

Bereavement policy



“Our school is a place where we all come together as one community to learn, have fun and make lasting friendships all under God’s love and care”

Approved by:

The Senior Leadership
Team

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Last reviewed on:

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This bereavement policy has been written in line with Wintson's Wish, a bereavement charity supporting grieving children and families.

Aims

Around 127 children and young people are bereaved of a parent every single day in the UK. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person¹.

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.

This bereavement policy aims to:

- Set out a guideline for how the school will respond to a death in our school community
- Set out a plan for communicating deaths in a timely manner that balances our school community's interests and transparency with the wishes of the family of the deceased
- Identify best practices for supporting pupils and/or members of staff experiencing bereavement
- Define the roles and responsibilities of key staff members and the governing board
- Provide a roadmap and framework for pupils or staff returning to school following bereavement

¹ Winston's Wish <https://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/facts-and-figures/>

2. 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 key professionals in the case of a sudden and unexpected death or suicide 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

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 SENDCO
- teach about loss and bereavement as part of the planned curriculum or in the role of tutor (teachers only)
- inform the head teacher at the earliest possibility if they hear about a death of someone in the school community

2.1 The head teacher

The head teacher has overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy and for delegating any responsibilities under this policy to other members of staff.

The head teacher will:

- Liaise with the family of the deceased
- Where appropriate, communicate details of a death to pupils and staff as set out in this policy, or activate communication teams
- Respond to media requests for information in the case of a publicised death
- Participate in any multi-agency reviews as requested
- Lead reintegration meetings for pupils or staff returning to school after a bereavement
- Arrange for monitoring and support of the pastoral support team or any individual staff members who are supporting bereaved pupils or staff

2.2 Pastoral support staff (SENDCO, School councillor, ELSA's)

The pastoral support team has responsibility for monitoring and supporting bereaved pupils and staff members (including before their bereavement, where relevant – for example, in the case of terminal illness).

The pastoral support team will:

- Provide direct support to bereaved pupils and staff, for example through ELSA support and our art therapy service.
- Signpost to external support available to bereaved pupils and staff
- Organise safe spaces for bereaved members of the school community to take a time out
- Organise memorials, e.g. temporary tributes, books of condolences, memorial web pages
- Arrange for the attendance and supervision of pupils at funerals (where permitted)
- Be aware of dates and holidays that may be particularly difficult for bereaved pupils or staff and ensure they are supported on those days
- Provide additional support during significant transitions e.g. when moving up to the next year group or transitioning to a new school

2.3 Governing board

The governing board is responsible for monitoring the implementation of this policy, and supporting the headteacher.

The governing board will:

- Undertake regular monitoring of how the school is supporting the bereaved, and the staff who support them
- Monitor the headteacher's emotional wellbeing, for example through regular check ins with the chair of governors and performance manager.
- Assist the headteacher, where required, in responding to media requests for information in the case of a publicised death
- Where necessary, arrange for another staff member to take the lead if the headteacher is not available to respond to a death immediately

3. Provision for supporting staff who support the bereaved

Supporting pupils and staff who are grieving can be painful. Those staff members who carry out this essential work will be monitored and supported.

- Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA'S) have ongoing supervision sessions with their attached Education Psychologist.
- Our art therapist is supervised through the Catholic Children's Society supervision procedures.

- 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](#).

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 staff counselling.

We will work within our leave of absence 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.

4. Immediate actions following a death

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.

4.1 Clarifying information and the wishes of the family

- 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)

- 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.

4.2 Sharing the news with staff

- 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.

4.3 Sharing the news with pupils

- 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.

4.4 Informing parents/carers

- inform the parents/carers in line with the wishes of the family.

4.5 Responding to specific causes of death

Some deaths need to be handled more sensitively due to their potential to cause fear, anger or imitation.

Following a sudden and unexpected death – suicide

Suicide is not just a 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/> and seek advice from The Catholic Children's Society Connect-Ed Mental Health Services.

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’.

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.

School would take 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. The pastoral team would seek advice from our drama therapist, through Catholic Children's Society and Connect –Ed. School would also seek what support is available through Hounslow's Local Offer www.hounslow.gov.uk 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/>

Following a sudden and unexpected death – contagious disease

If the death is due to contagious disease, we will follow procedures as determined by our local health protection team

4.6 Responding to the media

In the event that a death that affects the school raises media interest, we will respond in the following manner:

- The head teacher in partnership with the chair of governors will respond appropriately to media interest. No other staff member should respond to media requests, and should instead refer enquires to the head teacher and chair of governors.

5. Follow-up actions and support following a death

- 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.
- offer families the support of our Emotional Literacy Support Assistants, Rainbows groups and, if necessary one to one counselling through the Catholic Children's Society.
- signpost families to bereavement support including that provided by Winston's Wish
- ensure that learning about loss and bereavement is embedded into appropriate curriculum areas including PSHE and RSE education. When teaching about loss and bereavement we will give careful thought as to how to support those directly affected by loss and bereavement.

