

Bereavement Policy

2020

Bereavement Policy			
Responsibility for monitoring this Procedure:			
Sara Shepherd			
<i>(Reviewed annually or in response to changes in legislation or operating procedures)</i>			
Date	Reviewed By:	Role	Date Approved by Governors
June 2020	Sara Shepherd	Headteacher	

Bereavement Policy

School Vision

“Every child, every day, happy to learn”

Introduction

A death can affect a school and its community in many ways. Adults and children benefit from being kept informed of a death. Children and young people are curious about death and if they are not informed of the circumstances or feel unable to ask questions, the normal grief process can be obstructed. Within our school community there will almost always be some recently bereaved children who are struggling with their own situation. We would hope to not encounter such circumstances, but the statistical inevitability of such an occurrence implies the necessity of having a Bereavement Policy in place in order that we might be proactive, rather than reactive, when responding to these sensitive situations.

Rationale

At St Margaret's, we believe that bereavement and loss are an inevitable part of living and growing, at different times in people's lives. We provide opportunities within our curriculum for children to develop their own appropriate range of emotional, spiritual and intellectual responses to manage their experiences. Our ethos which is based on open and mutual support provides opportunities for these experiences and feelings to be explored in a supportive and nurturing manner. Bereavement affects everyone in different ways. Support may be required over time and/or at the time when children, adults and the community are feeling vulnerable. By adopting our planned and reflective approach, we support the emotional well-being of our children, our families and community and our staff.

Aims

This policy aims to:

- provide a framework for all staff to give guidance in how to deal, professionally, sensitively and compassionately with the bereavement.
- support children, families and/or members of staff before (where applicable), during and after a bereavement.
- provide opportunities for children to explore, express and develop an understanding of their feelings, share their memories and develop coping strategies.
- enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between members of staff, pupils, the family/carers and the community.
- identify how the whole school community can work together, with outside agencies as appropriate to support each other.
- identify the roles and responsibilities of key staff within school and members of the Governing Body.
- 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 role of members of the Governing Body is to:

- approve policy and ensure its implementation.

The role of the Head teacher is to:

- monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.
- respond to media enquiries.
- be first point of contact for family/child concerned.
- keep the members of the Governing Body informed.

The PSHE/SENCo co-ordinator/s will:

- ensure that school have suitable books and other materials to help children discuss death and come to terms with loss.
- liaise with outside agencies/families to organise bereavement/counselling support.

Following a Bereavement

One of our main concerns is for the immediate family of the deceased and as a school we are committed to any such family as they may need practical, emotional and ongoing support. 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.
- have different perspectives/viewpoints of death which are influenced by religions/cultural beliefs. All viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment.

Procedures

The following procedures provide a framework for informing staff, members of the Governing Body, children and the community following a death.

- Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the Headteacher and their wishes respected in communicating with others. Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion, whilst being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations.
- Staff should be informed before children and be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.
- Children who are affected should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them.
- A letter to all school families affected should be composed at the earliest opportunity and a decision made as to whom, and how, it should be distributed.
- The school should be aware that the school timetable may need a degree of flexibility to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of children affected by the situation. However, minimal disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security and familiarity.
- Staff affected by the death will be offered on-going support as appropriate.
- In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance may be clarified, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances.
- Where necessary, a press statement should be prepared by the Headteacher
- School should be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life so information should be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points.

Informing staff and members of the Governing Body of a death in the school community

- On contacting the school office, parents must be put through to the most senior member of staff in school.
- Where a death occurs in the holidays or at weekends the parents will contact whoever they can – they may have the phone number for school for example. Whoever receives the information will pass this on to the Headteacher.
- When sharing information, it is important to agree, with the parent/carers, 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. Discussions with the family should include deciding how and what to tell staff, children and the community.
- All staff should be made aware of a bereavement as soon as possible with factual information in a sensitive and supportive manner. A staff meeting will be arranged to share the information with absent staff being identified. These staff will then be notified over the telephone.
- School will offer support for staff who may be visibly upset or experiencing feelings of anger etc. People often connect the incident to their own personal experiences of loss and staff may wish to share feelings of past bereavement. Staff will be offered the opportunity to do this confidentially, if they wish to.
- Bereavement support or counselling will be offered where necessary.
- The funeral: It is essential to find 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 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.

