

POLICY TEMPLATE

# Child Bereavement Policy

This school bereavement policy template has been written by experts and reviewed by experienced educational professionals. Adapt this bereavement policy for your own school by tailoring the information to reflect your own settings and procedures.

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# 1. Ethos

[This example statement should be changed to reflect your individual school's ethos.]

Our school is a place of learning but we recognise that wellbeing and pastoral support is equally instrumental in the success of every student. Creating a good, supportive work environment is also crucial for teachers to remain at their best. Everyone in our school works to create a safe, happy, and challenging learning environment where everyone is valued and can thrive both individually and as a community.

Our school is committed to supporting the wellbeing and the emotional health of students and staff, especially during the most difficult circumstances, including a time of death or dying or loss. Bereavement can cause children to be more vulnerable – this is regardless of whether the death is sudden or unexpected or as a result of a long illness. Further, we recognise that loss covers a range of events - it can be felt acutely when students and staff are affected by divorce or separation. Therefore, some parts of this policy may be helpful in that context too.

We recognise that a school can be uniquely placed to help at these times and we are committed to doing so.

## 2. Policy rationale

- On average in the UK, there is in excess of 40,000 children affected annually by the death of a parent.
- Many more children are affected by the death of someone close to them, including friends or relatives, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, or cousins.
- Furthermore, 12,000 children die each year in the UK.

Whilst we all hope that bereavement does not affect anyone in our school, it is statistically inevitable that individuals - or in some circumstances the whole school community - may be affected by this issue. Within our school community there will almost always be a number of students or staff who are struggling with bereavement. Sometimes, the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil. As a school that is committed to the emotional wellbeing of staff and students, we believe that it is important to be able to respond to such issues in a proactive rather than reactive way.

This policy is in place to enable us to help everyone act empathetically and appropriately if this issue arises.

## 3. Aims

The main aims of this policy are to:

- Identify best practice for supporting students or staff at times of bereavement and loss.
- Identify roles and responsibilities for certain members of staff when dealing with a bereavement situation and capture the role of governors.
- Ensure guidance is available for everyone in our school for how to respond to a death of someone in, or connected to, our community.
- Ensure points of external support are identified and accessible.
- Create a roadmap of support for the journey through the bereavement process in the school.

- Identify key individuals who will engage with the media and create a clear method of engaging with both the media and social media at times of bereavement.
- Provide practical guidance about how to speak to someone coping with bereavement.

When using this policy, it is important to remember that this is a guidance document and every situation, student, and staff member is different. You must always use your discretion and tailor the information laid out in this policy accordingly; for example, some students will need little support, but others could need much more in-depth support. If in any doubt, we encourage you to speak to a colleague, the pastoral support team or the headteacher for guidance and support.

Further, we recognise that helping students and staff in these situations can affect the person helping. Should this be the case, please seek support from others in the school or use the signposts in this policy.

## 4. Key persons and overarching responsibilities

[There are no definite rules when dealing with these circumstances and every school is different, so this section should be adapted to suit your individual school.]

<b>Head of Governors</b>	Name:	
	Email:	
	Phone:	
<b>Bereavement Link Governor</b>	Name:	
	Email:	
	Phone:	
<b>Headteacher</b>	Name:	
	Email:	
	Phone:	
<b>Deputy Head</b>	Name:	
	Email:	
	Phone:	
<b>Pastoral Lead</b>	Name:	
	Email:	
	Phone:	
<b>Additional Designated Bereavement Supports</b>	Name:	
	Role:	
	Email:	
	Phone:	

## 4.1. Governing body

The school governing body should be responsible for:

- Monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of this policy by providing reports at full governing body meetings. A link governor should be associated with pastoral support and in conversations with the headteacher. Support the head or designated staff member to manage contact from, and with, the media.
- In the absence of the headteacher, support the deputy or other designated staff member to implement this policy.
- Ensure the wellbeing of the headteacher and other senior leaders in connection with matters relating to this policy.