5.1 Support for pupils and staff

Pupils and staff may require support to grieve in the initial days and weeks following a death.

- We will consider each individual situation carefully to ensure that the response from the school is sensitive, accurately reflects the needs of the situation, and involves those affected as appropriate.
- Pupils and staff can access the support of the school pastoral team as appropriate to the needs of each individual case.
- Pupils and staff will be signposted to external support, e.g. community mental health resources and bereavement charities if appropriate to each individual case.

5.2 Timetables

- Returning timetables will be discussed as appropriate to each individual bereavement case.

5.3 Tributes and condolences

- Tributes and condolences will be arranged as appropriate to each individual bereavement case.

5.4 Funerals

We will consult the family as appropriate, to confirm:

- Whether members of staff and/or pupils are welcome to attend the funeral or memorial service
- How condolences should be made and how staff and pupils can contribute

If staff are welcome to attend the funeral and wish to do so:

- Staff should request leave to attend a funeral by speaking to or emailing Mrs Orpwood, our deputy head teacher.

If pupils are welcome to attend the funeral and wish to do so:

- Parents of pupil's wishing to attend should email the senior leadership team requesting leave.

6. Support for pupils returning to school after bereavement

Whether a pupil has been away from school following a personal bereavement or after a death affecting the whole school community, the school will support them in their return to school and for as long as necessary afterwards.

6.1 Reintegration meeting

Reintegration meetings will be held if requested by the bereaved pupil and/or their parents/carers. If requested, a member of the pastoral team will meet with the bereaved pupil and their parents/carers to discuss how best to manage a return to school.

The purpose of the meeting will be to:

- Determine whether the pupil is emotionally ready to return to the classroom either full-time or with adjustments to the timetable to allow for a phased return
- Address any concerns the pupil and their parents/carers have about the return to school
- Consult with the pupil about how or even if they want their classmates to know of the death (where relevant)
- Open lines of communication between the pupil and relevant staff to ensure support should the pupil feel overwhelmed
- Open lines of communication between the school and the pupil's parents/carers to coordinate support
- Consider any additional support needed for a pupil who is vulnerable or has special educational needs (SEN) or a disability

6.2 Ongoing support

- We will maintain regular contact with the pupil's parents/carers to monitor how the pupil is coping
- We acknowledge significant dates or holidays may be especially difficult and will support the pupils sensitively and as appropriate to each individual case
- We know that grief may impact a pupil's progress and affect their behaviour. School will be sensitive to this and arrange additional support as appropriate to each individual case.
- We will take care to manage changes for bereaved pupils by preparing them in advance (where possible) and taking extra steps to support necessary transitions

7. Support for staff returning to school after bereavement

Whether a staff member has been away from school following a personal bereavement or after a death affecting the whole school community, the school will support them in their return to school and for as long as necessary afterwards.

7.1 Reintegration meeting

Reintegration meetings will be held if requested by the bereaved member of staff. If requested, a member of the pastoral team will meet with the bereaved staff member to discuss how best to manage a return to school.

The purpose of the meeting will be to:

- Determine whether the staff member is ready to return to work and the best way to make that return (e.g. a phased return to work or a temporary change in duties)
- Address any concerns the staff member may have about the return to school

- Consult with the staff member about how or even if they want their pupils and colleagues to know of the death (where relevant)
- Set guidelines for communication between the staff member and their line manager to monitor and support the staff member

7.2 Ongoing support

We acknowledge that grief can have an impact on a staff member's physical and mental health, which can then go on to affect their performance.

We also recognise that grieving is highly personal and that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution for monitoring and supporting a bereaved person.

We will work with each individual to create a system of monitoring and support that works for that person.

8. Monitoring arrangements

This policy will be reviewed every three years by Jodi Gough (SENDSCO). At every review, the full governing board committee will approve it.

9. Links with other policies

This policy is linked to our:

- Child protection policy
- Critical incident policy
- Behaviour policy
- RSE policy
- PSHCE policy

Appendix: useful contacts

ORGANISATION	CONTACT DETAILS
Child Bereavement UK	Helpline: 0800 02 888 40 https://www.childbereavementuk.org/contact-us
Winston's Wish	Helpline: 08088 020 021 https://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/contact-page/

ORGANISATION	CONTACT DETAILS
Cruse Bereavement Care	Helpline: 0808 808 1677 https://www.cruse.org.uk/about-cruse/contact-us
Mind	Infoline (information and signposting to further help): 0300 123 3393 Further contacts: https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/useful-contacts/
Catholic Children's Society	https://www.cathchild.org.uk/
Connect-Ed Mental Health Services	www.cathchild.org.uk/connected/