Bereavement and Loss Policy

2026 - 2029

Greensand Federation

Approved by:	Ratified by Governing Body	**Date:** May 2023
Effective Date:	May 2020	
Last reviewed on:	July 2026	
Next review due by:	July 2029	
Reviewed by:	Andrew Rutter – Head of School	
Website:		
Yes/No	YES	

Rationale

Every 22 minutes in the UK a parent of a dependent child 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 children who are struggling with bereavement – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a student. While we hope to not encounter such circumstances, the statistical inevitability of such an occurrence implies the necessity of having a Bereavement Policy in place. This is so that we might 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 and long lasting.

Objectives

The core intentions of the policy are:

- To support students and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement

- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and the local community

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

The role of the Executive Principal:

The Executive Principal has overall responsibility for the policy and its implementation, for liaison with the governing body, parents/guardians, the Local Authority and other relevant outside agencies. In the absence of the Executive Principal, the Head of School will assume responsibility for the implementation of the policy.

<u>The Executive Principal/Head of School will:</u>

- 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.

The role of the Governing Body:

The Governing Body has responsibility for approving the Bereavement Policy and ensuring its implementation as an active document. The policy will be reviewed every three years.

This includes:

- Reflecting on its effectiveness (in practice)
- Utilising expertise within the school and sharing responsibilities
- The role of pastoral staff (including i.e. pastoral staff, school counsellors and mentors)
- To provide bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff. NB: It is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for students, supporting each other and implementing this policy. To this end it is desirable that the whole school staff have some awareness of bereavement through whole school training if possible
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary schools.

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 – ideally 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.

General Procedures:

1. Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the Executive Principal/Head of School 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. NB: We need to be mindful of the use of social media sites and their impact throughout this time as rumour and gossip spread quickly.

2. Staff should be informed before students and be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.

3. Students 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 students need to be informed.

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, familiarity and routine.

6. Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate.

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. The Executive Principal/Head of School will liaise with the media and possibly the police as appropriate.

9. 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. The school should be aware of any ongoing bereavement issues for new students. To this end it is important to have effective communication with 'feeder' schools.

10. In living in a multi-ethnic and multi-faith society it is necessary to be aware of the differing cultural and religious traditions of grieving and mourning. The school should ensure that they do not deny young people the opportunity to grieve and mourn within the traditions of their own culture and religious beliefs.

    NB: Many of the guidelines in this policy are only appropriate when the school community as a whole has experienced a death, for example a teacher, a student, or another staff member. Perhaps a more common experience for teachers and learning support staff is that of a student experiencing the death of a parent. Whole school or class activities will not normally be appropriate in this situation, but the needs of that individual student should still be given careful consideration. If a child has been bereaved, it is important to involve them in decisions about how the school manages issues relating to their loss. Talk to the child about their preferred way of informing their peers about what has happened and about the support they need.

Managing the first day:

Upon hearing news of a death, members of staff should contact the Executive Principal/Head of School. If a parent, relative or close friend of a student has died, the Executive Principal/Head of School 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 guardians are able to attend, the Executive Principal/Head of School will need to decide who is best suited/qualified to deal with the situation.

The Executive Principal/Head of School, supported by the Senior Leadership Team and the student's House Achievement Leader, 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.

Multiple deaths and/or death 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 Executive Principal/Head of School 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 noticeboards, etc. The school may decide to write to parents/guardians to allow them to explain to their children the meaning and implications of an event.

Funerals, memorial services/student participation:

Before the bereaved student or member of staff returns to school there is likely to be a funeral. It is probable that students and staff will express a wish to attend, or take part in the service, but they should only do so with the agreement of the deceased's family or relatives' prior agreement, as well as the agreement of their own parents/guardians. The Executive Principal/Head of School, or her/his representatives, should be the only person representing the school and in contact with the family/relatives, will need to discuss funeral arrangements.

If the bereaved family wish students and staff to attend, the team should be available to offer support before and after the service. If they do not wish the school to attend, their wishes should be respected, and the school should consider arranging an alternative means of memorial and remembrance.

Planning a memorial service, reading lessons, poems, or choosing hymns may all assist in the grieving process.

The tutor group or body of students most affected might like to write down their thoughts and feelings; these may be given to the bereaved family. It should be the role of the House Achievement Leader to ensure that no inappropriate remarks or comments are made. After either service, staff and students should be encouraged to meet and express their thoughts and feelings. Refreshments would normally be provided. Such services are important in initiating the mourning process.

A memorial garden may serve as a venue for gatherings and quiet moments of reflection.

<u>Death of a member of staff:</u>

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 – i.e. 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.

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 Executive Principal/Head of School should contact the deceased parents/guardians/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 the event of a young person becoming terminally ill their wishes and those of their parents or guardians should always be respected. Should the young person wish to attend school, pastoral 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.

Supporting the Family:

Parents and guardians 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 guardians:

- 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 guardian, 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
- The 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. Their 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, jealousy or guilt towards the dead person. The expression of this verbally can cause the remaining family members distress and shock. Parents and guardians need to know this is normal and will decrease as the young person and the family become more stable and settled
- Parents and guardians 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 guardians 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.

<u>Self-care for those working with the bereaved:</u>

It is easy to overlook the stresses and anxieties placed on those dealing with the bereaved. In many instances these can be quite exacting and yet because our sympathy and attention naturally rests with those grieving, we can easily forget the emotional weight resting on the shoulders of those offering support.

<u>To assist, the following points will be considered:</u>

- 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.

Suggested templates for letter to parents/guardians:

Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a student, permission will be gained from the child's parents/guardians. The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the parents/guardians.

Template letter for parents/guardians about the death of a student:

Dear Parents/Guardians

Your child's class teacher/form tutor had the sad task of informing the children of the death of **NAME**, a student in **YEAR**, who died from 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. 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 their life.

Yours sincerely

Executive Principal/Head of School

Template letter for bereaved parents/guardians:

Dear Parents/Guardians

We are so very sorry to hear of **NAME**'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/her 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 **NAME**'s funeral service, or other memorial opportunities, please let us know. In time, we will also ensure that anything of **NAME**'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 at this very sad time and do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of support in any way.

With sympathy

Executive Principal/Head of School

Template letter on death of a staff member:

Dear Parents/Guardians

I am sorry to inform you that a **[well respected/long-standing/well-loved/ popular/well known]** member of our staff, **NAME**, died **[suddenly/in hospital/ after a short illness]**.

The students were told today by their **[Class Teacher/Form Tutor/House Achievement Leader/in assembly]** and many will be reacting to this news. When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some students may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

We have tried to answer their questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Child Bereavement UK website childbereavementuk.org

Our thoughts are with **NAME's** family at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember **NAME's** life.

Yours sincerely

Executive Principal/Head of School

Additional information and resources can be accessed at:

- www.winstonswish.org.uk A useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community.
- www.keech.org.uk The website of Keech Hospice Care, our local Children's Hospice. Gives details of its facilities and the support it offers.
- www.chums.info A bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss
- www.childbereavement.org.uk A bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss
- www.juliesplace.com A support resource for bereaved siblings
- www.bhf.org.uk/smallcreature British Heart Foundation site to help children come to terms with loss using cartoon creatures. An animated film and we have a printed pack to go with it.
- www.bbc.co.uk/.../bereavement/bereavement_helpchildren.shtml Information on the way bereavement affects children
- http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk An organisation offering local bereavement support to both adults and children
- http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/index.htm Federation of organisations