



Bereavement Policy

September 2023

Principles

Vision: 'Growing together, respecting each other.'

Mission Statement: To inspire children to achieve their true potential in a happy and safe environment.

The school's aim is to provide support to pupils who experience bereavement within their families, and support to pupils and staff on the death of a member of the school community, whether it be an adult or a child. The way in which children and young people are treated 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 should be viewed as a framework rather than anything prescriptive, acknowledging that different strategies and procedures may be necessary in the various parts of the school, appropriate to the age of the pupils concerned. Much of the information and guidance in this policy follows the advice given by the Child Bereavement Charity and further advice can be found on their website, www.childbereavement.org.uk

At Sherdley we know the importance of listening to the child, parent and family. We know that trauma and loss can have a significant impact upon a child's ability to cope and regulate their emotions. We are experienced in and have in depth knowledge of how Adverse Childhood Experiences – ACEs – can impact children's lives, not only in the present but also their future. We know that our children are individuals with unique experiences and lives which vary from day to day. We understand how these positive and negative experiences may present themselves in school.

Convention of Children's Rights

This policy directly links to the Convention of Children's Rights.

Article 3 – The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all things that affect children.

Article 28 – Every child has the right to an education. Primary education must be free. Discussions in school must respect children's dignity. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this.

Article 31 – Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic acts.

Article 12 – Every child has the right to have a say in all matters affecting them and to have their views taken seriously.

Objectives:

- To ensure the best offer of support is available for children and families when they lose a loved one.
- To ensure that staff have the most up to date knowledge in how bereavement may present itself to children of different ages.
- To have a coordinated plan as a school for when a family suffers a bereavement.
- To share knowledge of and signpost parents and families to external agencies who can support them in their grief.
- To identify who will be a point of contact for parents.

The role of the Head Teacher

- To be the first point of contact for parents / family members
- To disseminate factual information to key staff
- To communicate the families' wishes to key members of staff
- To respond to any media enquiries (after consultation with governing body and LA)
- Keep the Chair of Governors informed

The role of the Safeguarding Lead

- To ensure staff stay informed of relevant and up to date training
- To discuss levels of support for the child and family as and when is felt appropriate or requested
- To support staff – class based – in their delivery of support
- To share up to date resources and reading for staff
- To direct staff to training both online and face to face
- To seek guidance from external agencies including Educational Psychology Services

Responding to a death

Breaking the news to staff, pupils and families

News of the death of a close member of a child's family or the death of a pupil or member of staff must be passed to the Headteacher who will immediately try to obtain factual information, avoiding unnecessary rumour or assumption, which could only lead to further distress.

Where possible the Headteacher will liaise directly with the family and agree exactly what information should be passed on to staff and pupils. Staff will be informed straight away, ideally before the pupils, remembering part time staff that may not be in school that day.

Discussions must take place with family and their wishes taken into account before any information is given to the pupils. Pupils should, however, be told as soon as possible to avoid rumour and uncertainty. This is best done in familiar groups by someone they know, probably their class teacher. A large assembly is not usually ideal, particularly for young children. Opportunity should be given for pupils to ask questions and respond to the news. The bereaved child 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, of course respecting the wishes of the family. Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Headteacher.

The first few days

As far as 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 a teacher has died, the class should 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.

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 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 the Pastoral Team will offer extra support. For example, if 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. Grief is a normal and natural response to loss. Both school and families need to work together to note changes in behaviour and if necessary counselling from outside agencies may be sought. Where appropriate this will involve the agreement of the families. It should be noted that not everyone needs outside counselling; grief is a natural process that can be aided by the family and school working in partnership.

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.

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. 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.

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, in the staffroom, are necessary and important. Support and counselling is available to any member of staff and can be arranged through the Headteacher. Staff can also self-refer for advice and support using the Schools Advisory Service.

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.

Longer Term Support

At Sherdley Primary we have a knowledgeable Pastoral Team who has received extensive training in supporting children and families through bereavement. A number of staff have completed online webinar training from Bereavement UK also linked to bereavement.