



Bereavement Policy - May 2020

Introduction

A death can affect the school community in many different ways. Adults and pupils benefit from being kept informed of a death. Rumour and gossip can be very damaging and can lead to both young and old 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 Elmhurst we believe that bereavement and loss are an inevitable part of living and growing. We provide opportunities within our setting 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 could 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 well being of the child, family and staff.

Aims

- To provide a framework for all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, to give guidance in 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 rely on, and gain much needed support.
- To appoint a designated staff member who will act as a “support coordinator” and liaise with the bereaved child or young person and their family both prior to the child / young person’s return to school and whilst they are at school
- 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 support by sensitive staff.
- To have clear expectations about the way school will respond to the death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.
- The family will feel supported and be given an opportunity to express their feelings of loss.
- A letter should go to families within school the same day if possible (Appendix 2).
- Staff will be provided with guidelines of how to inform pupils (Appendix 3).
- 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.

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 the bereaved family and their wishes taken into account before decisions are taken on how and what to tell the staff in school.
- All staff (including part-time) should be informed of a bereavement as soon as possible with factual information. 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 visible upset and feeling of anger or guilt. People may connect the death to their own personal experience of bereavement, so feelings about past bereavements may need to be discussed. This is a perfectly natural response.
- Senior Leadership team will be available to talk things through with a member of staff, parent or child if they are finding the situation particularly hard. Advice for families will also be provided of support services available to them outside school.
- Bereavement support or counselling should be available to all as necessary (Appendix 1).

- Where possible all staff that have requested to attend the funeral or memorial service will be released from class.

Informing pupils of a death in the school community

Pupils of all ages can experience grief, sadness, loss and separation.

- Pupils in the same class should be told, in small groups, by adults they know.
- Pupils in other classes should also be informed in a similar way, where possible.
- A letter should go to all families within school the same day if possible
- Staff will be provided with guidelines of how to inform pupils (Appendix 3).
- Time and space will be provided as determined by the circumstances of individual events.
- Staff will be as honest as possible about their own feelings and experiences and talk about their relationship with the person.

Ongoing support

- The family and staff will be given an opportunity to celebrate the life of the child with a special assembly held in school at an appropriate time.
- SLT and staff recognise that we are not experts in bereavement counselling and support and therefore will look out for behaviour which suggests that a referral to an external professional may be in the child's best long term interest. HTs will contact the parent/carer in such cases as soon as possible.

Supporting pupils of a death outside of the school community

When school is informed of a bereavement that is linked to a school pupil eg. 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 the child's behaviour and share any information.

Monitoring

The policy will be monitored and updated every two years.

The guidance and resources will be reviewed at regular intervals to enable any new resources or information to be included.

This policy was agreed by the Governing Body on
It will be reviewed in

Links to other policies

- Critical incident plan
- Wellbeing Policy
- Safeguarding and Child protection
- Behaviour Policy

Appendix 1

Additional resources:

Useful online resources and information

- www.winstonswish.org.uk – a useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community.
- www.childbereavement.org.uk-a bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss
- bhf.org.uk/smallcreature British Heart Foundation site to help children come to term with loss using cartoon creatures.
- <https://www.cruse.org.uk/> - Cruse Bereavement Care. Includes resources to support schools and families. Cruse, National Helpline is 0808 8081677. Local line (answerphone only) is 01458 898211.

- www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/feelings-emotions/when-someone-dies

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
- Badger's Parting Gifts - Susan Varley

Appendix 2 - sample letter (to be amended due to specific circumstances)

Dear Parents, Carers and friends,

Unfortunately, we need to inform you of the sad and sudden death of XXX, a (pupil, member of staff, colleague) at Elmhurst.

XXX has been a popular member of our school community for xxx years. She/ he will be missed.

When someone dies, it is normal for their family and friends to experience lots of different feelings such as sadness, anger and confusion. The staff will be able to help answer any questions the children may have but we do request that you respect the family's privacy at this time. If needed, we are also able to signpost you to various resources which may be of help to you and your child. Please ask.

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

Yours sincerely,

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. If you have any worries or questions about (Name) having died, that is perfectly normal. When you're ready, ask to see me and then we will talk about it.”