

Bereavement Policy

Rationale

Bereavement is an experience we cannot protect our students from; all members of our community will be affected by it at some point. It may be more difficult for the school when the death is of a child or staff member at Mayfield School; this policy will focus on bereavement of this kind.

The purpose of this policy is to give our leaders and wider staff confidence in adopting a carefully considered procedure in the event of bereavement. It should be noted that it is unlikely that any common procedure can cater for all needs; death affects us so personally and is coloured by many factors including overall resilience and prior experience of loss, often reactivated when bereaved.

This policy seeks to provide a framework for when the school faces loss; it is valuable that pre-emptive measures are in place for when we might be acting from a place of shock and bereavement ourselves, at which time our capacity to be thorough and procedural might be challenged.

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 in offering practical, emotional and on-going support as far as is possible.

Following a bereavement:

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, taking into account the voice of the affected community themselves.
- 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 present.
- That differing backgrounds, faiths and cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and that all viewpoints should be valued and respected in our community.
- That the death of a child has substantial repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/care team of that child and that every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far-reaching impact.

This policy will focus most closely on the prospect of student death, however the death of a member of staff equally has potential to impact the school to its very core.

Overall, the same principles and procedures will apply to the death of a staff member as they do for the death of a student. The Co Headteachers will need to inform the Chair of the Governing Body, as the employer in the case of a staff member. The Local Authority should also be informed.

They will need to give additional consideration to who will adopt the classes and responsibilities that a staff member previously held. This will usually be navigated by the appropriate Head of Faculty/head of department/line manager alongside the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

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Notification of a death:

In the event of student's death, the school may be notified in an infinite number of ways. If death occurs during school hours, usually a parent/close relative would call the school directly and speak to the most senior member of staff on site.

Where a death occurs in the holidays or at weekends the parents will likely contact whoever they can – in that instance the member of staff who takes the call will immediately contact the most senior member of staff possible and that person will then assume responsibility for the dissemination of information.

Similarly, with a staff member, if this occurs outside of school hours their next of kin may inform staff known to them personally; this may not be a member of SLT. Whoever receives this information *should inform a Co-Headteacher immediately*.

Dissemination:

- Where possible, discussion should take place with the bereaved family and their wishes taken into account before any decisions are made in relation to how and what to tell the staff and wider school community.
- It is important to consider any cultural or religious implications and seek advice if necessary.
- The school should ensure that people closest to the loss are told as soon as possible (to avoid accidental discovery, such as through social media), in a sensitive and supportive manner. We may not always be aware of the full extent of a student's or staff member's impact.
- If students are in school, this news would likely be delivered by the Co Headteacher or a member of the Senior Leadership Group (SLT), accompanied by the Year Group Leader (YGL). The student's familiarity with these staff should be considered.
- Where the circumstances allow, all staff should be informed as soon as possible using the most practical method of communication, e.g. a whole staff briefing/meeting or by email; ensuring this includes part time staff and measures are taken to inform absent staff.
- The Co Headteacher/senior member of staff will give a factual explanation of how the death occurred and if applicable the circumstances of what happened leading up to the death.
- The Senior Leadership Team will need to be prepared for reactions to this news including visible upset or other strong emotional responses. People may connect the incident to their own personal experience of bereavement, so feelings about past bereavements may re-surface; this is perfectly natural.
- The school should also be prepared to arrange supply cover if necessary.
- It is helpful to establish one senior staff member as a point of contact for the family to ensure free flow of accurate information to and from the school. There will also be a clear point of contact for other parents who wish to convey information about the bereavement itself or students affected by it.
- Bereavement support or counselling should be available as necessary through Tina Vorley or Safeguarding or Wellbeing team. They may need to request external bereavement support from specialist organisations such as Grief Encounter, Winston's Wish, Cruse and the borough Educational Psychology Service (EPS).
- It may be helpful to agree a set time for teachers to inform their classes of what has happened. The Co Headteacher might wish to script exactly what will be said. It is important to identify any absent students who may have missed this information sharing.
- The school may follow this up with a special assembly, most likely for the affected year-group.
- Tina Vorley or Safeguarding or Wellbeing team can be on hand at the end of the working day for staff to de-brief and reflect on the day's events and to agree any further action or support that may need to be put in place.

Allowing the community to process the news and to grieve:

- An appropriate private space can be dedicated to those people most affected by the bereavement.
- Cover will be arranged as necessary.
- Children should 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 or ability, taking into account aspects of the circumstance that may be confidential.

