



Loss and Bereavement Policy

Date: February 2024

Signed: _____
(Chairperson Board of Governors)

Date: _____

Rationale

No matter how prepared we think we are, death is often traumatic and unexpected. A considered, planned and organised response to an event is often more effective than acting on impulse.

We, at St. Anthony's Primary School, understand the importance of providing support to children, families, staff, governors and the wider school community during and after bereavement. The way in which children and young people are responded to 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 is not prescriptive; different strategies and procedures may be necessary in different circumstances. These must take into account the age of the pupils concerned, the relationship the bereaved had with the deceased and the relevant context in which the bereavement has occurred. All mentions of 'the family' in this policy, refer to the family of the deceased individual. The wishes of the family will always be considered when carrying out any of the actions outlined in this policy. If the family objects to any of the procedures, the school will work to ensure reasonable adjustments are made.

Every 22 minutes in the UK a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 41,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, and, sadly, around 12,000 children die in the UK each year.

Within our school community there will almost always be some recently bereaved children who are struggling with their own situation – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil. We would hope to not encounter such circumstances, but the statistical inevitability of such an occurrence implies the necessity of having a Bereavement Policy in place in order that we might be proactive, rather than reactive, when responding to these sensitive 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.childbereavement.org.uk

Intervention Team

Mr P. Mallon
Mr H. Hamill
Class Teacher

When news of a death reaches the school a member of the Team must be informed so that the Team can meet to make decisions on how to progress. A member of the Team will contact the next of kin of the child/member of staff to discuss how the school can best deal with the child's/member of staff's needs. One of this key member's primary roles should be to gather all the facts, particularly if the death has been traumatic, and disseminate this information to all staff, taking into consideration the wishes of the family.

The role of the head teacher – Mr P. Mallon

Roles and responsibilities:

The role of the Head teacher:

- To have overall responsibility for the implementation of the policy and if necessary the implementation of the Critical Incident Policy.
- To liaise with external agencies as appropriate
- To respond to media enquiries as appropriate
- To be first point of contact for family/child concerned
- To inform all staff and arrange for the children to be informed, as appropriate, in line with the family's wishes.
- To keep the governing body up to date and fully informed as appropriate.

The role of Staff:

- To support the Head teacher in carrying out the procedures outlined in this policy
- To support staff, children and parents following a death, as directed by the Head teacher
- To support other staff members with communicating the news of a death
- Where necessary, to make referrals for children, staff and other members of the school community to receive support and counselling
- Where requested, undertake bereavement support training and share this knowledge with all other staff members.

The role of the Education Authority

- To advise and support staff
- Consult on referral pathways and identification of complex grief.

Head teacher:

The role of the EA

- To advise and support staff. Consult on referral pathways and identification of complex grief.

Role of pastoral staff:

(including i.e. spiritual advisors, school counsellors, mentors)

- To have bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff.

Death of Child or a Member of Staff

The sudden death of a pupil or member of staff challenges the very heart of the school community, its identity and its coping mechanisms. The EA provide support for schools in such circumstances (see Appendix). After consultation with the deceased's family, the Team would inform close friends and members of the child's year group before holding a special assembly to announce the news to the rest of the school. It is important to be open and honest and to not make any assumptions about the cause of death. After children have been informed they should be given the opportunity, within their class, to express their emotions, feelings and thoughts. Not all staff will feel confident with this and, if required, a Team member will help support staff.

Grief in a supportive environment can facilitate the grieving process. Sensitivity should be shown respecting the pupil's choice as to when they are ready to explore their feelings. For pupils or staff particularly affected it may be necessary to contact appropriate outside agencies. (see Appendix)

Funerals, Memorial Services

Pupils and staff may express a wish to attend a service but they should only do so with the agreement of the deceased's family and, in the case of pupils, with the agreement of their own family.

Procedure to help a pupil deal with bereavement when a member of their family dies:

- Visit or telephone the family before the pupil returns to school.
- Ask if you should inform other pupils in the class.
- Watch out for the reaction of pupils who have previously suffered loss.
- Watch out for signs of recurring grief for some months and particularly on anniversaries.
- Be available to listen to and support the bereaved pupil.

- Arrange a one-to-one session if appropriate.
- Be calm. Show them you are listening/understanding by occasionally repeating what they have said and acknowledging their emotions.
- Beware of using platitudes e.g. "I know how you feel."
- Talk to children using words they understand.
- Don't be afraid to show children how you are feeling
- Encourage children to ask questions and answer them honestly and simply.

Responding to a death:

Breaking the news to staff, pupils and families

News of the death of a close member of a child's or staff's family, the death of a pupil or member of staff or a member of the school community will be passed to the Head teacher who will try to obtain factual information to avoid unnecessary rumour or assumption, which could lead to further distress.

