

Highfield Primary School



Bereavement policy

Approved by:	David Wilson	Date: July 2020
Last reviewed on:	July 2020	
Next review due by:	July 2023	

1. Aims

This bereavement policy aims to:

- Set out a guideline for how the school will respond to a death in our school community
- Set out a plan for communicating deaths in a timely manner that balances our school community's interests and transparency with the wishes of the family of the deceased
- Identify best practices for supporting pupils and/or members of staff experiencing bereavement
- Define the roles and responsibilities of key staff members and the governing board
- Provide a roadmap and framework for pupils or staff returning to school following bereavement

2. Roles and responsibilities

2.1 The Headteacher

The headteacher will be responsible for:

- The overall implementation of this policy
- Liaise with the family of the deceased
- Where appropriate, communicate details of a death to pupils and staff as set out in this policy, or activate communication teams.
- Respond to media requests for information in the case of a publicised death, or appointing a member of staff to undertake these duties.
- Participate in any multi-agency reviews as requested
- Lead reintegration meetings for pupils or staff returning to school after a bereavement
- Arrange for monitoring and support of the pastoral support team or any individual staff members who are supporting bereaved pupils or staff

2.2 Pastoral support staff

Pastoral staff will be responsible for:

- Provide direct support to bereaved pupils and staff.
- Signpost to external support available to bereaved pupils and staff (see Appendix)
- Organise safe spaces for bereaved members of the school community to take a time out.
- Organise memorials, e.g. temporary tributes, books of condolences.
- Arrange for the attendance and supervision of pupils at funerals (where permitted)
- Maintain a calendar of dates and holidays that may be particularly difficult for bereaved pupils or staff and ensure they're supported on those days.
- Provide additional support during significant transitions e.g. when moving up to the next year group or transitioning to a new school.

2.3 Governing board

The governing board will be responsible for:

- Monitoring the implementation of this policy, and supporting the headteacher.
- Undertake regular monitoring of how the school is supporting the bereaved, and the staff who support them.
- Assist the headteacher, where required, in responding to media requests for information in the case of a publicised death.
- Where necessary, arrange for another member of SLT i.e. the deputy headteacher to take the lead if the headteacher is not available to respond to a death immediately.

3. Provision for supporting staff who support the bereaved

- Access to one to one time with a member of staff who is trained in bereavement support.
- Availability of information about accessing bereavement support inside/outside of school (see Appendix)

4. Immediate actions following a death

When the school is informed of the death of a child or member of staff, the following action should be considered;

- Discussion should take place with the family and their wishes taken into account before decisions are taken on how and what to tell the children in school.
- Counseling should be available if necessary e.g. in cases of sudden or violent death (outside agencies should be involved with this e.g. Psychological Service).
- The school may be closed, or as many people as possible released to attend a funeral or memorial services should it be appropriate and they wish to do so.
- Staff and children should be supported throughout the grieving period; anyone displaying signs of stress should be offered appropriate support.
- Pupils and staff may express a wish to attend, or take part in the service, but they should only do so with the prior agreement of the deceased's family, relatives or next of kin, as well as the agreement of their own parents/carers.

4.1 Terminally Ill Pupils/Staff

- In the event of a child or member of staff becoming terminally ill, their wishes and those of their parents/guardians/next-of-kin should always be respected.
- Should the child wish to attend school, the class teacher may need to inform the class of the child's condition.
- Occasionally, the child may wish to talk to their fellow classmates about their predicament themselves.

4.2 Sharing the news with staff

- All staff and governors will be invited to a meeting by the headteacher as soon as practicable.
- Absent staff and governors, including part-time staff, will be identified so they can be informed as soon as possible. If it is not possible for absent staff to be told in person, a phone call will be arranged.

Any information provided to staff and governors during the meeting will have prior approval from the family. During the meeting, the headteacher, with the support of pastoral staff, will:

- a) Explain what happened leading up to the death and factual explanation of how the death occurred.
- b) Designate a member of staff as media spokesperson who will be responsible for liaising with the media as required.
- c) Identify what internal and external support is available to staff and governors. (see Appendix)
- d) Discuss the arrangements for informing pupils, including whether all pupils will be told and who will be responsible for informing them.

Staff members that will be responsible for informing pupils about the death will be provided with a script which sets out what pupils should be told and includes information on how to answer some difficult questions. This will be created by the headteacher and pastoral support, with input from the family.

