

Bereavement Guidance

This document is to provide information and guidance in the event of a bereavement within the school community, and acts as guidance only. It is to be read alongside the Bereavement Policy.

Pre-bereavement

- identify a key point of contact in school in terms of information exchange and to update when things change, for example Headteacher/Deputy/Parent Support Advisor/ Inclusion Manager.
- look to involve faith or community leaders when appropriate and with the agreement of the family

Following a bereavement

As an immediate response

- consider any religious beliefs that may affect the timing of the funeral or impact on other aspects of the bereavement process
- allocate member(s) of staff to be the key point(s) of support for the affected child / young person or children / young people and ensure there is support in place for the staff members if required. This may depend on the specific situation, relationship with the pupil/family and experience of the staff member, but could include the Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher/Class teacher/Inclusion Manager/PSA/ELSA/TA
- staff are to be careful with their language, avoiding phrases such as 'passed away' or 'gone to sleep'. Staff are to try to use the words 'died' or 'dead' to help children understand the permanence.
- dependent on the pupils' wishes, inform pupils who are most directly affected first (such as a friendship group), preferably in small groups, by someone known to them and in keeping with the wishes of the family and expertise of the school. Ask the pupil 'how / when / who do you want to talk about it with?' to ensure lines of communication remain open even if they're not ready to talk about it when asked.
- inform the wider school community in line with the wishes of the family, for example through letters to parents, special assemblies, or teachers announcing to class groups. It might be helpful to write a script to prepare what to say (see Example Scripts and Example Letters for help with what to say).
- send letters or cards of condolence to families or individuals directly affected

For the funeral

- identify which staff and pupils may want to attend if invited by the family and the practicalities of issues such as risk assessment, staff cover and transport. In some rare circumstances it may be appropriate to close the school
- organise tributes such as a condolence book, flowers or a collection in line with family wishes and the wishes of staff and pupils

After the funeral

- ensure friendships are secure – peer support can be particularly important for a bereaved child or young person
- monitor the emotional needs of staff and pupils and provide listening time and ongoing appropriate support

When the pupil returns to school

- offer the use of a quiet room or area for time out of class if needed, providing a 'Time-out Card' if appropriate, which allows them to leave class without explanation, or the use of a non-verbal signal. Some may wish to be treated as normal, others may have a specific request.
- be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life. So, we will record information and share this with relevant people, particularly at transition points. This could include ensuring significant dates and events for the child are recorded and shared with appropriate staff for future reference. This could include creating a calendar/register of death dates, anniversaries, birthdays and mothers/fathers' day card making.
- Class Teacher to discuss the volume of work and make short-term adjustments e.g. amount of homework set. Make a plan if needed so that there is a clear way forward.
- Ensure that there is preparation in place for mothers/fathers' day card making in advance for those pupils affected by parental bereavement, for example, and this information is passed on to any supply teachers if appropriate.

Following a sudden and unexpected death – suicide

Information provided to the school community in the immediate aftermath of a sudden and unexpected death will depend on the age of the pupils, but should be based on and reinforce:

- facts (not rumours)
- an understanding that death is permanent
- an exploration of normal and wide-ranging reactions to sudden and unexpected death – expressions of anger and guilt are entirely normal
- an understanding that, with support, people can cope
- an understanding that fleeting thoughts of suicide are not unusual
- an awareness of suicidal warning signs and resources available to help
- an understanding of expectations around funerals.

When discussing any suicide that has occurred, we will ensure that the information given is age appropriate and:

- is factually correct but does not include detail of the suicidal act itself does not romanticise, glorify or vilify the death
- does not include details of any suicide note
- does not include speculation over the motive for suicide
- takes care with the language used – for example using phrases such as ‘died by suicide’ or ‘ended his / her life’ rather than ‘committed suicide’ or ‘successful suicide’, and saying ‘attempted to end his / her life’ rather than ‘unsuccessful suicide’ or ‘failed attempt at suicide’.

National support services and support resources

The NHS:

- [Children and bereavement](#) – includes lots of resources for parents and children, including helplines and tips for creating a memory box

Child Bereavement UK: www.childbereavementuk.org

- [Telling a child that someone has died](#)
- [Parenting bereaved children - a video](#)

Childhood Bereavement Network:

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk> Find childhood bereavement support in your local area.

Cruse Bereavement Care: www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk Support for anyone who has been bereaved.

- [Children and young people's physical responses to grief](#)
- [Children and young people's emotional responses to grief](#)

Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families

- [On My Mind](#) is a resource for children to learn how to support their own mental health and wellbeing. It stresses the importance of [self-care](#)

Winston's Wish: www.winstonswish.org Support information and guidance for bereaved children, young people and for those caring for bereaved families.

- [Bereavement support for schools](#)
- [Talking to children about coronavirus](#)
- [How to say goodbye when a funeral isn't possible](#)
- [Supporting bereaved children with SEN](#)

Child Bereavement UK

- [Supporting a bereaved pupil](#)
- [Supporting pupils who've been affected by coronavirus](#)
- [Supporting a bereaved child in an early years setting](#)
- [Supporting a bereaved pupil in a primary school](#)
- [Supporting a bereaved student in secondary school](#)

Child Bereavement UK together with London Grid for Learning (LGfL):

[Managing a sudden death in the school community](#) – includes tips on managing social media and media relations

SOBS (Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide)

SOBS help meet the needs and overcome the isolation experienced by people who have been bereaved by suicide.

