

WHITEHILLS PRIMARY SCHOOL

"...putting children first...."



BEREAVEMENT POLICY

Date reviewed: April 2022

Reviewed by: Headteacher

Ratified by Governors: May 2022

Introduction

At Whitehills Primary School, we recognise and understand that every bereavement has unique circumstances but this policy will provide a planned, open and considered approach to ensure that our school can support the emotional well-being of either the child, family and or member of staff within our school community.

'Statistically, 1 in 29 pupils aged five to sixteen-years olds has been bereaved of a parent or sibling that is one in every class. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, relative, friend or other significant person. Within a school community there will almost always be some pupils who are struggling with bereavement – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil.' Child Bereavement UK 2020

Therefore, it is almost inevitable, that at some time our school will have to deal with a death that impacts the whole school community. Death is something that we naturally do not like to think about, so when we are faced with it, we often find ourselves underprepared. So, with that in mind, we will endeavour to develop our level of understanding about bereavement within school whilst acknowledging that we have a duty to help and support anyone within school when they could be feeling their most vulnerable, in a way that best meets their needs.

Children may need to look again at the details surrounding the death of an important person in their lives as they grow older. Feelings they had when young will be different several years further on as their understanding matures and the meaning of the death changes as they move through life. This is not unresolved grief but the experience of different feelings later in life, often connected to or triggered by events such as changing classes, transitioning to secondary school or other significant change within their family lives. We understand that all children mature at different rates and their understanding and responses to bereavement are likely to be based as much on their experience of life as on their chronological age.

As a staff, it is important for us to remember that children will be grieving for life and their loss will always be with them, so this policy aims to provide a guiding framework rather than a prescriptive document. It will outline ways; to respond in caring for the wellbeing of children and staff at a time when they may be in shock, upset and confused, to ensure effective communication takes place, to ensure effective support is available for each member of the school community so there is as little disruption as possible to the daily school routine.

Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support that some pupils, or members of staff, require. However, where the impact of the grief is more complex, referral to more specialist support will be considered and outsourced.

Aims and Objectives of the Bereavement Policy

- To identify key staff within the school and LA, resources and further support services to help the whole school community work together.
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between members of staff, pupils, the family/carers and the community.
- To provide a framework for all staff, teaching and non-teaching, to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with difficult and upsetting circumstances.
- To have clear expectations about the way school will respond to the death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.
- To support pupils and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement.
- To meet the needs of all its children and staff and to be a place that both child and family can rely on, and gain much needed support.
- For children to have the opportunity to tell their story, express their feelings, share their memories and develop coping strategies through support by sensitive staff.

Guidelines for Staff and Governors

A death can affect the school community in many different ways and often depends on:

- The role the deceased person had within school
- How well known they were in the local community
- Circumstances surrounding the death, particularly suicide or violent deaths

Bereavement councillors state from their experience of working with many schools affected by death that adults and children benefit from being kept informed. Rumour and gossip can be very damaging and can even lead to both young and old developing the attitude that the death is not a topic to talk about. Children and young people have a healthy curiosity, and if they are not informed of the circumstances or feel they are unable to ask questions, their normal grief process can be obstructed.

The following guidelines may help when informing staff and governors:

- Where possible, discussion should take place between the bereaved family and the Head Teacher or member of the Senior Leadership Team to enable their wishes to be taken into account **before** any decisions are made in relation to how and what to tell the staff and wider school community.
- Any cultural or religious implications **must be** considered and advice sought if necessary.
- **All** staff will be informed as soon as possible using our normal method of communication, e.g. a whole school staff meeting or team meeting. We will ensure this includes part time staff and measures will be taken to inform absent staff over the telephone.
- A factual explanation of how the death occurred will be given and if applicable the circumstances of what happened leading up to the death.
- The Senior Leadership team will be available to support staff once they have received the news. People may connect the incident to their own personal experience of bereavement, so feelings about past bereavements may need to be discussed. This is perfectly natural and time will be given for staff to process their feelings.
- Supply cover will be organised if necessary.
- One person from the Senior Leadership Team will be established as a point of contact for the family to ensure free flow of accurate information to and from the school.
- Bereavement support or counselling will be made available to all members of staff as necessary (external bereavement support will be outsourced if needed)
- If appropriate staff and pupil condolences will be arranged as part of a collaborative agreement.
- A set time for teachers to inform their class what has happened will be agreed, alongside how this is to be done and **exactly** what is going to be said. Absent pupils must be identified. (*Appendix 2*)
- If appropriate a special class or whole school assembly, memorial service or memorial tree or garden etc. will be agreed as part of a collaborative agreement.
- The Senior Leadership Team will be on hand at the end of the working day for staff to debrief and reflect upon the day's events and to agree upon any further action or support that may need to be put in place.
- Where possible staff who have requested to attend the funeral or memorial will be released, however this may be dependent on class cover and staff ratios.

