

Bereavement Policy



Fishburn Primary School

Academic Year

2021 / 2022

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Approved by: Governing Body

Aims of Document

This document aims to set out the considerations that senior leaders will need to create a comprehensive bereavement policy. Senior Leaders will need to think about how it links to other policies, e.g. critical incidents, and how it relates to the overall ethos of the school that has a bereavement aware culture in place.

Rationale

In every school there will almost always be individuals who are dealing with grief and loss. It is estimated that 45,000 children are bereaved every year in the UK (www.winstonswish.org). Within school there is an opportunity to support them to be a listening ear, to offer them some structure and normality where it's needed, opportunities to be a child, and to support their wellbeing as a whole. Having a bereavement policy in a school ensures the preparation and planning needed to support those affected, whether it's an individual or the whole school community. A bereavement policy can provide a guiding framework for managing these events; however, it is important to recognise the range of experiences and losses that might occur, and that each circumstance will be different. If a pupil or a staff member dies, the actions taken will be different from supporting a bereaved pupil, and schools should also refer to their policy on managing critical incidents. Every school will need to consider their individual context and the culture and ethos of their school community when writing their bereavement policy.

Communication and Information Sharing

When a death occurs, careful consideration needs to be given as to how to establish the key facts, and what, how and when this information should be shared with other staff, pupils and families. Where a particular family is affected, make sure to establish what they are happy to share with the school community. Stick to key facts and discourage any speculation. If in school, bad news is usually best broken within smaller groups rather than whole school assemblies.

In case of the death of a pupil, staff member or a serious incident on school premises or on a school trip, please also refer to your critical incident policy and establish how you might deal with any potential media interest.

Establishing key information

- Consider the details of the death - who will be responsible for gathering this information?
- Are there other services that need to be consulted?
- Who will be responsible for liaising with the family?
- How and when will information be shared with staff? Ideally this will be done before informing children.
- How will this be managed if the incident takes place during the school holidays/weekends?
- Does the death affect an individual in school or is it likely the whole school community will be affected?
- Are there other children not directly affected by the incident but may be vulnerable (e.g. have previously experienced a bereavement or are anticipating a bereavement)? Can a discrete register be established so that staff are aware of this and can exercise particular sensitivity?

Informing other children/families

- Consider the circumstances of the death and whether other children/classes need to be informed, and to what level of detail. If an individual/family is affected by the bereavement, make sure you have checked with them what they are happy to share.
- Consider how the information can be shared with children and who will be responsible for this – do they need additional support to do this?

- Ensure information is factual and simple language is used, discouraging speculation.
- Talk briefly about the person who died without eulogising them.
- It can be helpful to give pupils a practical and positive activity to do, for example making a card.
- Remember that children and young people may share information about the loss on social media – how will this be addressed?
- Consider whether parents need to be informed, and if so can advice and signposting be provided in case further support is needed?

Support in School

The first few days

Maintaining structure and routine can be important for children and young people affected by bereavement, however staff need to be responsive to how the child or young person is presenting and allow some flexibility within the day to meet their needs at this difficult time.

- What support will be available to children and young people and staff?
- Are there safe spaces that children/young people can go to? How and when can they be accessed?

Support for children and young people

Best practice suggests that support is usually best given in the first instance by people who are familiar to us. This helps to maintain a sense of calm and consistency where possible. Grief is a natural process that many of us will go through without the need for specialist support, particularly if we already have good support structures. We all respond to grief in different ways and it can take time to come to terms with events.

- Are all staff aware of the range of feelings and behaviours to anticipate from a child who is grieving?
- Does the child/young person need a key person in school to go to?
- Are there any additional needs to think about e.g. SEND?
- Are there other children/young people affected? Consider that while they might not be personally affected by the loss, the nature of events can be a trigger for past experiences, may exacerbate current issues or increase vulnerability in some groups.
- Have self-help materials been made available, and do children/young people know where to go if they have questions or need support?
- Is information about helplines accessible?
- Which external agencies/local services are available?
- Do staff know when to seek specialist advice and a referral to outside agencies?

