



Bereavement Policy

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Date of Policy: November 2022

Reviewed: November 2025

Presented to the Full Governing Body: 09 December 2025

Date of Next Review: January 2027

Introduction

Woodcock Hill Primary School is a Rights Respecting School, this policy will ensure that, as duty bearers, we play our part in ensuring children receive support for their health and well-being during bereavement.

Article 24 (health and health services); Every child has the right to the best possible health. Governments must provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment and education on health and well-being so that children can stay healthy. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this. (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child)

Rationale

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

Grief and Loss

Depending on their age, children and young people will understand and experience grief and loss differently. It is quite normal for grief and loss to look different in different aged children, and it can often look like there are periods where the child has 'got over it', but this is a way of processing what is happening. The grief can often emerge later, or emerge, go away, and then emerge again in a cycle. All ages can, and do experience loss and grief.

Primary School Aged Children

- They understand that death is final and may begin to fear about death of close people, or even themselves.
- They may ask a lot of specific questions about the nature of the death, as a way of understanding, but may not have the language to express their emotions.
- You may see acting out, or attention seeking behaviours.
- They can believe that they caused the death and feel responsible, e.g. by being naughty. They may be extremely guilty.
- You may see them losing skills again and acting as a younger child.
- They might refuse to go to school.

What is important, and makes the difference, is open communication, normalising of emotions, and being there and present with a child or adult. Grieving children need support and presence more than advice.

Objectives

- 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 endeavour to counter any adverse effects of bereavement and maintain pupils' emotional well-being.
- The Children Act 1989 aimed to ensure that the welfare of the child was paramount, working in partnership with parents to protect the child from harm.

Roles

The Role of the Governing Board

- To approve policy and ensure its implementation, to be reviewed annually.
- To provide a Press statement (if appropriate / needed)

The Role of the Head Teacher – Mr. D. Higgins

- To respond to media enquiries
- To keep the governing board fully informed
- Write to the bereaved family (example letters in the appendix)
- Organise representation at the funeral, if appropriate
- Consider partial or full closure for funeral, if appropriate
- Write a letter to the school community, if appropriate

The Role of the Mental Health Lead – Mrs. S. Nash

- A member of SMT will be the first point of contact for the family/child concerned or member of staff.
- Mental Health Lead to attend training on bereavement and provide CPD to staff
- Liaise with external agencies
- To advise and support staff.
- To refer to external agencies for complex grief
- Ensure that during the transition to a new school information is shared on the bereavement the child has experienced

Staff

- To work with the child as appropriate and monitor progress
- To log their support for a child on My Concern
- To report on progress to SMT

Procedures

The school will work in partnership with parents / relatives / carers or member of staff. If there has been a bereavement, information on what the child has been told will be sought in order that the school does not say anything that could confuse or upset the child or relatives.

When the school is informed of bereavement or loss the following actions will be taken:

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Family Bereavement

Child

- A letter of condolence will be sent by the Head Teacher (example letters in the appendix).
- A member of SMT will contact the family and offer appropriate support.
- The family should be asked how much and what the child already knows and how they have been involved.
- The family should be asked how much they want to share with the school community, e.g. peers of the bereaved child, so a supportive culture and understanding can be created.
- It should be explained to the family how the school can support the child or family.
- Outside agency support will be sought if necessary.
- A member of staff known to the child will be assigned to the child and will monitor progress. They may work 1-1 or in a group with the child, if appropriate.

Member of Staff

- A letter of condolence will be sent by the Head Teacher
- Staff member will have compassionate leave
- Time off given for the funeral
- Named member of SMT will support and be point of contact

Death of a Child or Member of Staff

- Discussion should take place with the family and their wishes taken into account before decisions are taken on how and what to tell the children in school.
- Counselling services would be signposted or brought into the school setting, if needed.
- Consideration given to whole school work on grief and loss.

Terminally Ill pupil / Staff Member

In the event of a child or member of staff becoming terminally ill, their wishes and those of their family should always be respected.

