

Dean Valley Community Primary School



Dean Valley
Community Primary

Bereavement Policy

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Bereavement Policy

We, at Dean Valley Primary School, understand the importance of providing support to children, families, staff, governors and the wider school community during and after bereavement. The way in which children and young people are responded to when someone important in their lives dies has a profound effect on their future ability to manage their own lives. The caring and supportive school environment has a key role to play and we recognise that every situation is unique and demands careful handling, with the wishes of the pupil or family being of paramount importance.

This policy is not prescriptive; different strategies and procedures maybe necessary in different circumstances. These must take into account the age of the pupils concerned, the relationship the bereaved had with the deceased and the relevant context in which the bereavement has occurred.

All mentions of 'the family' in this policy, refer to the family of the deceased individual. The wishes of the family will always be considered when carrying out any of the actions outlined in this policy. If the family objects to any of the procedures, the school will work to ensure reasonable adjustments are made.

Rationale:

Every 22 minutes in the UK a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 41,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, and, sadly, around 12,000 children die in the UK each year.

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.

Roles and responsibilities:

The role of the Head teacher and SLT:

- To have overall responsibility for the implementation of the policy
- To liaise with external agencies as appropriate
- To respond to media enquiries as appropriate
- To be first point of contact for family/child concerned
- To inform all staff and arrange for the children to be informed, as appropriate, in line with the family's wishes.
- To keep the governing body up to date and fully informed as appropriate.

The role of Staff:

- To support the Head teacher and SLT in carrying out the procedures outlined in this policy
- To support staff, children and parents following a death, as directed by the Head teacher and SLT
- To support other staff members with communicating the news of a death
- Where necessary, to make referrals for children, staff and other members of the school community to receive support and counselling
- Where requested, undertake bereavement support training and share this knowledge with all other staff members.

The role of the Local Authority:

- To advise and support staff
- Consult on referral pathways and identification of complex grief.

Responding to a death:

Breaking the news to staff, pupils and families

News of the death of a close member of a child's or staff's family, the death of a pupil or member of staff or a member of the school community will be passed to the Head teacher who will try to obtain factual information to avoid unnecessary rumour or assumption, which could lead to further distress. Where possible the Head teacher or SLT will liaise directly with the family involved and agree exactly what information should be passed on to staff and pupils. The family's wishes will be taken into account before any information is given to the pupils.

Staff will be informed as soon as possible, ideally before the pupils, ensuring enough time is given to enable them to discuss what has happened, how they feel and what internal and external support is available. All this information will also be shared with part time staff, governors and those who may not be in school that day.

Where necessary a press statement will be prepared by the Head teacher and SLT and agreed with the Local Authority.

If pupils need to be told they will be told as soon as possible to avoid rumour and uncertainty. This will be done in familiar groups by someone they know, for example their class teacher, and the information will be shared in an age appropriate way. Opportunities will be given for pupils to ask questions and respond to the news. The bereaved child or member of staff may or may not wish to be present when the news is broken.

It may be appropriate for a letter to go home to all parents that same day, respecting the wishes of the family.

Children with specific needs that may influence their response to being informed about the death will be identified and told separately. These needs include the following:

- Children that had a long-term and/or close relationship with the individual who has died
- Children with SEND
- Children who have difficulty managing their emotions or behaviour

The first few days

As far as is possible, it is best to have as little disruption as possible to the school timetable and school life should try to go on as normal, but with flexibility as necessary.

If it is a teacher who has died, the class will be covered by another teacher from the school whom the children know well and feel comfortable talking to.

Many bereaved children and young people find returning to school as soon as possible a welcome refuge of normality after the chaos of emotion at home and their return should be as fuss free as possible.

A bereaved child will require enormous support but, as far as possible, school life should go on as normally as possible.

A bereaved member of staff will need to be supported to have the appropriate amount of compassionate leave.

Support for Pupils and Staff

In supporting both the bereaved child and the other pupils, staff will act sensitively at all times, seeking advice when necessary, from both the Head teacher and the families involved.

The class teacher will be the first line of support for the child but should the child need extra support away from the classroom, extra support will be provided. E.g. a child finds it difficult to stay in the classroom when they are upset, it may be necessary to identify with them a suitable place, where they can go for some quiet time with an adult they trust.

Both school and families need to work together to note changes in behaviour and if necessary counselling from outside agencies may be sought. Children and young people bereaved through suicide or violent death are likely to need skilled help and support but the informal support of familiar adults is still vital.

Supporting a bereaved child is very upsetting and emotionally demanding for staff and therefore informal support between colleagues is vital. Opportunities to discuss feelings and reactions with colleagues are necessary and important. Support and counselling is available to any member of staff and can be arranged through the Head teacher.

All staff should be aware of colleagues and offer support on an individual basis where necessary and alert a member of the SLT if they become concerned about a colleague's well-being. 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.

Support for bereaved members of staff will be offered in line with their wishes and feelings and the agreed management of human resources policies and procedures.

Funeral and Remembrance Activities

In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance may be discussed, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances.

Following the death of a member of the school community a special assembly or remembrance service may be held as a way of saying 'Goodbye' and as a celebration of their life. This may take many forms, but will always be in accordance with the wishes of the bereaved family. All remembrance activities will be planned so that they are respectful of the culture and religious beliefs of the family.

Supporting a child if someone dies

If a child or a parent informs staff that a close member of the family has died it is important that this information is shared with the people working with the children in school and with the Head teacher and SLT. The Head teacher and SLT will decide if this information needs to be shared more widely amongst staff – for example, if a parent or sibling dies. The school will work closely with the family to provide suitable support for the children in whatever way feels best – counselling, nurture time, somewhere quiet to talk, etc. Trained members of staff can support with bespoke activities when the time is right. School will also signpost families to appropriate organisations for support and will assist with referrals if necessary. Information will be available on the school website.

If school is closed when the death occurs we will endeavour to continue to follow the points outlined above sensitivity and taking into account the wishes of the family; communication with the family is vital. Careful consideration will be given to how the news of the death is communicated and by what medium if we are in a situation where we cannot have face-to-face contact with pupils, staff and the school community.

Useful Websites/ telephone numbers:

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/how-we-grieve>

http://sabp.lgfl.org.uk/section_B2.html (Why Does Everybody Grieve Differently?)

http://sabp.lgfl.org.uk/section_B3.html (How Might a Person Express Their Grief?)

http://sabp.lgfl.org.uk/section_B4.html (Recognising Grief Over Time)

- Winston's Wish Family Line - 0845 2030405 – national helpline offering guidance, information and support to anyone caring for a bereaved child, including professionals and family members

- www.winstonswish.org.uk

- Childhood Bereavement Network - 020 7843 6309 – a network of child bereavement services

- www.childbereavement.org.uk

- CRUSE Bereavement Care (0870) 167 1677 www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

- www.mind.org.uk