## 4.2. Headteacher

The headteacher (or in their absence a designated deputy) is responsible for the implementation of this policy including:

- Ensuring that all staff are supported and receive appropriate and up to date training.
- Being the first point of contact for the family of any student who dies whilst on roll or any student or staff member who is affected by a bereavement.
- Ensuring that approaches to all aspects of bereavement are always respectful of religious and cultural beliefs and values.
- Ensuring that the most appropriate member of staff for an individual student is assigned to speak with any bereaved student (or the whole school, where that is appropriate) - for example, head of year or form teacher.
- Ensuring appropriate planning is in place for re-integration of students or staff when they return to school.
- Being the central point for receipt of information relating to any death within the school community and monitoring the effectiveness of the support given to those impacted by bereavement.
- Speaking to students and staff about a bereavement within the school community or ensuring that the appropriate member of staff does so.
- Where appropriate, being the central point for decisions such as necessary timetable revisions, leave, and memorial activity.
- Contacting the local authority in the case of a sudden or unexpected death or suicide.
- Ensuring participation in any multi-agency child death reviews or a point of contact for the coroner.
- Being the first point of contact for any media enquires or media releases.
- Together with the chair of governors and relevant staff members, taking decisions and managing any social media interactions or strategies.
- Ensuring that staff and students required to attend hearings relating to the death, such as Coroners Court, are supported (where it is appropriate for the school to provide this support).

## 4.3. Pastoral support team

The school's pastoral support team should:

- Be appropriately trained to deal with issues relating to bereavement and ensure that relevant information and training is available for all staff.
- Ensure day-to-day support for bereaved students, including coordinating support from the most appropriate member of staff for the particular student.
- Provide support to other members of staff who are actively supporting the bereaved student.

- Ensure that external support is provided, where considered necessary - for example, where there has been a sudden or violent death of a student or students, and outside support from counsellors or child psychologists might be valuable.
- Ensure a coordination of any acts of remembrance - for example, a book of condolence, planting a tree, or organising a special assembly.
- Make sure that there are safe places for students to be whilst in school if they feel the need to leave a classroom situation.
- Coordinate with the school's behaviour leads and relevant staff for individual students to ensure that students are supported appropriately.
- Arrange support for a student at a funeral or other remembrance activity (where this is considered appropriate).
- Provide monitoring and support for a pupil whose progress in school ceases or regresses due to the impact of bereavement or loss on their emotional wellbeing and engagement with learning.

Pastoral support should also maintain a calendar of significant dates for the student and ensure appropriate support is in place at difficult times, including when a student changes school or in the time coming up to a holiday period.

## 4.4. All staff

All staff should be aware of this policy and ensure that they are ready to support a student if asked to do so. Further, staff should be trained to be aware of issues relating to bereavement including knowing how to access support and assess any changes in behaviour which may be of concern. Further, all staff should inform the headteacher as early as possible when they know about a death affecting anyone in the school.

If you are concerned about a change in behaviour or a loss of learning as a result of a bereavement, you must speak with the pastoral team or appropriate member of staff to access support for the student.

All staff should be aware of how to share information in a sensitive way so that trust is maintained. When dealing with any issues relating to this policy, staff should keep information they share to a minimum to keep the student or fellow staff member safe. Sensitive information will only be disclosed with careful thought as to the needs of those involved and in line with all data regulations. If there is an issue which relates to safeguarding, staff should follow the safeguarding procedures including with reference to sharing and recording of information.

# 5. Timeline and actions to take in different types of bereavement situations

## 5.1. Pre-bereavement

Pre-bereavement support may be needed in situations where someone has not died yet, but is going to die - for example, a long-term illness. In this situation, the school will:

- Stay in contact with the family through a designated member of staff, as appropriate, so that the school is fully aware of all of the circumstances.
- Ensure that only relevant and agreed information is shared.
- Consider whether or not professional support might be useful and, if so, either signpost to that support, or arrange for it to be given.
- Where appropriate, involve religious or faith leaders.
- Ascertain how those involved wish for the wider school to be involved (if at all).