Child

- Should the child wish to attend school, and it is safe to do so the parents would meet with the SENCO and a risk assessment will be completed.
- If appropriate, and agreed by the parents, the teacher will be supported by the Mental Health Lead to explain the situation to the children.
- Areas of the risk assessment may need to be shared with the children - as appropriate.
- A member of staff known to the child would be available for support for individuals after the children have been told.

Member of Staff

- Staff would be spoken to together to discuss how to explain the situation to their individual classes.

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- A decision would be made by SMT on who would speak with the member of staff's class.
- The class teachers would speak with their class, explain the situation and take questions.
- Staff would be on-call to support children when needed

Return to School

For the bereaved child or member of staff, returning to school may be traumatic, they will need to be carefully supported through this process.

A named member of SMT will over-see the process of reintegration back into school.

Child

- Although school can provide stability and normality, flexibility will be necessary. The child may need time to grieve and manage overwhelming feelings.
- A member of staff known to the child will be assigned to the child; this may be for 1-1 sessions or just to 'check-in' with the child – as appropriate.
- The assigned member of staff will monitor the child, put concerns on My Concern and feedback to the Mental Health Lead.
- A safe-space where the child can go if needed may be appropriate
- Staff should be aware of anniversaries as this can spark a revival of feelings of bereavement.
- It may be appropriate to refer for external support.

Member of Staff

- A return to school meeting will be carried out.
- A reduced timetable may be considered.
- A named member of SMT will meet with the member of staff regularly to ascertain how the member of staff is and if any support is required

Talking to a Bereaved Pupil

- Members of staff need to be available to listen and support if possible
- Pupils may be offered 1-1 sessions if appropriate
- It is ok to ask the child how they are after the bereavement. Staff shouldn't be afraid to approach the subject. If the child does not want to talk about it they will say, but by the member of staff not acknowledging it the child may feel people don't care. They need to know they can come to staff if they need to.
- Staff will be calm and show them they are listening and occasionally repeat what they have said to acknowledge their emotions.
- If people feel like crying, they should
- Staff should be aware of the use of language and phrases, ask the family for guidance on what the child has already been told / the language used. Respect the families' choice of vocabulary but be aware of misconceptions e.g. gone – may lead to the question gone where? Lost – can we find them? Died in their sleep – will they die in their sleep? The child will need things explaining to them and reassurance given.

Do

Let the child know you genuinely care.

Make time to be available and listen.

Allow them to express their feelings their way and let them know these feelings are normal.

Let them know it is OK to cry and to share their feelings.

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Be honest.

Don't

Stop the child talking.

Tell them how they should or should not feel.

Avoid them.

Be frightened of sharing your own feelings.

Support for Staff

Supporting bereaved pupils can be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions.

Further information is available at childbereavementuk.org

The helpline is 0800 02 888 40 or a live chat is available on the website 9am-5pm Mon-Fri.

Resources

Other agencies that can help and offer support when a bereavement has occurred:

The school has access to a box of bereavement books / stories that can be used to help support children.

These are kept in the SEN resource cupboard in the infant building.

www.childbereavementuk.org Tel: 0800 02 888 40

www.childline.org.uk Tel: 0800 1111

www.cruse.org.uk Tel: 0808 808 1766

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

www.winstonswish.org.uk Tel: 08088 020 021

A short film is available on the Child Bereavement UK website: childbereavementuk.org/for-teachers-when-a-pupil-returns-to-school-afterbeing-bereaved

APPENDIX

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 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 longtime 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> Head Teacher

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/her* very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to *his/her* friends and classmates. *He/She* was a much loved member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help as you plan’s funeral service or other memorial opportunities, please let us know. In time, we will also ensure that anything of’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,
Head Teacher

Sample Letter on Death of a Staff Member:

Dear parents,

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

We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Children who wish to attend will be welcome to do so, though it will not be compulsory. 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 very popular 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.....
Head Teacher