4.3 Sharing the news with pupils

- The headteacher will have a discussion with the family about whether all pupils need to be informed about the death.
- If the death affects the whole school i.e. the death of a staff member or pupil, the headteacher will strongly recommend to the family that all pupils should be informed; however, if the death does not affect the whole school, it may be more appropriate to just inform certain groups of pupils.
- The headteacher will make the final decision regarding which pupils will be informed.
- Where possible, pupils will be informed about the death in small groups by their class teacher at the same time.
- Pupils with specific needs that may influence their response to being informed about the death will be identified and told separately. These needs include the following:
 - a) Pupils that had a long-term and/or close relationship with the individual who has died.
 - b) Pupils with a history of loss
 - c) Pupils with SEND
 - d) Pupils who have difficulty managing their emotions or behaviour
- Where possible, a member of pastoral staff will be present when pupils are told about a death so they can help with answering any questions.
- Pupils will be given time to ask questions about what has happened and to talk about how they are feeling. Any questions that are asked by pupils will be answered factually.
- Pupils will be told where they can go to in school for support and will also be directed to any external support.

4.4 Sharing the news with pupils in a large group

- If it is not possible to inform pupils about a death in small groups, the headteacher, in communication with the family, will decide if it would be appropriate to inform pupils in a large group. For example, during an assembly.
- Where an individual pupil has been bereaved, they will be asked if they want to attend the assembly and if they do not want to be involved, appropriate support will be arranged for the pupil during and after the assembly.

- The headteacher will tell the family and, where relevant, the bereaved pupil exactly what they will say and to whom. The headteacher, with support from relevant pastoral staff, will deliver the information to pupils.
- After pupils have been informed, they will go to their classes and be given time to express any thoughts or feelings about what they have been told.

4.5 Informing parents/carers

- The headteacher will have a discussion with the family about whether all parents need to be informed about the death.
- If the death affects the whole school, e.g. the death of a staff member or pupil, the headteacher will strongly recommend to the family that all parents should be informed; however, if the death does not affect the whole school, it may be more appropriate to just inform parents that are directly affected.
- The headteacher will compose a letter to parents about the death. The letter will contain the basic, factual information about the death, information about how the school is supporting pupils, how they can support their children, and who to direct questions or concerns to.
- A letter will be sent home with pupils explaining the steps we have taken during the day to inform pupils of the death, what additional support has been made available and where to go for more help and information.

4.6 Responding to specific causes of death

Pre-bereavement

- A member of pastoral staff will meet with the pupil regularly to provide the pupil with an opportunity to talk about what is happening and how they are feeling.
- All staff will remain vigilant to signs that the pupil is facing challenges in relation to their psychological, physical and social development and will refer any concerns to pastoral staff who will ensure appropriate support is put in place.

Pupils with a life-threatening illness

- The headteacher, the pupil and their family, and other relevant staff members (e.g. a member of pastoral staff) will decide how to share the news that a pupil is terminally ill with the school community.
- Other pupils will be informed about how they can best support the pupil in the most appropriate way.

Suicide

- The school will respond to a suspected suicide within 48 hours. The headteacher, or other appointed member of staff, will contact the police or the family as soon as possible to confirm the death and whether it is being treated as a suicide.
- If the family does not wish the cause of death to be disclosed to the school community, the school will state that the nature and cause of death are still being determined and that additional information will be forthcoming.
- If the death is subject to an ongoing investigation, the headteacher will check with the police before speaking about the death with pupils who may need to be interviewed by the police.
- Staff will be told about the death first
- The script that staff will use to inform pupils of the death will be factual while avoiding excessive detail about the suicidal act itself.

- Immediate emotional support will be arranged for any pupils and staff who require it.

Any information distributed to the school community and media regarding the death will:

- Be factually correct but not include detail of the cause of death or method used.
- Not include speculation over the motivation for suicide or details of any suicide note.
- Staff will report any concerns about pupils to the headteacher and the appropriate support will be put in place or a referral to specialist services will be made in line with the Child Protection Policy.
- Pupils and staff will be warned about the risks of un-moderated online memorials (e.g. those on social media), such as their comments becoming public without their permission and online memorials attracting negative comments.

Cultural and religious behaviours

The school will keep in mind the cultural attitudes and behaviours relating to a death and will make sure these needs are taken into consideration when putting support in place for those affected.

