



PARKSIDE MIDDLE SCHOOL

BEREAVEMENT POLICY

Introduction

Every year 20,000 children under the age of 16 years will be bereaved of a parent and many more will experience the death of someone else special in their life. In addition to these individual pupils, schools may also experience the death of a child at the school or a staff member. It is almost inevitable therefore, that at some time all schools will have to deal with a death that affects the school community.

As children spend a large proportion of their time at school, teachers and staff members may be the primary source of care and support.

Death is something that most people choose not to think about so when faced with it we often find ourselves ill prepared. The purpose of this Bereavement Policy is to help everyone involved at a time when there may be shock, upset and confusion, ensuring that there is as little disruption as possible, effective communication takes place and each member of the Parkside Middle School community is supported to help them through a very difficult time.

The policy is provided to all staff and should be read in conjunction with the following policies:

- Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy
- Critical Incident Policy

The school's aim is to provide support to pupils who experience bereavement within their families, and support to pupils and staff on the death of a member of the school community, whether it be an adult or a child.

The way in which children and young people are treated when someone important in their lives dies has a profound effect on their future ability to manage their own lives. The caring and supportive school environment has a key role to play and we recognise that every situation is unique and demands careful handling, with the wishes of the pupil or family being of paramount importance.

This policy should be viewed as a framework rather than anything prescriptive, acknowledging that different strategies and procedures may be necessary in the various parts of the school, appropriate to the age of the pupils concerned. Much of the information and guidance in this policy follows the advice given by the Child Bereavement Charity and further advice can be found on their website, www.childbereavement.org.uk.

Objectives

The core intentions of the policy are:

- 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 identify key staff within school and LA, and clarify the pathway of support.

The role of the governing body

- To approve policy and ensure its implementation, to be reviewed in two years.

The role of the Headteacher

The Head Teacher will have overall responsibility for support and liaison in the event of a death or traumatic loss. If the Headteacher is absent, then the Senior Deputy Headteacher will take responsibility.

- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities.
- Co-ordinating the planned action to manage school related incidents in and beyond the school.
- To monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.
- To respond to media enquiries.
- To be first point of contact for the family/child concerned.
- To keep the governing body fully informed.
- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff.

The role of the Local Authority

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

The role of pastoral staff

- To have bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff.

The impact of death on young people

The impact of death upon children should not be underestimated. While it is true that their understanding of death develops over a prolonged period, it is clear that:

- Young children can suffer deeply because of the death of a member of their family, or a close friend.
- This suffering is more intense when they do not have opportunities to talk or to grieve openly, and do not feel that those close to them recognise their feelings - even though they themselves may not yet have the words to express them.
- There is sometimes a tendency not to talk about how they feel as they do not wish to place an extra burden on for example the remaining parent if their father or mother has died. The child, in effect, might try to manage on their own, which can be very difficult for them.

Reactions to bereavement can include:

- Withdrawal
- Open distress
- Tears
- Panic
- Aggression
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Other signs of stress.

Bereaved children may act out this stress in unexpected ways, such as:

- Nervous
- Giggling
- Stoical bravery
- Untypical aggression
- Becoming the class clown
- Or total denial

They may also become extremely tired, to the point of exhaustion, as so much emotional energy goes into dealing with the loss and the stress of the changes in the family. For some children, there may be additional terrors; if the death has been referred to as 'falling asleep' or 'being taken', then it is sometimes the case that children become afraid of sleep; words like 'loss' or 'lost' can put fear into a young child's mind, too, and they are afraid of losing other family members. Children can become particularly clinging and attached to the members of the family who remain.

An expected bereavement

In addition, the death of a terminally ill pupil or member of staff can be planned for with full support being given before the actual event. Often pupils will want to create a memory board to allow their emotions to be shared with others. Open discussion and realistic language are often the best way to deal with issues that arise. Once the pupil or member of staff dies then it is important that all emotional support is given and the need to mourn is recognised.

The impact of the death of a pet or loved animal

At Parkside Middle School we are aware of the emotional impact the death of a family pet or, for example, a horse or farm animal, might have on a pupil or a member of staff. Emotional support can be offered. Whilst much of the Bereavement Policy deals with the death of people, we should not underestimate how important the death of a pet can be to pupils and staff.

Responding to a death

Breaking the news to staff, pupils and families

News of the death of a close member of a child's/staff's family or the death of a pupil or member of staff must be passed to the Headteacher who will immediately try to obtain factual information, avoiding unnecessary rumour or assumption, which could only lead to further distress.

