

ST. PETER'S CE PRIMARY SCHOOL, HESWALL

Bereavement Policy

2023-2024

Date Adopted: 18.06.24

Date of Review: Summer 2024

Committee: FGB

St Peter's CE 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. We believe that we need to ensure that all students have access to a happy, challenging and safe learning environment. To achieve this, we need to nurture a partnership with parents and students that is based upon openness, mutual respect and the highest expectations of all.

St Peters CE Primary School is fully committed to the emotional health and well-being of our children 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.

Rationale

A parent of children under the age of 18 dies every 22 minutes in the UK; around 23,600 a year. This equates to around 111 children being bereaved of a parent every day.

1 in 29 5-16 year olds has been bereaved of a parent or sibling - that's a child in every average class (Child Bereavement UK, 2017 statistics)

Staff in a primary school are certain to encounter pupils who have been deeply affected by bereavement. Close bereavements bring profound effects and changes to a child's life. There is no fixed pattern to how a child will grieve. It is almost inevitable therefore, that at some time any school will have to deal with a death that impacts the whole school community. Death is something that we do not like to think about, so when we are faced with it, we often find ourselves underprepared.

Additional information and resources can be accessed at
www.childbereavement.org.uk

Aims and Objectives

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

1. To identify key staff within the school and LA, resources and further support services to help the whole school community work together.
2. To provide a framework for all staff, teaching and non-teaching to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with difficult and upsetting circumstances.
3. To have clear expectations about the way school will respond to the death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.
4. To support pupils and/or staff before (where applicable) during, and after bereavement.
5. To meet the needs of all its children and staff and to be a place that both the child and family can rely on, and gain much needed support.
6. For children to have the time and opportunity to tell their story, express their feelings, share their memories and develop coping strategies through support by caring and sensitive staff.

Guidelines for staff and governors

A death can affect the school community in different ways and depends on:

- The role that the deceased person had in school.
- How well known they were in the local community
- Circumstances surrounding the death, particularly suicide, or other violent or sudden deaths.

Rumour and gossip can be damaging and can lead to both young and old developing the attitude that the death is not a topic to talk about. Children and young people have a healthy curiosity and if they are not informed of the circumstances, or feel they are unable to ask questions, their normal grief process can be affected.

Roles and Responsibilities

The governing board will be responsible for:

- Overseeing the implementation of this policy.
- Reviewing this policy with the headteacher on an annual basis to ensure its effectiveness.

The headteacher will be responsible for:

- The overall implementation of this policy.
- Liaising with external agencies, as appropriate, including the clergy.
- Informing governors and staff when a death occurs and arranging for pupils to be informed, as appropriate and with approval from the family.
- Being the first point of contact for staff, pupils and parents directly involved in a death, or designating this role to another appropriate member of staff.
- Responding to any enquiries from the media or the wider school community or appointing a member of staff to undertake these duties.
- Ensuring staff have the necessary training to support bereaved pupils and to deliver sensitive news.
- Liaising with the media as required.
- Monitoring media and social media activity regarding the death.
- Respecting the family's wishes in relation to what information can be provided to the media.

All staff members will be responsible for:

- Undertaking any bereavement support training arranged by the headteacher.
- Seeking support from pastoral staff as appropriate.
- Supporting their colleagues and pupils following a death, as appropriate.

The initial response

If a family or member of staff contacts the school to inform them of a death, the member of staff that answers the phone will transfer the call to the headteacher or the most senior member of staff available.

If the school is made aware of the death through a source other than the family, the headteacher will contact the family either by phone or through a home visit.

The headteacher will gather factual information about what has happened and establish the family's wishes with regards to what information will be communicated to the school community and how, taking into consideration the families cultural or religious beliefs.

If a death affects the entire school, e.g. the death of a pupil or member of staff, the headteacher will inform the family that staff and pupils will be informed as soon as possible.

If the death affects an individual member of staff, e.g. the death of a relative, the headteacher will ask the member of staff if they would like this to be communicated to any of their colleagues. If it is decided that the death will be communicated, the headteacher will discuss with the staff member what information will be communicated and how they would like it to be delivered.

If a death affects an individual pupil, e.g. the death of a parent, the headteacher will ask the family if they would like this to be communicated to the school community. If it is decided that the death will be communicated, the headteacher will discuss with the family, and the pupil, if possible, what information will be communicated and how the family would like it to be delivered.

If the death of a pupil's family member occurs while the pupil is at school, a member of the pupil's family will be asked to come to the school to inform the pupil of what has happened and to take them home. If this is not possible, arrangements will be made for a member of staff to take the pupil home.

The headteacher will make contact with any other agencies as required, e.g. the police, and will decide if any temporary variation needs to be made to the school timetable, e.g. rearranging or cancelling certain lessons.

In the event of the death of the headteacher, the deputy headteacher will be responsible for the duties outlined above.