Forces' families

The needs and feelings of bereaved forces' pupils will always be considered prior to any school activities relating to the armed forces, e.g. commemorating Armed Forces Day, and additional support will be put in place for pupils as required.

- Appropriate support will be implemented for bereaved forces' pupils, particularly during times of change
- Bereaved forces' pupils will be protected from any unwanted media attention and there will be a designated area in school that the pupil can go to if they are feeling overwhelmed.

A death involving murder or manslaughter

- The headteacher will contact the police or the family to establish the facts about what has happened.
- A designated staff member will be available to talk to the pupil to help them to answer any questions they may get from their peers about what has happened.
- Research indicates that pupils that have been bereaved due to murder or manslaughter can be at significant risk of developing PTSD. Any concerns relating to the pupil will be addressed in line with the Child Protection policy.
- Media personnel will not be permitted onto the school site at any time.

5. Follow-up actions and support following a death

5.1 Funerals and condolences

We will consult the family as appropriate, to confirm:

- Whether members of staff and/or pupils are welcome to attend the funeral or memorial service
- How condolences should be made and how staff and pupils can contribute

6. Support for pupils returning to school after bereavement

6.1 Reintegration meeting

A member of the pastoral team will meet with the bereaved pupil and their parents/carers to discuss how best to manage a return to school. The purpose of the meeting will be to:

- Determine whether the pupil is emotionally ready to return to the classroom either full-time or with adjustments to the timetable to allow for a phased return
- Address any concerns the pupil and their parents/carers have about the return to school
- Consult with the pupil about how or even if they want their classmates to know of the death (where relevant)
- Consider any additional support needed for a pupil who is vulnerable or has special educational needs (SEN) or a disability

6.2 Ongoing support

We will maintain regular contact with the pupil's parents/carers to monitor how the pupil is coping. We acknowledge significant dates or holidays may be especially difficult. The dates will be monitored and additional support will be available.

We know that grief may impact a pupil's progress and affect their behavior. To manage this we will;

- Address behavior using our behaviour Policy
- A record will be made of anniversaries and days with regards to the death which may act as a trigger for challenging behavior.
- Any incidents of bullying, where a bereaved pupil is the victim or perpetrator, will be addressed in line with the behavior and anti-bullying policy, taking into account the pupil's needs and circumstances.
- All staff members will remain vigilant to signs that a bereaved pupil is facing difficulties in relation to their psychological, physical and social development and will refer the pupil to pastoral staff who will put appropriate support in place.

We will take care to manage changes for bereaved pupils by preparing them in advance (where possible) and taking extra steps to support necessary transitions.

7. Support for staff returning to school after bereavement

7.1 Reintegration meeting

The Head teacher will meet with the bereaved staff member to discuss how best to manage a return to school.

The purpose of the meeting will be to:

- Determine whether the staff member is ready to return to work and the best way to make that return (e.g. a phased return to work or a temporary change in duties)
- Address any concerns the staff member may have about the return to school
- Consult with the staff member about how or even if they want their pupils and colleagues to know of the death (where relevant)
- Set guidelines for communication between the staff member and their line manager to monitor and support the staff member

7.2 Ongoing support

We acknowledge that grief can have an impact on a staff member's physical and mental health, which can then go on to impact their performance. We also recognise that grieving is highly personal and that there can't be a one-size-fits-all solution for monitoring and supporting a bereaved person. We will work with each

individual to create a system of monitoring and support that works for that person. Whenever necessary we will request additional support from colleagues or from external support agencies (see Appendix).

8. Monitoring arrangements

This policy will be reviewed termly. At every review, it will be approved by the full governing board.

9. Links with other policies

This policy is linked to our:

- Child protection policy
- Critical incident policy
- Behaviour policy

Appendix: useful contacts

ORGANISATION	CONTACT DETAILS
Child Bereavement UK	Helpline: 0800 02 888 40 https://www.childbereavementuk.org/contact-us
Winston's Wish	Helpline: 08088 020 021 https://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/contact-page/
CRUSE Bereavement Care	Helpline: 0808 808 1677 https://www.cruse.org.uk/about-cruse/contact-us
Mind	Info line (information and signposting to further help): 0300 123 3393 Further contacts: https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/useful-contacts/
Place2Be (internal)	Helpline: 02079235500 https://www.place2be.org.uk/about-us/news-and-blogs/2015/may/bereavement-and-the-impact-on-children/