



# Bereavement

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This policy is written using guidance from:





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Disclaimer: This policy was correct at the time of writing using current guidance from Child Bereavement UK.

## 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 wider school community at Elmbrook School there are often recently bereaved children who are struggling with their own situation. Sometimes the entire school community may be 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.

***“A child can live through anything so long as he or she is told the truth and is allowed to share the natural feelings people have when they are suffering.” Eda Le Shan***

## Introduction

We understand that bereavement is faced by members of our school community at different times and that when the loss is of a member of our school community – such as a child or staff member, it can be particularly difficult. Pupils need to be supported when they experience family bereavements and other significant losses in the course of their lives while they are at school.

This policy will provide guidelines to be followed after a bereavement. The aim is to be supportive to both pupils and adults, and for staff to have greater confidence and be better equipped to cope when bereavement happens. Every death and the circumstances in which it occurs is different and this policy has been constructed to guide us on how to deal professionally, sensitively and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances.



Elmbrook School is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and pupils. We are dedicated to the continual development of a 'healthy school'. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that support and prepare pupils for coping with separation or loss of a loved one, either through death or divorce.

## Objectives

The core intentions of the policy are:

- To support pupils and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement.
- To ensure that all staff members are trained and can recognise common symptoms and behaviours associated with grief.
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and community.
- To identify key staff within school and the LA and clarify the pathway of support.
- To set out how to inform pupils/colleagues about a death and what to do when you are required to tell a pupil that someone close to them has died.
- 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 the contact details of local and national support agencies specialising in bereavement are available.
- The Children Act 1989 aimed to ensure that the welfare of the child was paramount, working in partnerships with parents to protect the child from harm. All intentions of this policy endorse that aim as we endeavour to counter any adverse effects of bereavement and maintain pupils' emotional well-being.

## Roles and Responsibilities

### **The role of the Management Committee**

- The nominated Governor with responsibility for bereavement is **Richard Hall**, as part of his role as Health and Wellbeing Governor.
- To review practice in school.

### **The role of the Headteacher**

- To be the first point of contact for the family/child concerned.
- To respond to media enquiries.
- To keep the Management Committee fully informed.



## The role of the Leadership Team

- To monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.
- To advise and support staff, including signposting where needed.
- To consult on referral pathways and the identification of complex grief.
- To provide bereavement support training to all staff, and specific, more in depth training as necessary.
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities.
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary, secondary or specialist schools.
- Implementing the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.

## Immediate Procedures Following a Death

An accepted procedure outline will not enable everyone to feel comfortable in dealing with the practicalities of death and bereavement. Each bereavement is unique and comes with its own specific challenges; however, it is useful to have a framework to build on. One of our main concerns must be the immediate family of the deceased, and as a school, we state our commitment to any such family as may need practical, emotional and ongoing support.

1. Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the Headteacher 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.
2. Staff should be informed before pupils and be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.
3. Pupils who are affected should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them.
4. 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,
5. 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.
6. Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate.
7. 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.



8. Where necessary, a press statement should be prepared by the Headteacher.
9. 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.

## The Death of a Pupil

The school may be notified in a number of ways. Upon notification of the death of a pupil:

- Past experience has shown that if death occurs parents usually let the school know directly and the person answering the phone will put them through to the most senior member of staff on site.
- Where death occurs in the holidays or at weekends the parents will contact whoever they can – they may have the phone number of a member of staff who cares for the child at home for example.
- In that instance the member of staff who takes the call will immediately contact the most senior member of the school team possible and that person will then assume responsibility for the dissemination of the information.

### **If A Child Dies In School**

- If any member of staff has concerns regarding a child's health they will contact a first aider and ideally the Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher.
- In the case of serious concern, the school will call for an ambulance. Due to the seriousness of the situation, this decision can be taken by the first aider or a member of the SLT.
- Immediately inform the Headteacher or, in her absence, the most senior member of staff on site.
- The Headteacher will then ensure that the parents are contacted and seek their agreement to meet the ambulance at the hospital.
- If the child stops breathing a trained school staff member will administer CPR. In some cases, parents may have given the school a protocol to be followed in the event of a serious health incidence. In rare cases, this may include a request that mechanical resuscitation is not administered. However, whilst the school respects the parents' preference in this matter, due to the statutory responsibility imposed on the school regarding "duty of care", the need for school staff to administer manual CPR overrides such preference. Once the ambulance has arrived at school, the child is given over to their care and it is the ambulance team's decision as to where the child is taken or which form of treatment is administered.
- Where the parents have given the school a protocol to be followed in the event of an emergency medical issue occurring - e.g. no resuscitation - this protocol will be handed to the paramedics.



