

Ysgol Bryn Gwalia



Bereavement Policy

Last Review Date	July 2022
Date to be reviewed by Senior Management Team	July 2025
Date Adopted by Governing Body	July 2022
Head Teacher – Mrs Lorraine Dalton	<i>L Dalton</i>
Chair of Governors – Mrs Janiene Davies	<i>J E Davies</i>



Introduction

This policy will provide guidelines to be followed after a bereavement. The aim is to be supportive to both pupils and adults, and for staff to have greater confidence and be better equipped to cope when bereavement happens.

This school is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and pupils. We are dedicated to the continual development of a 'healthy school'. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that support and prepare pupils for coping with separation or loss of a loved one, either through death or divorce.

The school's aim to provide support to pupils who experience bereavement within their families, and support to pupils and staff on the death of a member of the school community, whether it be an adult or a child. The way in which children and young people are treated when someone important in their lives dies has a profound effect on their future ability to manage their own lives. The caring and supportive school environment has a key role to play and we recognise that every situation is unique and demands careful handling, with the wishes of the pupil or family being of paramount importance.

This policy has been constructed to guide us on how to deal professionally, sensitively and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances and should be viewed as a framework rather than anything prescriptive, acknowledging that different strategies and procedures maybe necessary in the various parts of the school, appropriate to the age of the pupils concerned. Much of the information and guidance in this policy follows the advice given by the Child Bereavement Charity and further advice can be found on their website, www.childbereavement.org.uk

Objectives

The core intentions of the policy are:

- 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, before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement.
- To provide a framework for all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with difficult and upsetting circumstances.
- To help the whole school community to work together, with outside agencies as appropriate, to support each other
- To help staff have time and space to work through their own feelings and become aware of the needs of the children.
- To identify key staff within school and Local Authority, and clarify the pathway of support.

Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Governing body.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To approve policy and ensure its implementation, to be reviewed in two years.• To have clear expectations about the way school will respond to a death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.
Head Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.• To respond to media enquiries.• To be first point of contact for family/child concerned.• To keep the governing body fully informed.
Local Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To advise and support staff.• Consult on referral pathways and identification of complex grief.
Pastoral staff (Including school counsellors, mentors)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To have bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff.

Procedures - Responding to a death

Breaking the news to staff, pupils and families

News of the death of a close member of a child's family or the death of a pupil or member of staff must be passed to the Head of School who will immediately try to obtain factual information, avoiding unnecessary rumour or assumption, which could only lead to further distress.

Where possible the Headteacher will liaise directly with the family and agree exactly what information should be passed on to staff and pupils. Staff will be informed straight away, ideally before the pupils, remembering part time and peripatetic staff that may not be in school that day.

Discussions must take place with family and their wishes taken into account before any information is given to the pupils. Pupils should however, be told as soon as possible to avoid rumour and uncertainty. This is best done in familiar groups by someone they know, probably their class teacher. A large assembly is not usually ideal, particularly for young children. Opportunity should be given for pupils to ask questions and respond to the news. The bereaved child may or may not wish to be present when the news is broken.

It may be appropriate for a letter to go home to all parents that same day, of course respecting the wishes of the family. A suggested letter can be found at the end of this policy.

Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Head Teacher

The first few days

As far as is possible, it is best to have as little disruption as possible to the school timetable and school life should try to go on as normal, but with flexibility as necessary. If it is a teacher who has died, the class should be covered by another teacher from the school whom the children know well and feel comfortable talking to. Many bereaved children and young people find returning to school as soon as possible a welcome refuge of normality after the chaos of emotion at home and their return should be as fuss free as possible. A bereaved child will require enormous support but as far as possible school life should go on as normally as possible.

The funeral

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. It is essential to sound out the family's wishes. The family may well welcome involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to keep things private.

The Headteacher will make arrangements for the school to be represented at the funeral, and identify which staff and pupils may want to attend, together with the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport. For some schools it is appropriate to close, for others it is not, consequently difficult decisions will sometimes have to be made concerning attendance.

Will flowers be sent and/or a collection made? Involve staff and pupils in the decision. Cultural and religious implications need consideration.

If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed.

Memory Assemblies

Following the death of a member of the school community a special assembly or remembrance service may be held as a way of saying 'Goodbye' and as a celebration of their life. This may take many forms, but will always be in accordance with the wishes of the bereaved family. Staff need to be able to show pupils that it is perfectly normal to feel upset at the loss of a friend and that helpful rituals, prayers, and remembering can be shared in a manageable way together.

The family will also be consulted about any plans for a memorial or tribute (eg a tree, special garden, piece of artwork, a bench) if appropriate.

Support for Pupils and Staff

In supporting both the bereaved child and the other pupils, staff will act sensitively at all times, seeking advice when necessary, from both the Head of School and the families involved. The class teacher will be the first line of support for the child but should the child need extra support away from the classroom the another member of staff will offer extra support. For example, if a child finds it difficult to stay in the classroom when they are upset, it may be necessary to identify with them a suitable place, where they can go for some quiet time with an adult they trust. Grief is a normal and natural response to loss.

Both school and families need to work together to note changes in behaviour and if necessary counselling from outside agencies may be sought. Where appropriate this will involve the agreement of the families. It should be noted that not everyone needs outside counselling; grief is a natural process that can be aided by the family and school working in partnership.

Children and young people bereaved through suicide or violent death are likely to need skilled help and support but the informal support of familiar adults is still vital.