Where possible the Headteacher will liaise directly with the family and agree exactly what information should be passed on to staff and pupils. Staff will be informed straight away, ideally before the pupils, remembering part time and peripatetic staff that may not be in school that day. Discussions must take place with family and their wishes taken into account before any information is given to the pupils. Pupils should, however, be told as soon as possible to avoid rumour and uncertainty.

This is best done in familiar groups by someone they know, probably their class teacher. A large assembly is not usually ideal, particularly for young children. Opportunity should be given for pupils to ask questions and respond to the news. The bereaved child may or may not wish to be present when the news is broken. It may be appropriate for a letter to go home to all parents that same day, of course respecting the wishes of the family. Suggested letters can be found at the end of this policy in Appendices. Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Headteacher.

The first few days

As far as is possible, it is best to have as little disruption as possible to the school timetable and school life should try to go on as normal, but with flexibility as necessary. If it is a teacher who has died, the class should be covered by another teacher from the school whom the children know well and feel comfortable talking to.

Many bereaved children and young people find returning to school as soon as possible a welcome refuge of normality after the chaos of emotion at home and their return should be as fuss free as possible. A bereaved child will require enormous support, but as far as possible school life should go on as normally as possible.

Support for Pupils and Staff

In supporting both the bereaved child and the other pupils, staff will act sensitively at all times, seeking advice when necessary, from both the Headteacher and the families involved. The class teacher will be the first line of support for the child but should the child need extra support away from the classroom the Deputy Headteacher, Welfare Manager, Mental Health First Aiders will offer extra support.

For example, if a child finds it difficult to stay in the classroom when they are upset, it may be necessary to identify with them a suitable place, where they can go for some quiet time with an adult they trust.

Grief is a normal and natural response to loss. Both school and families need to work together to note changes in behaviour and if necessary, counselling from outside agencies may be sought. Where appropriate this will involve the agreement of the families. It should be noted that not everyone needs outside counselling; grief is a natural process that can be aided by the family and school working in partnership. Children and young people bereaved through suicide or violent death are likely to need skilled help and support, but the informal support of familiar adults is still vital.

Following the death of a member of the school community a special assembly or remembrance service may be held as a way of saying 'Goodbye' and as a celebration of their life. This may take many forms but will always be in accordance with the wishes of the bereaved family. 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.

Supporting a bereaved child is very upsetting and emotionally demanding for staff and therefore informal support between colleagues is vital. Opportunities to discuss feelings and reactions with colleagues, in the staffroom, are necessary and important.

Support and counselling is available to any member of staff and can be arranged through the Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher. All staff should be aware of colleagues and offer support on an individual basis where necessary and alert a member of the SLT if they become concerned about a colleague's wellbeing.

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.

Death of a child

Please see Appendix 1 for full details of handling a death at school or off site. If a child dies at school or on a school trip the Critical Incident Plan should be put into operation immediately.

Specific advice following a death for working with police, parents, children at school, teachers and media

Working with the police

Very soon after the death is announced the police should visit as they must carry out an investigation into the circumstances. Clear rooms or spaces for them to work in. They may want to collect evidence. The police will normally tell the child's next of kin and will want to speak at once to any relevant staff, who will need someone with them, and will probably need to stay at school.

Telling pupils

Where a pupil collapses during the school day when other pupils are present, is rushed to hospital and subsequently dies, those pupils will need to know what has happened. The school will consult with the family regarding their wishes in sharing the information with the school community.

It is important to agree with the police the timing and content of the information that you give to pupils to meet the needs of the pupils whilst not impeding any police investigation.

Parkside Middle School will consider if there are any siblings or close relatives who need to know first. They may then be informed, but only when parents are ready to collect them.

Pupils will be gathered at an appropriate time.

Telling teachers

Staff will be informed immediately by the Headteacher.

Telling parents

The police will tell the parents of the child. Getting a letter to other parents, which both expresses sympathy and gives information about the death, is very important. It saves rumours, which can be intensely hurtful to pupils, parents and teachers.

Dealing with the media

Some deaths may attract media attention. All members of staff will be 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.

Confidentiality

Although it is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure, pupils will be made aware that complete confidentiality in some circumstances cannot be totally guaranteed. This will help in retaining the trust of pupils and parents/carers and will ensure that the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. Sensitive information is only disclosed internally or externally with careful attention to the rights and needs of individuals.

Inclusion and equality

Parkside Middle School recognises that there is a range of cultural and religious customs and procedures concerning death and that there may be different expectations of the bereaved child and family. Some of these may affect matters of the school organisation. The school will try to present a balance of different approaches to death and loss.