## 5.2. Immediate actions to take after a tragedy or when someone has died

### 5.2.1. Know the facts

In the immediate aftermath of any tragedy where bereavement is an issue, it is important to find out as much information as possible. This is important to prevent the spread of rumour and misinformation. A designated liaison staff member should be assigned to the family and should make efforts to gather facts and ascertain how those connected to the bereavement would prefer information to be disseminated. This will include consideration of any religious or cultural requirements.

This information might come from the family of a student who has died: what do they want to be shared and how do they wish the rest of the school or wider community to be told?

If it is not possible to contact the family, the headteacher - together with any other member of staff - will decide what is most appropriate in terms of content of information, when to share it, and how. Support from the Chair of Governors should be sought if needed.

### 5.2.2. Disseminating information

The headteacher and pastoral team will decide the most appropriate method of communicating for each audience. This may be different in each case, but at the outset it should be agreed who, what, and how staff, students, parents or carers, and the wider community (if appropriate) will be informed.

Further practical support about how to deliver information can be found in the Annex.

This dissemination of information can be complicated where there is information being shared on social media. Further information can be found at Section 8 of this policy about interactions with both the media and social media.

#### 5.2.2.1. Sharing with the whole school and/or wider community

Circumstances where the whole school and the wider community needs to be informed are, for example, where there is a suicide, a sudden or violent death, or where the school suffers a tragedy such as bus crash. In these circumstances, the headteacher together with the pastoral team will decide whether it is best, in all the individual circumstances, to inform students and staff in smaller groups or all together. This group will also, in advance of any conversation, agree what information will be shared.

#### 5.2.2.2. Sharing bad news with individuals

Where the school has to break news of a death to an individual student or member of staff, the headteacher - together with a member of the pastoral team - will agree who is the most appropriate person to have that conversation. They will also agree what will be said and when is the most appropriate time to do this. Often, it will be best to have this conversation immediately but there may be circumstances when a slight delay is appropriate – if for example you are waiting for a particular member of staff to convey the information or where the family have asked the school to delay.

## 5.3. Short-term actions

### 5.3.1. Signposting to external support

Initial external support and signposting is as follows:

- If the death is related to suicide the school may signpost students and staff to support from the Samaritans.
- If the death is violent or linked to alleged criminal offence(s) the school will seek support from outside statutory agencies such as the police or local authority and may signpost to Child Bereavement UK.
- Where there is a tragedy involving multiple students or staff members, the school will give immediate thought as to the merits of engaging emergency support from counsellors or psychologists.

### 5.3.2. Short term support measures in school

In the few days following a bereavement a school can, and should, be a safe place for a student or staff member. We will use the following strategies as ways of helping people involved in a bereavement to feel safe and supported:

- Adjusting timetables to build in quiet time or letting those affected by the bereavement know that it is acceptable to need time or space alone. Leaving lessons (in a managed and nondisruptive way) will be allowed if necessary, for some students.
- Making a designated area in the school environment for those affected to access. For example, a quiet classroom (preferably near to teaching staff who can help if needed) or pastoral room will be available. Suitable places in our school include:

<b>Designated safe spaces</b>	Location:
	Location:

- In the case of a death of a student or staff member, we will set up a safe, quiet but supervised space for a tribute. This is most likely to include a tribute book which, if appropriate, we will invite any family members to be involved in, or we will share the images of the tribute with them at a later stage. We will consult with students and staff before removing the tribute.
- A special assembly may be organised for a student or staff member who has died, to allow a time for the affected members of the school to come together and remember the person who has died. This size and content of the assembly should be carefully considered and organised by the pastoral team in collaboration with the affected teachers, with pupil-led sections such as readings or poems, as appropriate.
- A member of staff will be available for direct support for the student(s).
- Letting students and staff know that the headteacher is checking about funeral arrangements and keeping relevant people informed.
- Ensuring that staff members are aware of the school's arrangements for compassionate leave.

## 5.4. Return to school for pupils or staff affected by a personal bereavement

### 5.4.1. Student return to school

Although there is no set time for when it is best for a child to return to school, being absent for a long period of time can cause difficulty in settling back and increase anxiety. Our school recommends a return to school as soon as possible in order to reduce disruption for the child, though this recommendation is flexible depending on the individual circumstances of death and the wishes of the child and family.



