Bereavement Policy

1. Introduction

Every year 20,000 children under the age of 16 years will be bereaved of a parent and many more will experience the death of someone else in their life. In addition to these individual pupils, schools may also experience the death of a child at the school or a staff member. It is almost inevitable therefore, that at some time all schools will deal with a death that effects the school community.

As children spend a large proportion of their time at school, teachers and staff members maybe the primary source of care and support. Bereaved children will see our school as a safe haven away from the turmoil of emotions at home and will look to trusted staff members for help.

Death is something that most people don't think about so when they are faced with it we often find ourselves ill prepared. The purpose of this Bereavement Policy is to help everyone involved at a time when there maybe shock, upset and confusion, ensuring that there is as little disruption as possible, effective communication takes place and each member of the school community is supported to help them through a very difficult time.

2. The Impact of Death on Young People

The impact of death upon children should not be underestimated. While it is true that their understanding of death develops over a prolonged period of time, it is clear that:

- Young people can suffer deeply as a result of the death of a member of their family, or a close friend.
- This suffering is more intense when they do not have opportunities to talk or to grieve openly, and to feel that those close to them recognise their feelings – even though they themselves may not yet have the words to express them.
- In particular, for teenagers, there is sometimes a tendency not to talk about how they feel as they do not wish to place an extra burden on for example the remaining parent if their father or mother has died. They in effect try to manage on their own, which can be very difficult for them.

Reactions to Bereavement can include:

- Withdrawal
- Tears
- Aggression
- Fear
- Open Distress
- Panic
- Anxiety
- Other signs of stress

Bereaved children may act out this stress in unexpected ways, such as:

- Nervous giggling
- Untypical aggression
- Or total denial
- Stoical bravery
- Becoming the class clown

They may also become extremely tired, to the point of exhaustion, as so much emotional energy goes into dealing with the loss and the stress of the changes in the family.

For some children, there may be additional terrors, if the death has been referred to as 'falling asleep' or 'being taken', then it is sometimes the case that children are afraid of sleep, words like 'loss' or 'lost' can put fear into a young child's mind, too, and they are afraid of losing other family members. Children can become particularly clinging and attached to the members of the family who remain.

An Unexpected Bereavement

In addition, the death of a terminally ill pupil or member of staff can be planned for with full support being given before the actual event. Often pupils will want to create a memory board to allow their emotions to be shared with others. Open discussion and realistic language are often the best way to deal with issues that arise. Once the pupil or member of staff dies then it is important that all emotional support is given and the need to mourn is recognised.

3. Specific advice following a death for working with police, parents, children at school, teachers and media.

- Working with the police:

Very soon after the death is announced the police should visit as they have to carry out an investigation into the circumstances.

Clear rooms or spaces for them to work in. They may want to collect evidence. The police will normally tell the child's next of kin and will want to speak at once to the (usually very upset) teacher who will need someone with them and will probably need to stay at school.

The police will almost certainly tell you that you must not speculate on the cause of death. But remember that the media are under no such restrictions.

- Telling pupils:

Where a pupil collapses during a school day when other pupils are present, is rushed to hospital and subsequently dies, those pupils will need to know what has happened before

they leave at the end of the school day. The school will consult with the family regarding their wishes in sharing the information with the school community.

It is important to agree with the police the timing and content of the information that you give to pupils so as to meet the needs of the pupils whilst not impeding any police investigation.

Are there any siblings, close relatives, or girl/boy friend who need to know first? Advise them first, but only when parents are ready to collect.

Gather children together at an appropriate time. The pupils will listen until you have told them the pupil has died. Then they may stop hearing. If the pupil has died as the result of an accident you may want to ask them not to speculate about the causes of the accident and not to spread rumours. Getting them to hear this is very difficult. Allow them a few minutes just to be together as a group. They will need to cry. Expect that some pupils will contact the local press.

- Telling Teachers

You will need to tell the teachers who were nearest to what happened first. Depending on who that teacher is, they will probably need someone with them. If you want teachers to tell other pupils for you, have a statement ready for them to read out before you advise them.

- Telling Parents

The police will tell the parents of the child. Getting a letter to other parents, which both expresses sympathy and gives factual information about the death, is very important. It saves rumours, which can be intensely hurtful to pupils, parents and teachers.