Pupils and staff will be made aware that there are a range of different responses to bereavement and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

Equality, safeguarding and equal opportunities statement

Parkside Middle School, in all policies and procedures, will promote equality of opportunity for pupils and staff from all social, cultural and economic backgrounds and ensure freedom from discrimination on the basis of membership of any group including gender, sexual orientation, family circumstances, ethnic or national origin, disability (physical or mental), religious or political beliefs.

Parkside Middle School aims to:

- Provide equal opportunity for all
- Foster good relations, and create effective partnership with all sections of the community
- Only take actions which does not discriminate unlawfully in service delivery, commissioning and employment
- Provide an environment free from fear and discrimination, where diversity, respect and dignity are valued.

All aspects of Safeguarding will be embedded into the life of the school and be adhered to and be the responsibility of all staff.

RESOURCES- HOW TO HELP

Children's understanding and experience of loss and grief

- Provide continuity of care, routines and support.
- Provide opportunities within the curriculum for children to talk about emotions, life changes and death.
- Talk to the child about what has happened. Provide opportunities for children to use words to describe feelings, and the language associated with death.
- Answer questions honestly and in straight forward age-appropriate language. (Avoid the use of euphemisms and metaphors). Use the word "dead" to describe the absence of life.
- Reassure the child that they are not responsible for what has happened and that they will be cared for. By the time most children are 8 years old they begin to understand death as having a cause, as being permanent and as being something that can happen to anyone, including themselves. It is helpful to remember that knowledge comes through experience. What a child understands may depend as much on past child experience as it does on his/her chronological age.
- Encourage play, drawing and painting to allow the child to express how they feel.
- Provide opportunities within the curriculum for children to learn about where the end of human life occurs, such as home, hospital.
- Provide opportunities within the curriculum for children to express their own ideas about what happens after earthly life is over.
- Share stories about loss and change.
- Encourage the child to talk through their own ideas about death.
- Provide opportunities within the curriculum for children to talk about memories.
- Provide opportunities within the curriculum for children to learn about religious and secular customs associated with death.
- Allow the child to make their own decisions about whether they join in death rituals/attend funerals.

The questions children ask generally fall within 4 main categories:

- A need for factual information
- A need to check out emotional responses
- Searching for a reason for what has happened
- Spiritual and religious concerns

Latest information - Coronavirus Disease (Covid 19)

Please see the latest grief and bereavement advice which can be accessed via the following NHS link

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/coping-with-bereavement/>

In the unfortunate event of a death from Covid 19 of a member of staff, a pupil or a pupil's close relative, the school must find ways to respond appropriately, supporting all members of the School community and enabling them to process their grief. The death of a child is an extremely serious occurrence at all times and must be handled correctly, appropriately and sensitively toward all parties involved at all times.

In these circumstances, it is important that all emotional support is given and the need to mourn recognised. It is also vital to remember that pupils are likely to have been frightened and alarmed already by the large numbers of deaths from Covid 19 during the pandemic and experiencing a bereavement in this context may prove to be extraordinarily upsetting.

Useful Websites:

- Acorns Children's Hospice Trust, an interactive website providing information about the work of Acorns Children's Hospices www.acorns.org.uk
- The Child Bereavement Charity, resources and information for bereaved families, children, professionals and volunteers.
- Information about a small number of professional development courses for teachers www.childbereavement.org.uk
- Winston's Wish, offers a grief support programme for children who have experienced the death of a parent or sibling. www.winstonswish.org.uk

Books:

For children aged 7-9 years old

- Falling Angels- Thompson C, Red Fox, London
- The Blue Pearls- Stuart- Warfel E, Barefoot Books, Bath
- Charlotte's web E. B. White Penguin, 1993. ISBN 014 036 4498
- My brother Joey died Gloria Houston TCF (USA), 1982. ISBN 0-671-42401-7
- Your friend, Rebecca Linda Hoy Heinemann Educational, 1992. ISBN 043 512 3882

For children aged 9-11 years old

- Skellig- Almond D, Hodder and Stoughton, Sevenoaks
- Vicky Angel- Wilson J, Yearling Books, Ealing

For children aged 11-13 years old

- Helping children cope with loss and change – Syderhelm A, Routledge
- The Sad Book – Rosen M, Redbrain Books