Where a student is returning to school following an absence due to a personal bereavement, the school will offer a re-integration meeting. This will be undertaken by the headteacher or the most appropriate member of staff for that student. The meeting will support the student's return to school and will review: (a) whether or not the student is ready to return to the classroom; (b) listen to their concerns and wishes about returning to school; (c) find out how they want to share the news (if at all); (d) consider how to open communications with the student and parents to raise any concerns and/or offer on-going support and (e) consider what, if any, additional support that student might require for a successful return to the classroom.

This additional support to discuss includes:

- To find a timeout space and ensure staff know that the student may leave their lesson to access "time-out".
- To consider whether the student can be supported well through their peer group or by older students; if this is thought to be the case the school will help the supporting students to undertake this role.
- To consider giving the student a way of diverting to other activities such as arts or screen time or creating some way for remembering the person they have lost.

#### 5.4.2. Staff return to school

Where a staff member is returning to work after a bereavement the school will hold a meeting with the member of staff to see if they are ready to return to work and how they can best be supported. This meeting should cover what they want their students to know (if anything) and assess whether or not they are ready to return to work. The staff member should also be encouraged to share any concerns they have. It may be that this meeting would be best attended together with a friend of the person returning to work. The meeting can be run by the headteacher or a designated member of staff. The school will also ensure that the staff member and the school have a clear method of communicating any concerns to each other and ascertain whether or not the member of staff might benefit from outside support such as grief counselling.

## 5.5. Funeral attendance

- It may be that students and staff wish to attend a funeral. If this is the case the headteacher will check with the family whether or not this is appropriate and if there are any religious or cultural issues that need to be addressed.
- If the family agree then an appropriate member of staff should ensure that the student is prepared for the funeral – if they haven't attended one before it can be helpful to explain what will happen.
- The appropriate member of staff should ensure that any staff absence is covered and all relevant staff members must be made aware that a student won't be attending school on the particular day.
- If appropriate the school could consider sending someone to support the student at the funeral.
- The school may consider it appropriate to send a tribute to the funeral – the headteacher should ensure that this is handled appropriately.

## 5.6. Longer term actions

### 5.6.1. Permanent memorials

A permanent memorial can be a good way of a school coming together to remember the loss of those associated with the school. When considering a memorial, the family should be consulted before making a decision. The headteacher or a designated staff member should speak to the family and ensure that their views are considered when making a final decision.

## 5.6.2. Longer-term pupil support

Consideration must be given to the longer term needs of any pupils affected by a bereavement. The school:

- Recognises that some students will grieve for the rest of their lives and some days may be more significant than others – the pastoral team or a designated member of staff will keep a record of significant dates and ensure that extra support is available at these times.
- Recognises that bereavement can adversely affect learning and achievement for some students, whereas other students can put extra pressure on themselves to achieve. Both of these can be detrimental to the student. All staff should be alert to this and discuss any such concerns with an appropriate member of staff – this might be a form tutor, head of year or pastoral support.
- If the student is very young or vulnerable it might be that further support or one to one support might be appropriate.

# 6. Suicide and sudden death by homicide

## 6.1. Suicide

Dealing with a suicide can present a different set of needs, including being a potential trigger for further suicides. The school recognises that dissemination of information shortly after the event (where possible within two days) is paramount to the wellbeing of our students. The information we share will:

- Include a clear set of facts and no information will be based on rumour or speculation.
- Not glorify death and will not include any details of any suicide note.
- Take the utmost care with our choice of language: we will always, for example, use the terms “died by suicide” or “ended his or her life by suicide” rather than “committed suicide” or “successful suicide”. Similarly, we will not use the term “unsuccessful” or “failed” suicide but rather we will use “attempted to end his or her life”.
- Ensure that the students are fully aware that death is permanent.
- Ensure that students are aware that there are a wide range of reactions to suicides including both anger and guilt.

