pupil or member of staff as well as reacting to a critical incident or tragedy, such as the death of someone within the school community.

This links to our school ethos by supporting young people to be happy, caring, respectful and high achieving individuals. Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support that some pupils, or members of staff, require. Where the impact of the grief is more complex, referral to more specialist support may need to be considered. Additional information and resources can be found at: childbereavementuk.org

Rationale

1 in 29 pupils aged five to sixteen-years olds has been bereaved of a parent or sibling; that is one in every class. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, relative, friend or other significant person. Within a school community there will almost always be some pupils who are struggling with bereavement – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil. The school will aim to provide an environment that is sensitive and compassionate to the needs of those wishing to grieve, whatever their cultural or religious beliefs.

Objectives

To create a bereavement aware culture by

- Creating a framework for all staff to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with the bereavement.
- Supporting pupils and/or members of staff before (where applicable), during and after bereavement.
- Enhancing effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between members of staff, pupils, the family/carers and the community.
- Identifying key staff within school and the governing body/Local Authority/Academy Trust.
- Have clear expectations about the way school will respond to a death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.

Roles and responsibilities

The Headteacher will take overall charge and will oversee communications with the family or families. The best person to liaise with the family may depend on the specific situation, relationship with the pupil/family and experience of the member of staff and so could be Headteacher/Assistant Head/Class Teacher/SENDCO/TA or office staff.

Pupils in school will be informed face to face, parents or carers by letter on the same day. Absentees from school will be noted to ensure that they are also informed on their return by their form Class teacher. Staff who are absent will be informed by their Line Manager.

The indiscriminate spread of news via social media may mean that some members of the school community hear the news before others. Communication with staff will take place either by Telephone 'pyramid' (out of hours), or staff meeting, depending on the circumstance. When delivering news to pupils, consideration will be given as to whether news will be shared in smaller groups with a familiar adult, or a whole school assembly. If a pupil has died, it may be more appropriate to share the news with their class/year group first.

The news will be shared with the school community through class teachers and assemblies as appropriate, but again during a period of closure this may require communication by alternative means. At all the times the impact of hearing the news via text message/social media/email will be considered.

If the press is involved, the Headteacher will liaise with journalists and if necessary the Police. In the case of sudden or traumatic death of a pupil, the school may be called upon to be a part of a multi-agency review. The DSL would be appointed as representative.

The school will provide a safe place and time to grieve and will seek pastoral support through external bereavement support organisations. Educational Psychologists can offer advice and guidance for schools with regards to staff and pupils deaths, but if its extended family members it would be necessary to use external agencies such as The Dove Service. Support and information can be found on the Child Bereavement UK website childbereavementuk.org. If a pupil or member of staff dies by suicide, Samaritans provide a Step-by-Step programme to support schools (0808 168 2528).

Procedures

The school will follow a procedure which will:

- Clarify information and the wishes of family/families.
- Share the news with staff and pupils.
- Prepare a script.
- Inform parents/carers.

Some families may want to share information with the school community while others may not. A simple confirmation of the death may be required until more details are available, and/or the family consulted. The school can help to prevent speculation and rumours, as well as be a source of support for the family and the school community.

Suggestions for writing a script:

- 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, and with the family's permission, explain briefly where and when the death occurred.
- 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. Where appropriate, remind pupils of their responsibilities and the impact when posting on social media.
- Talk briefly and positively about the person who died without eulogising them.
- Mention any arrangements already in place, including for those needing support.

- Acknowledge that not everyone will be feeling sad and that is OK.
- Allow a break in the timetable for pupils to process the news and take a little time-out.
- A template letter to parents/carers is provided (in the appendices).

They may also be directed to guided support from Child Bereavement UK's Helpline on 0800 02 888 40 or <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>. **Live Chat** on the website, available 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

Information on the school's database, including references and addresses will probably need to be amended and updated. This also applies to notice boards etc. The school may decide to write to parents to allow them to explain to their children the meaning and implications of an event. It may be necessary to retrieve the personal belongings of the deceased for their return to the next-of-kin.

Section 1: The death of a pupil or member of staff

The first few days

Although school can provide stability and normality for staff and pupils, some flexibility may be necessary. Bereaved young people may need time to grieve and manage overwhelming feelings, being able to leave a classroom and take time out in a safe space can be very welcome. The location for a temporary tribute/book of condolence needs to be safe, accessible and ideally where pupils can be supervised. The family will be offered the opportunity to visit, if they wish to, or share with them later. It will be necessary to consult with staff and pupils before removing any temporary tribute, giving notice to prepare them beforehand.

In living in a multi-ethnic and multi-faith society it is necessary to be aware of the differing cultural and religious traditions of grieving and mourning. The school should ensure that they do not deny young people the opportunity to grieve and mourn within the traditions of their own culture and religious beliefs.

