



A member of the Sapientia Education Trust

# **BEREAVEMENT POLICY**

(a Local Governing Body Policy)

## **Autumn 2020**

CHAIR OF GOVERNORS: Karen Lynch

MINUTED: 7<sup>th</sup> October 2020

REVIEW: Three years

DATE OF NEXT REVIEW: Autumn 2024

## Aim of the policy

The aim of this policy is to provide basic information and practical advice for staff, including approaches that all of us will adopt to support bereaved children and their families. We want to offer children appropriate support, which can have a positive and long-lasting impact on their well-being. Whilst it may not seem possible to get it right all the time, we know that acknowledging the death of a family member or friend, and taking pro-active steps, can make a significant difference to a child.

## Rationale

Around 1 in 29 school aged children in Great Britain will have experienced the death of a parent or sibling by the age of 16. Furthermore, 78% of 11-16 year olds report being bereaved of someone to whom they are close, including the death of a friend.

Research shows that suffering a significant bereavement in childhood has the potential to have a significant impact on children's future well-being. Bereavement can be linked to a number of issues, for example: bereaved children are more likely to be bullied, have lower academic attainment, lower aspirations for continued learning, increases in physical health complaints, exhibit more risk-taking behaviours, have higher levels of anxiety and depression (into adulthood) and a change in behaviour can sometimes lead to an increased likelihood of exclusion from school and youth offending.

The way in which all staff in our school are able to respond to the needs of bereaved children plays a crucial role at a time of great need. Whilst we acknowledge that we cannot take away the pain of a bereavement, as a school, we are committed to providing the best support that we can for our pupils and their families if and when bereavement occurs.

## Children's experience of bereavement

Children's understanding of death will vary with their age and stage of development. Young children may not have the language or cognitive ability to tell us how they feel or process information. Likewise, older children, although they have greater understanding and language, may be unwilling to talk to the adults around them.

Children are affected by bereavement in different ways; Some may be sad and withdrawn, others may be angry and display challenging behaviour. Some children show their grief immediately, whilst others may not at the beginning, but may do so later, after weeks or even months. Grief is an ongoing process which children and young people revisit as they grow up and their level of understanding changes.

Children will not 'get over it', but with time, can learn to cope with all the changes. We know that many bereaved people continue to have a bond with the person who died – in a different way.

## What our school will do to help

Children and young people will understand death through the language we use to describe it. Using euphemisms and other words for death (e.g., lost, asleep, living in the stars) can be confusing. It is helpful for children if we use the words 'death' and 'died', and do not avoid these. Honesty and clear language around death will help prevent misunderstanding. We will try and answer children's questions honestly, but it is also okay for staff to say 'I don't know, but I will try and find out'. Staff do not have to be 'bereavement experts' to help grieving pupils. Kindness, compassion and a listening ear go a long way to supporting bereaved children.

Whilst acknowledging that not every bereaved child needs counselling and it takes time for children to adjust, children and families might benefit from specialist bereavement services. As a Suffolk school we would make a referral to Cruse Bereavement care – Suffolk. This organisation supports bereaved children whatever the cause of death. They offer a Young People's Helpline and Young People's website at [www.hopeagin.org.uk](http://www.hopeagin.org.uk) They also have a team of volunteers who are trained to work with children and young people up to the age of 17 based in Ipswich. Contact details are telephone - **01473 230888** or [www.suffolkcruise.co.uk](http://www.suffolkcruise.co.uk) Their national service provides phone support through the Daytime Helpline on **0808 808 1677** as well as email support from [helpline@cruse.org.uk](mailto:helpline@cruse.org.uk).