We will also make sure that our students are aware that fleeting thoughts of suicide are not unusual and with support people can, and do, cope.

## 6.2. Homicide

Where a student is dealing with a bereavement caused by a homicide it is important to seek professional help where this is thought necessary. Winston's Wish provide support in this connection. The school recognises that students in these circumstances can often feel real anger at what has happened and be extremely insecure about the future and the world around them. In some circumstances, the student may know the person who has caused the death. They may be very confused and feel a double loss, where the person causing the death is convicted and imprisoned. In helping any student in these circumstances, the school will be honest and consistent in the way we interact with them.

# 7. Major incidents

Dealing with a major incident can be very emotionally draining for everyone involved with the school. The headteacher, in consultation with the Chair of Governors, will be responsible for decisions about:

- What information to tell parents, staff, and students. Please remember it is highly likely that the content of any written communication will be used by the local media on their digital channels including their own social media. Be mindful of the content when preparing letters to parents.
- When to tell these groups and how this should be done.
- Which members of staff will be assigned to gather information (and whether this should be a team rather than an individual).
- How and when to deal with the media and social media content (also see Section 8) – it may be that professional support is required. If this is the case the headteacher is responsible for engaging that support.
- Ensuring that no-one in the school community, except those designated to do so, talks with the media or engages in social media without consent from the headteacher.
- Making the governing body aware of the situation both initially and as it develops, and being aware that the media may make contact with them for comment.
- Making contact with any relevant local agencies.
- Any ongoing decisions relating to the incident including any Child Death Reviews or coroners' hearings.
- Ensuring that any staff or students are appropriately supported if attendance at a hearing is required.

# 8. Media

The school has a clear media protocol when dealing with issues that relate to a death that the media may be interested in:

- Where necessary the school will engage specialist support.
- The headteacher will be the single point of contact for any, and all, media enquiries. If the head is absent, this role will be filled by a nominated deputy.
- If appropriate, a written media statement will be prepared and posted on the school's own social media channels, as well as given to the media.
- There should be a group supporting the headteacher which should include (at least) the Chair of Governors, any designated deputy head, and any designated staff member from the pastoral team.
- All staff and everyone in the school community will be instructed not to speak to the media without first consulting the single point of contact.
- Where any interview is required and considered appropriate this will be undertaken by the headteacher or other single point of contact in their absence.
- All governors will be asked not to engage with the media but will receive a briefing should this prove impossible.
- Where considered appropriate, if for example social media content is being displayed that is incorrect or inflammatory, the school will not usually take unilateral action but will seek advice from a professional - either the school's media manager or trusted Crisis PR Managers. The Crisis PR Manager's contact details are as follows:

<b>Crisis PR Manager</b>	Name:	
	Email:	
	Phone:	

## 9. Links to other policies

You can access our other policies below:

[Provide links to the relevant policies]

- Critical incident
- Child Protection and Safeguarding
- Attendance
- Behaviour
- Equality
- Health and Safety
- Off site visits policy
- Staff Handbook

## 10. Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years and agreed by the Board of Governors.

Last reviewed	Date:	
	Signature:	

## 11. Annex: Training providers, resources, and guidance

### 11.1. Training and resources

The following organisations can provide training, support, and guidance for child bereavement:

Child Bereavement UK	Helpline: 0800 02 888 40 <a href="https://www.childbereavementuk.org/contact-us">https://www.childbereavementuk.org/contact-us</a> Live Chat available on website Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm
Winston's Wish	Helpline: 08088 020 021 <a href="https://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/contact-page">https://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/contact-page</a>
Cruse Bereavement Care	Helpline: 0808 808 1677 <a href="https://www.cruse.org.uk/about-cruse/contact-us">https://www.cruse.org.uk/about-cruse/contact-us</a>