- Any change in circumstance following the first call to parents should be reported to them as soon as possible. **NB:** Staff must not impart shocking or worrying news to a parent if they are travelling in a car alone.
- Once the child is placed in the ambulance a member of staff will be appointed to travel to the hospital either in the ambulance or in their own transport. The purpose of this is to be a familiar face to the child's family on their arrival at the hospital. This person will remain in regular contact with the Headteacher and/or the Deputy Headteacher.
- The school will notify the LA if there is a death in school at the earliest opportunity. All press enquiries are to be routed through the Headteacher, Chair of Governors and LA Media Team.

### **If a Child Dies on a School Trip**

If a crisis situation occurs whilst a child is out on an educational trip, then the adult with the child - or the teacher in charge - should telephone for an ambulance first and then contact the school to inform the Headteacher. The school will then take the responsibility of contacting the parents. Once the ambulance team reaches the child, the child becomes the responsibility of the ambulance team, and they will direct any subsequent actions. The off sites visits protocols give guidance for such situations and should be followed. The school will notify the LA, at the earliest opportunity, if there is a death out of school. The above procedures and protocols will then apply.

### **The Death of a Member of Staff**

All of the principles and procedures listed above apply to the death of a staff member. For a letter template see Appendix 1.

In addition to the above, the school will notify the LA as employer. Where appropriate to the wishes of the staff member's family, the Headteacher will seek permission from the Chair of Governors to close the school so that all members of staff are able to attend the funeral.

### **Sharing Information**

It is important to agree, with the parent, before the school can take on the role of informing concerned parties within, or outside, the school community. Evidence from many schools has shown that parents are often happy to have this burden taken away from them, as they have many people unconnected with the school to contact. There can be no definitive list of people to contact and, therefore, it will be different for each child. The school should ensure that all people who are close to the child are told in a sensitive and supportive manner rather than risk them hearing it 'on the



grapevine'. The school needs to ensure it does not add to the sorrow by leaving people feeling marginalised.

The following people should be considered:

- Current school staff not in school that day – including admin and premises staff
- Previous school staff who worked closely with the child
- Social Work team if applicable
- SEN team
- Medical team – the school nurse for example
- Taxi driver and escort
- Chair of Governors
- Other professionals who work with the child – SEMH team, LCI team, Educational Psychologist, Speech & Language therapist etc
- Other parents – if children have been informed, the school needs to send a note to parents informing them of the loss, and they may need to support or comfort their children. See Appendix 1. Some parents may need to be telephoned if their relationship is closer but who may not have been informed by the family.

The process for telling the other pupils will be decided by the Headteacher following consultation with the teaching staff. For example, with different aged pupils there will be different decisions made and the class teacher of the class with the loss will usually be the best person to tell the rest of the children in that class. It is important that staff avoid adding worry – for example, if the child died in hospital we do not want to give children a fear of hospitals. Although the finality of death cannot be diminished, if there are mitigating circumstances that may help - such as that the child was in pain and now is free of pain - this can be used to help alleviate sorrow. Children must be told that, while they may feel sad, they do not have to feel guilty if they go on to have fun and pleasure in their day ahead. They must not feel obliged to assume a burden of grief. Children must be allowed to ask questions at this time or at any point in the following days or weeks. Staff must answer honestly and to the best of their knowledge.

## Responding to the Media

Some deaths, particularly those in sudden or traumatic circumstances, attract media attention. All members of staff are advised not to respond to journalists and to refer all enquiries to the Headteacher, who will make a considered response after seeking assistance from the Local Authority Press Office.



## The First Few Days...

Elmbrook School will try to map out the first few days (and possibly weeks) after a death or incident in the most supportive way possible. It is usually best to have minimum disruption to the school timetable, but some flexibility may be required. We will consider what the school approach will be if pupils and/or staff are too upset to attend lessons. If a teacher has died, it will need to be discussed what happens to his/her class. As a bereaved child returns to school, home visits and return interviews may be appropriate prior to the child returning. The appropriate staff need to be aware and prepared how to support the child in the best way possible, and the child's peers also need preparing on how to support their classmate.

## The Funeral

- It is essential to sound out the family's wishes. The family may well welcome involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to keep things private.
- The Headteacher and/or the Deputy Headteacher will make arrangements for the school to be represented at the funeral, and identify which staff and pupils may want to attend, together with the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport. For some schools it is appropriate to close, for others it is not, consequently difficult decisions will sometimes have to be made concerning attendance.
- Will flowers be sent and/or a collection made? Involve staff and pupils in the decision.
- Cultural and religious implications need consideration.
- If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed. Past experience has shown that this can be helpful in their grieving.