Spiritual guidance at this difficult time can be offered to the family through contact with the clergy/rector at Heswall Parish.

Guidelines for informing staff and governors

- Arrange a staff meeting as soon as practicable. Identify absent staff.
- If a death has occurred in a holiday period, make sure that all staff are informed. Use your usual methods of communication to break this news to staff.
- Tell the story of what happened leading up to the death.
- Give a factual explanation of how the death occurred.
- Be prepared for obvious upset and feelings of anger/guilt. People may connect the incident to their own personal experience of bereavement, so feelings about past bereavements may need to be discussed. This is perfectly natural.

- To enable absent staff to feel part of a caring team, arrangements should be made to inform them over the telephone if a personal visit is impractical. Consider the relationship between the absent colleague and deceased.
- For a death that may attract media coverage (e.g. if the member of staff was a well-known personality or died tragically), identify a nominated spokesperson (e.g. Headteacher, Chair of Governors) to provide a 'news statement' at an agreed time, as a way of dealing with media intrusion. Liaison with the individual's family is essential, prior to reporting information to the media, in order to respect their wishes and privacy.
- Establish good lines of communication with all relevant parties, this will always include family and staff, in other cases it may involve communication with emergency services, health, the Educational Psychology service, Social Care and other support services.
- Provide details of someone who can be available to talk things through with a member of staff, parent or child if they are finding the situation particularly hard. This person could advise the family of support services available if required.
- Nominate staff to prepare a letter to parents and carers.
- Provide staff with a script about what has happened so that consistent information is given to all of the pupils. Include where possible some answers to difficult questions that staff may be asked by the children, to prevent them needing to think of appropriate responses on the spot.
- Encourage everyone to consider how to meet their own support needs and take care of themselves, this may be from friends, family, support services and/or buddying up with other members of staff. Provide contact details for support in your local area.

Guidelines for informing Pupils

The headteacher will have a discussion with the family about whether all pupils need to be informed about the death. If the death affects the whole school, e.g. the death of a staff member or pupil, the headteacher will strongly recommend to the family that all pupils should be informed; however, if the death does not affect the whole school, it may be more appropriate to just inform certain groups of pupils. The headteacher will make the final decision regarding which pupils will be informed.

Where possible, pupils will be informed about the death in small groups at the same time by a member of staff that is familiar to them.

Pupils with specific needs that may influence their response to being informed about the death will be identified and told separately. These needs include the following:

- Pupils that had a long-term and/or close relationship with the individual who has died
- Pupils with a history of loss
- Pupils with SEND
- Pupils who have difficulty managing their emotions or behaviour

Staff responsible for informing pupils will use the script provided to them. To ensure all pupils are told about the death in an age-appropriate way, a number of scripts may be created and distributed to staff with clear instructions of which script to use for which year group.

Pupils will be given time to ask questions about what has happened and to talk about how they are feeling. Any questions that are asked by pupils will be answered factually. Pupils will be told where they can go to in school for support and will also be directed to any external support.

Guidelines for informing parents

The headteacher will have a discussion with the family about whether any parents need to be informed about the death. If the death affects the whole school, e.g. the death of a staff member or pupil, the headteacher will strongly recommend to the family that all parents should be informed; however, if the death does not affect the whole school, it may be more appropriate to just inform parents that are directly affected, if any.

A letter will be sent to parents about the death. The letter will contain the basic, factual information about the death, information about how the school is supporting pupils, how they can support their children, and who to direct questions or concerns to.

Funerals

If appropriate, the headteacher will discuss with the family whether any staff, governors or pupils are able to attend the funeral. With the family's approval, the headteacher will arrange for the school to be represented at the funeral and identify which staff and pupils may want to attend.

The headteacher and chair of governors will decide if it is necessary for the school to be fully or partially closed during the funeral. Necessary cover arrangements will be made for staff attending the funeral.

The media and social media

Any communication with the media or social media activity will be agreed with the family. Only the appointed media spokesperson will deal with media enquiries and communications. Staff, governors and pupils will not respond to any media enquiries themselves or make any public statements about the death.

Staff, governors and pupils will not post any information about the death on social media. The media spokesperson will investigate any post made regarding the death and will refer any concerns to the headteacher. If information about the death is circulated on social media prior to the school making an official statement, the headteacher and media spokesperson will release a statement on the school's social media channels, with the agreement of the family, to prevent rumours from spreading.

Comments and other activity on school-posted social media statements will be monitored and moderated by the media spokesperson. If staff, governors or pupils find any false, negative or malicious information being posted about the death on social media, they should report this to the headteacher.

If a member of staff is found to have been posting content on social media or providing information to the media that is false, negative or malicious, action will be taken in line with the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure. If a pupil is found to have been posting content on social media or providing information to the media that is false, negative or malicious, action will be taken in line with the Behavioural Policy.