4. Dealing with the media

The nominated press officer should field enquiries. You may well need intense help. A press officer may be required for the whole day, or even longer.

The press and local TV channels may contact the parents and may speculate about the cause of death. This is a very hard thing to deal with, especially if a tv crew has filmed this speculation by distraught parents.

You may find you have no time to prepare interviews but aim to filter statements through the Head and Press Officer. Keep expressing your sympathy for the parents so that editors will find it hard to cut this part of your statement.

If there is a post mortem, this may happen very quickly, possibly within 24 hours of the death. Ensure you are advised of the results of any post-mortem as soon as possible. The best way to stop speculation is to give facts.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

When an individual case arises, the policy is adhered to and therefore is monitored through this process and adjusted as required. The policy is evaluated in accordance with the policy monitoring and evaluation cycle and the date of renewal is stated on the header of this policy.

Appendix 1: Death of a Child Policy

1. Immediate Action

If a child dies at school or on a school trip the Crisis Management Plan should be put into operation immediately. All staff should be issued with sections 2.1 and 2.2 of the Plan (see below). On discovery of a possible death, the member of staff should:

- Call the emergency services at once, including paramedics and police.
- Summon medical centre staff (if on site) and Deputy Head (to activate Crisis Management Plan)
- Secure the scene and remain with the body until help arrives.

2. From the Crisis Management Plan

All staff should be familiar with the following immediate actions required to activate the Crisis Management Plan (Section 2.1 and 2.2 of the Crisis Management Plan)

2.1 Immediate Response to an Emergency at School
In responding to an emergency during normal school activities it will be the responsibility of the Headteacher.

2.1.1 The building if appropriate has been evacuated.
2.1.2 The necessary Emergency Services have been summoned.
2.1.3 A roll call has been taken to ascertain that all pupils, staff and any visitors are safe.

2.2 **Off-Site Activity**

It is the responsibility of the Teacher in Charge of the group or where necessary, by delegation to another member of staff or responsible adult, to:

2.2.1 Make sure that all members of the party are accounted for and that they are safe.
2.2.2 If there are injuries immediately establish their extent and administer appropriate first aid.
2.2.3 Call emergency services if required.
2.2.4 Ensure that the remainder of the party is adequately supervised throughout and decide for their return to school.
2.2.5 Arrange for at least one adult to remain at the incident site to liaise with the emergency services and to ensure that all the staff and pupils are accounted for.
2.2.6 Control access to telephones until contact is made with the Headteacher (as appointed), emergency contact point or designated senior member of staff and until he/she has had time to contact any parent whose children are directly involved.

It will be the job of the DSL to ensure that school records are updated.

3. All other Aspects of the Emergency Management Plan Apply

The death of a child is an extremely serious occurrence and must be handled correctly, appropriately and sensitively towards all parties involved at all times.

4. Care for the Bereaved and the community

Following the death of a child either at school or on a school off-site activity every measure will be taken at appropriate times to provide support and counselling for those who need it:

- To liaise with the family and to support them
- To establish appropriate ways for pupils and staff to assist grieving
- To honour memory
- To manage the shock and loss of such an event
- To organise and re-establish normal daily business within the school

Measures may include:

- Specific support for those close to the child that died
- The opportunity for quiet time out of normal activities if appropriate in the weeks immediately following the death
- Other such reasonable steps

It is usually appropriate for the whole community to achieve some closure through a memorial service or similar event, after a period of time has elapsed. It may be that members of the child's family would be able to attend a memorial event of this kind, and draw some comfort from attending and meeting their son/daughter's friends.

5. Child Dies away from School

If a child dies in the school holidays and away from school, the points in section 4 should still be followed. The member of the SLT on duty at the time should contact Headteacher who will inform class leads, who will then share with their staff.

All staff may need support, and pupils should be contacted, especially any known close friends. A letter from the school to the rest of the school community should be sent as soon as possible.

6. Review

This policy will be reviewed three yearly by the Heads and Senior Leadership Teams.

Appendix 2
Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a member of staff

<Date>

Dear Parent/Guardian

I have had the sad task of informing the children of the tragic death of <Name> who has been a teacher at this school for a number of years.