Support for staff

It can be an emotionally difficult time for staff who are supporting a child who is bereaved, especially if their own experiences of loss are triggered.

- How will the wellbeing of staff be monitored?
- Who can staff go to if they need support, both internally and externally?
- Are there opportunities for more informal peer support?
- Do staff need any additional training to support them in their role? Please contact your link EP or Lead Partner to find out more about training provided by the SEND & Inclusion Service.

The funeral

- Who will be responsible for finding out the arrangements?
- Are there religious/cultural considerations to be made?
- Will someone from school attend and are there practical implications for this?
- What are the wishes of the family?
- Are any children from school attending and will they need additional support?
- Will there be any flowers/collection/cards sent?
- Returning to school after a bereavement
- If the child has taken time off school:
 - Who will liaise with them before they return and find out what support they might need?
 - Who will meet them on their first day back?
 - What support has been put in place for them if they need time out, or someone to talk to?

Ongoing support

There are no set timeframes for bereavement, and feelings can be triggered at different times during the year and stages of life.

- If a child/staff member has died, consider ways in which their life can be celebrated e.g. special assembly (See Appendix E)
- How will the wellbeing of those affected be monitored over time?
- What school-based interventions are there that support children with bereavement?
- How will anniversaries and other trigger points be managed sensitively? (See Appendix)

School Curriculum and Ethos

1 in 29 children have been bereaved of a parent or sibling (www.winstonswish.org) - that around 1 in every class. Children and young people will also likely experience the death of other people who are important to them and across our lifetimes we will all experience bereavement. In order to help children and young people effectively manage bereavement and losses in their lives it is important that we equip them with the skills and resources to be able to cope when they experience the death of someone they know.

By introducing the subject of death and bereavement in the classroom we can help pupils to normalise and understand the process of grieving and help them to develop the skills to empathise with friends who may be going through a bereavement. It will also help children and young people understand that it is ok to talk about death and dying and demonstrate that the adults around them are open to conversations about a topic that can often be difficult to talk about.

Death and bereavement is a topic that can be taught alongside the usual PSHE curriculum within Primary and Secondary schools. There are a range of resources available online to support this including;

- Elephants Tea Party - Created by Child Bereavement UK, this resource offers lesson plans and activities to support discussion round death and grieving. There are resources available to download for free aimed at pupils aged 5-11years and 11-13years (<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Pages/Category/elephants-tea-party>)
- Project Eileen – a multimedia project aimed at Year 10 pupils, currently being piloted in two Secondary Schools and due to make their resources more widely available in 2020. (www.projecteileen.co.uk)
- Zippy's Friends (ages 5-7) and Apple's Friends (ages 7-9) – A coping and social skills programme for Primary age children which covers death and bereavement within the sessions. (<https://www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk/what-we-do/programmes-for-schools.html>)

- Winston's Wish Guide to Supporting Grieving Children and Young People in Education – the teaching learning and grief section contains some useful ideas which could be incorporated into lessons relating to death and bereavement.
(<https://www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/supportfor-schools/>)
- Educating and Supporting Children around Death, Dying and Bereavement by St Francis Xavier's Primary School, Falkirk. This resource, containing 5 detailed lesson plans for pupils aged 9-12 years, was developed as part of the school resilience project (this is not linked to Durham Resilience Project)
https://www.goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk/content/resources/1525951432_The_Resilience_Project.pdf
- Youth Aware Mental Health (YAM) is a universal programme for Y9 young people in Durham schools. While it is not a programme that focuses specifically on bereavement and loss, it supports young people to know that it is ok not to be ok and to know how to seek support from friends, family, teachers and services. The programme is facilitated by a team of staff from a range of services (including SEND and Inclusion and resilience nurses) and is free to schools. For more information contact epsdurham@durham.gov.uk

Although bereavement and loss is an important topic to discuss, schools should remain mindful that this can be a sensitive topic for many people, including staff members themselves. It is important that before engaging in sessions staff are aware of pupils who have experienced a bereavement and that appropriate steps are taken to ensure that pupils feel supported, for example, giving them options about how they would like to engage with the session.

