

**ST OSWALD'S
C OF E
PRIMARY SCHOOL**



TO SERVE ONE ANOTHER

Bereavement Policy

Policy Approved: February 2020

Next Reviewed: February 2021

Introduction

St Oswald's Primary School is fully committed to supporting all those affected by loss and death in a supportive and caring environment in which everyone can respond appropriately to individual circumstances.

Our school is fully committed to the emotional health and well-being of our children and young people and that of 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.

When home circumstances are changed because of a death in the family and all around is 'different', our school aims to be a place that both child and family can rely on, and gain some much needed support. If the death is of a child or member of staff, the whole school community will work together; with outside agencies as appropriate, to support each other.

The main aim of this policy is to provide a framework for all staff, both teaching and nonteaching, to give guidance on how to deal sensitively and compassionately in difficult and upsetting circumstances.

Links to other Policies

This policy links to the following policies

- Child Protection and Safeguarding
- Equal Opportunities
- Behaviour
- PSHE
- Healthy Schools

Aims and Objectives

This policy outlines practical measures to be taken when people are in shock, or upset, especially with sudden or multiple deaths or traumatic circumstances to include:-

- To ensure that there are designated, named members of the school staff who will provide support to 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 the community.
- To set out how to inform students/colleagues about a death and what to do when you are required to tell a student that someone close to them has died.
- To identify key staff within the school and LEA and clarify the pathway of support.
- To discern what support will be offered to staff/students if they have been bereaved.
- To set out clear procedures in respect of what to do in the case of a crisis or disaster situation on school premises or on a school trip.
- To ensure that all staff members are trained and are able to recognise common symptoms and behaviours associated with grief.
- To ensure that the contact details of local and national support agencies specialising in bereavement such as Cruse Bereavement Care and Child Bereavement UK are available.
- To set out a procedure on how to deal with media interest surrounding a death and designating two/three members of staff to act as media coordinators.
- All intentions of this policy endorse that the aim as we endeavour to counter any adverse effects of bereavement and maintain pupils' emotional well-being.

The Role of the Governing Body

- To approve the policy and ensure it is implemented.
- To review the policy every three years.
- To support the Head Teacher in overseeing the way in which the bereavement is tackled in the curriculum.

The Role of the Headteacher

- To monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.
- To respond to media enquiries.
- To keep the governing body fully informed.

The Role of the Local Authority

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

The Role of Pastoral Staff

To have bereavement support training and cascade the learning/practical ways of supporting bereaved pupils, to other staff.

Procedures

- Contact with the deceased's family should be established by 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.
- Staff should be informed before pupils and be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstances.
- Pupils who are affected should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them.
- 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 on-going 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.
- Where necessary, a press statement should be prepared by the Head Teacher.
- 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.

Staff Support

It is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for pupils and mutual support for each other and implementing this policy. Bereavement awareness training will be provided for all staff. We will ensure that members of staff are regularly consulted as to their training needs and training is provided as appropriate to keep up to date with developments.

Breaking News to Staff, Pupils and Families

This is usually done when a pupil or staff member has died. Publicly talking about a single pupil who has experienced a death of a parent or family member may not be the best thing to do.

- Speak to the family if possible, offer them condolences and support before ascertaining what they would like to happen. Give them a direct telephone number for someone they can contact in school.
- Obtaining factual information should be made a priority.
- It is essential that all staff are informed straight away, including lunch time supervisors and peripatetic teachers, ideally before pupils.
- Decisions need to be made about where pupils will be told, if this is necessary. Identify the most vulnerable pupils and what support they might need.
- Pupils should be told as soon as possible. This is best done in familiar groups by someone they know. A large school assemble is usually not ideal.
- Staff may need guidance on words to use and the approach to take.
- If necessary send a letter to families on the same day, if possible. A prepared script is attached (See Appendix 1-3) as it is difficult to find the right words when emotional and in shock.
- Consider including guidelines for parents on supporting bereaved children with the letter.