## Memory/Celebration Assemblies

It may be appropriate to hold a memory assembly for the child. Staff need to be able to show pupils that it is perfectly normal to feel upset at the loss of a friend and that helpful rituals, prayers, and remembering can be shared in a manageable way together.

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.



## On-Going Support

Following a bereavement or significant loss, we believe that children and adults alike have the right to:

- be given space and time to grieve;
- be given support from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate – if possible, of their own choice;
- encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement.

We recognise that

- grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real;
- there is no timescale to grief; it is lifelong and is not a linear process to move through;
- differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment;
- the death of a child has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/care team of that child and every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far reaching contacts.

### **For a Bereaved Pupil**

- Not all children will need the support of specialist practitioners; they will need support from familiar people who care, and a key person is essential.
- Keep a routine, providing a sense of normality.
- Offer a safe place, away from an emotionally intense atmosphere - this should be a neutral space and person to allow the child to share their feelings without the worry of upsetting a loved one (eg a surviving parent).
- Provide time to be themselves without feeling guilty, eg being with their friends, time to play outside.
- Ensure a regular dialogue with home, providing assurance about behaviours and general wellbeing.
- Provide a place in school where a child can go if they are too upset to be in the classroom.
- Provide signposting and access to appropriate resources, eg bereavement counselling.

### **For Staff**

Following bereavement, it is only to be expected that some members of staff will be emotionally affected and would benefit from the provision of some time for reflection.

The following support may be helpful:

- A specific room could be allocated for the duration of a lunchtime to enable staff to meet and share their thoughts over a coffee or tea. It should be



emphasised that anything shared on such occasions should be held as confidential and not for public airing.

- Access to one to one time with a member of staff who is trained in bereavement support.
- Give staff time to attend the funeral if appropriate.
- The Educational Psychology team offer counselling support and staff will be reminded about this service.
- Availability of information about accessing bereavement support outside of school, eg: CRUSE, Vivup, Laura Centre.

### **For Pupils**

Experience in many schools has shown that most pupils can be supported by the school staff.

- In most cases, each child will have a favoured member of staff to approach.
- The PSHE co-ordinator and Health & Wellbeing Lead will ensure that we have suitable books and other materials to help children discuss death and come to terms with loss.
- Social Stories and therapeutic stories may be one way to help pupils to understand loss.
- The anti-bullying message needs to be reiterated and monitored closely.
- The SEMH team and the Educational Psychology team can offer support to pupils who may need more help.

### **For The Family**

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support. Send a letter of condolence from the school.
- Give parents and family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died.
- Send a representative to the funeral.
- Hold a collection /flowers to be sent 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 wall or book, then this should be returned to the parents at an appropriate time, and pupils informed where it has gone.
- If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed.

Parents will be told that they are welcome in the school and will be encouraged to come and visit. Past experience has shown that this can be helpful in their grieving. The first visit to the school is often difficult and will be arranged sensitively in accordance with the parents' wishes. It will then be for the parents to decide if they wish to maintain ongoing links. Each family will be different, with differing needs.



Therefore, the school will always be there to act as a source of support and information.

## Times of 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.**

## Appendices

Appendix 1 - Suggested templates for letters to parents

Appendix 2 - List of online resources and information



## Appendix 1

### Suggested templates for letters 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/Carers,

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <group>/<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 very 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 and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion while others may feel numb. 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 celebration in the school in the next few months as a means of remembering <Name's> life.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher



## 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.

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 you plan <Name's> funeral service or other memorial opportunities, please let us know. In time, we will also ensure that anything of <Name's> that remains in school is returned to you, including photos we may have on our 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,

Headteacher



## Sample letter on the death of a staff member:

Dear Parents/Carers,

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 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 at [www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org).

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 their 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 sincerely,

Headteacher

## Appendix 2



## List of Online Resources and Information

[www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)

A useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community.

[www.rainbows.co.uk](http://www.rainbows.co.uk)

The website of Rainbows Hospice Care, our local Children's Hospice. Gives details of its facilities and the support it offers.

[www.thelauracentre.org.uk](http://www.thelauracentre.org.uk)

A bereavement support service and counselling for children who have suffered a loss.

[www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)

A bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

[www.bhf.org.uk/smallcreature](http://www.bhf.org.uk/smallcreature)

British Heart Foundation site to help children come to terms with loss using cartoon creatures. An animated film and we have a printed pack to go with it.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-oxfordshire-44157986/bereavement-lessons-talking-to-children-about-death>

Information on the way bereavement affects children

<http://www.cruse.org.uk>

An organisation offering local bereavement support to both adults and children

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk>

Federation of organisations