When children display ongoing problems for a significant amount of time, where problems are not getting better or deteriorating, or when there are serious issues like self-harm, not eating and/or not attending school, then a referral to specialist services is needed. With consent, we would make a referral to the Suffolk Emotional Wellbeing hub. The Emotional Wellbeing Hub is a multi-agency team offering a central point of contact for families, professionals, and young people to access mental health services or to discuss concerns about the emotional wellbeing of a child or young person in East or West Suffolk. They have a helpline to call - **0345 600 2090** and online referrals can be made at <https://gateway.mayden.co.uk/referral-v2/2703a180-2ff7-4779-8b6b-6de81ecd8b1b>

Sometimes the death of a family member might be covered widely in the media. It is helpful to know what information is in the public domain. When children are bereaved by suicide, families are often left with agonising questions. Schools can sometimes be a hotbed for rumours and speculation. It is important for us to acknowledge this, and respond appropriately, taking into account the wishes of the child and family. When deaths are investigated by the coroner, maybe because it was an unnatural death or the cause of death was unknown, this information is usually covered in the media.

The organisation Seesaw gives helpful tips for helping children through grief, which we will follow:

- Be there
- Initiate and anticipate
- Listen
- Silence is golden
- Accept and acknowledge the expression of feelings
- Offer opportunities for remembering
- Help the child find support and encouragement
- Allow the child to grieve at their own pace
- Be patient...
- Provide for times of fun
- Give the child choices
- Believe in the child's ability to recover and grow
- Be yourself

## Working with families

We place great importance on working in partnership with parents/carers. Some families may wish to have close involvement with the school, whilst others prefer things to be more private. It is important that we ensure that the children's needs are met, whilst taking account of the families' wishes. Children and young people may have a wide ranging religious and cultural beliefs and traditions, and it is important to respect differences. Whilst respecting family's wishes, it must be remembered that we have a duty of care towards all children. We are committed to meet the social, emotional and behavioural needs of our children; we will also follow our safeguarding procedures.

### Immediately after being informed, as a school, we will:

- Contact the parent/carer to express sympathy – this might be difficult, but it is much easier to be in touch with the family early on.
- Gather as much information as possible about the circumstance of the death, and find out what the child has been told.
- Encourage children and young people to come back to school as soon as is possible.
- Explain that support will be available for them and that we can discuss this in detail upon their return.
- Share information with all staff – and talk with them again after any meetings with the child and family once their wishes are known, e.g. what kind of support would they like from staff.
- Meet with the parent/carer and child to find out their views of how they would like to be supported. We acknowledge that this might be difficult, but unless we discuss this with the family and child/young person we will not know what support will be most helpful to them.

### Key points we will discuss:

- If and how children would like the information to be shared with their classmates
- Who would be the best person to provide support for them, and who they can talk to when they are finding it difficult
- How they will access time out if they are finding it difficult to cope with a lesson (exit cards can be helpful)
- Identify a person who will keep in touch with home (usually Head of House/Form tutor)
- Discuss pressures of homework and any forthcoming exams

### Short-term support

We will be sensitive to the needs of the bereaved child – these might be different for different children. Some children might appreciate the availability of a quiet space – but others might just want the usual opportunities to be with their friends and experience a sense of normality.

We will also need to be aware of other children who might be affected because they have also experienced a bereavement. Children often provide a considerable amount of support to their friends – we may need to consider how close friends are supported, and whether to make parents aware.

We will reassure children that their feelings are normal and offer validation; All feelings are OK.

We will monitor how children are progressing academically, as we know that many bereaved children do not achieve as well as their peers. Many children struggle with difficulties in concentration as the bereavement takes up a lot of thinking time. Young people have said that teachers sometimes get angry

with them as they had not completed work as a result of being unaware of their situation. Good communication across the school is really important - Staff cannot be supportive if we are too precious about the information we share – all staff need to know.

We will give praise for any achievements and reassure the child that things will improve in time. If necessary, we will support the child to catch up with work missed. We acknowledge that it is a challenging task for our staff to find a balance between allowing for difficulties whilst not lowering expectations. We will notify examination boards of the impact of bereavement if exams are due. We need to be aware that sometimes children can feel great pressure to achieve following a bereavement.

We will be consistent with our expectations for appropriate behaviour, but offer support if a child has difficulties. We will arrange regular 'check-in' meetings with their trusted adult to monitor their progress and take account of issues as they arise, offering early support.