Supporting a bereaved child is very upsetting and emotionally demanding for staff and therefore informal support between colleagues is vital. Opportunities to discuss feelings and reactions with colleagues, in the staffroom, are necessary and important. Support and counselling is available to any member of staff and can be arranged through the Headteacher.

All staff should be aware of colleagues and offer support on an individual basis where necessary and alert a member of the Senior Management Team if they become concerned about a colleague's wellbeing. 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.

Appendices

Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a pupil

Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the child's parents. The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the parents and school.

Dear Parent/Carer,

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the death of **, a pupil in ** ** died from an illness called *****. As you may be aware, many children who have such illnesses get better but sadly had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday.

**** was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew them.

When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try to answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we would be more than happy to help you.

We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating life.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

ii. Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a staff member

Dear Parent/Carer,

I am sorry to have to tell you that a much-loved member of our staff [name] has died. The children were told today and many will have been quite distressed at the news. Noone wants to see children sad, but we are very aware that factual information and emotional support are the best means of helping children deal with bereavement. I am sure there will be many parents who are also saddened by the news. Children respond in different ways so may dip in and out of sadness, and questions, whilst alternately playing or participating in their usual activities. This is normal and healthy. You may find your child has questions to ask which we will answer in an age appropriate way in school, but if you feel you would like more support and advice yourself, please do not hesitate to contact the school office.

You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at www.childbereavement.org.uk

We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Children who wish to attend will be welcome to do so, though it will not be compulsory. It is likely that school will be closed on the morning or afternoon of the funeral as staff will, of course, wish to pay their respects to a very popular colleague. I am sorry to be the bearer of sad news, but I appreciate an occurrence like this impacts the whole school community. I am so grateful for the thriving partnership we have with parents and trust that we, together, will be able to guide and support the children through what may be, for many, a very new experience in their lives.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

Websites:

- Acorns Children's Hospice Trust, an interactive website providing information about the work of Acorns Children's Hospices www.acorns.org.uk
- The Child Bereavement Charity, resources and information for bereaved families, children, professionals and volunteers. Information about a small number of professional development courses for teachers www.childbereavement.org.uk
- Winston's Wish, offers a grief support programme for children who have experienced the death of a parent or sibling. www.winstonswish.org.uk
- St Christopher's provides bereavement counselling to patients' families. Their Candle Project extends this support to all children, young people and their families in the south east London area. They also offer specialist training, advice and consultancy services to schools and other agencies working with children facing bereavement. www.stchristophers.org.uk/candle

RESOURCES- HOW TO HELP CHILDREN

Children's understanding and experience of loss and grief

Proactive ways of supporting children aged 3-7 years	Reactive ways of supporting children aged 3- 7 years old.
Children aged 3 -7 years are unable to grasp the concept of death. Their grief reactions are usually intense but short lived. They are also likely to regress to younger behaviour.	Provide continuity of care, routines and support.
Provide opportunities in the natural world for children to explore the differences between "alive" and "not alive".	Talk to the child about what has happened.
Provide opportunities within the curriculum for children to use language associate with death.	Encourage creative play and activities such as paintings and drawings to allow the child to express how they feel.
Provide opportunities for children to use words to describe feelings, and the language associated with death.	Answer questions honestly and in straight forward age appropriate language. (avoid the use of euphemisms and metaphors)
Share stories with themes describing emotions, life experiences of loss and change.	Reassure the child that they are not responsible for what has happened and that they will be cared for
Use the word "dead" to describe the absence of life.	

By the time most children are 8 years old they begin to understand death as having a cause, as being permanent and as being something that can happen to anyone, including themselves. It is helpful to remember that knowledge comes through experience. What a child understands may depend as much on past child experience as it does on his/her chronological age.

Proactive ways of supporting children aged 8-11 years old	Reactive ways of supporting children aged 8-11 years old
Provide opportunities within the curriculum for children to talk about emotions, life changes and death.	Encourage play, drawing and painting to allow the child to express how they feel
Provide opportunities within the curriculum for children to learn about where the end of human life occurs, such as home, hospital, hospice.	Talk about what has happened in easily understood language, avoiding the use of euphemisms and metaphors
Provide opportunities within the curriculum for children to express their own ideas about what happens after earthly life is over	Share stories about loss and change Encourage the child to talk through their own ideas about death
Provide opportunities within the curriculum for children to learn about religious and secular customs associated with death.	Allow the child to make their own decisions about whether they join in death rituals/attend funerals
Provide opportunities within the curriculum for children to talk about memories	Answer questions honestly and in a straight forward age-appropriate language

The questions children ask generally fall within 4 main categories:

- A need for factual information
- A need to check out emotional responses
- Searching a reason for what has happened
- Spiritual and religious concerns

Books to help:

For children aged 3-5 years old

- Scrumpy- Dale E, Anderson Press London
- My Grandad- Isherwood S, Oxford University Press, Oxford For children aged 5-7 years old
- Badger's Parting gifts- Varley S, Picture Lions, London
- Remembering My Brother- Perkins G, The Compassionate friends, Bristol

For children aged 7-9 years old

- Falling Angels- Thompson S, Red Fox, London
- The Blue Pearls- Stuart- Warfel E, Barefoot Books, Bath

For children aged 9-11 years old

- Skellig- AlmondD, Hodder and Stoughton, Sevenoaks
- Vicky angel- Wilson J, Yearling Books, Ealing