

Bereavement Policy

Member of SLT Responsible for Policy: D.Perks

Date: July 2016
Review Date: July 2018

The purpose of the Bereavement Policy is to assist 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 school community is supported to help them through a very difficult period of time.

No matter how prepared we think we are death or loss or separation is often traumatic and unexpected. Its unpredictability can severely unbalance a school whose normal working environment is one based on routine. Death, therefore, can be regarded as a potentially disunifying force that exists in an unpredictable world. Conversely; it can also be unifying; bringing people together in their grief.

Intervention is essential in managing and minimising any disruption. The aim should be to restore equilibrium between an individual's environment and his/her perception of the world as a safe and predictable place.

A considered, planned and organised response to an event is much more effective than acting on impulse. It is vital that our school maintains a shared course of action. It is for this reason that our school has an intervention team for major incidents. This group will be ready and willing to work collaboratively.

The Team

The Intervention Team consists of:-

The Key Members (Headteacher / relevant Assistant Headteacher Pastoral) - first point of contact will be responsible for allocating a lead teacher and dealing with all parties. The Headteacher/relevant Assistant Headteacher Pastoral will allocate a personal mentor if needed (to act as a listener, time out of class etc) after consultation with the bereaved person. The lead teacher will also act as media spokesperson, liaising with media and police if needed - post to be determined at time of incident.

The School Nurse or School Counsellor - although dependent on availability as they work in several schools in our area – can offer support to staff and pupils if appropriate.

A Form Tutor - likely to be the class teacher (or a previous teacher).

The Office Manager to oversee administration needs and be responsible for conveying group decisions.

Business Manager and Site Manager - If in the event of a death or major incident on school site will liaise with HSE (Health and Safety Executive)

A bereavement counsellor - to be sourced dependent on the area of need

Trained team members will receive specialist training in bereavement counselling in order to offer support and guidance to the team. (Mrs Tolhurst-Jones/Mrs Rogers)

The team will be made up as needed and membership may well change.

Meetings will be held, as appropriate, to talk through the needs of the team and to revise/review this policy.

The Key Members (Headteacher/relevant Assistant Headteacher Pastoral) will need to decide whether the whole team needs to be assembled. The death of a parent, although traumatic, would not normally warrant such action. The death of a pupil may well need a team response.

Multiple Deaths/Death in School/or any other traumatic loss or separation

- Principal of SAT to be contacted
Team to assemble as quickly as possible to gather the necessary facts and to discuss the impact on the whole school
- The parents or next of kin to be contacted immediately
- Police to be informed
- Shropshire Council to be informed – www.shropshire.gov.uk
- General staff briefing to be held to inform them of the situation
- Form Tutors then to address with their form what has taken place. A clear announcement without misinterpretation should be made. If a member of staff feels uncomfortable with this, procedures can be adjusted and additional support staff may be required.
- It is essential to allow children to articulate their thoughts and feelings as sharing their grief in a supportive environment can help in facilitating the grieving process.
- If liaison with the Media is required this should be carried out by the Head Teacher or in his absence the nominated relevant Assistant Head Pastoral.
- Chair of Governors, as required.

Death of a Staff Member or Pupil Not in School

Team to assemble as quickly as possible to gather the necessary facts and to discuss the impact on the whole school

- Key person to talk to parents or family to gain permission to inform the year group and staff and to agree what information needs to be communicated
- Decision on which students/staff need to be informed
- General staff briefing to be held to inform them of the situation
- Shropshire Council to be informed
- Appropriate students/staff to be informed in appropriate setting
- It may be necessary to retrieve personal belongings and plan their return to the family. Information on the school's computer system should be removed as soon as possible, likewise other school and class records as appropriate.

Death of a Parent or Carer/Sibling

- To discuss with the informant how and where the child will be told and by whom
- Key person to contact the family to seek permission/advice on what information is to be disclosed and to whom
- Further contact with family in due course to facilitate the return of the student

Death of a Grandparent/relative/family friend

- Communication with the student/family to ensure the child has been offered appropriate support within the school environment

Cultural/Religious Implications

- Key person to liaise with the family to ascertain if there is anything specific the school needs to be aware of or which needs to be implemented

Confidentiality is essential. To avoid rumours, it is important to be open and honest wherever possible and not to make assumptions about the cause of death. It is important that all staff and pupils be informed as quickly as possible although consideration as to the correct procedure should be agreed first. Such news is often greeted with disbelief, possibly panic and fear. Teachers should be prepared for a variety of responses.

It is essential to allow children to articulate their thoughts and feelings and to support them. Sharing their grief in a supportive environment can help facilitate the grieving process. It must be recognised that some pupils may not wish to share their feelings immediately.

Where it is thought necessary, we will engage a professional bereavement counsellor to work with staff or children.

If dealings with media are necessary, it is important that one person is nominated. This should be the Headteacher but in his absence the relevant Assistant Headteacher Pastoral may cover. A letter to all parents may be needed.

Funerals, Memorial Services

Before the bereaved pupil or member of staff returns to school there is likely to be a funeral. If other pupils or staff wish to attend there should be agreement with the deceased's family. If appropriate, the Key Members should represent the school.

If it is likely that others will attend, especially pupils, then support should be available before and after the service as this could be a traumatic experience for children.

The First Week/Return

The first part of the team's work is proactive, but at a later stage this becomes reactive. The situation will need to be monitored by the team (or those handling the situation). Before returning to school, it is deemed advisable for the Key Members to make a home visit or phone call to be as fully briefed as possible to determine the manner of return and outstanding worries the bereaved may have regarding their reintegration.

Most will want to return to normal as quickly as possible. Staff should be aware of this need. In the interests of the bereaved, staff should endeavour to foster an environment that is compassionate, yet disciplined. Getting the balance right can be difficult, but we must remember that school may be seen as an important safe haven.

As time progresses, the needs of the bereaved continue - especially at anniversaries.

It may be possible to consult and liaise with external agencies that can offer further counselling and advice - in or outside school.

It is important that all staff are recognised as having their own needs, as handling such matters may indeed bring back some painful memories. This plan should show that the school is aware that each case, whilst different, should be approached in a similar manner.

Policy reviewed by Headteacher July 2016

Next review date July 2018