## Funerals

Families are all different, some may hold a large funeral where members of the school community are invited, others might hold a small private funeral. In any case, as a school we will find out the family's wishes in regard to the attendance of a representative from our school, where appropriate. It is important that we discuss whether this should be the headteacher, and/or whether it is important that staff who knew the child and family well, to attend.

## Long-term support

We are aware that grief does not operate on a timetable, and it may be many months or years later that a young person is most in need of support. As children are growing up, their understanding and needs change, and many will revisit their bereavement at different stages of their life.

Our teachers are aware that when we are tackling sensitive subjects as part of the curriculum, we will not avoid them, but will be sensitive to the needs of bereaved children.

If appropriate, we will keep a diary of significant events (such as birthdays, anniversary of death) that can be passed on from year to year and to other schools during transition. It may be possible to add these events onto our database which will be accessible to all staff working with the young person.

People sometimes think it best to avoid painful reminders such as mother's or father's day, but we know that giving children the choice of what they want to do is really important. Avoiding the topic can leave children feeling that others do not care, or have forgotten their loved one. Providing opportunities when children can remember their loved one can be really important.

Summary - See Appendix 1: SeeSaw Suggested Action Flowchart

## Supporting Parents/Carers

We understand that a death in the family can cause a disruption for many months. Family members are grieving, relationships alter and members may take on new roles.

If appropriate, we will acknowledge the death by sending a card, flowers or phoning parents. Parents often report that other people avoid them because they do not know what to say. Taking their children back to school for a first time after a bereavement can be very difficult and as a school we can make arrangements to make it easier for them, e.g. meet them, allow them to drop-off/pick-up their child a bit earlier/later, etc. We will do our best to support parents and be flexible in these circumstances.

We know, keeping in touch with families and letting them know how their children are doing can be helpful. We will do this via telephone calls, emails or planners, as appropriate. We will find out from parents/carers which method of communication would be most helpful to them.

We will also provide general information and advice for parents/carers on supporting bereaved children on our school website, including signposting to local and national support services such as Cruise Bereavement Care, Winston's Wish and Child Bereavement UK.

### How staff will be supported

Bereavement is 'not only painful to experience, but also painful to witness' (Bowlby, 1980).

Supporting bereaved children can be very stressful. Support needs to be offered for a long time, and there are no easy solutions. Witnessing another person's grief can also remind staff of their own experiences of bereavement. As a school we have a duty of care towards our employees, and we will ensure that staff are appropriately supported when dealing with difficult issues, such as bereavement. Sapiientia Education Trust provide free, confidential access to support through the Employee Assistance Programme provided by the Validium Group. [www.validium.com](http://www.validium.com)

Being prepared can give staff confidence, which will make it easier to support bereaved children - bereavement training will be disseminated by trained and experienced colleagues from within the Trust, co-ordinated by the SEND Lead. This training can be revisited as appropriate and staff signposted towards further online training opportunities and useful professional guidance/resources.

### Teaching about death and bereavement

Death happens to children of all ages – it does not wait for them to be old enough to understand. Death seems to be a subject that nobody wants to address. Yet, in a survey by Ofsted of 178 young people about their views on preferred topics in PSHE, 'learning to deal with bereavement' was selected as their first choice (Ofsted: Not yet good enough, 2012). Through providing a curriculum that acknowledges and addresses death and bereavement we can improve the skills of children and young people to deal with and emerge positively from it.

As a school, we are committed to an education about death and the associated rituals and traditions of mourning. We will provide opportunities for discussion that help lessen the stigma attached to death, reducing its status as a taboo subject.

We will teach about death and bereavement in RE, Science, History and PSHE. We will also use opportunities for teaching about death and bereavement in other subjects as appropriate. Occasionally staff may feel that they can share their own experience of death and bereavement, which children and young people may find valuable if this provides a basis for class discussion. Sometimes we can use occasions when children start talking about death and bereavement as a whole class discussion and further teaching opportunity.