Teachers

- Forgotten mourners, The Susan Smith Guidelines for working with bereaved children
- Jessica Kingsley, 1999 (2nd edition). ISBN 1 85302 758 8
- Good Grief – No. 2: Over 11s and adults Barbara Ward Jessica Kingsley, 1995 (2nd edition). ISBN 1 85302 340 X
- Talking with children and young people about death and dying Mary Turner Jessica Kingsley, 1999. ISBN 1 85302 563 1
- When someone dies: how schools can help bereaved students Dwaine Steffes Cruse
- Bereavement Care, 1997 (teachers' edition). ISBN 0 900321 10
- Supporting Bereaved Students in Primary and Secondary Schools — practical advice for staff is a booklet that has been developed by King's College London and the National Council for Hospice and Specialist Palliative Care Services, now the National Council for Palliative Care (NCPC). It offers advice and support to school staff and includes tips from teachers who have had experience with bereaved children. An extensive resource list is included for those who wish to look further into the issues explored or enlist further support. The booklet can be ordered from NCPC.

External sources of support

Winston's Wish

<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus/>

Grief Encounter

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/serviceupdate/>

Childhood Bereavement Network

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/covid-19.aspx>

Hope Again (youth section of Cruse)

<https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/>

Child Bereavement UK:

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org>

(helpline, live chat and email support available)

Child Bereavement UK video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFm-SXeJwI8&>

Place2Be – Guide to helping parents answer questions from their children and to support family wellbeing:

<https://www.place2be.org.uk>

About Sudden

<https://sudden.org/>

Sudden is a charitable service providing emotional and practical support to people bereaved by a death which was unexpected, including COVID-19, suicide, a road crash, natural disaster, war, terrorism or an incident at work or outdoors. The service helps those dealing with a sudden bereavement from the very first days. Sudden is a service run by the road safety charity Brake, who has helped support thousands of people bereaved by road crashes since it was set up in 1995 by Chief Executive Mary Williams OBE. The Sudden service was launched in July 2020 after being awarded vital pandemic funding from the Government and the National Lottery Community Fund.

Monitoring and evaluation

When an individual case arises, the policy is adhered to and therefore is monitored through this process and adjusted as required. The policy is evaluated in accordance with the policy monitoring and evaluation cycle and the date of renewal is stated on the header of this policy.

Date of policy May 2022

Date to be reviewed May 2024

Headteacher.....

Chair of Governors.....

APPENDIX 1: DEATH OF A CHILD POLICY

1. IMMEDIATE ACTION

If a child dies at school or on a school trip the Critical Incident Plan should be put into operation immediately.

On discovery of a possible death, the member of staff should:

- 1) Call the emergency services at once, including paramedics and police.**
- 2) Summon Medical staff (if on site) and Headteacher (to activate Critical Incident Plan)
- 3) Secure scene and remain with the body until help arrives.

2. FROM THE CRITICAL INCIDENT PLAN

All staff should be familiar with the following immediate actions required to activate the Critical Incident Plan.

Immediate Response to an Emergency

2.1 At School

In responding to an emergency during normal school activities it will be the responsibility of the Senior Leadership Team to ensure that:

- 2.1.1** The building, if appropriate, has been evacuated.
- 2.1.2** The necessary Emergency Services have been summoned.
- 2.1.3** A register has been taken to ascertain that all pupils, staff and any visitors are safe.

2.2 Off-Site Activity

It is the responsibility of the Teacher in Charge of the Group, or, where necessary, by delegation to another Member of Staff or Responsible Adult, to:

- 2.2.1** Make sure that all members of the party are accounted for and that they are safe.
- 2.2.2** If there are injuries immediately establish their extent and administer appropriate first aid.
- 2.2.3** Call emergency services if required.
- 2.2.4** Ensure that the remainder of the party is adequately supervised throughout and plan for their return to base, either School or Field Trip Base.

2.2.5 Arrange for at least one adult to remain at the incident site to liaise with the emergency services and to ensure that all the staff and pupils are accounted for.

2.2.6 Control access to telephones until contact is made with the Headteacher emergency contact point or designated senior member of staff and until he/she has had time to contact any parent whose children are directly involved.

It will be the job of the DSL to ensure that school records are updated.

3. ALL OTHER ASPECTS OF THE CRITICAL INCIDENT PLAN APPLY

The death of a child is an extremely serious occurrence and must be handled correctly, appropriately, and sensitively towards all parties involved at all times.

4. CARE FOR THE BEREAVED AND THE COMMUNITY

Following the death of a child either at school or on a school off-site activity every measure will be taken at appropriate times to provide support and counselling for those who need it:

- to liaise with the family and to support them
- to establish appropriate ways for pupils and staff to assist grieving
- to honour memory
- to manage the shock and loss of such an event
- to organise and re-establish normal daily business within the school.