Tel: 0300 111 5065 - this is a national helpline that is open 9am to 9pm every day

Website: www.uksobs.org

Hope Again: <http://hopeagain.org.uk/> A website for young people who have been bereaved.

Papyrus: <https://papyrus-uk.org/> Support and advice for young people struggling with thoughts of suicide, and anyone worried about a young person.

Samaritans: <http://www.samaritans.org/your-community/supporting-schools> A range of guidance and support for schools.

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

[www.help2makesense.org](http://www.help2makesense.org;);

www.themix.org.uk

Local support services

Wiltshire Local Offer Links for national bereavement support organisations, including local hospices in Wiltshire who offer bereavement services to families known to them

<https://adults.wiltshire.gov.uk/Information/bereavement-support>

We Hear You counselling service: free professional counselling and therapy service for anyone affected by a diagnosis of cancer, or another life-threatening illness (clients could be ill themselves or have friends or family members who are ill, were ill in the past, or have died). Up to 16 weekly sessions for pupils age 4-18 attending Trowbridge schools. Sessions are on Fridays at the Hub, John of Gaunt school, during term time.

01373 455255 or email gwen.rogerson@wehearyou.org.uk

Wiltshire Educational Psychology Team

Dr James Wood, Lead Professional Educational Psychology
01722 438161
james.wood@wiltshire.gov.uk

Wiltshire Treehouse: Wiltshire Treehouse works closely with Child Bereavement UK to deliver high quality bereavement support to local families and professionals.

www.wiltshiretreehouse.org.uk / admin@wiltshiretreehouse.org.uk / 0749 350 9750

Wiltshire CSL: Collaborative Schools Ltd is a group of schools in Trowbridge who are working together to ensure the best education for all of its pupils.

jbullock@johnofgauntschool.org

Example Scripts

Script for informing pupils of a bereavement within the school community

Start by acknowledging you have some sad news to give.

- Be honest. Give the news stating simple facts, use the words dead/died.
- If known, and with the family's permission, explain briefly where and when the death occurred.
- If not known, say so, and that you will endeavour to find out. If rumours are rife, say which of these are definitely not correct, if known. Where appropriate, remind pupils of their responsibilities and the impact when posting on social media.
- Talk briefly and positively about the person who died without eulogising them.
- Mention any arrangements already in place, including for those needing support.
- Acknowledge that not everyone will be feeling sad and that is OK.
- Allow a break in the timetable for pupils to process the news and take a little time-out.

Example Letters

Death of a Pupil (to affected family)

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear the sad news of <Name'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 <Name> very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to <his/her> friends, classmates and teachers. <Name> 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 <Name's> funeral, please let us know.

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

With sympathy

<Sign off>

Headteacher

Death of a Family Member

Dear Parents/Carers,

We have some very sad news to share.

<Name of bereaved pupil> is in <year group / name of class>. We've just learned that his/her <relationship to pupil, e.g. father> has died <brief details of the cause, if appropriate, e.g. in a car accident, of complications arising from the coronavirus>.

We've been in contact with the family to express how sad we are about this news and to offer our support. Understandably, the family is still coming to terms with what's happened and appreciates having some privacy for now.

You can express your condolences by <insert the method requested by the family, e.g. by post, and insert an address or direct families to send condolences to the school to be forwarded to the family>.

We regret that we can't be there to break the news to your child ourselves and provide support. We trust that you'll let them know of this sad news at the appropriate time.

If you have concerns about how your child is coping with this news, you can <insert contact method here – you might ask them to contact their Class Teacher/PSA/Inclusion Manager>.

Kind regards,

<Sign off>

Death of a Pupil (after breaking news to pupil/s in school)

Dear Parents and Carers,

Your child's class teacher/form tutor/head teacher/head of year had the sad task of informing the pupils of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>.

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

He/She was a <valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly> member of the class/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 <Name's> family and friends at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember <Name's> life.

Sign-off

Headteacher

Death of a Pupil (not able to break news to pupil/s in school)

Dear Parents/Carers,

We have some very sad news to share.

We've just learned that <name>, a pupil in <year group / name of class>, has died <brief details of the cause, if appropriate, e.g. in a car accident, or complications arising from the coronavirus>.

We've been in contact with the family to express how sad we are about this news and to offer our support. Understandably, the family is still coming to terms with what's happened and appreciates having some privacy for now.

You can express your condolences by <insert the method requested by the family, e.g. by post, and insert an address or direct families to send condolences to the school to be forwarded to the family>.

Please share this news with your child now, so they can hear it from you rather than from their friends or through social media. We regret that we can't be there to break the news ourselves.

We'll be in touch soon with details about:

- *How we'll come together as a school to celebrate [name]'s life*
- *How we'll provide support for children as they grieve*

If you have concerns about how your child is coping with this news, you can <insert contact method here – you might ask them to contact the Class Teacher/PSA/Inclusion Manager>.

<You may wish to include some links to resources for supporting bereaved children – see Appendix 6 for example>

Thank you for your help and understanding at this difficult time.

<Sign off>

Death of a Staff Member

Dear Parents/Carers

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

The pupils were told today by their <class teacher/tutor/head of year/in assembly> 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.

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 <Name's> family at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember <Name's> life.

<Sign-off>

Headteacher