



Robert Bloomfield Academy

Bereavement Policy

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1. Introduction

A death can affect the school community in many differing ways. Adults and students 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 the 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.

2. Rationale

At Robert Bloomfield Academy 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.

3. 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.
- 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.

4. Roles and responsibilities in dealing with bereavement

4.1 The role of the Governing Body

- Approve the bereavement policy and ensure its implementation.
- Ensure the policy is reviewed every three years.
- Ensure that approaches to bereavement are respectful of religious and cultural values and beliefs.
- Ensure that staff are given appropriate opportunities for training, reflection and access to support if they need it.

4.2 The role of the Principal

- Lead a whole-school approach to the effective management of loss and bereavement including ensuring appropriate training and support provided for staff.
- Contact LA/MAT in the case of a sudden and unexpected death.
- Be the first point of contact for family/child/staff directly affected by a bereavement.
- Record bereavements affecting children.
- Designate liaison and support to other trained members of staff when appropriate.
- Monitor progress in supporting those impacted by a bereavement and liaise with external agencies.
- Keep the governing body appropriately informed.
- Deal with media enquiries.

4.3 The role of the Pastoral Lead

- Access bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff if appropriate.
- Know how to access support for themselves, for other staff and for the family, if advice or information is needed.
- Know how to report a concern if the bereavement or a sudden and unexpected death has placed a child at significant risk of harm.
- Know how to support a child when they are distressed and how to refer to specialist support if needed.
- Have a basic understanding of a child's needs when facing loss and change.
- Provide individual support as and when needed and in consultation with the Principal.
- Inform the Principal at the earliest possibility if they hear about a death of someone in the school community.

5. Procedures

5.1 Pre-bereavement

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

In cases where this is an adult within the school community, individual conversations will be held with the Principal 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 and explore what support could be provided to them.
- Identify a key point of contact (usually Mrs Allen) in school in terms of information exchange and to update when things change.
- Ensure that all relevant adults are clear about what information has and needs to be shared with the student.
- Keep lines of communication open to ensure that all information is received in a timely fashion.
- Explore the possibility of signposting to other organisations.

- Look to involve faith or community leaders when appropriate and with the agreement of the family.
- Explore what support for the students affected might look like in practice.
- Arrange training for specific members of staff to ensure all involved are confident in their ability to support the child.
- If appropriate, consider and reflect on how to communicate with the wider school community for example the child's class mates.
- If appropriate, begin conversations around practical considerations in the events leading up to the death and following the death.

5.2 Following a bereavement

We will consider each individual situation carefully to ensure that the response from the school is sensitive, accurately reflects the gravity of the situation, and involves those affected as appropriate.

As an immediate response, we will:

- Contact the deceased's family with the aim to establish the facts and avoid rumours (Principal)
- Consider any religious beliefs that may affect the timing of the funeral or impact on other aspects of the bereavement process.
- Find out, if possible, how the family would like the information to be managed by the school.
- Allocate member(s) of staff to be the key point(s) of support of the affected child/children and ensure there is support in place for the staff members if required.
- Send letters or cards of condolence to families or individuals directly affected.
- Principal to prepare a press statement, with support from the BEST communications team if required and with due regard to the family affected.
- Inform staff of the death before the children are informed, recognising that some students may have found out through other means. Where possible, staff will be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways to make sure all staff have the same version of the event. Where this has not been possible, staff will be supported to share the information.
- Inform students who are most directly affected (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.
- Inform the wider school community in line with the wishes for the family, via letter to parents, the same day, if possible.
- Make small changes to the school timetable to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of the child or children affected by the situation. However, we will aim for minimal disruption to the timetable as this can offer a sense of security and familiarity.

For the funeral, we will:

- Find out the family's wishes and follow these in terms of the involvement of members of the school community (or not).
- Identify which staff and students 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 flowers or a collection in line with family wishes and the wishes for staff and students.
- Be sensitive to religious and cultural issues.

After the funeral, we will:

- Consider whether it is appropriate to visit the child and family affected at home and plan a return to school.
- Ensure friendships are secure – peer support can be particularly important for a bereaved child.
- Continue regular contact with the family and show we still care about them and their child over time.
- Monitor the emotional needs of staff and students and provide listening time and ongoing appropriate support.
- Consider practical issues and make thoughtful and sensitive updates to parental and other contact details when needed.
- Continue to assess the needs of children most affected, and record and plan for support accordingly.
- Support children to explore their feelings and memories through identified activities. Some opportunities may include story telling, remembering activities, and expressing feelings activities.