Informing children and parents/carers of a death in the school community

- Children and young people of all ages can experience grief and loss.
- Children should be informed of a death in small groups, where possible, with an adult that they know and trust.

- Staff will be provided with guidelines of how to inform children (Appendix 3). They will be supported by a member of SLT.
- Time and space for children to ask questions, share memories etc. will be provided.
- Staff should be open and honest with children and feel about to, express their feelings about the loss if they wish.
- A bereavement support pack will be available for classes to access.
- Other parents – if children have been informed, the school will then inform parents of the loss, as they may need to support or comfort their children (see Appendix 3).

On-going support

- The family and staff will be given an opportunity to celebrate the life of the child with a special Collective Worship held in school at an appropriate time.
- School will provide on-going support for children to explore their feelings and memories through appropriate activities. Counselling or bereavement support will be sought if appropriate in consultation with families.
- During transition times, information about a child who has experienced a bereavement will be passed onto relevant staff in a new class or a new school.

How to support in school:

Although the finality of death cannot be diminished, 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.

- Work with children to identify **three safe people, three safe places and three activities**. The key to this is to have someone to go to, somewhere to go to and something to do in a crisis.
- **Emphasise** – put yourself in the shoes of the bereaved, listen without judgement and consider that their behaviour may be a way of them communicating their current emotions.
- **Normalise** – children need to know that it is fine to feel angry, to cry, to sob or to be silent as grief takes many forms. All of these emotions are normal in grief, that grief continues after the funeral and that we all have different reactions when someone that we know dies.
- **Containment** – helping the individual to manage their emotions and feelings so that they do not feel overwhelmed. This could be enabling them to express their emotions in manageable ways.
- Be honest and answer to the best of their knowledge
- Use clear language
- Expect questions
- Recognise every death and reaction to it as unique
- Don't assume
- Allow time
- Acknowledge that some days will be better than others
- **Take care of yourself**– staff need to ensure that you take care of your own well-being. This could include noticing their own emotions and seeking support if they feel overwhelmed themselves.

Suggested script

- “I've got some news to tell you today that might make you really sad. (Name) died yesterday. This means that we won't see (name) again. We have lots of memories of (name) that we can think about and we can celebrate those together.”

Euphemisms to avoid

- No longer with us.
- Slipped away
- Went to sleep
- Lost
- Daddy is a star now
- Passed away
- Gone away

Supporting a bereaved community

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- e.g. the Meeting Room - for the duration of a lunchtime 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 and not for public airing.
- Access to one to one time with a member of staff who is trained in bereavement support. • The Educational Psychology team offer counselling support and staff will be reminded about this service.
- Give parents and family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died.
- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support.
- Invite parents/family to any commemorative events held by the school, both at the time and in subsequent years. Return any belongings or memory books etc. to parents/carers at an appropriate time,
- If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed. Parents will be told that they are welcome in the school and will be encouraged to come and visit.

Monitoring

The policy will be monitored and updated every two years. The procedures and resources will be reviewed at regular intervals in order to update information and to offer support with new resources.

Links to other policies

Please read in conjunction with this policy the Mental Health and Well-being Policy and Collective Worship Policy.

Appendix 1 - Useful resources/Support

- Dudley LA resource box - Out of the Blue by Julie Stokes and Paul Oxley, Duck's Fish from the Dog, Duck and Cat Trust, The Huge Bag of Worries by Virginia Ironside, The Heart and the Bottle by Oliver Jeffers,
- <http://www.winstonswish.org.uk>" and www.childbereavement.org.uk
- Granpa – John Burningham
- When Dinosaurs Die – L and M Brown
- Liplap's Wish – Jonathan London and Sylvia Long
- The Memory Tree – Britta Techenstrup
- The Invisible String – Patrice Karst
- Helping Children and Adolescents Think about Death, Dying and Bereavement by Marian Carter, 2016 (examples of concepts, behaviours and adult responses)
- www.innerworldwork.co.uk (What survival looks like in Primary school poster)
- As Big as It Gets – supporting a child when someone is seriously ill – Winston's Wish
- Beyond the Rock – Winston's Wish
- A child's grief – Winston's Wish
- Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine by Diana Crossley
- Supporting Children through Grief and Loss: Practical Ideas and Creative Activities for schools and carers by Anna Jacobs
- Lucy's Story: A child's story of grief and loss by Anna Jacobs
- Staff can seek support in Dudley from <https://lets-get.com/home/bereavement>
- For further information and support you can contact Marie Faux and Sarah Doyle Mary Stevens Hospice 01384 443010 (marie.fox@marystevenshospice.co.uk)
- Winston's Wish Positive Responses to Death – a strategy for schools.