The First Few Days

- Map out the first few days after an incident. It is usually best to have minimum disruption to the timetable, but some flexibility may be required.
- Consider what the school approach will be if pupils or staff are too upset to attend lessons.
- If it is a teacher who has died, what will happen to his/her class?

Return to School

- Consider a home visit, return interviews, prior to the pupil returning to school.
- Ensure that the appropriate staff are aware and prepared.
- Inform their peers and prepare them on how to support their class colleague.
- Plan a quiet place where the pupil can go if necessary, alone or with a companion.

Funeral

- Establish whether the family would welcome involvement of members of the school community or if they wish to keep it private.
- Identify which members of staff and/or pupils may want to attend and the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport. It may be necessary to close the school for half a day/whole day.
- Decide whether to send flowers and/or make a collection.
- Cultural and religious implications need to be consideration.
- If necessary talk to the child regarding expectations of the funeral.

Support for the Bereaved Pupil

Not all children will need the support of specialist practitioners; they will need support from familiar people who care.

- Keep a routine, providing a sense of normality.
- Offer a safe place, away from an emotional intense atmosphere.
- Neutral space and people to share their feelings without the worry of upsetting a loved one (i.e. a surviving parent).

- Time to be themselves without feeling guilty (being with friends, time to play in a safe space outside the home environment).
- Regular correspondence with home, providing assurance about behaviours and general wellbeing, will ensure the child is managing the grief.
- Access to appropriate resources via Bereavement counselling, Healthy Schools or other support agencies.
- An individual link person to support the pupil/s when necessary.
- A suitable place in school for pupils who need some space if too upset to stay in the classroom and people to whom they can go for support.

Monitoring/Supporting Pupils

- Support may need to be offered to other vulnerable pupils.
- The anti-bullying message needs to be reiterated and monitored closely.
- Therapeutic books should be readily available to assist with counselling. These can be found in the Pastoral Mentors office.

Monitoring/Supporting Staff Members

- Supporting bereaved pupils will be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions. See list of outside agencies, including professionals from Children and Young People's Services that may offer help, both in the short and long term.
- Give staff time to attend the funeral if appropriate.
- Awareness of available resources and time to become familiar with what is available.

Support for Parents

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support.
- Send a letter of condolence from the school.
- Depending on the wishes of the family, give out information to appropriate people.
- Give the parents and/or family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who died.
- Send a representative to the funeral.
- Hold a collection or send flowers, as appropriate.
- Invite parents/family to any commemorative events held by the school, both at the time and in subsequent years.
- If memorial work has been completed, for example a remembrance book, this should be returned to the parents at an appropriate time and the pupils informed where it has gone.

Transition

It is vitally important to ensure that if a child has experienced bereavement that this information is passed on to the relevant persons when they move on to a new class or school.

Useful Website

www.childbereavementuk.org

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

www.griefencounter.org.uk

www.winstonswish.org

www.mind.org.uk

www.cruse.org.uk

Useful telephone numbers:

- Child Bereavement – Leeds – 0113 3503598
- Child Bereavement Network – 020 7843 6309
- Grief Encounter – 0808 802 0111
- Winstons Wish – 0808 802 0021
- Mind – 0113 3055800
- Cruse Bereavement Care Leeds – 0113 234 4150

Books dealing with death and loss

- Beyond the Rough Rock - Supporting a Child who has been Bereaved through Suicide - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley
- As Big As It Gets - Supporting a Child when Someone in their Family is Seriously Ill - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley
- The Secret C - Straight Talking about Cancer - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley
- I Miss You - First Look at Death - Pat Thomson

Storybooks available

- Grandpa- John Burningham
- Always and Forever – Alan Durant
- The Huge Bag of Worries – Virginia Ironside
- What on Earth Do you Do When Someone Dies? – Trevor Romain
- Badger’s Parting Gifts- Susan Varley
- Saying Goodbye to Daddy – Judith Vigna
- Waterbugs and Dragonflies – Explaining Death to Young Children

Appendix 1 – Template letter to parents

Suggested template 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 the school.