In the days after the death

- Any cultural or religious implications **must be** considered and advice sought if necessary.
- The Senior Leadership team will be available to support staff and children.
- Supply cover will be organised if necessary.

- An allocated quiet place where children, young people and staff can go if necessary will be identified.
- Some flexibility to the timetable may be required however, it is preferable for there to be minimum disruption.
- All staff will work together to support people who need emotional help and support, particularly those who worked closely with the person who has died and administrative staff who will be taking telephone calls, dealing with parents etc.
- The nominated member of the Senior Leadership Team who has responsibility for liaising with the individual's family, will ascertain their wishes about the school's involvement in the funeral, if any.

In line with the families' wishes, the practical issues below will be considered by school:

- Sending flowers to the home or to the funeral, making a collection etc...
- Who will attend the funeral?
- Cover to be arranged for any staff members who may be going to the funeral.
- Informing the parents of those pupils who will be involved.
- *Possible closure of the school.*

For a summary of information refer to the Bereavement Flowchart (Appendix 1)

Guidelines for supporting a bereaved child return to school

When the child returns to our school, they may want to get straight back into friends, work and routine. They will have been surrounded by grieving family members and often a chaotic household of visitors. School maybe their break from that.

The following procedures need to be in place to help the child:

- An appointed member of the SLT or member of the team will be the main contact point for them and their family.
- Ensure **regular** contact, this may be daily or weekly depending on needs and wishes of the family. This will help us to understand how they are coping, what support they may need now and in the future, to discuss concerns and worries and plan strategies to cope. Record this communication on My Concern.
- If they stay at home, remember them. Class teacher to have cards and messages sent to them from appropriate people (peer group and staff they have good relationships with) Activities such as these will give the other children the opportunity to discuss their own concerns or experiences with the family and help them to feel they are doing something positive to support them, you may want to collate them into a book. This death may remind others of their own experiences and so be prepared to support them. You may find out information about a child in your class that you didn't know before. Be ready to listen to them all.
- Before they return members of the Senior Leadership Team will ensure all staff will be made aware of the bereavement and the possible effects on them, their behaviour and their learning, so that appropriate care and support can be given throughout the setting. Remember bereaved children have 'physical' illness, such as headaches, tummy aches and feeling sick, as well as mental sadness including lack of concentration, feeling tired, disorganised anger and frustration. These will have an impact on work load and learning. Monitor how things are going on their return and maintain communication with all staff involved.
- Staff to maintain the normal rules and expectations of behaviour. This is important for the children within our school and the child who have been bereaved. The rules and expectations are all part of the 'normal' routine and will help to make them feel secure. Remember the impact of bereavement on the whole family when giving sanctions and the impact the sanctions may have on the whole family

- Consider 'time out' strategies that suit the child and the classroom environment. Time out cards, signals or signs can help them to exit the room quickly if they are feeling vulnerable or emotional. Make sure they have an identified safe place to exit to.
- Remember, there is no set pattern or time limit to grief. It is a unique experience and the process is a lifelong one. At different ages and during new or transitional times they will have new questions requiring answers and questions requiring a re-visit of what happened; to develop a better understanding and acceptance.
- It is not unusual for bereaved pupils to take time off school during the early stages of their bereavement. For some, the need to be with their families will be strong, and indeed they may suffer from separation anxiety when the time comes for a return to school. For others the familiarity, stability and routines of school life may prompt an early return. The time away from school will vary from pupil to pupil but when they do return, they may have a number of concerns.
- Guidelines for supporting a bereaved child return to school (Appendix 3)
- Guidelines for supporting a student with special educational needs (Appendix 4)

External support agencies: online

www.childbereavement.org.uk

Supports families and professionals when a child is bereaved or facing bereavement.
Child and Adolescent Bereavement Support.

www.simonsays.org.uk

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

Childhood bereavement.

www.childline.org.uk

Free national telephone helpline for children and young people.
All aspects of bereavement.

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

www.griefencounter.org.uk

Helps bereaved children and young people rebuild their lives.
Specifically for young people aged 12-18.

www.hopeagain.org.uk

www.supportline.org.uk

Confidential emotional support for children, young people & adults.
Grief support service for children and young people.

www.seesaw.org.uk

www.sands.org.uk

Providing support for parents and families whose baby is stillborn or dies soon after birth.
Support for families bereaved by suicide.

www.uk-sobs.org.uk

Those who are left behind after a suicide can be helped by talking to others who have experienced a similar loss.

www.widowedandyoung.org.uk

Peer-peer network for those widowed before their 51st birthday

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Help for grieving children and their families.

