

Bereavement Policy

History of Policy Changes

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Authorising Body: ELT

Review Period: Every 3 Years

Date	Page	Details of Change
May 2025	6	Resources added and useful links
	5	Roles and responsibilities
	6	Added safeguarding & Inclusion sections
	7	Updated Informing parents and wider school community
	8-9	Added Responding to a sudden / unexpected death
	9	Added Interactions with the Media and Social Media
	9-10	Added Pre-bereavement support
	10-11	Updated Ongoing support for a bereavement
	12	Updated Links to other policies / references
	13-14	Resources added and useful links

Contents

Section 1 – Statement of Intent

- Introduction
- Rationale
- Aims
- Roles & Responsibilities
- Safeguarding, Confidentiality and Recording
- Equality and Inclusion, values and beliefs

Section 2 – Response

- Informing staff & governors
- Informing pupils
- Informing parents and the wider school community
- Responding to a sudden & unexpected death
- The media and social media

Section 3 – Support

- Pre-Bereavement Support
- Support for the family
- Support for pupils
- Support for staff

Section 4 – References and Policy Links

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Useful online resources and information
- Appendix 2 Letter to families template
- Appendix 3 Guideline for how to inform pupils
- Appendix 4 Bereavement Response Plan

Section 1 – Statement of Intent

Introduction

A death can affect the school community in various ways. Adults and pupils will benefit from being kept informed of a death. Rumours and gossip can be very damaging and can lead to individuals developing the attitude that 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 obstructed.

Rationale

At Briarwood we believe that bereavement and loss are an inevitable part of living and growing. We provide opportunities for children to develop their own appropriate range of emotional, spiritual and intellectual responses to manage these experiences. We believe that the ethos of the school based on openness and mutual support, provides a framework in which these experiences can be realised in a supportive manner. Bereavement affects everyone in different ways and for different periods of time. Whatever the level of understanding about bereavement, we have a duty to help support anyone when they may be feeling their most vulnerable, in the way that best meets their needs. By adopting a planned and considered approach, the school can support the emotional wellbeing of the child, family and staff.

Aims

- To provide a framework for all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, to give guidance on how to deal sensitively and compassionately with difficult and upsetting circumstances.
- To meet the needs of all its children and staff and to be a place that both child and family can gain much needed support.
- For the whole school community to work together, with outside agencies as appropriate, to support each other.
- For staff to have time and space to work through their own feelings and become aware of the needs of the children.
- For children to have the opportunity to tell their story, express their feelings, share their memories and develop coping strategies through the support of sensitive staff.
- To have clear expectations about the way school will respond to a death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.
- To ensure the family feel supported and are given an opportunity to express their feelings of loss.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Executive Headteacher will be responsible for:

- Leading a whole-school approach to the effective management of loss and bereavement.
- Being the first point of contact for families/children and staff directly affected by a bereavement.
- Recording bereavements affecting children.
- Ensuring that approaches to bereavement are respectful of religious and cultural values and beliefs.

Senior Leadership Team will be responsible for:

- Supporting the Executive Headteacher in carrying out the procedures outlined in this policy.
- Supporting staff, pupils and parents following a death, as directed by the Executive Headteacher.
- Supporting other staff members with communicating the news of a death.
- Knowing how to access support for themselves, for other staff and for the family if needed.

All school staff will be responsible for:

- Supporting colleagues and pupils after a death, as appropriate.
- Knowing how to report a concern when a bereavement or sudden and unexpected death has placed a child at risk of significant harm, in line with the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.
- Seeking pastoral support from the Executive Headteacher or SLT as appropriate.
- Informing the Executive Headteacher at the earliest possibility if they hear about a death of someone in the school community.

Safeguarding, Confidentiality and Recording

Staff will, at all times, follow our school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy to ensure the welfare of the child remains the highest priority, and that all children are protected from harm.

It is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure. However, pupils will need to be made aware that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. To retain the trust of pupils and parents / carers, we will ensure the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. Sensitive information will only be disclosed internally or externally with careful attention to the rights and needs of individuals and in line with general data protection regulations.

If a child is suffering from trauma linked to a bereavement, we will share this as appropriate with staff, but not necessarily the details of their experience. We will discuss with the bereaved child and their family which adults in the school community they would like made aware of the experiences impacting the child.

We will use our usual school systems (CPOMS, Arbor and our Vulnerable + register) to record when a child has experienced a close bereavement, is at risk of suicide or has made a suicide attempt.