Sample letter on death of a pupil:-

Dear Parent

Your child's class teacher 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 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 to celebrate <Name's> life.

Yours sincerely,

Mr L Talbot
Head Teacher

Appendix 2 – Template letter to bereaved parents

'Sample letter to bereaved parents:-

Dear

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.

The school community at St Oswald's will miss him/her very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to his/her friends and classmates. He/She was a very much part of the school family community and will be greatly missed.

If there is anything that we can do to help with <Name's funeral service or any other memorial ceremonies, please do let us know.

Please be assured that you are in our thoughts at this very sad time and please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of support in any way.

With sympathy.

Yours sincerely,

Mr L Talbot
Head Teacher

Appendix 3 – Template letter to parents

Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a member of staff, permission must be gained from the deceased's family.

Sample letter on death of a staff member:-

Dear Parent

I am very sorry to have to inform you that a much-loved member of staff <name> has sadly died. The children were told today and many have been quite distressed to hear the news. No-one wants to see the 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 that there will be many parents who are also saddened by the news.

Children respond in different ways to bereavement, and may dip in and out of sadness, denial and anger and may wish to ask questions, this is normal and healthy.

You may find that 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.

We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Children who wish to attend will be welcome to do so. It is likely that the school will be closed on the morning or afternoon of the funeral as staff will, naturally, wish to pay their respects to a very popular colleague.

I am sorry to be the bearer of this sad news, and I appreciate an occurrence like this impacts on the whole school community. I am so very 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,

Mr Lee Talbot
Headteacher

Support and Further Suggestions for Teachers

Parents and carers often feel that teachers are experts on their children. They may 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. Teachers need not be experts on the subject but they do need to use sensitivity and their skills in understanding children's development and emotional needs.

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

- A death 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 child. To support the child 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 child, to protect themselves from more distress. Some adults will deny the bereaved child is grieving, as it will be too distressing for them to acknowledge the child'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 child 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 child to feel confused and unsafe.
- The child may feel resentment, jealousy or guilt towards the dead person or child. 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 child and the family become more stable and settled.
- Parents and carers need to be informed of the benefits that a child gains in being involved in the ceremonies and rituals that follow death. An explanation as to how mourning practices help children to express their feelings and come to terms with and accept the reality of their loss can be very beneficial.
- Teachers should 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 may require their own support structures. Supporting bereaved families, whilst rewarding, can also be emotionally draining.

Developmental Stages relating to an understanding of death

Age	Understanding of Death	Child's Needs	Phrases/Techniques
Infancy Birth – two years	Death as separation and /or abandonment Careful listening and watching Death is when the body stops working	Brief simple, honest explanations with familiar examples Reassurance of safety, parental support and attention	"We'll be here to take care of you.
Pre- school 2 – 6 Years Uses magical and intuitive thinking	Death as sleep, temporary, reversible, impersonal. Or as a person who comes to get you, can be catching Egocentric thinking causes feelings of responsibility or guilt	Clarification and expanded answers. Permission to attend funeral with assistance Acceptance of feelings without qualification, corrections or judgement.	Avoid euphemisms such as sleep, lost. Check and see if explanations are understood Expect repeat questions Acknowledge everyone's feelings of sadness and loss. Anticipate and counteract guilt Look out for unusual or subtle expressions of grief
School Years 6- 11 years Uses concrete thinking, begins rational thinking	Death is final, perhaps not inevitable Occurs to others Perhaps retaliatory	Reassurance that grief is OK, to feel bad is normal Open communication and opportunity to express feelings when ready. Encouragement to attend the funeral	Acknowledge adult feeling, including anger and guilt. It's OK to cry Accept fluctuating grief