Managing a sudden death in the school community

www.childbereavement.org.uk

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| The first 30 minutes | <p>It is likely that you will be feeling shocked yourself so give yourself time to process the information you have received.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check any relevant policies you have, such as Critical Incident Policy or Bereavement Policy • Identify a team that can help you • Contact the family to ensure you have correct and up to date information • Arrange a staff briefing, remembering absentees and part-timers • Identify any vulnerable staff members or pupils |
| Breaking bad news | <p>When the news of a death has been received by the school, the senior management team need to decide on their strategy and pathway forward. It is important to contact the family/families and clarify the situation and their wishes and preferences should be taken into consideration, wherever possible. Announcing the news to the school community can be challenging and it is important that it is handled sensitively and effectively. There are some important differences in the approach you might take, depending on what has happened and who is involved.</p> <p>Resources for children and young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Explaining to young children that someone has died</i> • <i>Explaining miscarriage, stillbirth or the death of a newborn baby to a young child</i> • <i>Children's understanding of death at different stages</i> |
| Supporting a bereaved family | <p>There is no right way to react to death. Anger, confusion, and sadness are among the many different reactions that bereaved pupils may have. How they're feeling may not be immediately obvious, so it's unhelpful to interpret their behaviour. It's much more important to observe and listen to them. Each pupil will deal with their grief in their own way.</p> <p>As they grow older, children's understanding will increase, but so will their needs for information to try to make some sense of what has happened. This may result in lots of questions.</p> <p>Resources for children and young people</p> <p>Understanding and 'owning' their feelings may help children. A book or leaflet which they can fill in can help them to express and understand feelings, build memories and feel less alone.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>My Dad and me – blank memory book</i> • <i>When someone special dies: under 7</i> • <i>When someone special dies: 7 - 11</i> • <i>When someone special dies: young people</i> |
| Supporting the school staff | <p>When a death occurs that affects a pupil or whole community it can be a very emotional and potentially stressful situation for you and your staff too.</p> <p>Making decisions, giving information and supporting others who may be stressed or emotional can be challenging. It is very important that you ensure you look after both yourself and your staff team to ensure you are able to best support your pupils and their families.</p> |
| Traumatic deaths | <p>When death happens suddenly and unexpectedly there may be a huge rush of events all happening at once. Children and young people can find it very scary, particularly if they have directly witnessed the events themselves or heard others talk about them. In addition, children and young people may be exposed to others' emotional reactions and everything can feel upsetting, uncertain and unsafe.</p> <p>Resources for children and young people</p> <p>https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/step-step/</p> |
| Social media and media | <p>Child Bereavement UK</p> <p>Website link: http://bereavement.lgfl.org.uk/section_six.html</p> |
| Looking to the future | <p>Grief just doesn't go away. It just changes over time. Therefore, bereaved pupils may continue to need further support throughout their schooling, although the nature of that support may change over time and in accordance with each pupil's individual needs. Children and young people may revisit their grief as their understanding of the world changes over time. Grief can also be compounded by other major changes in their lives such as moving house, changing school or financial difficulties. The death of a close friend or relative is a life changing experience.</p> |

Bereavement Flowchart (Appendix 1)

This flowchart will support you to build your school plan to respond to a bereavement:

Identify the relevant communication pathway and as a team the tasks required and who is best to complete them.



Members of the SLT will contact the family via phone call, card or letter of condolence.



An appointed member of the SLT will discuss with the family and child who they want their story shared with and the support that is available to them.



Members of the SLT will Inform all staff, families and children as agreed with the bereaved family.



An appointed member of the SLT will act as the point of contact with the family.



An appointed member of the SLT will arrange to see the child at home or in the setting to assess their needs and level of support required at this time.



An appointed member of the SLT will liaise with child and support their return to the school.



An appointed member of the SLT will continue to assess the needs of the child through observation, discussions with significant people, including the child regarding their concerns or worries, and outside agencies if required.



Appropriate staff to ensure friendships are secure as peer support can be very important.



An appointed member of the SLT will ensure significant dates and events for the child are recorded and shared with all staff for future reference (birthdays, anniversaries).



Staff to continue regular contact with the family to show that still care about them and their child.

Guidelines on How to Inform Children (Appendix 2)

During such difficult times, it is acceptable to show your emotions albeit in moderation. It is very important that we model to children healthy responses to sad news and a natural response to hearing about a death is to shed a tear.