Longer term we will:

- Be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life. So, we will record information and share 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.
- Ensure that learning about loss and bereavement is embedded into appropriate curriculum areas including PSHE. When teaching about loss and bereavement we will give careful thought as to how to support those directly affected by loss and bereavement.

5.3 Following a sudden and unexplained death

Suicide is not just a really difficult event to deal with, it also presents the unique risk of potentially being the trigger for another suicide.

It is necessary to maintain the structure and order of the school routine, while facilitating the expression of grief, and reducing the risk of imitative suicide.

Information provided to the school community in the immediate aftermath of a sudden and unexplained death will depend on the age of the students 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:

- 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’.

Homicide

It is estimated that around one child every day is bereaved of a parent or sibling through murder or manslaughter in Great Britain.

Children may experience profound and lasting shock, enormous anger at what has happened, rage at the person who caused their relative to die, deep fear at the perceived insecurity of the world around them.

Sadly, in many cases, the person who caused the death is also known to the child, resulting in great confusion and a double loss, for example, if one parent kills the other and is then imprisoned. In some families, the child may have to move to a new house, school, area – away from familiar and comforting places and routines.

An honest and consistent age appropriate approach should be taken with children about what has happened. It is not possible to shield them from what has happened completely.

5.4 If A Child Dies In School:

- If any member of staff has concerns regarding a child’s health they will contact a first aider and ideally the Principal or a member of the SLT.
- In the case of serious concern, the school will call for an ambulance. Due to the seriousness of the situation, this decision can be taken by the first aider or a member of the SLT.
- Immediately inform the Principal or, in her absence, the most senior member of staff on site.
- The Principal will then ensure that the parents are contacted and seek their agreement to meet the ambulance at the hospital.
- If the child stops breathing a trained school staff member will administer CPR. Once the ambulance has arrived at school, the child is given over to their care and it is the ambulance team’s decision as to where the child is taken or which form of treatment is administered.
- Any change in circumstance following the first call to parents should be reported to them as soon as possible. Staff must not impart shocking or worrying news to a parent if they are travelling in a car alone.
- Once the child is placed in the ambulance a member of staff will be appointed to travel to the hospital either in the ambulance or in their own transport. The purpose

of this is to be a familiar face to the child's family on their arrival at the hospital. This person will remain in regular contact with the Principal and/or a member of the SLT

- The school will notify the LA and MAT if there is a death in school at the earliest opportunity. All press enquiries are to be rooted through the Principal.

5.5 If a Child Dies on a School Trip

- If a crisis situation occurs whilst a child is out on an educational trip, then the adult with the child, or the teacher in charge, should telephone for an ambulance first and then contact the school to inform the Principal. The school will then take the responsibility for contacting the parents.
- Once the ambulance team reaches the child, the child becomes the responsibility of the ambulance team and they will direct any subsequent actions.
- The off sites visits protocols give guidance for such situations and should be followed.
- The school will notify the LA and MAT, at the earliest opportunity.

5.6 Military Families

Any sudden death is a devastating event for children. When the death is that of a member of the Armed Forces there are additional factors to consider, such as the traumatic nature of a death in a combat situation, intense media interest, repatriation, an inquest and a service inquiry. Private grief may become very public property and families may feel overwhelmed.

There can be an assumption that all deaths connected to the military will happen in action; in fact, these deaths form only a proportion of all the deaths of military personnel. Someone could be victim of murder or manslaughter when home on leave, they could have a sudden illness, die in a road traffic collision, or they may take their own life. For their families, of course, every death is a tragedy and they may need additional support above and beyond their family, friends and military networks.

Many adults find it difficult to talk about death with children and it can be tempting to shield them from pain. However, it is really important that children have a clear understanding that the person has died. If a person has been on active service or deployed elsewhere, it may be difficult for a child to comprehend that they won't be coming home as usual. Nothing we can say will make it worse – the worst has already happened.