Our thoughts are with <Name's> family at this time. All the pupils have been informed. Many will have known <Name> for many years and have been taught by him/her. They will have different memories, but will share the common bond that one of their teachers have passed away. He/she has given so much to the school and will be sadly missed.

When someone dies it is normal for family and friends to experience many different feelings such as sadness, anger and confusion, and young people can sometimes become quiet or withdrawn, angry, seek the company of their immediate friends, or ask questions about the meaning and purpose of life, and the nature of death.

The pupils have been told that their class staff will provide support and help if they wish to discuss their feelings.

We will of course keep you informed as to the funeral arrangements and the date and time of any memorial service. I am very sorry to have to write to you in this way.

Yours sincerely

Mrs P J Derries
Headteacher

Appendix 3
Guidelines for breaking news about a death to staff and governors

- Arrange a staff meeting which should take place as soon as possible.
- Impact factual information. Never make assumptions or repeat what has been said by rumour.
- Give news sensitively and empathetically, being Aware that people may react in different ways.
- Be cognisant of the relationships staff may have had with the person who has died.
- Ensure that there is someone responsible for telling people who are unable to attend the staff meeting i.e. part time staff, lunch time supervisors.
- Consider the best way of imparting the information to those absent e.g. by doing home visit, by telephone, text or e-mail etc.
- Identify individual members of staff who feel able to:
    - Support members of staff
    - Support groups of children

- The most appropriate person to support the children should be well known to them and trusted.
- Identify a member of staff who will liaise with the individual's family, to deal with staff condolences and any funeral arrangements (if necessary).
- Identify an appropriate member of staff who will take phone calls and/or direct appropriately. Try to establish a "protected" telephone line to ensure free flow of accurate information.
- Identify a member of staff who will provide a newsletter for parents (see examples of letter templates) which should be sent the same day.
- Arrange a staff meeting at the end of the day to ensure that staff are coping with the situation.
- Identify any unresolved problems or ongoing issues.
- Ensure that those staff that live alone have contact numbers of friends in case of need.
- Identify sources of advice and support to access for help in coming to terms with the bereavement (see bereavement toolkit).

Appendix 4
Guidelines for breaking news of the death to the pupils.

- Inform the pupils as soon as possible about the death.
- Where possible, the pupils should be informed in class groups.
- Identify those children who had a long term and/or close relationship with the person who has died so they can be told separately.
- If appropriate, a special assembly could be held at a later time in the day to remember the person who has died.
- Allow the pupils to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.
- Allow the pupils to verbalise their feelings.
- All the pupils to discuss the situation and share their experiences of death.
- Be honest about your own feelings and talk about your relationship with the person.
- Avoid using euphemisms.
- Those pupils who have had more involvement with the person should be given the opportunity to share their feelings and experiences either within the group or in a one-to-one situation.
- Reassure them that not all people who are ill or have had an accident will die and that many people get better.
- 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.
- Be available for any pupil who needs additional help and support.
- Refer to the bereavement toolkit for further guidance.

Appendix 5
Things to consider in the days following the news of the death.

- It is important to consider any cultural or religious implications and seek advice if necessary.
- Ensure nominated staff with responsibilities for supporting staff and children, are available to do so.
- It may be necessary temporarily to provide staff cover for their normal activities.
- Identify an allocated quiet place where children, young people and staff can go if necessary.
- It is preferable for there to be minimum disruption to the timetable but some flexibility may be required.
- Try to engender an awareness of when people need help and support, particularly those who worked closely with the person who has died and secretaries/administrative staff who are taking telephone calls, dealing with parents etc.
- Through the nominated staff member who has responsibilities for liaising with the individual's family, ascertain their wishes about the school's involvement in the funeral, if any.
- Putting an obituary in the paper, sending flowers to the home or to the funeral, making a collection etc.
- Who will attend the funeral, making a collection etc.
- Cover for any staff who may be going to the funeral.
- Transport to and from the funeral.
- Informing the parents of those pupils who will be involved.
- Possible closure of the school. If this is the case remember to tell appropriate staff in advance.

