



GREATFIELDS SCHOOL

# Bereavement Policy

**Approved by SLT:**

**Date: July 2020**

**Approved by Local Governing Board:**

**Date: July 2020**

**Next Review Date: July 2021**



## 1. Introduction

We believe that the key to becoming a great school is to ensure that all students have access to a happy, challenging and safe learning environment. To achieve this, we need to nurture a partnership with parents and students that is based upon openness, mutual respect and the highest expectations of all.

Our school is fully committed to the emotional health and well-being of our children and young people and that of our staff. We are dedicated to the continual development of a healthy and thriving school community and strive to work towards this in all aspects of school life. We are passionate about providing an ethos, environment and curriculum that can provide support during difficult times, including a time of death or dying.

## 2. Rationale

Every 22 minutes in the UK a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 41,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, and, sadly, around 12,000 children die in the UK each year. The Covid 19 pandemic has brought these statistics into sharp focus.

Within our school community there will almost always be some children who are struggling with bereavement – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil. 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 challenging situations. Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children – or staff – require, though referral to more specialist support should be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex. Additional information and resources can be accessed at [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)

## 3. Objectives

The core intentions of the policy are:

- To support pupils and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and community.
- To identify key staff within school and the Local Authority and clarify the pathway of support.
- The Children Act 1989 aimed to ensure that the welfare of the child was paramount, working in partnership with parents to protect the child from harm (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents>). All intentions of this policy endorse that aim as we endeavour to counter any adverse effects of bereavement and maintain pupils' emotional well-being.

## 4. The role of the Governing Body



- To approve this policy and ensure its implementation as an active document. To be reviewed every three years. This includes:
  - Reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
  - Utilising the expertise within the school and sharing responsibilities.

## 5. The role of the headteacher

*The Headteacher has overall responsibility for the policy and its implementation, for liaison with the governing body, parents/carers, the Local Authority and other relevant outside agencies.*

*The Headteacher will:*

- Monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.
- Respond to media enquiries.
- Keep the governing body fully informed.
- Be first point of contact for family/child concerned.
- Advise and support staff, consult on referral pathways and help with the identification of more complex grief.

## 6. The role of pastoral staff and safeguarding team

- To have bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff

*NB: It is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for pupils, supporting each other and implementing this policy. To this end it is desirable that the whole school staff have some awareness of bereavement through a whole school training if possible.*

- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies.
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary schools.

## 7. Procedures:

1. Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the headteacher and the family's wishes respected in communicating with others. Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion, whilst being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations. NB: We need to be mindful of the use of social media sites and their impact throughout this time as rumour and gossip spread quickly.

2. Staff should be informed before pupils and be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.



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3. Pupils should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them. A decision should be made as to whether this information should be given as part of a whole school approach or if only certain groups of pupils need to be informed.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate.
7. 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.
8. Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Headteacher.
9. 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. The school should be aware of any ongoing bereavement issues for new pupils. To this end it is important to have effective communication with 'feeder' schools.

*NB: Many of the guidelines in this policy are only appropriate when the school community as a whole has experienced a death, for example a teacher, a pupil or another staff member.*

*Perhaps a more common experience for teachers and learning support staff is that of a pupil experiencing the death of a parent. Whole school or class activities will not normally be appropriate in this situation, but the needs of that individual pupil should still be given careful consideration.*

*If a child has been bereaved, it is important to involve them in decisions about how the school manages issues relating to their loss. Talk to the child about their preferred way of informing their peers about what has happened and about the support they need.*

### 8. Talking about death or grieving

When you talk to bereaved children

- **Listen and validate** – children often don't recognise their feelings as grief. Let them know that whatever they're feeling is normal and okay
- **Acknowledge their fears** – children's fears, no matter how irrational, are real and we can't take them away. Just knowing that someone they trust is listening to them is helpful
- **Reassure, but only as much as you can do so honestly** – for example, a child whose family member has died from COVID-19 will quite rationally be afraid of other family members dying. It's unhelpful to try to calm a child's fears by saying that won't happen when it already has, and it can diminish the child's trust in you. Rather, acknowledge the possibility but counter with facts about how rare this is
- **Check their understanding** – children can be very literal, and what might seem obvious to us may not be so clear to them. As you talk to them, regularly check that they understand what you've said
- **Share your own feelings** – it's okay to let children know that you're also sad and upset. It can be reassuring that what they're feeling is normal



## If the bereaved child is struggling to express themselves

Grief is overwhelming at any age, and children may struggle to express what they're going through. You can get the conversation started by:

- Sharing [Lost for words](#) – a free e-book of advice by grieving children for grieving children
- Sharing '[Thunks on death](#)' (about halfway down the page) – a set of cards designed to open discussion about death and grief
- Completing [memory books](#) (see under the heading 'Resources for children and young people')

## 9. Supporting Staff who are supporting bereaved students

Working with bereaved children is painful, and those staff members who step up to the plate will also need your support. Tracey Bosely of [Child Bereavement UK](#) gave us the following tips for managing staff who take on this important role:

- **Don't let them go at it alone** – make sure more than one staff member is assigned to each bereaved child. Not only will this share the load, but it'll also ensure that all staff assigned to a child have someone to talk to without breaching confidentiality
- **Check in with them regularly** – be proactive, and be the one reaching out. Staff may feel guilty about asking for your time right now
- **Be prepared to step in** – tell them to step back if it becomes clear they're overwhelmed
- **Make bereavement training available** – many organisations offer training for school staff, including:
  - [Child Bereavement UK](#)
  - [Winston's Wish](#)
  - [Cruse Bereavement Care](#)
  - [EduCare](#)

## 10. Resources for parents

The NHS [Children and bereavement](#) – includes lots of resources for parents and children, including helplines and tips for creating a memory box  
[Child Bereavement UK](#)

- [Telling a child that someone has died](#)
- [Parenting bereaved children - a video](#)

[Cruse Bereavement Care](#)

- [Children and young people's physical responses to grief](#)
- [Children and young people's emotional responses to grief](#)

[Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families](#)

- [On My Mind](#) is a resource for children to learn how to support their own mental health and wellbeing. It stresses the important of [self-care](#)