Equality and Inclusion, values and beliefs

We recognise there are a diverse range of cultural and religious beliefs, customs and procedures concerning death and that bereaved children and families may have differing expectations. In the event of a bereavement, we will at all times consult closely with the family and consider their wishes, beliefs and customs when communicating a death in the school community.

We will present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. We will make pupils aware of differing responses to bereavement, and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

Section 2 – Procedures and Guidance

Guidelines

The following guidelines will provide a framework for informing staff, governors and pupils following a death.

Informing staff and governors of a death in the school community

- Where possible discussion should take place with family and their wishes should be considered before decisions are made on how and what to tell staff.
- All staff should be informed of a bereavement as soon as possible, with factual information including all part time staff. A staff meeting will be arranged as soon as practicable and absent staff will be identified. Arrangements will be made to inform absent staff over the telephone.
- Senior leadership team will be prepared for reactions to this news including being visibly 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 a perfectly natural response.
- All staff should be made aware of where, and who, they can turn to for emotional support.

Informing pupils of a death in the school community

Pupils of all ages can experience grief and loss.

- Pupils in the same class should be told in small groups with adults they know.
- A letter should be sent to families within school the same day if possible (Appendix 2).
- Staff will be provided with guidelines of how to inform pupils (Appendix 3).
- Time and space will be provided.
- Staff will be as honest as possible about their own feelings and experiences and talk about their relationship with the person.
- A bereavement support pack will be available for classes to access.

Informing parents and/or the wider school community

The Executive Headteacher will notify parents and / or the wider school community of a death in line with the family's wishes. If the death affects the whole school, e.g. the death of a staff member or pupil, the Executive 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 inform parents that are directly affected.

A nominated member of staff will compose a letter 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.

Responding to a sudden and unexpected death

Some deaths can happen very suddenly and, in some circumstances, will need to be handled more sensitively due to their potential to cause fear, anger or imitation. The procedures outlined in this policy will be followed for all deaths affecting the school community and individual pupils; however, specific measures will be implemented for certain circumstances.

Suicide

Whilst families bereaved through suicide will be experiencing grief and sadness, they may also face additional pressures from difficult questions and intrusive public scrutiny at a time when they are highly vulnerable. Suicide also presents the unique risk of potentially being the trigger for another suicide. In such situations it is especially important to carefully consider a range of additional factors including; accuracy of information, language used, communication and the prevention of unhelpful speculation. The School's response is based on the Samaritan's Step by Step guidance for responding to suicide in schools. For a copy of this guidance, please refer to Appendix 1 of this policy.

In the event of a suspected suicide within the school community, the Executive Headteacher, or other appointed member of the Senior Leadership Team, will contact the police or the family within 48 hours to confirm the death and whether it is being treated as a suicide. If the family does not wish the cause of death to be disclosed to the school community, the school will state that the nature and cause of death are still being determined and that additional information will be forthcoming. If the death is subject to an ongoing investigation, the Executive Headteacher will check with the police before speaking about the death with anyone in the school community who may need to be interviewed by the police.

Staff will be told about the death first, in line with the 'Informing Staff and Governors' section of this policy. Adequate time will be allowed for staff to process the news, before informing pupils. The script that staff will use to inform pupils of the death will be age and/or stage appropriate and should:

- Be factual while avoiding excessive detail about the suicidal act itself
- Reinforce the understanding that death is permanent
- Recognise that people may respond to the death in different ways
- Emphasise that, with support, people can cope and come to terms with the loss.

A death involving homicide or manslaughter

Research indicates that pupils that have been bereaved due to murder or manslaughter can be at significant risk of developing PTSD. Any concerns relating to a pupil who may be affected by the death will be addressed in line with the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and appropriate support will be put in place, in line with Section 3 of this policy.

The Executive Headteacher will contact the police or the family to establish the facts about what happened. All staff will follow the 'interactions with the media and social media' section of this policy.

No media personnel will be permitted onto the school site at any time.

Interactions with the Media and Social Media

In the event of a sudden or unexpected death, the school may be approached for comments by the local and / or national media. Any communication with the media will be agreed with the family. Only the Executive Headteacher, or a member of the Senior Leadership Team nominated by the Executive Headteacher, 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 and governors will not post any information about the death on social media in line with the school's E-Safety Policy and Acceptable Use Agreement. If information about the death is circulated on social media prior to the school making an official statement, the Executive Headteacher or nominated spokesperson from the Senior Leadership Team will release a statement on the school's social media channels, with the agreement of the family, to prevent rumours from spreading. If staff or governors find any false, negative or malicious information being posted about the death on social media, they will report this to the Executive Headteacher. Any staff breach of confidentiality or school policies may be subject to disciplinary procedures.

