

BISHOP VESEY'S GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Bereavement Policy

Review prepared by:	Designated Safeguarding Lead
Approved date/by whom	Headteacher 5 June 2020
School's next review date/by whom:	Summer 2023
Signed by Headteacher	



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1. INTRODUCTION

This policy has been written in line with the United Nations Rights of the Child specifically Articles 3 and 12 which state that the best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children and that every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.

Our school prides itself that all youngsters in our care are equipped with high-quality learning experiences that prepare them for life in the 21st century, whilst also providing them with the traditional values of courtesy and self-discipline.

We believe all students should 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 mutual respect and the highest expectations of all.

Our school is fully committed to the emotional health and well-being of our students and 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

1 in 29 pupils aged five to sixteen-years olds has been bereaved of a parent or sibling – that is one in every class. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, relative, friend or other significant person.

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. This Bereavement Policy enables the school to 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.childbereavementuk.org

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.



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- To identify key staff within school and clarify the pathway of support.

4. THE ROLE OF THE HEADTEACHER

The Head Teacher 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 Head Teacher 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.
- Signpost the family/child to relevant member of the pastoral team

5. THE ROLE OF THE DESIGNATED SAFEGUARDING LEAD

The Designated Safeguarding Lead should have had Bereavement support training.

The DSL will:

- Train other members of the staff
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies.
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary schools.

6. FOLLOWING A BEREAVEMENT

We believe that children and adults alike have the right to:

- Be given space and time to grieve
- Be given support from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate – if possible, of their own choice.
- Encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement.

We recognise:

- That grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real.
- That differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment.
- That the death of a child has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/care team of that child and every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far-reaching contacts.



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7. DEATH OF A STUDENT OR MEMBER OF STAFF

7.1 General Procedures

- Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the Head Teacher 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. We will be mindful of the use of social media sites and their impact throughout this time.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate.
- 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.
- The Head Teacher will liaise with the media and the police as appropriate.
- 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.
- It is necessary to be aware of the differing cultural and religious traditions of grieving and mourning. The school should ensure it does not deny young people the opportunity to grieve and mourn within the traditions of their own culture and religious beliefs.

7.2 Managing the First Day

Upon hearing news of a death, members of staff should contact the Head Teacher. The Head Teacher, supported by the Senior Leadership Team and the student's Head of Year (if relevant), should gather all details surrounding any death. It is vital to have all the facts. If the death/s have been particularly traumatic the media may be involved. It is essential that correct information is disseminated to all staff.



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7.3 Multiple Deaths, Deaths in School

In the event of multiple deaths, additional support and resources will probably be required. The senior leadership team should meet to agree a planned course of action.

It is likely that there will be considerable (if unwanted) media interest. The Head Teacher will decide what information should be released. Clearly information that might upset, confuse or exacerbate the situation should be withheld.

It is important that one individual, pre-selected and briefed by the team, acts as spokesperson, relaying consistent information. Another consideration might be the setting up and running of an emergency school hotline.

It may be necessary to retrieve the personal belongings of the deceased for their return to the next-of-kin. Information on the school's database, including references and addresses will probably need to be amended and updated. This also applies to notice boards etc. The school may decide to write to parents to allow them to explain to their children the meaning and implications of an event.

7.4 Death of a Member of Staff

When such an event occurs, it is usually extremely traumatic, especially for members of staff forced to deal with their own grief as well as comforting students. Planning how a school manages such an event is important. To avoid rumours, it is advisable that the news is broken as soon as possible. A gathering together of staff to allow them to grieve in private before announcing the news to the rest of the school is something that should be considered.

Generally, such news is broken in assembly, in a space where everyone maybe told simultaneously. Later in class students should be allowed the opportunity to express their grief individually with the support of the form tutor. Some students may have already experienced death and their way of coping with such events is sometimes observed in emotional outbursts. Some may express feelings of anger, panic or relief. It is important to try to remember that this is a time when everyone is hurting.

For a community as close knit as a school, a memorial service in keeping with the ethos and ethnic beliefs of the school is normally a good idea. The coming together of the whole school collectively for one purpose helps each individual come to terms with his/her own grief in a shared experience – ie helping to initiate the grieving process. Such services also offer the opportunity for those who may have been unable to attend the funeral to express themselves through drama, poems and letters.

It is at times like these when members of the staff often feel insecure of their own abilities, finding it difficult to cope. Without encroaching on their privacy staff might keep an eye on those teachers particularly affected by the death of a close colleague.



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7.5 Death of a Student

The death of a fellow student is probably the most demanding situation a young person might be forced to face whilst in school. Comprehending and coming to terms with such an event is going to be equally difficult and will require great emotional support from the school staff.

If faced with a sudden death, the Head Teacher should contact the deceased parents/carers/next of kin as soon as possible thus enabling compliance with any of their wishes. The immediate class friends and siblings of the deceased should be gathered and the news, if not already known, be broken before an announcement is made to the rest of the school, thus allowing private grief.

To avoid rumours an announcement should be made to the whole of the school as soon as practically possible. Additional support from fellow teaching colleagues may well be required as well as the assistance of the school's bereavement counsellors.

