



DITCHAM PARK SCHOOL

Where every child is known and valued

Bereavement Policy

Compiled by	Bursar
Approved by	Headmaster
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Bereavement Policy

This policy applies to all pupils in the school including those in the EYFS.

Introduction

Bereavement affects everyone at some time or another. Whilst every situation is unique and every individual will grieve differently, this policy seeks to be proactive rather than reactive when responding to highly sensitive situations and give all involved guidance and a clear pathway of support available at such highly emotional times. In the event of a sudden or unexpected bereavement school staff may feel considerable anxiety about knowing how to best respond and are placed in an extremely important position in supporting children and families. This also has an inevitable impact on the staffing body.

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

Within a school community there will almost always be some pupils who are struggling with bereavement – 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.

Covid-19 – supporting grief from a distance

While the stark reality of coronavirus is dominating the news, it is important to remember that children grieve all deaths equally. Whether Covid-19 related, or from causes we are more familiar with, right now grieving is a different experience. As we cannot come together and take comfort in each other's presence, we need to be able to respond to death in a virtual space.

The School may not be able to put its normal school bereavement strategy into action during the Covid-19 pandemic, but we aim to support our pupils and families to the best of our abilities at this challenging time, particular in periods of “lockdown”.

This support may include a variety of interventions, actions and activities including:

- Staying in regular contact with the bereaved child.
- Scheduling regular points of contact during the week with the bereaved child (and, where the pupil is a vulnerable child, with parents or carers too).
- Providing a space for other children to share their grief and condolences, perhaps by encouraging classmates to make drawings or write letters which can be delivered to the bereaved child by the School appointed person, and consideration of a online fundraiser



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being established by older children, in memory of the deceased (with the family's permission).

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

The role of the governing body:

To approve policy and ensure its implementation, to be reviewed in three years.

The role of the Headmaster:

- 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.

The role of Pastoral staff: (including Headmaster, Head of Seniors (DSL), Head of Juniors (DDSL), Pastoral Co-ordinator and Head of Learning Support)

- To provide support and guidance
- To act as a point of contact for families and staff in communicating and respecting their wishes

Procedures

1. Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the Headmaster, in conjunction with the Head of Seniors or Head of Juniors (as appropriate), and their wishes respected in communicating with others. Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion, whilst being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations.
2. Staff should be informed before pupils and be prepared to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.
3. Pupils who are affected should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate.



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7. 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.
8. Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Headmaster.
9. School should be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their life so information should be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points (Bereavement form template). This aims to ensure understanding and continuity of care throughout the child's school life, acknowledge and value the family and reduce pressure on the family. This should also generate awareness of particularly difficult times of year or occasions (such as Mother's or Father's Day) need to be handled sensitively.

Training

Knowing how to support a pupil before, during and after loss can be very difficult. School staff do not need to be experts in bereavement support: listening and providing comfort and care in a safe space at school is always the first step to providing that support.

Staff Support

At times of sadness and trauma, school staff are often points of great support to our children and families. Inevitably, however, such times are likely to be very emotional for staff themselves whilst they are managing the support of their pupils and colleagues.

Being alongside anyone experiencing a loss can be emotionally difficult but supporting a bereaved child, particularly so. The need for support for yourself is not a sign of an inability to cope or of professional incompetence, but a recognition that everyone needs help to carry out this demanding role. Below are some ideas for our staff to look after themselves at such a time:

1. Share feelings: Use friends and colleagues to talk about how you are feeling and to share experiences. Just knowing that others are affected can help you to feel less alone and better-able to cope. Informal peer support in the staffroom can be a welcome opportunity to talk through issues and concerns and reduce feelings of inadequacy by jointly talking through strategies to help.
2. Anticipate that you may experience an emotional reaction: It is perfectly normal and OK to be emotionally affected. However, recognise that to help others, you need to feel reasonably strong yourself. You may become aware of previous losses in your own life that have resurfaced. If it all feels too close to home, do not be afraid to say so. This is not a sign of weakness but merely a recognition that we all have our limits.
3. Professional boundaries: When working in a school environment, it is very easy to let the carer in us take over and forget our professional boundaries. Getting over-involved is not helpful to either yourself or to the bereaved child or adult. Remember that you cannot carry their grief for them, but you can share their journey by being there for them and being aware.
4. Have information on resources and organisations: Sharing contact details of bereavement organisations will enable you to do something practical to support a grieving family. You will be helping by putting them in touch with people who are qualified and experienced in offering the support they might need.



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5. Help others: If you become aware that a colleague is stressed or affected by a death in your school community, or know that they have experienced a bereavement themselves, try to find the time to ask how they are.
6. Give yourself what you need: Make time to do something just for you or give yourself a treat. Physical exercise can be a great stress buster.
7. SLT will provide the first point of contact for arranging additional school-based support.

If staff members or parents want further professional support, they can ring the Child Bereavement UK helpline on 0800 02 888 40 or email support@childbereavementuk.org. Other organisations offering support are listed on page 5 of this policy.

Resources

Books that might be useful:

The Copper Tree, Hilary Robinson

The Coat I Wear by Mel Maxwell

Badger's Parting Gifts by Susan Varley

Sad Book by Michael Rosen

Always and Forever, Alan Durant

Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine, Winston's Wish (more of a workbook with activities)

Please do read through first and see if you think they are suitable for your child as children will respond differently to texts at different ages and some may be more suitable for the future.

