



## **BEREAVEMENT POLICY**

### **Aims and Ethos**

Oakhill Primary School is fully committed to supporting all those affected by loss and death in a supportive and caring environment in which everyone can respond appropriately to individual circumstances.

Our school is fully committed to the emotional health and well-being of our children and young people and that of our staff. We are dedicated to the continual development of a healthy and thriving school community and strive to work towards this in all aspects of school life. We are passionate about providing an ethos, environment and curriculum that can provide support during difficult times, including a time of death or dying.

### **Rationale**

In the event of a sudden or unexpected bereavement school staff may feel considerable anxiety about knowing how to best respond. This is understandable in a culture where death is seldom openly discussed.

Every year 20,000 children under the age of 16 years will be bereaved of a parent and many more will experience the death of someone else special in their life. In addition to these individual pupils, schools may also experience the death of a child at the school or a staff member. It is almost inevitable therefore, that at some time all schools will have to deal with a death that affects the school community.

As children spend a significant amount of their time at school, teachers and staff members will be the primary source of care and support. Bereaved children may see school as a safe haven away from the turmoil of emotions at home and may look to trusted staff members for help.

Death is something that most people choose not to think about so when faced with it we often find ourselves ill prepared. The purpose of the Bereavement Policy is to help 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 time.

### **Objectives**

This policy outlines practical measures to be taken when people are in shock, or upset, especially with sudden or multiple deaths or traumatic circumstances to include:

- A framework for all staff to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with the bereavement.
- To support pupils and/or members of staff before (where applicable), during and after bereavement.
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between members of staff, pupils, the family/carers and the community.
- To identify key staff within school and the governing body/Local Authority/ academy trust.
- To have clear expectations about the way school will respond to a death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.

## The Death of a pupil or member of staff

### Roles and responsibilities

The school may be notified about the death of a pupil or member of staff in a number of ways.

- If parent or family member calls school directly with the news the person answering the call will put them through to the **Head Teacher** immediately (or a member of **SLT** if HT not available)
- If a member of staff is contacted themselves about the death or they hear or read something about the death via the News or Social Media, they must contact the **Head Teacher** immediately.
- It is the responsibility of the **Head Teacher**, or member of **SLT** for the dissemination of the information to other members of the school community
- A member of staff will be appointed to liaise with the family. The best person for this will be decided by the **Head Teacher and SLT** and will depend on the specific situation, relationship with pupil/family and experience of member of staff. This person can be **Head Teacher/SLT/Class Teacher/SENCO/PST**. This designated person will liaise with the family to offer support and discuss their wishes.
- The indiscriminate spread of news via social media may mean that some members of the school community hear the news before others, therefore the Head Teacher will inform members of the school community about the death as soon as possible by email / staff briefing.
- **Class Teachers and Support Staff** will share the news of the death with their own classes with the support of the **Head Teacher, SLT or PST** if required. If Class Teachers are absent the news will be shared to that class by a member of **SLT**. Classes directly affected by the death (death of pupil in class, Class Teacher or support staff) will be informed of death by **Head Teacher** or **SLT** supported by **PST**.
- The **Head Teacher** to send letter of condolence on behalf of whole school community.
- **Head Teacher**, once permission has been received from family, will inform parents of the death by ParentMail/letter (template attached).
- If the death occurs during a school holiday **Head Teacher/SLT** will, once permission has been received from family, inform parents by ParentMail and ask them to share the news of the death with their child themselves. (template attached).
- **PST** will support pupils individually or in groups. **PST** will also contact external agencies e.g. DOVE to help with support if this is necessary for example sudden deaths and multiple deaths.
- If the press are involved the **Head Teacher, SLT and Governors** (and in some circumstances the Local Authority/MAT) will prepare a press release. And a designated member of **SLT** will liaise with journalists.
- In the case of a death of a pupil, **PST/SENCO** will inform any other professionals are involved with the child and family e.g. school nurse, educational psychologist, Family Support Worker
- In the case of a sudden, suspicious or traumatic death of a pupil the **Head Teacher (DSL)** and/or Deputy DSL will represent the school as part of the multi-agency review.
- If a pupil dies by suicide **PST** will contact Samaritans (0808 168 2528) who will provide a step-by-step program of support for school.