Memory banner/book

Those closest to the bereavement are likely to seek togetherness with others sharing their loss and might benefit from the opportunity to outpour emotions and thoughts in some way that is concrete. In early stages it is beneficial that the 'container' for this unprocessed material is big (such as a large banner) and allows for mess and expression of feelings without words, since that is what grief often looks like early on. A memory book may be introduced at a later stage; it has a sense of permanence and is often widely read. Therefore it can be helpful for the rawest of emotions to be less restrained and for the memory book to follow. This can be for *anyone* to come and write their favourite memories of the student/staff member. Parents/family of the deceased may wish to receive the book and often find it comforting to read the comments over time; photographs can also be added.

Any banners which may or may not be displayed to the wider school community can be taken down at an appropriate time as agreed between key staff and students who contributed to its making. The school may wish to consider a more lasting memorial to the student/staff member that will embed in the fabric of the school; such as a permanent display or plaque.

The Funeral

The Co Headteacher will liaise with staff and family regarding funeral arrangements.

The Co Headteacher, or in their unavoidable absence, a deputy, will typically attend as a mark of respect, arrangements can be made on a case by case basis for other staff to attend.

Assemblies and Life Studies

Assemblies and Life studies lessons for the year-group/s most affected can present valuable opportunities for the community to feel a sense of togetherness in their grief and if appropriate, for memories to be shared. They also allow the school to approach the bereavement from different perspectives: such as an opportunity for guest speakers or organisations to offer insight in to a particular cause of death e.g. Fusion.

On-going Support:

Therapeutic bereavement groups may provide a valuable avenue for students (and staff) to explore grief, loss and feelings where appropriate; although some may benefit more from 1:1 support from the TVO or an appropriate external agency.

For Staff

Following a bereavement in school, it is to be expected that many members of staff will be emotionally affected. While staff will likely lean on one another informally, the WBT should endeavour to offer a chance for staff to gather as a group to share/process and reflect on feelings evoked by this loss. This might be in the staffroom or as a group after school; the school might wish to involve the EPS who can often provide support and advice at these early stages. It should be emphasised that anything shared on such occasions will be confidential to the room (unless safeguarding).

Staff should be signposted to relevant resources to support themselves and the students they work with. (Appendix A)

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ELSA trained staff can be deployed to support lessons that the deceased previously taught or learnt in.

Further to this, staff should be signposted to TVO who they can seek support from 1:1 if needed.

For Students

Experience has shown that most students can be supported by the school staff, and that each child will likely have a favoured member of staff to approach. The Year Group Leader will over time identify students most affected by this bereavement and refer these onwards to the Safeguarding Team it is likely some parents will reach out to let us know if their child is struggling. As time progresses, the team will provide 1:1 support or invite students to participate in bereavement groups. The EPS and EWMHS and other agencies may be able to enhance capacity to offer bereavement support, especially in the cases of students who already presented as most vulnerable.

The school will be prepared to support students and staff as significant dates that might affect them e.g. date of death, birthday, and anniversaries, arise.

Staff should try to consider possible triggering that might occur in reaction to sensitive class/assembly topics.

For Parents

Parents may be invited into school as a group where members of the WBT can offer advice/guidance on helping their children cope with bereavement.

As a community we will stay alert to how endings, transitions and further losses might re-evolve grief and how these processes can best be managed for those in our school who might be especially sensitive to them.

Anticipatory Grief

Anticipatory grief can occur for students and staff when they learn that someone close to them is about to die. It will be normal for them to feel shock, devastated, confused and frightened. Students may start to feel different to their peers who are not going through this life changing event. The emotions can be as intense as those following a bereavement. In the time leading up to the death there may be the sense that they will be abandoned with no roots to keep them anchored. A strong sense of relief can be fostered by helping them to recognise and identify others who will be there with them after the expected death.

Appendix A

Child Bereavement UK:

www.childbereavementuk.org for schools:

A CPD certified, low-cost solution to ensure your school has the skills and confidence to support bereaved students and their families

Lesson plans and teaching resources:

Helping Children Think About Bereavement

Heather Butler, available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

This fun story and related short activities are presented as four, differentiated, lesson plans including English as a second language and for students with learning difficulties. It helps students develop resilience and coping skills.

Childhood Bereavement - developing the curriculum and pastoral support

Job and Francis

Using case studies and drawing on best practice, this very useful resource aims to help those working in schools address death, dying and bereavement from both a pastoral care and educational perspective. It provides lesson ideas on how to achieve this through the curriculum. Available - The National Children's Bureau, 020 7843 6000

The Little Book of Bereavement for Schools

Ian Gilbert

A short, personal account of the way various educational establishments tried and succeeded, tried and failed, and sometimes didn't try at all after the death of his children's (aged 9, 13, and 18) mother. It opens with a 15 point, straightforward guide which would be a helpful starting point for any school wondering what to do after the death of a parent.

Then, Now and Always

J Stokes, available from www.winstonswish.org.uk

More suitable for those with pastoral care responsibilities, this guide for supporting children as they journey through grief includes a section on enabling a school community to respond positively to a death.

