



Bereavement

Policy last reviewed: May 2023

Next review date: May 2027 (or as required)

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Background

Schools have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are their pupils. At Ravenscroft we take very seriously our duty towards all our pupils who have been entrusted to our care and seek to provide a school environment where all children are safe, secure, valued, respected and listened to.

Rationale

Within our school community there will almost always be some recently bereaved children who are struggling with their own situation – or sometimes the entire school community is 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.

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 the Trust, and clarify the pathway of support.

The Children Act 1989 aimed to ensure that the welfare of the child was paramount, working in partnership 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 Headteacher:

- To be first point of contact for family/child concerned.
- To respond to media enquiries with support from the Trust
- To ensure designated individuals within the school have been informed so a programme of support can be put in place in liaison with the family.
- To keep the governing body and Trust fully informed.

The role of Well-being Team / Pastoral Staff:

- To have bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff
- To liaise respectfully with the family so that the school is aware of beliefs and customs to ensure messages and information given do not conflict
- To ensure a network of support is provided for the child which includes appropriate designated individuals who the child / family is comfortable with as well as internal / external support
- To monitor progress and liaise with external agencies
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary schools.
- Consult on referral pathways and identification of complex grief.

The role of the class teacher / support staff:

- To liaise with pupils and their families regularly so that any bereavement is communicated immediately within the school
- To refer the child to the well-being team for suitable targeted support
- To create a positive environment within the classroom where opportunities to share emotions and information about themselves can be made appropriately

The role of the Trust:

- To support the Headteacher with media enquiries
- To advise and support staff.

The role of the governing body:

- To approve policy and ensure its implementation, to be reviewed in three years
- To support the Headteacher with media enquiries

Parents

Within school we work in partnership with parents. When pupils join the school, we find out as much as possible about every child to tailor the academic, social and emotional teaching in school to match their needs.

Parents are encouraged to make teachers aware of any changes that might have profoundly affected their child, such as: divorce, bereavement, moving, new babies etc.

If there has been bereavement, information on what the child was told is valuable, in order that the school does not say anything that could confuse or upset the child or family, particularly linked to religious cultures and beliefs.

Procedures

A tragedy or death can affect each individual in the school community. It is important that all relevant staff are informed as soon as practicable and therefore avoid rumours. In consultation with the family, parents and children will also need to be informed about what has happened, as soon as is appropriate.

If a child has been bereaved it is important to involve them in decisions about how the school manages issues relating to their loss. Where appropriate the child will be consulted about their preferred way of informing their peers about what has happened and about the support they need.

When school is informed of bereavement or loss, the following actions should be considered:

- The family should be contacted by the Head Teacher or designated staff member
- Aim to establish the facts – to avoid the ‘rumour mill’ filling any information gap
- It should be explained to the family how the school can be involved to support the child and family
- Find out, if possible, how the family would like the information to be managed by the school
- The family should be asked how much and what the child already knows and how they have been involved
- The importance of working together and liaison will be explained – both parties assessing any changes in behaviour. Eating and sleeping patterns may change or behaviour in school may deteriorate or the child becomes withdrawn
- Staff should be informed before pupils and be prepared to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance. Make sure all staff have the same version of event/information
- Involve outside agencies as appropriate e.g. the school nurse, Psychological Service
- Are there siblings or extended family at school – what is their understanding of the situations?
- Decide whether to inform children through assemblies, class groups etc



- Pupils who are affected should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them: The child's class and friendship group are likely to require a more personalised response
- Are there any 'special circumstances' that are significant?
- Cultural/religious dimensions
- Are there any practical implications for the day to day running of the school?
- If appropriate, 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
- Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Head Teacher
- 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
- Staff affected by the death will be offered on-going support as appropriate
- For a member of staff experiencing close family bereavement, absence will be arranged for attendance at a funeral and appropriate time off in line with the Absence Management Policy. Additional time may be given through sick leave as appropriate.