Appendix 6
Bereavement Toolkit

The Bereavement in School Toolkit is a resource to be used at The Grove School offering guidance, examples and possible solutions to problems encountered on a day to day basis when trying to help bereaved children. It also includes a list of resources and useful contact details when looking for help and support.

How the school can help

- **Make sure that the right people are informed**

It is essential that all staff, including support staff, know about the bereavement, so that they respond sensitively.

- **Make sure that children are given the opportunity to discuss their feelings of bereavement with an adult that feels confident in this area and is able to give each child space for their different and normal feelings.**

When the report of the death first comes to school, it may be appropriate for the relevant staff (for each bereaved sibling), to talk to the House or year group within it, to create opportunities for them to ask questions and discuss how they can help their bereaved classmate. On the child's return to school, even close friends may need encouragement to voice difficult feelings, to say, "I'm sorry your brother died". One of the key 'hurts' which bereaved children recall is the feeling that few people, if any, acknowledged their loss.

Most children welcome the opportunity to talk privately to an adult about their loss. Even if the child cannot verbalise his/her feelings, it is helpful for a trusted teacher to show sympathy (without saying "I know how you feel"), and to use words like sad, lonely, upset, afraid, so that the child realises the school knows about the death. The family may be so overwhelmed by the trauma that little individual acknowledgement is given to the child's feelings when they are at home.

Some children need a retreat when grief overtakes them, and it helps if the school accepts a pupil's need to express their grief, providing a 'safe place' and a trusted adult to be with them. Once the bereaved child returns to school routine, it is helpful to share concerns with parents so that they know how he or she is coping in school. Most families appreciate some sort of direct communication from the school, especially if the child who has died was a former pupil.

Be prepared to create exceptional circumstances for particular children who need particular help. Set up clear boundaries and make it clear that you have allowed certain behaviours to happen. When the child is ready you can reverse these arrangements. A

bereaved child for example may well need to be allowed to behave in a special way according to how they are dealing with the situation. The key is to try to create a normal environment for them by asking what they want to do. Talking, sharing with a Counsellor, writing or drawing are very common forms of expression which can help. It is always best to talk this through and share ideas with Deputy Heads, or the designated Safeguarding Officer. They will help you to decide what to share with other children.

- **Seek creative, but sensitive ways of constructively moving the child forwards**

Books, stories, music and art can be very helpful in exploring loss, both with other pupil's and with the bereaved child. There are many excellent books written on bereavement for different ages of children, both in the fact and fiction sections, now available from shops, libraries or the web, and many school libraries have a selection of such recommended publications. Sensitivity is needed so that deep grief is not triggered at an inappropriate time. For example, a school assembly using literature on the subject might help the school to explore grief and loss, but not when a newly bereaved child is present. The Scholastic book '100' Assemblies contains some good ideas on assemblies dealing with loss and change (pg66 – 80).

- **Be aware that this is likely to take a long while and be prepared to allow for anniversaries and gestures over time**

The grief caused by the death will be long-lasting, and schools need to recognise anniversaries and celebrations will be difficult – especially the first birthday and Christmas or other religious festivals. It will help if key dates and times are noted and passed on to the next class teacher or next school, along with other records and information. As children mature, the death is felt and questioned at new levels, both emotionally and intellectually, often causing renewed grief and distress.

Close friends of the girl/boy, or of the child who has died, will suffer varying grief reactions. Their teachers will probably need the support of colleagues at this time, they might need to be reassured that their ideas for giving comfort to the children are wise, and that they will be of benefit to those in their care. Many younger teachers themselves may not have experienced bereavement, especially of this kind, before.

If the person who died was a pupil at the school, you might feel it appropriate to send a representative to the child's funeral or a memorial or thanksgiving service – if the family agree with this idea. Also, in these circumstances, the child's books and work should be kept carefully and returned to the family by a teacher at a suitable time.

It is very important to keep details of the date of a bereavement, so that key staff can be made aware of anniversaries, which will frequently result in emotional challenges for the pupil or pupils.

- **Helping the school recovery**

This is a long-term issue. You can help a school recover through a memorial service or assembly and through the use of counsellors. Recognise that those who go to counsellors may well not be those whose need is greatest. A brother or sister may well have intense needs that appear later. It is very difficult for the school to know when to stop making allowances.