Practical ideas: Memory boxes can be constructed to contain mementoes and items of significance; Family trees and Life Story work can help to reiterate and reinforce the child's experiences; Art and craft work – memory mobiles; salt jars; decorating photo-frames; creating a collage; 'comfort cushions' made from a favourite item of clothing.... many ideas to express feelings and assist understanding; Releasing balloons; celebrating special days; lighting candles; visiting a memorial site; Collate group responses to a loss to help in understanding of shared grief; Plant flowers; create a memory garden.



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Organisations that offer support

Winston's Wish was the UK's first childhood bereavement charity. They've been supporting bereaved children since 1992 and continue to lead the way in providing specialist child bereavement support services across the UK. This includes in-depth therapeutic support in individual, group and residential settings, as well as a freephone national helpline, training for professionals and specialist publications.

Child Bereavement UK helps children, parents and families to rebuild their lives when a child grieves or when a child dies. They support children and young people up to the age of 25 who are facing bereavement, and anyone affected by the death of a child of any age. They provide training to professionals in health and social care, education, and the voluntary and corporate sectors, equipping them to provide the best possible care to bereaved families.

For Parents

Cruse Bereavement Care **0844 477 9400**

<http://www.cruse.org.uk/>

Child Bereavement UK **0800 02 88840**

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/telling-a-child-that-someone-has-died>

NHS

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/children-and-bereavement>

Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families

<https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind>

For School Staff and those supporting bereaved children in School

Child Bereavement UK **0800 02 88840**

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/telling-a-child-that-someone-has-died>

Winston's Wish **08088 020021**

<https://www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/support-for-schools>



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Appendices

(This form should be completed at the end of a meeting between the child's parent/carer, or an adult nominated by them, and an appropriate member of school staff)

School Bereavement plan for _____ (Child's name)

Completed on _____ (date)

Relationship of deceased to child:

Nature of death:

Significant anniversaries to be aware of:

Any other relevant details:

Any specific anxieties that your child may be experiencing:

Are there any particular strategies/support that you would like us to try with your child?

At this point, teacher should share several resources that may be used (eg, books) and relate some of the practical ideas that may be helpful, eg ,memory book/box, feelings diary, sharing when a child is upset or wanting to talk in school with parents/carers).

Are you comfortable for this information to be shared sensitively with other teachers, office and support staff if necessary? Please indicate information you wish to be kept confidential.



Sample Assembly

A whole school assembly, usually delivered by a Headmaster, can be used for the situation involving the death of a pupil or a member of staff. This may or not be appropriate; possibly, this can be adapted to form individual class assemblies instead.

The benefit is that the entire school receives the same news at the same time, keeping speculation and rumour at bay and ensuring any information given is factual.

Follow the assembly with some classroom time for pupils to express any thoughts or feelings around the news that they have just been given.

End with something practical to do such as writing cards.

Suggested words for school assembly.

Primary school: I have some very sad news to tell you. Jim Jones in Year 5 died on Saturday morning. He was crossing the road with his Mum on the way to the local shop. A car being driven too fast knocked him down.

An ambulance was called, and Jim was taken to hospital. The doctors and nurses did all they could to try to save his life, but his injuries were too severe and tragically he died. His mum is not injured.

Jim was well known throughout the school for being a Manchester United fan and a very keen member of the football team. He was only nine years old and much too young to die but sadly very occasionally accidents do sometimes happen.

Some of you may be feeling shocked at this news, some of you might be feeling rather frightened, some of you might be feeling nothing at all. All of these feelings are OK.

Our thoughts are with Jim's Mum, his Dad, and his little sister Mary who must wish with all their hearts that this terrible accident had never happened.

When you go to your classes after this assembly, you can spend some time thinking about what I have just told you. Your teachers will try to answer any questions that you might have. We can all help Jim's family a little bit by drawing a picture of our favourite memory of Jim or just writing a card that we can send to let them know that we are thinking about them.

The school will probably be holding a special assembly next week for Jim when we can spend more time thinking about him, remembering him, and say a special goodbye. When I have more details, I will let you all know. If any of you have ideas for this or would like to take part, I would love to hear from you.



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Suggested templates for letter to parents

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.

Sample letter on death of a pupil:

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher/form tutor/had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>.

<Name> died from an illness called cancer. As you may be aware, many children who have cancer get better but sadly <Name> had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday.

He/She was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

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 <Name's> life.

Yours sincerely <Name> Headmaster

Sample letter to bereaved parents:

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear of ...'s death. There are no words to express the sadness of losing a child and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through. Clearly, as a school community, we will miss him very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to his friends and classmates. He was a much-loved member of our school family. If we can do anything to help as you plan (x)'s funeral service or other memorial opportunities, please let us know. In time, we will also ensure that anything of (x)'s that remains in school is returned to you, including photographs we may have on the school system. Be assured that you are in our thoughts and prayers at this very sad time and do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of support in any way.

With greatest sympathy,

Headteacher



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Sample letter on death of a staff member:

Dear parents/carers,

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. No-one 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.

The children will have the opportunity at school to discuss the death. The school website will give details of the funeral and arrangements re staff/pupil attendance. 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 respected 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,

Headmaster

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