A Teacher's Handbook of Death

Jackson and Colwell, available from www.jkp.com

Offering ideas for including death and bereavement in the curriculum, it is factual and informative around rituals and processes associated with death and dying.

Workbooks to use with students:

Grief Encounter Workbook

Shelley Gilbert

A workbook to encourage conversations with children, young people and adults about death. Grieving is hard work, especially for parents and children in deep grief. This book is full of creative activities and offers comfort to mourners old and young.

When a Child Grieves

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

This has a section called Someone Died – It Happened To Me in which children aged 7 to 18 years talk about their feelings when someone special dies. Includes a primary school case study describing when two students died in different circumstances. Useful for classroom discussion or training staff.

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A death in the lives of...

Available from Child Bereavement UK's online shop

A group of young people discuss the support they needed to help them cope with bereavement. Includes a section where they talk about what was, and what was not, helpful at school. A good one for Life Studies.

www.childbereavementuk.org

A dedicated section for young people with short films and film clips made by bereaved young people, including: What teachers need to know; A message to parents; A message to friends; and messages from young people bereaved by murder and manslaughter.

Further notes for staff on supporting students in the event of a student's death

You do not need to be an expert to provide effective help:

It often elicits feelings of inadequacy when faced with young people experiencing deep sadness or trauma. Being alongside children who are hurting can be painful for staff. Typically teachers and school staff are caring individuals who naturally have the characteristics required to support bereaved children. It is more about being there for them whilst in school and drawing on your relationship with them in the classroom than being a bereavement professional.

- When facing the enormity of change that comes with sudden loss/death, adhering to routines in the day and in the classroom can be valuably predictable at a time of many unknowns. Focus your support around the real needs of the students, it's important not to presume vulnerability. Put them in the driving seat and be guided by them.
- Try to normalise the feelings that a bereaved young person might share, e.g. shock, or the news seeming unreal.
- Recognise that every death and every reaction to it is unique – often determined by our own relationship with loss.
- Expect questions, but don't feel pressured to provide immediate answers. Our students will value sincerity, even if we don't have all the answers.
- Teachers, particularly supply ones, knowing about the loss, whilst understanding that they may not wish to speak to them about it
- Treat the student like everyone else but do not ignore what has happened
- Have the anniversaries on record and where appropriate, guided by intuition refer to that date
- Remember that putting it behind you and moving on is not that simple
- Provide extra support with work so that the student does not get behind
- Try not to put the spotlight on the student
- Allow the student to leave the classroom without having to explain if they feel overwhelmed

It's ok to feel...

Supporting bereaved students can be stressful when you may already be struggling with your own reactions and emotions.

It's ok to model sadness and shock, Don't be afraid to display emotion - this just shows that you are human, but can it throw you if you are not expecting to react in this way.

Identifying students most vulnerable to loss

It is important to keep an eye out for students who might be most affected - those who witnessed the event or who themselves are dealing with loss in a way that might be re-evoked by this further loss. Also be aware that altered patterns of behavior may not present immediately in fact they may develop many months or even years after the death of someone; perhaps at a time when the student feels it is safe enough to grieve or that they can no longer manage the feelings internally.

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Ritual/remembrance

Ritual and remembrance can be valuable tools at times of grief. If your planned session is derailed simply talking or devising ways to express the dominant feelings in the room creatively can be hugely valuable.

Self-care

You may become aware of previous losses in your own life that have resurfaced. If it all feels too close to home, do not be afraid to say so.

Look after yourself – talking about death and supporting distressed children can be very emotionally demanding. Reach out to colleagues, our school's WBT or to outside organisations who can provide help to process some of these feelings and experiences. See useful helplines below...

Bereavement-specific resources for staff and students

Childline

0800 1111

childline.org.uk

Free 24-hour helpline for children and young people in the UK.

The Mix

themix.org.uk

Online guide to life for 16-25 year olds. Straight-talking emotional support is available 24 hours a day. Chat about any issue on our [moderated discussion boards](#) and [live chat room](#).

Kooth

Kooth offers emotional and mental health support for children and young people aged between 11 – 24 years and is available up to 10pm every day.

Website: <https://www.kooth.com>

Grief Encounter

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk>

Supporting bereaved children and young people

Their helpline, grieftalk, can be contacted from 9am-9pm Monday- Friday.

0808 802 0111.

Winston's Wish

Freephone National Helpline (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm) on 08088 020 021.

Cruse (Bereavement Care) Helpline

The helpline is open Monday-Friday 9.30-5pm (excluding bank holidays), with extended hours on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings (open until 8pm), 0808 808 1677.

Child Bereavement UK

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org>

Child Bereavement UK supports families and educates professionals both when a child of any age dies and when a child is facing bereavement.

Helpline: [0800 02 888 40](tel:08000288840)