Section 3 – Support Measures

Pre-Bereavement Support

In some situations, it is known in advance that a death is going to occur. This is usually because of a long or terminal illness.

In cases where this is an adult within the school community, individual conversations will be held with the Executive Headteacher in terms of support, information exchange and practical considerations.

When the expected death is of a child or a member of a child's family we will:

- Contact the family to confirm factual information, maintain open lines of communication and explore what support could be provided to them.
- Ensure that all relevant adults are clear about what information has and needs to be shared with the pupil.
- Explore the possibility of signposting to other organisations such as Winston's Wish or a local hospice.
- If appropriate, consider and reflect on how to communicate with the wider school community, for example the pupil's classmates.
- Explore support opportunities for pupils affected.
- Support members of staff to ensure they are confident in their ability to support the pupil.
- All staff will remain vigilant to signs that the pupil is facing challenges in relation to their psychological, physical and social development and will refer any concerns to the Executive Headteacher or a member of the Senior Leadership Team, who will ensure appropriate support is put in place.
- Refer the pupil for specialised support relating to pre and post bereavement, including trauma and / or bereavement therapy, as appropriate.
- If appropriate, begin conversations around practical considerations in the events leading up to the death and following the death.

Ongoing support for a bereavement

The School will consider each individual situation carefully to ensure the response from the school is sensitive, accurately reflects the gravity of the situation, and involves those affected as appropriate. The family, pupils and staff will be given an opportunity to celebrate the life of the child or member of the school community with a special assembly held in school at an appropriate time. The School will also provide ongoing support for children to explore their feelings and memories through identified activities. Some opportunities may include storytelling, remembering activities, and expressing feelings activities.

Supporting the family

The Executive Headteacher will be the main point of contact between the school and the family, or will appoint a member of the Senior Leadership Team to this role where necessary. The Executive Headteacher will contact the family to offer condolences and discuss how the school can best support them. The family's wishes and feelings, including their cultural and religious beliefs, will always be considered and respected when making decisions and conducting activities relating to the death.

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 letters or cards of condolence.
- 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.
- Signposting the family to relevant support networks and organisations, as appropriate.

Supporting the pupils

All pupils, even those not directly affected by the death, will require support, particularly if the death affects the whole school community, e.g. the death of a staff member. Staff will talk to pupils about what has happened using age-appropriate and developmental stage appropriate language. Please see Appendix 3 for scripts and conversation starters that can be used in these instances.

Following a death in the school community, pupils will be invited to take part in remembrance activities, e.g. remembrance assemblies. These will be performed with consent of the family and will take account of their wishes.

Staff will identify any pupils that may need more direct support and make a referral to the Senior Leadership Team for further pastoral support. This might include, but is not limited to:

- A Pastoral Support Referral for wellbeing or trauma support and interventions.
- Regular check-ins with an assigned trusted adult.
- A referral for specialised therapy, with the consent of the child and the family.
- A temporary part-time timetable, if appropriate.

Supporting pupils with a death outside of the school community

When school is informed of a bereavement that is linked to a school pupil e.g. family member, close family friend, pet:

- The family should be asked how the school can be involved to support the child and family.
- It should be explained to the family how school can provide resources to support the pupil.
- Both parties will monitor any changes in child's behaviour and share any information.

Supporting the Staff

- The Senior Leadership Team will be available to talk things through with a member of staff if they are finding the situation particularly hard.
- Bereavement support or counselling should be available to all as necessary, this can be accessed through self-referral using the EAP service or a direct referral for support from the Senior Leadership Team.
- Where possible all staff that have requested to attend the funeral or memorial service will be released from class.
- All staff and governors will be invited to take part in any planned remembrance activities.

Section 4

Links to other policies

- Child Protection & Safeguarding policy
- Emotional Health & Wellbeing Policy
- E-Safety Policy and Acceptable Use Agreement
- Leave of Absence policy

References

- Winston's Wish Positive Responses to Death – A strategy for schools
- Winston's Wish, in partnership with NAHT, Example Bereavement Policy Template, May 2020
- Bereavement Guidance for Schools & Settings – Bristol Educational Psychology Service
- Samaritans Step by Step guidance to responding to suicide in schools.