When children have experienced bereavement and loss, there are some considerations to make within school around the curriculum:

- Make their time in school predictable with a sense of calm, consistency and routine
- Consider whether 'new' routines might be supportive
- Ensure they know what to expect from adults around them and what adults might expect of them e.g. we may take a flexible approach to rules and boundaries but let children and young people know about these adjustments
- Reduce the cognitive load where appropriate
- Reduce worries by ensuring they have understanding around what will be happening each day and support that is available to them
- Generate joy – let them know it is ok to feel happy and hopeful and engage with aspects of school they enjoy

Additional Considerations

Religion and Culture

Schools function within a multi-cultural society, in which various beliefs, religious and non-religious preferences should be taken into account. Respect for the differing needs, rituals and practices is essential when acknowledging a death and supporting children, young people and their families. For more information see Appendix F.

Traumatic bereavements/death by suicide

Sudden deaths and bereavements in traumatic circumstances can lead to additional complexities in the grieving process. Sudden and traumatic deaths can include suicide, homicide, accidental deaths and sudden fatal medical emergencies. In these circumstances, the reality of the situation can be hard to accept, with no chance to say goodbye and possible regrets over unfulfilled plans. There may also be media attention which can be particularly difficult for an individual grieving the loss of a loved one.

In these circumstances the usual processes outlined within the school bereavement policy remain appropriate however further thought may need to be given to liaising with the family and Police Family Liaison Officer as appropriate. In addition, consideration must be given to if and how information is shared with the school community. Additional specific information relating to supporting children with sudden and traumatic bereavements is also available on www.childbereavementuk.org and www.winstonswish.org.

Where the death involves a pupil or a staff member, schools should refer to their Critical Incident policy and advice can be sought from the Durham EPS and SEND & Inclusion Team. Particular care must be given to suspected suicide as this can raise vulnerability within the school population. The Samaritans have a guide on managing a suspected suicide within school which can be found at <https://media.samaritans.org/documents/samaritans-help-when-we-needed-it-most.pdf>

Local support for individuals and families bereaved through suicide can also be found through 'if u care share' <https://www.ifucareshare.co.uk>.

Appendix A: Typical responses to loss and bereavement in children

Everyone is affected in a unique way by grief and this can also depend on the age and developmental stage of the child or young person. Some common feelings and behaviours in children include:

- becoming upset by seemingly minor events
- aggression, anger and non-compliance
- difficulty focusing on tasks
- fear of being alone and separation anxiety
- feelings of guilt/confusion
- reluctance to go to school
- complaining of headaches/stomach aches/minor illness
- feeling tired or becoming unusually hyperactive
- difficulties with peer relationships
- sleep disturbances

The way a child processes their grief may also depend on a number of factors:

- The relationship they had with the person who died
- The circumstances of the loss and if it occurred in a traumatic way
- Whether it was anticipated or not
- Whether they have experienced multiple losses
- The external support they have

Specialist Support

Although there are no limits as to how long grieving should last and what it should consist of, if over time children and young people are unable to move forward and appear to be 'stuck' in their grief, they may need support from specialist bereavement services. Signs that the child might need specialist intervention include:

- Frequent trouble accepting the death
- Inability to trust others since the death

- Uneasiness about moving on with life
- Detachment from other people to whom the bereaved person was previously close
- The prolonged feeling that life is meaningless
- The view that the future will never hold any prospect of fulfilment
- Excessive and prolonged agitation since the death

(Adapted from Cruse Bereavement Care)