Within school we have a range of books that deal with different aspects of death including:

- When a friend dies – Marilyn Gootman
- The healing your grieving heart journal for teens – Alan and Megan Wolfelt
- When children grieve – John James and Russell Friedman

- The little book of bereavement for schools – Ian Gilbert
- The grieving teen – Helen Fitzgerald
- A student dies, a school mourns – Ralph Klicker
- Grief in school communities – Louise Rowling
- Supporting teenagers through grief and loss – Anna Jacobs
- 4 Winston’s wish books – You just don’t understand, As big as it gets, Hope beyond the headlines, beyond the rough rock.
- Bereavement resources folder from Rosedale funeral home
- Nelson’s journey support pack
- Winston’s Wish – Guide to support grieving children and young people in education.

These books are available for staff to use to teach about death and to support bereaved children. They are located in the Waveney Head of House office. We will continue to add to this collection.

### Role/Responsibilities of the Head of School

It is the Head of School’s responsibility to ensure that this policy is implemented, and that a co-ordinated response is provided to bereaved children and their families. They will ensure that all staff know what is expected, and that everyone can contribute in a way that is consistent with the ethos of the school. They will ensure that information is shared with all staff and passed on to other schools at times of transition. They will put appropriate support in place for staff and allow staff to attend appropriate training opportunities. Working with form tutors and teachers across the school, the Head of School, will promote teaching about death and bereavement across the curriculum.

### Further Information

*This policy has been adapted from the sample bereavement policy, provided by the Norfolk Critical Incident Lead Officer (2015) and the Whitehouse Farm Primary School draft bereavement policy (2020), taking into account our own school ethos, experience and further good practice guidelines.*

## References

- Bereavement and Loss: Guidance for schools, Leicestershire County Council
- Supporting bereaved pupils in school – SeeSaw’s Information Pack for school
- Bereavement policy framework– Surrey Healthy Schools
- Childhood Bereavement Network
- Nelson’s Journey – Advice for Professionals
- Winston’s Wish – Introductory Course of Childhood Bereavement
- Not yet good enough: Personal, social, health and economic education in schools – Ofsted (2012)
- Advice from Dr Bianca Finger-Berry, Critical Incident Lead Officer, Norfolk

## Useful websites / phone numbers

Suffolk Local info link: <https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/advice.page?id=dpLsXmeKK7Q>

Cruse bereavement care Suffolk helpline 24/7: 01473 230888

Rosedale funeral Home: <https://www.rosedalefuneralhome.co.uk/bereaved-children/>

Suffolk Emotional Wellbeing Hub: <https://gateway.mayden.co.uk/referral-v2/2703a180-2ff7-4779-8b6b-6de81ecd8b1b>

Child Bereavement UK: [www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)

Childhood Bereavement Network: [www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk)

Winston’s Wish: [www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org) Telephone: 08088 020 021

Cruse: [www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-schools](http://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-schools)

East Anglia’s Children’s Hospices: [www.each.org.uk](http://www.each.org.uk)

Autism Speaks: [www.autismspeaks.org/grief-and-bereavement-resources](http://www.autismspeaks.org/grief-and-bereavement-resources)

## Support for staff

Cruse: [www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk)

Validium: [www.validium.com](http://www.validium.com) or phone 08003 58 48 58

## Training for all staff

SET COMPASS – Bereavement Training April 2020 [www.winstonswish.org/school-bereavement-courses](http://www.winstonswish.org/school-bereavement-courses)

Contact from family about bereavement



Form tutor/HOH/Assistant HOH ← Allocation of tasks → Head of School/Head of House



Send card/letter of condolence to pupil and family



Inform pupils/teaching/non teaching staff of situation (as agreed with family)



Arrange to see pupil/family to decide what level of support is needed



Nominate with pupil the member of staff who will offer ongoing support



Ensure significant dates entered on pupil's records/register



Ensure regular liaison with staff to identify any problem areas



Discuss difficulties with pupil and devise coping strategies



Offer support to friendship group/staff as necessary



Keep regular contact with family



Be aware that grief is a lifelong process and can re surface at any time

*Adapted from: Christine Druce, Schools and Families Liaison Worker, SeeSaw, Bush House, 2 Merewood Ave, Oxford OX3 8EF*