- Be honest and factual.
- Use clear language – use the person’s name, do not use euphemisms like ‘passed away’ or ‘lost’ use the words dead, died and death to avoid confusion.
- Allow the children to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms they will understand.
- Allow the children to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.
- Allow the children to verbalise their feelings.
- Allow the children to discuss the situation and share their experiences of death (even if that is the death of a pet).
- Ensure the children understand that the death is nothing to do with anything they have said or done. It is in no way their fault.
- Reassure them that not all people who are ill or have had an accident will die and that many people get better.
- Acknowledge some days will be harder than others
- Do not expect to go straight into maths, allow for a time of restoration preferably with a physical outlet.
- Put an appropriate time limit on the discussion. It is preferable to resume normal school activities as soon as possible thus ensuring minimal disruption within the school day which also offers a sense of security and familiarity.

Suggested scripts to use when someone dies:

“I’ve got some really sad news to tell you today that might upset you. I know most of you will have heard of cancer/Covid19, and know that sometimes people with cancer/ Covid19 get better, but other times people die from it. _____, has been ill with cancer/ Covid19 for a sometime. I have to tell you that _____ died yesterday in hospital”.

“Sometimes people have accidents at work, at home, at school or on the road. People may be hurt or injured in the accident and they may have to go to hospital for treatment. Sadly, there are some accidents that cause people to die. I have some really sad news to tell you that might upset you. Yesterday _____, who is in Year 4, was in an accident and he was so badly injured that he died”.

Guidelines for supporting a bereaved child return to school (Appendix 3)

Some of the more common concerns might be:

How will staff and peers react: Who has been told? What do they know? What will be said? How much will I have to say to people?

You can help by: *meeting with them to welcome them back, acknowledge the death and talk through their concerns. Saying something simple like “I am sorry to hear that your dad died – sometimes it helps to talk about it and if so, who would you like to be there for you?” is usually much appreciated by them. If possible offer them choices about how things should be handled and what support would be helpful. Let staff and classmates know how they want to be received and supported.*

Fear of sudden emotional outbursts: anger, distress, panic...

You can help by: *normalising grief reactions and giving them choices about what strategies will help them to cope in the classroom e.g. able to leave lessons without fuss – “exit card” system, where they can go and who they can talk to.*

Fear when they realise they may not remember what the deceased person looks like

You can help by: *Suggesting that a laminated photo of the deceased person may give enormous comfort when the visual image begins to disappear. A ‘transitional’ special teddy or other memento will often give great comfort in times of distress and upset. They may also want to show this when talking about the person who died. It should be stressed that whatever helps the child within reason should be encouraged.*

Fear of being behind with work and unable to catch up

You can help by: *clarifying with other staff what is essential to accomplish and what can be left, and offering appropriate help to achieve what needs to be done.*

Inability to concentrate and feel motivated or sit still

You can help by: *reassuring them that this lack of motivation and concentration is normal and will pass. Offer shorter more manageable tasks, write down the task, give lots of encouragement for achievements, and minimising difficulties can often help.*

Family grief impacting on normal family functioning

You can help by: *Adjusting expectations and understanding that disrupted routines, sporadic meals, chaotic bedtimes etc are possible reasons why they may be inadequately prepared for school, does not have the necessary equipment, and may be tired or hungry. Talking with them to ascertain where areas of difficulty lie and try and work out strategies with them and their family to help keep things on an even keel in school. Identify their strengths and help them build on them.*

Guidelines for supporting a student with special educational needs (Appendix 4)

All children benefit from being given simple, honest “bite size” pieces of information about difficult issues - often repeated many times over.

When talking about death and bereavement with a child with learning difficulties it might be helpful to consider:

- **Who** should be key worker working with the child and family. Once decided inform parents who this person will be and keep in contact, this should be someone they ALREADY have a good relationship with.
- **Where** is the student most receptive to new ideas? Use this space for talking with them.
- **What** should be talked about? (As agreed with parents). Ensure that you use the same language and ideas as the family to avoid any confusion.
- **How** will the new information normally given? - signs, verbally, pictures. Use their normal communication methods to talk about illness and death.
- **How** the new information going to be shared to ensure their understanding? If you need to make a social story www.speakingspace.co.uk will assist with this
- **Proceed** at a level, speed and language appropriate to them.
- **Build** on information given using small chunks as the whole information given gradually will be easier for the child to absorb.
- **Repeat** the information as often as is needed.
- **Watch carefully** for reactions to show if the child understands, then modify and repeat as needed.
- **Follow** the child's lead. If the child is indicating the need to talk or have feelings acknowledged, encourage this as appropriate.
- **Watch** for changes in behaviour to try and identify if the child is struggling more than they can say and offer support as needed.
- **Maintain** normal daily routine as much as possible.
- **Liaise** with other agencies involved with the child to ensure accuracy and continuity of information.