<b>Mind</b>	<p><b>Infoline:</b> 0300 123 3393</p> <p><a href="https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/useful-contacts/">https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/useful-contacts/</a></p>
<b>Hope Again</b>	<p><a href="http://hopeagain.org.uk/">http://hopeagain.org.uk/</a></p> <p>A website for young people who have been bereaved.</p>
<b>Papyrus</b>	<p><a href="https://papyrus-uk.org/">https://papyrus-uk.org/</a></p> <p>Support and advice for young people struggling with thoughts of suicide, and anyone worried about a young person.</p>
<b>Samaritans</b>	<p><a href="https://www.samaritans.org/your-community/supporting-schools">https://www.samaritans.org/your-community/supporting-schools</a></p> <p>Has a wide range of support and guidance for schools.</p>
<b>High Speed Training</b>	<p><a href="https://www.highspeedtraining.co.uk/education/child-bereavement-training">https://www.highspeedtraining.co.uk/education/child-bereavement-training</a></p> <p>Provide a high quality, CPD accredited Child Bereavement Training course to help you understand a child's bereavement process and how to provide support.</p>
<b>Local support services and/or Local Authority</b>	<p><a href="#">[Add contacts for your relevant local services here]</a></p>

## 11.2. Guidance for staff when talking about a death

Being prepared when delivering bad news will help to make these conversations easier. These are the steps that Child Bereavement UK suggest using when deciding how to deliver news about any death. This can be used in any situation and with any audience:

- Start by acknowledging you have some sad news to give.
- Be honest. Give the news stating simple facts. Use the words dead/died.
- If known, and with the family's permission, explain briefly where and when the death occurred.
- If not known, say so, and that you will endeavour to find out. If rumours are rife, say which of these are definitely not correct, if known. Where appropriate, remind pupils of their responsibilities and the impact when posting on social media.
- Talk briefly and positively about the person who died without eulogising them.
- Mention any arrangements already in place, including for those needing support.
- Acknowledge that not everyone will be feeling sad and that is OK.
- Allow a break in the timetable for pupils to process the news and take a little time-out.

## 11.3. Stages of grief

Knowing about the 'normal' stages of grief can be very useful in beginning to understand what someone may be going through when grieving. The 'Kübler-Ross' stages of grief are an accepted model and include denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

The stages have evolved since their introduction and have been very misunderstood over the past three decades. They are responses to loss that many people have, but there is not a typical response to loss, as there is no typical loss.. Our grief is as individual as our lives.

The five stages are a part of the framework that makes up our learning to live with the one we lost. They are tools to help us frame and identify what we may be feeling, but they are not stops on a linear timeline in grief. People may flip between elements of different stages, back and forth, within hours or minutes – not just experiencing them in order over several months or years. Our hope is that with these stages comes the knowledge of grief's terrain, making us better equipped to cope with life and loss.

### **Denial**

This stage is about surviving the loss of a person. The denial and shock experienced help us to cope with the pain and slow down the feelings of grief. When denial and shock begin to fade, and we begin the healing process, the denied feelings begin to surface.

### **Anger**

The feeling of anger is normal and a healthy part of the healing process. It is important not to try and suppress angry feelings – they are in fact helpful, by providing a connection to the real world. The feelings of anger may be directed to all parts and people in a person's life, to their family, friends, themselves or even their faith.

### **Bargaining**

Bargaining is a stage where we obsess over 'what if' and 'if only' scenarios. It can range from praying to do anything to bring a loved one back, to going round in circles thinking what could have been done differently. Guilty feelings often accompany people in this stage.

### **Depression**

The depressive stage is characterised by a deep sadness that penetrates through life, and may feel never-ending. People may feel empty, withdrawn, in a fog, or wondering if it is worth carrying on without their lost loved one. Depression is often seen as something which needs to be 'fixed', or for people to 'snap out of', but this is not the best way to think about it.. The loss of someone close is a truly sad event – depression is a normal and appropriate part of the grieving process, and people in this state need gentle care, support and patience.

### **Acceptance**

Acceptance is when we truly accept the reality of a loved one being physically gone as a permanent situation. It does not mean the person is 'over it' or everything is now 'OK'. Rather, it means that a person has reached the point where they are able to readjust their life to cope with continuing in a reality without their loved one present. It is a time when we may reach out and invest in our existing friendships, family, and forge new connections as well.