Where possible the Head teacher will liaise directly with the family involved and agree exactly what information should be passed on to staff and pupils. The family's wishes will be taken into account before any information is given to the pupils. Staff will be informed as soon as possible, ideally before the pupils, ensuring enough time is given to enable them to discuss what has happened, how they feel and what internal and external support is available. All this information will also be shared with part time staff, governors and those who may not be in school that day.

Where necessary a press statement will be prepared by the Head teacher and agreed with the Local Authority through the Critical Incident Team. If pupils need to be told they will be told as soon as possible to avoid rumour and uncertainty. This will be done in familiar groups by someone they know, for example their class teacher, and the information will be shared in an age-appropriate way. Opportunities will be given for pupils to ask questions and respond to the news. The bereaved child or member of staff 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, respecting the wishes of the family.

Children 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:

- Children that had a long-term and/or close relationship with the individual who has died
- Children with SEND

- Children who have difficulty managing their emotions or behaviour

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 will 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. A bereaved member of staff will need to be supported to have the appropriate amount of compassionate leave.

Return to School

In this phase of the process, the work of the team should be re-active, sympathetic and supportive to meet the needs, feelings and emotions of both staff and pupils. In most cases it is advisable, provided the bereaved or family of the bereaved agree, that everyone is aware of the situation before the pupil returns.

Teachers should endeavour to foster an environment that is compassionate, yet disciplined. School, with its routines and rituals, often provides a respite at this traumatic time.

Anniversaries or birthdays often spark a revival of feelings of bereavement and it is important to be aware of such dates and to react with sensitivity and respect.

Terminally ill Pupils/Staff

The wishes of the person and their next of kin must always be respected. Honesty about death and dying is the best line of approach. Sometimes there is just no other way.

Changes in the Bereaved Child

Children in the Primary School age group have an understanding of the finality of death. After a death a child may display reactions such as:

- Withdrawal
- Aggression
- Anger
- Nervousness
- Sullen moods
- Lack of concentration
- Sleep problems
- Loss of self-esteem
- Headaches, stomach ache, sickness

These are all normal reactions for young children.

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 teacher 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, extra support will be provided. e.g. 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 such as a sensory space. The use of the Sunshine Room when they first arrive at school in the morning may provide them with the opportunity to regulate themselves and prepare for the day ahead.

Both school and families need to work together to note changes in behaviour and if necessary counselling from outside agencies such as Barnardos or Reach Mentoring may be sought. However, it is always important to keep in mind the six month period after a bereavement which individuals should be given space to deal with grief before any form of counselling is undertaken.

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 are necessary and important. Support and counselling is available to any member of staff and can be arranged through the Mrs H. Hamill.

All staff should be aware of colleagues and offer support on an individual basis where necessary and alert a member of the SLT if they become concerned about a colleague's well-being. 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.

Support for bereaved members of staff will be offered in line with their wishes and feelings and the agreed management of human resources policies and procedures.

Funeral and Remembrance Activities:

In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance may be discussed, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances.

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. All remembrance activities will be planned so that they are respectful of the culture and religious beliefs of the family.

Supporting a child if someone dies:

If a child or a parent informs staff that a close member of the family has died it is important that this information is shared with the people working with the children in school and with the Head teacher.

The Head teacher will decide if this information needs to be shared more widely amongst staff – for example, if a parent or sibling dies. The school will work closely with the family to provide suitable support for the children in whatever way feels best – counselling, nurture time, somewhere quiet to talk, etc. Trained members of staff can support with bespoke activities when the time is right. School will also signpost families to appropriate organisations for support and will assist with referrals if necessary.

Information will be available on the school website.

If school is closed when the death occurs we will endeavour to continue to follow the points outlined above sensitivity and taking into account the wishes of the family; communication with the family is vital. Careful consideration will be given to how the news of the death is communicated with reference to the Critical Incident Policy.

Self-care:

"The loss of a loved person is one of the most intensely painful experiences a human being can suffer and not only is it painful to experience but also painful to witness, if only because we are so impotent to help." - Bowlby

Teachers also require support structures when dealing with grief. Never take on too much. If you are having difficulty dealing with your own or other's grief, talk to a partner, friend or colleague.

and finally...

Some advice

- Tell the people you love that you love them.
- Leave no unfinished business.
- Have fun – enjoy the child in you.
- Each day maximise the pleasure of living.
- Strive to be happy and loving.
- Accept the fact that no one can live forever.

Appendix

Useful Contacts

EA Primary Officer, Assistant Education Officer

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Cruse

· Helpline 0808 808 1677

Barnardo's Advice Line

· 028 9064 5899

Inspire: workandstudy@inspirewellbieng.org

08088000002

PIPS: www.pipscharity.com

028 9080 5850

Useful Resources

- "When Someone very Special Dies" Woodland Press
- "Out of the Blue" Hawthorn Press
- "Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine" Winston's Wish
- "A Child's Grief" Winston's Wish
- "Making a Memory Box" Winston's Wish