The headteacher will be the main point of contact between the school and the family or will appoint another member of staff to this role where necessary. The headteacher will invite the family into the school to discuss how the school can best support them. The family's wishes and feelings will always be considered and respected when making decisions and conducting activities relating to the death.

Support for the family

Any support that is put in place will be decided on a case-by-case basis, depending on the family's needs and wishes. Support may include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Sending a letter of condolence
- Sending flowers and or donations to a chosen charity of the families choice
- Giving the family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died
- Inviting the family to commemorative events held by the school
- Spiritual guidance and support can be offered to the family through contact with the clergy/rector at Heswall Parish.

Support for pupils

Pupils that have experienced a significant bereavement, e.g. of a family member

A member of staff that is familiar with the pupil will be appointed to act as their main point of contact – the pupil will be made aware of who the staff member is. The headteacher will contact the pupil's family to discuss whether the pupil will be attending school. Any support put in place for a pupil will be pupil-led, based on their needs and wishes.

When deciding what support will be put in place for a pupil, the impact the death will have on the pupil will always be considered in the context of pre-existing factors. The following contextual factors will be considered:

- The circumstances surrounding the death, e.g. was it under traumatic circumstances, was the death expected, or did multiple people die?
- The relationship between the pupil and the person who has died.
- The ability of the pupil's family to support them following the death, e.g. if a pupil's parent has died, how able is the surviving parent to support the pupil?
- Family factors such as size, financial state, structure, style of coping, communication and stressors that affect the child.
- The support the pupil has from their peers and other organisations and people.
- Characteristics of the pupil, including their age and any SEND they have.

The pupil will be a part of discussions regarding who should be informed about the death and how, where appropriate.

If a pupil chooses to attend school immediately after a bereavement, they will be allowed a flexible timetable and staff members will be made aware that the pupil may not be able to work to their usual capacity. The designated staff member will keep in communication with the pupil's family to inform them about how the pupil is doing. If the pupil is absent from school following the bereavement, they will be made aware of who has been informed about what has happened and what they were told.

The designated staff member will make regular contact with the pupil during their absence. The headteacher, designated staff member, pupil and the pupil's family will make arrangements for the pupil's return to school, e.g. a phased return.

If a death occurs soon before or during a time where the pupil will take an exam, the headteacher will report the circumstances to the exam board who will decide if special considerations apply. If a pupil misses an exam due to the death of a close family member or friend, the headteacher will report this to the appropriate exam board who will then make a decision as to whether special considerations can be applied.

Any safeguarding concerns regarding a bereaved pupil will be dealt with in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

Support for all pupils

All pupils, even those not directly affected by the death, will need to be supported following a death, particularly if the death affects the whole school community, e.g. the death of a staff member. Pupils will be given the opportunity to speak to a member staff. Staff will talk to pupils about what has happened using age-appropriate and developmental stage appropriate language.

Following a death in the school community, pupils will be invited to take part in remembrance activities, e.g. remembrance assemblies.

Staff will identify any pupils that may need more direct support and make a referral to the headteacher who will assess what support might be required in collaboration with pastoral staff.

If deemed appropriate, spiritual guidance can be offered to the pupils through contact with the clergy/rector at Heswall Parish.

Support for staff

Staff directly affected by the death, e.g. if they are a relative or close friend of the individual that has died, will be identified and the appropriate support will be put in place. The level of support will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the headteacher, and may include the following:

- Ensuring the staff member is not left on their own
- Arranging for lessons or other duties to be covered
- Organising bereavement leave
- Arranging for external support to be provided
- Spiritual guidance can be offered to the family through contact with the clergy/rector at Heswall Parish.

Returning to school after bereavement

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. It can be helpful to meet with the pupil and their family/carers to establish what has happened and to discuss their return to school. This could be a familiar adult, such as the class teacher, teaching assistant, SENCO, Deputy or Headteacher.

The purpose of this meeting should be to:

- Acknowledge the death.
- Find out how the pupil would like to share their news.
- Organise a safe space for the bereaved pupil to go if they feel overwhelmed by their grief and need a 'time-out'. How will they inform staff of this? For example, a 'time-out' card, a non-verbal signal or message. How will this be communicated to all staff?
- Consider whether to provide 'time-out' activities – journals, art and craft, books, screen time, memory boxes etc.
- Set guidelines for communication – with the pupil, between members of staff and between home and school.
- Consider providing support for peers when they have a bereaved friend. A short film is available on the Child Bereavement UK website:

childbereavementuk.org/for-teachers-when-a-pupil-returns-to-school-after-being-bereaved

Long term support

The pupil/staff member 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. There may be changes in their behaviour, how will these be managed?
- Bereaved young people can find change difficult, so preparing them in advance (where possible) may help them to voice their worries and ease the process.
- Consider vulnerable pupils as they may need additional support, particularly on transition.

End