It is also a natural reaction to want to spare children from learning how the death has happened. However, when there has been a death in service, the media will be involved and the story will become public knowledge. It is much better that children and young people hear the news from us in a calm and accurate way rather than from rumour or from another child in the playground.

Initial response

Principal or designated key person makes contact with the family to:

- acknowledge what has happened
- express support
- discuss how to share the news with the rest of the school community
- check if family want their contact information shared
- Principal or designated key person shares the information with rest of staff and,

where possible, follows family choice on how this news is shared more widely with a) the child's peers and b) the rest of the school.

- Principal or designated key person shares information with the governors.
- Principal or designated key person makes contact with the young person, if appropriate, through a written card or letter to the child to acknowledge what has happened and express support.
- One (or two) contacts are agreed with the family to liaise with them and the child.
- Where appropriate, the information is shared with the school community, as agreed with the family. A simple form of words that parents can share with their children is appreciated. For example:

"We have some sad news to share. We heard today that the [relationship e.g. father] of [name] in Year [X] has died. S/he died suddenly/had been ill for a long time. We are in touch with the family and have expressed our sadness and our support. The family would appreciate any condolences which can be sent to [contact details]/At the moment, the family would prefer some time to absorb what has happened but will appreciate your condolences in a while. If you have concerns about your child, contact their class teacher/tutor. "

- The impact of this news on any other children in the school who have been bereaved or whose relative is seriously ill should be considered and direct contact made by their class teacher.
- Check in on staff response. Any death affecting a student can trigger other remembered griefs and, at this time of crisis, a sense of helplessness in not being able to respond as wished.

Further support

- Keep the support-at-a-distance coming through the chosen contact/s.
- Consider compiling condolences for the child from their peers. This could include collected messages and compiling an electronic book of condolence to email to the family. Other people might choose to send photos or drawings to remember them by. Once school is open again, you could offer a memorial of these drawings to display in school and then give to the family afterwards.
- Obtain, if possible, support resources for the family, for example: information about grief and children, suggested books and resources.
- When schools re-open, remember the support needs of bereaved children in planning their return to the classroom.

6. Equality and inclusion, values and beliefs

We recognise that there is a range of cultural and religious beliefs, customs and procedures concerning death. It follows that bereaved children and families may have differing expectations.

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

7. Support for bereaved staff

We are aware that staff also experience bereavement. When this happens, we will ensure they are provided with support to take care of themselves and to know where they can go for additional help should they need it.

We will work within our leave of absence policy and if necessary, with the LA occupational health team to ensure staff are provided with appropriate leave and support at a time of bereavement.

Teachers dealing with their own bereavement are encouraged to speak with the Principal about any areas of the curriculum which they feel uncomfortable to teach or want support to teach.

8. Curriculum

Children explore the concept of loss, bereavement, and grief as part of the statutory elements of our PSHE curriculum. It is also addressed through cross-curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles, as well as through art, literacy and religious education.

We also use assemblies to address aspects of death, such as Remembrance Day. We also observe national minutes of silence and explain the purpose of this.

We will answer any questions relating to loss or death in a sensitive, age-appropriate, honest and factual way. Children will not be expected to disclose any personal experiences but will be signposted to support if they want it.

We give children opportunities to learn about and discuss cultural and religious issues around death and encourage them to express their own responses and feelings.

9. Additional Support Links

As part of PSHE and our safeguarding work we will also signpost to appropriate sources of support for students and adults in the school community.

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

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

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

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.

Chums: <http://www.chums.uk.com> A local charity supporting for children and their parents/carers following a bereavement.

10. Letter Templates

Template letter to parents and carers - death of a student

Dear parents and carers

Your child's **Class teacher/Principal** had the sad task of informing the students of the death of **(name)**, a student in **(year)**.

(Name) died **suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness yesterday/last week/over the weekend/during half term**. **He/She** was a member of the **(classname)** class 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 students 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.

Our thoughts are with **(name)** family and friends at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school **will celebrate/remember (name)** life.

(Sign off)

Principal

Template letter to parents and carers - death of a member of staff

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 students were told today by their **class teacher/Principal/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 students 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.

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

Principal

11. Author and Date

Author: Louise Day, Assistant Principal and Safeguarding Lead

Approved by: John Linehan, Principal and Governing Body

Date: March 2025