In event of a young person becoming terminally ill their wishes and those of their parents or carers should always be respected. Should the young person wish to attend school, staff may need to inform students of the young person's condition. Occasionally the student may wish to talk to their fellow classmates about their predicament themselves. Honesty about death and dying we feel is the best line of approach.

8. SUPPORTING A BEREAVED STUDENT

If a parent, relative or close friend of a student has died, the Head Teacher will decide (after speaking to the student's next-of-kin) who should approach the student.

A parent or relative coming into school to break the news, possibly with support from a member of staff, would normally be the best and usual approach. If no parents, relatives or carers are able to attend, the Head Teacher will need to decide who is best suited/qualified to deal with the situation.

The school recognises that the pupil may need time off school whilst others will prefer to follow their normal routine. When a pupil has time off school, a meeting with pupil and family carers to discuss return to school will take place.

The member of staff who leads this meeting should be someone the child feels comfortable to talk to.

The purpose of this meeting should be to acknowledge the death and find out how or if the pupil would like to share their news. The meeting will also organise a safe space for the bereaved pupil to go if they feel overwhelmed by their grief and need a 'time-out' and inform the relevant staff of this. The pupil will be issued with a small laminated card to place on their desk if they need to leave the room.



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Once the pupil has returned, they will need continuous on-going support. The pupil will be consulted as to which member(s) of staff they feel is/are most appropriate for them.

The pupil will continue to grieve for the rest of their life. Significant dates or anniversaries, Mother's/Father's Day, etc. may be particularly difficult. Regular contact with the family/carers and reviews with the pupil will help to build up an overall picture of how the pupil is coping will be carried out by the staff member(s) the pupil has nominated.

The school recognises grief may impact the pupil's progress and will be alert to changes in their behaviour.

Where necessary, the school will also offer support to friends of the bereaved student.

9. SUPPORTING THE FAMILY

Parents and carers often feel that teachers are experts on their children. They may invariably therefore turn to the school for advice and information, especially on matters of bereavement. It is important to remember that the family, friends and the immediate community often best support those suffering from bereavement, as is the case with other stressful life events.

The following are some points that may be helpful to bear in mind when talking to parents and carers:

- A death in the family will disrupt the family for many months; in fact, the family will never be the same again. Family members are grieving, relationships alter, and members may take on new roles. Sometimes there is a change of carer, house or school, all of which add to the disruption and distress experienced by the young person. To support the young person, it is helpful to minimise, if possible, changes and disruptions in their normal daily routine and life in school.
- bereaved family members may emotionally and physically withdraw from the young person, to protect themselves from more distress. Some adults will deny the bereaved person is grieving, as it will be distressing for them to acknowledge the young person's pain. This may cause distress and confusion, causing grief reactions of anger, withdrawal or psychosomatic behaviours such as, headaches, stomach-ache or sickness. The bereaved young person may regress in behaviour, becoming clingy, difficult or withdrawn. His/her schoolwork may suffer. These changes will be partly due to grief but also to the disruption and changes within the family, causing the young person to feel confused and unsafe. Even the simple withdrawal of attention from the young person can lead to problems; the young person may feel resentment, jealous or guilt towards the dead person. The expression of this verbally can cause the remaining family members distress and shock. Parents and carers need to know this is normal and will decrease as the young person and the family become more stable and settled.



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- Parents and carers need to be informed of the benefits that a young person gains in being involved in the ceremonies and rituals that follow the death. An explanation as to how mourning practices help young people to express their feelings and come to terms with and accept the reality of their loss can be very beneficial.
- Finally, teachers need to remember that parents and carers will often use them as role models, counsellors or extended family; looking to them for support for themselves as well as finding appropriate ways of supporting and talking with their children. Teachers therefore may require their own support structures, so they too can turn to others for emotional support, advice and information if needed. Supporting bereaved families, whilst rewarding, can also be emotionally draining.

10. SELF CARE FOR THOSE WORKING WITH THE BEREAVED

Supporting the bereaved can be emotionally draining. Bishop Vesey's recognises the emotional weight resting on the shoulders of those offering support.

To assist, the following advice will be given to those supporting the bereaved:

- Anticipate possible reactions you may experience with grief and loss. Each one of us is likely to react differently depending on our age, personality, cultural and religious background. If you are ever unsure about how you should react to others' grief, honesty is always the best line of approach.
- Try to accept that you may experience emotional reactions yourself. Such an event might trigger thoughts of your own past grief experiences. You may even find yourself doubting your own abilities. It is not unusual to experience existential thoughts and find yourself querying life's injustices, questioning perhaps your own beliefs.
- Panic attacks and worries about death – your own, or perhaps that of your family – may also become a preoccupation.
- Try to accept that giving such support can affect you in perhaps ways you had not considered. Normally these reactions will subside after a few days or weeks but if they persist do not be afraid to ask for professional support.
- Never take on too much. If you find that you are having difficulty in managing to cope, look to others to offer support – a partner, friend, or colleague.
- It is important to remember that you alone cannot carry other peoples' grief.