Appendix 2 – 10 Things to Say instead of stop crying

- 1) It's ok to be sad.
- 2) This is really hard for you.
- 3) I'm here with you.
- 4) Tell me about it.
- 5) I hear you.
- 6) That was really, scary, sad etc.
- 7) I will help you work it out.
- 8) I'm listening.
- 9) I hear that you need space. I want to be here for you. I'll stay close so you can find me when you're ready.
- 10) It doesn't feel fair.

Appendix 3 – Template letters

Template letter to parents/families

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear the sad news of <Name's> death. There are no words to express our sadness and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through.

As a school community, we will miss <Name> very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to <his/her> friends, classmates and teachers. <Name> was a <valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly> member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help as you plan <Name's> funeral, please let us know. We will continue to keep in touch and will support you in any way we can.

With sympathy,

Template letter to parents/families about the death of a staff member

Dear parents/carers

I am sorry to inform you that a <well-respected/long-standing/well-loved/popular/well-known> member of our staff, <Name>, died <suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness>.

The pupils were told today by their <class teacher/tutor/head of year/in assembly> and many will be reacting to this news. When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some pupils may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

We have tried to answer their questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Child Bereavement UK website childbereavementuk.org.

Our thoughts are with <Name's> family at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember <Name's> life.

Template letter to parents and carers - death of a pupil

Dear parents and carers,

Your child's class teacher/form tutor/head teacher/head of year had the sad task of informing the pupils of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>. <Name> died suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness yesterday/last week/over the weekend/during half term.

He/She was a <valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly> member of the class/school community and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some pupils may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal. We have tried to answer their questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Child Bereavement UK website childbereavementuk.org

Our thoughts are with <Name's> family and friends at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember <Name's> life.

Appendix 4- The Charter for Bereaved Children from Winston's Wish (www.winstonswish.org.uk)

Winston's Wish supports children, young people and their families after the death of a parent or sibling. This charter is based on our conversations with thousands of children and their families, who have told us what gave them hope after bereavement.

Bereavement support

Bereaved children need to receive support from their family, from their school and from important people around them.

Express feelings and thoughts

Bereaved children should be helped to find appropriate ways to express all their feelings and thoughts associated with grief - such as sadness, anxiety, confusion, anger and guilt.

Remember the person who has died

Bereaved children have the right to remember the person who has died for the rest of their lives; sharing special as well as difficult memories.

Education and information

Bereaved children need and are entitled to receive answers to their questions and information that clearly explains what has happened, why it has happened and what will be happening.

Appropriate response from schools and colleges

Bereaved children need understanding and support from their teachers and fellow students without having to ask for it.

Voice in important decisions

Bereaved children should be given the choice about their involvement in important decisions that have an impact on their lives, such as planning the funeral and remembering anniversaries.

Everyone involved

Bereaved children should receive support which includes their parents or carers, and wider family.

Meet others

Bereaved children benefit from the opportunity to meet other children who have had similar experiences.

Established routines

Bereaved children should, whenever possible, be able to continue activities and interests so that parts of their lives can still feel 'normal'.

Not to blame

Bereaved children should be helped to understand that they are not responsible, and not to blame, for the death.

Tell the story

Bereaved children are helped by being encouraged to tell the story of what has happened in a variety of ways. These stories need to be heard by those important people in their lives.

Policy Review

This policy is reviewed every two years.

	Signed Headteacher	Signed Chair of Governing Body
Date of review:		
Date of next review:		