Death of a child or member of staff:

When the school is informed of the death of a child or member of staff, the following action should be considered:

- Discussion should take place with the family and their wishes considered before decisions are taken on how and what to tell the pupils in school
- Counselling should be available, if necessary, e.g. in cases of sudden or violent death, outside agencies should be involved with this e.g. Psychological Service
- The school may be closed, or as many people as possible released to attend a funeral or memorial service, should it be appropriate and they wish to do so
- Staff and pupils should be supported throughout the grieving period; anyone displaying signs of stress should be offered appropriate support
- Pupils and staff may express a wish to attend, or take part in the service, but they should only do so with the prior agreement of the deceased's family, relatives or next of kin, as well as the agreement of the pupils' parents/carers.
- The class most affected might like to write down their thoughts and feelings; these could then be given to the bereaved family to assist in the planning of the service
- After the service, staff and pupils should be encouraged to meet and express their thoughts and feelings, as such services are important in the grieving process.

Terminally Ill Pupils/Staff:

- In the event of a pupil or member of staff becoming terminally ill, their wishes and those of their parents/guardians/next-of-kin should always be respected
- Should the child wish to attend school, the class teacher may need to inform the class of the pupil's condition
- Occasionally, the pupil may wish to talk to their fellow classmates about their predicament themselves. Honesty about death and dying may be the best line of approach. Sometimes there is just no other way.



Return to School:

For the bereaved pupil or member of staff, returning to school may be a source of anxiety

- Where there has been a close family bereavement, in most cases everyone (teaching, support staff, volunteers if appropriate and pupils) should be made aware of the situation before the pupil returns (providing the parents/guardians and the bereaved pupil agree)
- It is useful to designate a member of staff who has a good rapport with the pupil/ staff member to be a source of support
- Staff should show appropriate compassion and allow expression to those suffering grief
- Teachers should try to foster an environment that is compassionate, yet disciplined
- Family life at this traumatic time, can be particularly distressing, routines upset, relationships strained, the future uncertain. For this reason, school routines should be kept as normal as possible in order to provide a respite
- Staff should be aware of anniversaries as this can spark a revival of feelings of bereavement
- Staff might keep an eye on those particularly affected by the death of a close associate.

Talking to the Bereaved Pupil:

- Try to be available to listen and support if possible, arrange a one-to-one session with the designated staff member as soon as possible after the pupil returns to school
- Be calm and show them that you are listening and understanding by occasionally repeating what they have said and by acknowledging their emotions
- If people feel like crying they should cry – crying is not a sign of weakness, but often a sign of deep feeling
- Beware of using platitudes e.g. “I know how you feel,” (pupils may feel offended that you presume how they feel).

Do

- | | |
|--|--|
| ✓ Let the pupil know that you genuinely care | ✓ Talk honestly and share your feelings |
| ✓ Make time to be available and listen | ✓ Be honest |
| ✓ Accept all that the child is saying | ✓ Have eye contact |
| ✓ Allow them to express their feelings their way | ✓ Have appropriate physical contact |
| ✓ Let them know their feelings are normal | ✓ Let them know that it is not their fault |
| ✓ Let them know that it is OK to cry | ✓ Be aware of the home situation |

Don't

- | | |
|--|--|
| ✗ Stop the pupil talking | ✗ Deny your pain and feelings |
| ✗ Tell them how they should or should not feel | ✗ Point out things for which they should be grateful |
| ✗ Avoid contact | ✗ Be frightened of sharing your own feelings |
| ✗ Change the subject | |

The following document / websites have been considered in the production of this policy:

www.childbereavement.org.uk

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=c7QU3Ekx78A&feature=youtu.be>

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-schools>



Appendix 1

Further information & advice for parents

For advice and guidance on Bereavement please click on the link below.

Cruse Bereavement www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk (0870) 167 1677

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-parents>

<https://www.thegoodgrieftrust.org/>

<https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/hope-again-parent>

Winston's Wish www.winstonswish.org.uk 01242 515157

Child Bereavement Online www.childbereavement.org.uk

Books dealing with death and loss

- I Miss You - First Look at Death - Pat Thomson *Simple factual and sensitive exploration of death which includes interactive questions*
- Grandpa- John Burningham
- Always and Forever – Alan Durant *The animals talk and laugh about their memories of their friend Fox following his death.*
- The Huge Bag of Worries – Virginia Ironside *Jenny's worries build up and get out of control. She just can't get rid of them, until she meets an old lady who helps her sort them out. Illustrations that encourages children to talk about their worries*
- Badger's Parting Gifts- Susan Varley *When badger dies his friends ease their sadness by remembering the special "gifts" he gave them*
- Waterbugs and Dragonflies – Explaining Death to Young Children Doris Stricknew