Measures may include:

- specific support for those closest to the child who has died
- the opportunity for quiet time out of normal activities if appropriate in the weeks immediately following the death. The Thrive Rooms or Pupil Support Unit may be an appropriate place for this.
- Counselling support

5. CHILD DIES AWAY FROM SCHOOL

If a child dies during the school holidays and away from school, the points in section 4 should still be followed. A letter from the school to the rest of the school community should be sent as soon as possible.

GUIDELINES FOR BREAKING NEWS ABOUT A DEATH TO STAFF AND GOVERNORS

- Arrange a staff meeting which should take place as soon as possible.
- Impart factual information. Never make assumptions or repeat what has been said by rumour.
- Give news sensitively and empathetically, being aware that people may react in different ways.
- Be cognisant of the relationships staff may have had with the person who has died.
- Ensure that there is someone responsible for telling people who are unable to attend the staff meeting i.e., part time staff, peripatetic staff, lunch time supervisors. Consider the best way of imparting the information to those absent e.g., by doing home visit, by telephone, text, or e-mail etc.

- Identify individual members of staff who feel able to:

- a) support members of staff
- b) support groups of children

The most appropriate person to support the children should be well known to them and trusted.

- Identify a member of staff who will liaise with the individual's family, to deal with staff condolences and any funeral arrangements (if necessary).
- Identify an appropriate member of staff who will take 'phone calls and/or direct them as appropriate. Try to establish a "protected" telephone line to ensure free flow of accurate information.
- Identify a member of staff who will provide a newsletter for parents, which should be sent the same day or as soon as possible.
- Arrange a staff meeting at the end of the day to ensure staff are coping with the situation.
- Identify any unresolved problems or ongoing issues.
- Ensure that those staff that live alone have contact numbers of friends in case of need.
- Identify sources of advice and support to access for help in coming to terms with the bereavement

GUIDELINES FOR BREAKING NEWS OF THE DEATH TO THE PUPILS

- Inform the pupils as soon as possible about the death.
- Where possible, the pupils should be informed in small groups i.e., class groups.
- Identify those children who had a long term and/or close relationship with the person who has died so they can be told separately.
- If appropriate, a special assembly could be held later in the day to remember the person who has died.
- Allow the pupils to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.
- Allow the pupils to verbalise their feelings.
- Allow the pupils to discuss the situation and share their experiences of death.
- Be honest about your own feelings and talk about your relationship with the person.
- Avoid using euphemisms.
- Those pupils who have had more involvement with the person should be given the opportunity to share their feelings and experiences either within the group or in a one-to-one situation.
- Reassure them that not all people who are ill or have had an accident will die and that many people get better.
- Put an appropriate time limit on the discussion. It is preferable to resume normal school activities as soon as possible thus ensuring minimal disruption within the school.
- Conclude the discussion with a prayer or special poem to remember the person who has died and their family.
- Be available for any pupil who needs additional help and support.
- Refer to the bereavement toolkit for further guidance.

THINGS TO CONSIDER IN THE DAYS FOLLOWING THE NEWS OF THE DEATH

- It is important to consider any cultural or religious implications and seek advice if necessary.
- Ensure nominated staff with responsibilities for supporting staff and children, are available to do so.
- It may be necessary temporarily to provide staff cover for their normal activities.
- Identify an allocated quiet place where children, young people and staff can go if necessary (Thrive Room).
- It is preferable for there to be minimum disruption to the timetable, but some flexibility may be required.
- Try to generate an awareness of when people need help and support, particularly those who worked closely with the person who has died and secretaries/administrative staff who are taking telephone calls, dealing with parents etc.
- Through the nominated staff member who has responsibilities for liaising with the individual's family, ascertain their wishes about the school's involvement in the funeral, if any.
- Putting an obituary in the paper, sending flowers to the home or to the funeral, making a collection etc.
- Who will attend the funeral, making a collection etc.
- Cover for any staff who may be going to the funeral.
- Transport to and from the funeral.
- Informing the parents of those pupils who will be involved.
- Possible closure of the school – Governors involvement.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a pupil

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.

Dear Parents / Carers

*Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the death of **, a pupil in **. ** died from an illness called cancer. As you may be aware, many children who have cancer get better but sadly ** 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 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 life.

Yours sincerely...

Appendix 2

Template of a letter informing parents of 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 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.....