



Twickenham
PRIMARY ACADEMY

Managing Bereavement Policy

This policy is available to parents and prospective parents on the school's website and by request from the School Office. If you require a copy of this document in large print or audio format, please contact the School Office.

Policy Review Schedule

Policy Name	Managing Bereavement Policy
Review Frequency	Every 3 years
Statutory Policy	No
Policy Owner	Principal
Lead Reviewer	Principal
Approver and date of last approval	Principal, November 2023
Key review dates	Changes made
April 2020	Written by J. Smith
01/04/2022	Reviewed by P Gollob, no changes
October 2022	Reviewed by E Moscardini – no changes
November 2023	Reviewed by E Moscardini – no changes

1. Rationale

A death can affect the school community in many differing ways. Adults and pupils benefit from being kept informed of a death. Rumour and gossip can be very damaging and can lead to both old and young developing the attitude that death is not a topic to talk about.

At Twickenham Primary Academy we believe that bereavement and loss are an inevitable part of living and growing. We provide opportunities within our setting for children to develop their own appropriate range of emotional, spiritual and intellectual responses to managing these experiences. We believe that the ethos of the school based on openness and mutual support, provides a framework in which these experiences can be realised in a supportive manner. Bereavement affects everyone in different ways and for different periods of time. Whatever the level of understanding about bereavement, we have a duty to support any child when they could be feeling their most vulnerable, in the way that best meets their needs. By adopting a planned and considered approach the school can support the emotional wellbeing of the child, family and staff.

2. Aims

- To provide a framework for all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with difficult and upsetting circumstances.
- To meet the needs of all its children and staff and be a place that both child and family can rely on, and gain much support.
- For the whole school community to work together, with outside agencies as appropriate, to support each other.
- For staff to have time and space to work through their own feeling and become aware of the needs of the children
- For children to have the opportunity to tell their story, express their feelings, share their memories and develop coping strategies through support by sensitive staff.
- To have clear expectations about the way school will respond to the death/s, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.



- The family will feel supported and be given an opportunity to express their feelings of loss.

3. The death of a pupil or member of staff

- A member of the senior leadership team will take overall charge of ensuring that the policy is followed.
- **Communication:** Firstly check that the information you have is correct. If possible speak to family members as they may have specific wishes about what information they would like shared.
- Always try to communicate with staff first, then pupils. Where possible, this should be done face to face and with the whole group. However, where this is not possible, the whole staff team should be emailed.
- The senior leadership team will meet to decide how the news is to be delivered to pupils – deciding if it is more appropriate to do this in smaller groups with a familiar adult. A whole school assembly may not be appropriate or wanted, especially if it is an individual pupil who has been bereaved. However, there are times when this is the best way to give news especially when the death has affected the whole school and if the person who died was well known to the school community
- If a pupil dies by suicide Samaritans provide a step-by-step programme to support schools in explaining this to pupils. They can be contacted on 0808 168 2528
- **Procedures:** You need to be prepared when delivering sad news so a script will be used. Do not be surprised or afraid to show emotion, this is a human reaction.

Example script

I have some sad news to give you.

I need to tell you that _____ has died.

They died _____ in _____ (*only give where and when with family permission*)

Or

I do not know how they died but will try to find out.

Please do not share this on social media as it would be upsetting for the family.

I know that many of you will miss _____. (*do not eulogise*)

If you would like to talk to someone about this, please go to _____

Not all of you will feel sad and that is okay too.

- A letter will be sent to parents/carers (see appendices).
- Although school can provide stability and normality for staff and pupils, some flexibility may be necessary. Bereaved young people may need time to grieve and manage



overwhelming feelings, being able to leave a classroom and take time out in a safe space can be very welcome.

- **Book of condolence** SLT will decide if a book of condolence is appropriate. If there is to be one provided, it needs to be located in a safe, accessible and supervised space. The deceased's family will be invited to visit it, but if they are not ready to do this ensure photographs are taken to share with them later.
- Ensure that staff and pupils are consulted prior to removing any temporary tribute, giving notice to prepare them before hand.
The funeral: Consult the family to find out whether members of staff and/or pupils are welcome to attend.
- Depending on the situation, it may be appropriate to close the school to enable the school community to attend.
- If pupils wish to attend they must be accompanied by their parents.
- **Support for staff and pupils:** Seesaw will be consulted if appropriate. Supporting bereaved pupils can be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own emotions and reactions. At certain points in time, some staff members may be more vulnerable due to circumstances in their own lives.
- **Remembering:** consult the family of the person who died about any plans for a memorial, assembly or other tribute. A more permanent memorial (tree, garden, artwork, bench) may be appropriate, but in future the removal, relocation or replacement will need to be managed sensitively.