Appendix 1

Useful online resources and information

- <https://www.bristolsafeguardingineducation.org/media/af2loxiq/bereavement-guidance-for-schools-and-settings-003.pdf> - Bereavement Guidance for Schools & Settings – Bristol Educational Psychology Service
- <https://supportaftersuicide.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Step-by-step-support-Help-when-you-needed-it-most-booklet-UK-EDS08UK-2020-WEB-1.pdf> - Samaritans Step by Step guide
- <https://winstonswish.org/> – a useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community. Free on-line training for educational staff is available
- <https://www.cruse.org.uk/> - Cruse Bereavement Care: Support for anyone bereaved.
- <https://childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk> - This website will provide the tools to find local support for children that have experienced loss.
- <https://www.stpetershospice.org.uk/> - St Peters Hospice – Palliative and end of life care and support, including bereavement support in Bristol and surrounding areas.
- <https://www.sands.org.uk/> - Support for parents and families whose baby is stillborn or dies soon after birth, and anyone affected by the death of a baby.
- <https://www.ataloss.org/> - website designed to support finding bereavement support and services across the UK.
- <https://www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk/> - freephone service for all affected by the death of a child
Tel: 0800 282986
- <https://www.hospiceuk.org/our-campaigns/dying-matters/dying-matters-resources> - Dying Matters: resources to help people talk more openly about dying, death and bereavement and to make plans for the end of life.
- <https://www.thegoodgrieftrust.org/> - The Good Grief Trust - a charity run by bereaved people, helping all those experiencing grief in the UK. Provides information and stories about grief and bereavement, including a map of UK bereavement services.
- <https://thelossfoundation.org/> - offers support to people who have lost someone to cancer. Includes free support groups, walking events, workshops and a peer connection service.
- <https://www.sueryder.org/> - Sue Ryder – charity that offers bereavement support, including ways of finding bereavement support online.
- <https://www.widowedandyoung.org.uk/get-support/bereavement-support> - WAY (Widowed and Young) - advice for people who have lost a partner before their 51st birthday.
- <https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/> Hope Again: A website for young people who have been bereaved.
- <https://www.papyrus-uk.org/> Papyrus: Support and advice for young people struggling with thoughts of suicide, and anyone worried about a young person.
- <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/> Samaritans: A range of guidance and support for schools.
- <https://www.tcf.org.uk/> - The Compassionate Friends – Offers support and friendship to bereaved parents and their families
- <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/search?q=understanding+death&c=244&r=parent&fco=0> – this link will provide teachers with useful resources they could adapt to meet pupils’ individual needs and support them with their loss.

Books on Bereavement

- Granpa - John Burningham
- When Dinosaurs Die - L & M Brown
- Liplap's Wish - Jonathan London And Sylvia Long
- The Memory Tree – Britta Teckentrup
- I Have a Question about Death - Gaines and Polsky
- Upside Down, Downside Up - Ilze lee
- The invisible String – Patrice Karst
- I can't believe they're gone – A kid's grief book that hugs, helps and gives hope – Karen Brough
- The River – Tom Percival
- I Can Overcome My Sadness: A Children's Book About Grief and Loss – Clara Harper
- The burst balloon: Helping children understand grief and loss – Cher Louise Jones
- Your love is always with me – Kirsten Hopfensperger
- Someone I Love Has Died: A Grief Activities Book For Children: A Grief Activities Book For Children – Catherine and Jennie Stephenson

Appendix 2

Letter to family template

(Date)

Dear Parents/Carers,

Unfortunately, we need to inform you of the sad and sudden death of (Name), a pupil in our (Name) School.

(Name) had been a pupil at Briarwood for (number) years, she/he was a very popular member of the school community and will be missed by everyone that knew her/him.

When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The staff will be able to help answer any questions the pupils may have and we have a resource pack available to support the pupils understanding. If there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to contact us and we would be more than happy to help you.

Our thoughts are with (Name) family at this time. We will be arranging a special assembly in the next few months to celebrate (Name) life.

Yours sincerely,

Nicolle Deighton

Executive Headteacher

Appendix 3

Guide for how to inform pupils

- Be honest
- Use clear language
- Expect questions
- Recognise every death and reaction to it is unique
- Don't assume
- Allow time
- Acknowledge that some days will be better than others

Suggested script

"I've got some really sad news to tell you today that might make you sad. (Name) died yesterday. This means that we won't see (Name) again. We have lots of memories of (Name) that we can think about and we can celebrate those together"

Class resources

'The Memory Tree' pack will be available for classes to use. The pack contains a story book and resources linked to the story.

Language for discussing suicide

When discussing suicide, be aware of up-to-date phraseology to avoid language which could be considered stigmatising or blaming

Instead of Saying	Say
Committed suicide	Died by suicide Took his/her/their own life Killed himself/herself/their self
Failed / Unsuccessful suicide attempt	Aborted suicide attempt (when the person stops themselves) Interrupted suicide attempt (when an outside circumstance stops the individual)