The funeral

The Headteacher will consult the family to find out whether members of staff and/or pupils are welcome to attend. It may be appropriate for pupils be involved in choosing flowers or organising a collection. Consideration will be given for the practicalities of issues such as staff cover to allow all those wishing to attend the funeral to do so and any arrangements for pupils attending the funeral, and how they will be supported/supervised.

Support for pupils

Support will be provided for pupils through pastoral teams and through the following external agency:

The Dove Service
 The Dudson Centre
 Hope Street
 Hanley
 Stoke-on-Trent
 Staffordshire
 ST1 5DD

Head Office: 01782 683155 / 683153
Email: enquiries@thedoveservice.org.uk

Support for staff

Supporting bereaved pupils can be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions. At certain points in time, some members of staff may be more vulnerable due to circumstances in their own lives. The well-being of staff will be monitored by the Senior Teams and where necessary support and training can be sourced from The Dove Service.

Further information about training can also be found at childbereavementuk.org or contact Child Bereavement UK's Helpline on 0800 02 888 40 or **Live Chat** on the website, available 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

In event of a young person becoming terminally ill their wishes and those of their parents or carers should always be respected. Should the young person wish to attend school year staff may need to inform students of the young person's condition. Occasionally the student may wish to talk to their fellow classmates about their predicament themselves.

Multiple Deaths

In the event of multiple deaths, additional support and resources will probably be required. The Senior leadership team should meet to agree a planned course of action. It is likely that there will be considerable (if unwanted) media interest. The Headteacher will decide what information should be released. Clearly information that might upset, confuse or exacerbate the situation should be withheld. It is important that one individual, pre-selected and briefed by the team, acts as spokesperson, relaying consistent information. Another consideration might be the setting up and running of an emergency school hotline.

Remembering

The Headteacher will consult the family of the person who died about any plans for a memorial, assembly or other tribute. A more permanent memorial (a tree, a special garden, a piece of artwork, a bench) may be appropriate, but in future the removal, relocation or replacement will need to be managed sensitively. Pupils will be involved in the plans as appropriate.

Returning to school after a bereavement

Most grieving pupils do not need a 'bereavement expert', they need the support of familiar and trusted adults. School, with its familiar environment and routines, can be a place of comfort for a bereaved young person. It can be helpful to meet with the pupil and their family/carers to establish what has happened and to discuss their return to school. This could be a familiar adult, such as the class teacher, SENDCO, Assistant Headteacher or Headteacher.

The purpose of this meeting should be to:

- Acknowledge the death.
- Find out how the pupil would like to share their news.
- Organise a safe space for the bereaved pupil to go if they feel overwhelmed by their grief and need a 'time-out'
- Consider whether to provide 'time-out' activities – journals, art and craft,

books, screen time, memory boxes etc.

- Set guidelines for communication – with the pupil, between members of staff and between home and school.
- Consider providing support for peers when they have a bereaved friend.

A short film is available on the Child Bereavement UK website:

childbereavementuk.org/for-teachers-when-a-pupil-returns-to-school-after-being-bereaved

Longer term support

The pupil will continue to grieve for the rest of their life and may require ongoing support. Significant dates or anniversaries, Mother's/Father's Day, etc. may be particularly difficult. Regular contact with the family/carers and reviews with the pupil will help to build up an overall picture of how the pupil is coping.

The grief may impact the pupil's progress. Some pupils work really hard and may put themselves under extra pressure to succeed, while others may find it difficult to focus in class and on their work. Identified staff such as the Class teacher will monitor and also ensure that such information, with the SENDCO is used to inform any transition plans between schools, especially where a vulnerable child needs additional support. Bereaved young people can find change difficult, so preparing them in advance (where possible) may help them to voice their worries and ease the process.

Section 2: Supporting a bereaved pupil

Death, grief and bereavement in the curriculum

Teaching the topic of death, grief and bereavement will help pupils to understand feelings of grief and prepare them for the future. Informing parents and carers in advance will help to gather information about previous bereavements so that vulnerable pupils can be prepared for the lesson. Recently bereaved pupils may find it helpful if they are given the option to work elsewhere or step outside, if they think it would be too painful to attend.

- This topic is addressed through [Elephant's Tea Party resource on Child Bereavement UK's website](#)

Support for staff

Being alongside anyone experiencing a loss can be emotionally draining, and supporting a bereaved pupil particularly so. At certain points in time, some members of staff may be more vulnerable due to circumstances in their own lives. The Senior Team can support these members of staff and whether there is capacity to utilise other staff members to help share the load. Support and training is provided by

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on 0800 02 888 40