4. Supporting a bereaved pupil

- Most grieving pupils do not need a bereavement expert, they need the support of familiar and trusted adults. School with its familiar environment and routines can be a place of comfort for a bereaved young person.
- Meet with the pupil and their family/carers to establish what has happened and to discuss their return to school. Familiarise yourself with the circumstances surrounding the death. Make sure that what you say does not conflict with the family's wishes. This should be a familiar adult.

Meeting outline

- Acknowledge the death
- Find out how the pupil would like to share the news
- Organise a safe space for the bereaved pupil to go if they feel overwhelmed by their grief and need a 'time out'. They may be provided with a time out card. Ensure all staff working with the child is aware of what has been provided (including supply teachers).
- Consider whether to provide time out activities e.g. journals, art, books, screen time, memory boxes
- Set guidelines for communication – with the pupil, between members of staff and between home and school.



- **Longer term support:** The pupils will continue to grieve for the rest of their life and may require ongoing support. Significant dates or anniversaries, mother's/father's day etc may be particularly difficult. Regular contact with the family/carers and reviews with the pupil will help to build up an overall picture of how the pupil is coping.
- The grief may impact the pupil's progress. Some pupils work really hard and may put themselves under extra pressure to succeed, while others may find it difficult to focus in class and on their work. This may manifest in challenging behaviour, so time out cards will need to continue to be considered.
- Bereaved young people can find change difficult, so preparing them in advance (if possible) may help them to voice their worries and ease the process. They may need additional support for transitions.
- **Death, grief and bereavement in the curriculum:** Teaching the topic of death, grief and bereavement will help pupils to understand the feelings of grief and prepare them for the future. Informing parents and carers in advance will help gather information about previous bereavements so that vulnerable pupils can be prepared for the lesson. Recently bereaved pupils may find it helpful if they are given the option to work elsewhere or step outside, if they think it would be too painful to attend.
- **Support for staff:** Supporting a bereaved pupil can be emotionally draining. The staff involved must be supported by the SLT.
- **Pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities:** Young people with learning difficulties are sometimes assumed to need more help, this is not always true. The challenge is finding creative ways to communicate. Reassure them, as others, that being angry is OK. Offer opportunities for safe ways to express frustration and anger, feelings which are common in grief. For example, they could punch a cushion. They may require tight boundaries for this in order to keep other children safe.

5. Pupils with a life threatening illness

- **Communication:** consult with the family what they would like the classmates to know about the illness.
- Be honest and clear.
- A nurse involved may talk to the class about a friend's treatment and illness.
- Truthful explanations need to be given regarding absences, changing appearances, lack of energy, treatments and exclusion from activities such as sport. Seriously ill pupils are often extremely knowledgeable about their illness and may well be happy to provide the answers themselves.
- Expect usual standards of behaviour within the pupil's limitations, this helps reduce feelings of favouritism amongst other pupils. Other parents and carers at the school may have concerns surrounding their own children being upset or made anxious by a classmate that is seriously ill. The realisation that their children are contributing to an increased quality of life for the sick pupil may create a more positive approach.

6. Forces Families

- Bereaved forces children may experience multiple losses. They usually move due to posting every two years or so. Therefore having to move to a new house, or even country, quite quickly as the result of a death is doubly hard at what is already a difficult and stressful time.
- A child may have to change school mid term. This may be stressful as they may face integrating into a new school and having to make new friends when other children are in



already established friendships. Some service children attend boarding schools and will experience even greater change following a death.

- Forces families can experience a loss of identity when someone close dies. Forces families lose not just their own former family unit but also their belonging to a much wider one. The family's identity is very bound up with the role of the parent and, if that person dies, everyone is forced to rethink their place in the world.

7. Supporting children bereaved by murder or manslaughter

- Supporting a child around the death of someone important to them is one of the hardest things for an adult to do. When the death was by murder or manslaughter, this adds yet more emotional pain and trauma to an already devastating situation.
- The requirements of the criminal justice system can cause lengthy delays to rituals such as the funeral, which may hinder or complicate grieving.
- Every child is different; their response will be influenced by their age, their relationship with the person who died and also with the accused, if known.
- The child may be at significant risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder, particularly if they witnessed the crime or were involved in the incident in some way.
- The death may also be likely to be reported in the local or national news. There may be intrusion from the media or questions from people about what happened.
- When the person responsible for the killing is known to the child, this can complicate responses and reaction. Government statistics state that 75% of victims under 16 knew the main suspect.
- A family member may be a suspect, but for the child they are still a parent, brother or sister.
- Where one parent kills another, in effect a young person who has lost both parents in a manner that is both sudden and shocking. The death may mean that they have to move from their home and be looked after by relatives or by someone they are not familiar with, or do not know at all.

8. Responding to frightening events

Events in the news can cause parents, school staff and pupils to worry about themselves and others and can lead to adults feeling unsure as to what information they should give to young people. Frightening events can lead to a child to feel that the world is now a very unsafe place where the natural order of things is completely disrupted.

- Stick to normal routines and activities as much as possible.
- Manage your own anxiety so that you can provide calm reassurance to the pupil about their own safety.
- Give pupils opportunities to talk about events and to ask questions without forcing them to talk.
- Answer questions honestly.

Appendix 1:

Cultures and Beliefs

Buddhism

- Belief in rebirth but not of a soul passing from one body to another
- Approaches death with calmness and an open-minded attitude of acceptance
- Funerals are non religious events and is usually a cremation

Christianity

- Belief in one God
- Belief in afterlife vary with the different denominations
- For some there is a judgement and will go immediately to Heaven or Hell depending on how good or bad a life they led.
- Roman Catholics have a half-way place called Purgatory, where an impure soul can stay until fit to enter Heaven.
- Wreaths or bunches of flowers may be placed on the coffin.
- Traditional to wear black but this varies
- Often marked by a headstone but if cremated the family may have the ashes scattered.

Hinduism

- Reincarnation and a cycle of rebirths.
- Funeral is a celebration
- Hindus cremate their dead as it the soul that has importance , not the body which is no longer needed.
- White is the traditional mourning colour and usually traditional Indian clothing. If attending ask what the appropriate dress would be.
- The chief mourner lights the funeral pyre or presses the button for the cremation in the UK.
- Ashes may be taken back to India to be scattered in the River Ganges. In the UK, some areas of water have been designated as acceptable substitutes.
- Intense period of mourning lasts for 13 days and involves all family and friends.
- The immediate family of the person who has died is considered to be in mourning for a year.

Humanism

- Humanists are non-religious
- Celebrate the life of the person that has died, stories are shared and memories recalled.
- Led by a celebrant. Funeral, usual a cremation will be tailored to meet the family's wishes rather than following a set pattern.

Islam

- Muslims believe in life after death. Some will reside in Paradise, others in Hell.
- Muslims believe that death is part of Allah's plan and open expressions of wailing may be viewed as disrespectful to this belief.
- Muslims are always buried, not cremated, usually within 24 hours of the death.
- Ritual washing is performed by the family.



- Coffin is often plain and simple.
- Grave is aligned to enable the head of the person that has died to be placed facing the holy city of Mecca.
- Muslim graves are unmarked, but to meet UK requirements a simple headstone is used as a compromise.
- There is official mourning period of three days. For forty days after the funeral, relatives may wish to make regular visits to the grave.

Judaism

- Death is seen as a natural process and part of God's plan
- Respect shown to the dead and comfort to the living
- Mourners will recite the prayer Dayan HaEmet.
- The body should be interred as soon as is practical after death.
- When a Jewish person dies the body should not be left unattended.
- The rabbi or funeral home will coordinate someone to be left with the body.
- Open caskets are forbidden and bodies are buried, not cremated.
- Several periods of mourning: aninut 1-2 days, Shiva until the 7th day, Shloshim until the 30th day. Avelut is the final period of formal mourning which is only observed for the death of a parent and lasts for 12 months.
- The son of the person who has died recites the mourners Kaddish daily.

Sikhism

- Sikhs believe the soul goes through a series of rebirths, with the ultimate objective being to break the cycle and be reunited with God.
- Mourning is done discreetly.
- Body is cremated as soon as possible after death.

Practical Ideas

- Time out – to an agreed space, not wandering around the school
- Pocket comforter – soft piece of fabric, pebble or stone. Holding on to something solid can help a pupil remain grounded and control if upset.
- Keep a diary
- Happy/sad faces – give images of emotions to express how they are feeling
- Memory bracelet – make a friendship bracelet by plaiting together coloured threads.
- Make a pom-pom
- Dream catcher
- Worry dolls

Appendix 2:

Template letter to parents and carers

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear the sad news of *****'s death. There are no words to express our sadness and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through.

As a school community, we will miss ***** very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to his/her friends, classmates and teachers. ***** was a valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well liked/ popular/ friendly member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help as you plan *****'s funeral, please let us know.

We will continue to keep in touch and will support you in any way that we can.

With sympathy

Appendix 3

Template letter – death of a pupil

Dear parents and carers

Your child's class teacher/Principal had the sad task of informing the pupils of the death of *****, a pupil in Year ****.

***** died suddenly/ in hospital/after a short illness yesterday/last week/ over the weekend/ during the half term.

He she was a was a valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well liked/ popular/ friendly member of our school community and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some pupils 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 *****'s family and friends at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember *****'s life.

Yours faithfully

Principal

Appendix 4

Death of a member of staff

Dear parents/carers

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

The children were told today by ***** and many will be reacting to this news. When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some pupils may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

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

Yours faithfully

Principal