### Procedures

Designated member of staff will liaise with family and when appropriate clarify with the family what information about the death they would like shared and their wishes. Some families may want to share information with the school community while others may not. A simple confirmation of the death may be required until more details are available, and/or the family consulted. The school can help to prevent speculation and rumours, as well as be a source of support for the family and the school community. It helps to feel prepared when delivering sad news, so a simple script will be prepared by Head Teacher/SLT/PST/Class Teacher for staff members who are sharing the news this will also ensure that everyone receives the same information. Staff should not be afraid or surprised to show emotion, this is a human reaction.

Script may include the following

- Start by acknowledging you have some sad news to give.
- Be honest. Give the news stating simple facts, use the words dead/died.

- If known, and with the family's permission, explain briefly where and when the death occurred.
- If not known, say so, and that you will endeavour to find out. If rumours are rife, say which of these are definitely not correct, if known. Where appropriate, remind pupils of their responsibilities and the impact when posting on social media.
- Talk briefly and positively about the person who died without eulogising them.
- Mention any arrangements already in place, including for those needing support.
- Acknowledge that not everyone will be feeling sad and that is OK.

Allow a break in the timetable for pupils to process the news and take a little time-out.

The school timetable should remain as normal as possible to help provide stability and normality for both staff and pupils however in the first few days some flexibility may be necessary especially for pupils/staff in same class/year as the pupil/staff member that has died.

Bereaved children may need time to grieve and manage overwhelming feelings, children should therefore be allowed to leave the classroom and take time out in Blossom room which will open throughout the school day with a member of PST available for the first few days following the death.

A temporary tribute/book of condolence, if appropriate, will be accessible in Blossom Room and pupils can be supervised and supported by PST to contribute to it. In the case of the death of a staff member there will also be a temporary tribute/book of condolence in the school reception area for parents to contribute to.

The family will be offered the opportunity to visit, if they wish to, photographs will be taken to share with them at a later date.

Staff, pupils (and parents) will be consulted before removing any temporary tribute, giving notice to prepare them beforehand.

### **The Funeral**

- The Designated member of staff will consult the family to find out whether members of staff and/or pupils are welcome to attend.
- Depending on the families wishes a collection can be organised in memory of the pupil/staff member and donated to a charity of the families' choosing or a memorial.
- Head Teacher to identify the practicalities of issues such as staff cover to allow all those wishing to attend the funeral to do so. (For some circumstances, it may be appropriate to close the school, for others, it may not).
- If school remains open for the funeral support will be provided, if needed, for the pupils not attending by **PST**.
- Cultural and religious implications need consideration

### **Remembering**

A memorial assembly, if appropriate, can be planned by the school community. Family will be consulted about the assembly by the designated staff member and invited to attend if they wish.

The school community can be consulted, if appropriate, on a more permanent memorial (a tree, a bench, a special garden)

## Support for staff and pupils

PST along with class teachers will identify pupils who need extra support with their grief either individually or in groups. In the first instance these pupils will be supported by the PST. The PST will ask for advice from external agencies (listed below). If necessary PST will refer pupil to local services for support.

Supporting bereaved pupils can be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions. SLT will support staff during this time and refer to Occupational Health for further support if felt necessary.

## Multiple Deaths due to a crisis or disaster situation on school premises or on a school trip or a disease pandemic.

### Roles and Responsibilities

As above plus

- Some deaths, particularly those in sudden or traumatic circumstances, attract media attention. All members of staff are advised not to respond to journalists and to refer all enquiries to the **Headteacher/SLT**, who will make a considered response after seeking assistance from **Governors** and the Local Authority Press Office.
- Support for staff will be offered through our HR / insurance company and any other support available.

### Procedure

As above plus

- A memorial assembly to be held to remember pupils and/or staff who have died. Careful consideration to be given as to whether foundation stage and Key Stage 1 children are included
- Help to be sort from external agencies for support or advice on how to support the whole school community

*See appendix four for advice on how to support a bereaved child during COVID 19 pandemic.*

## Supporting a bereaved pupil

### Returning to school after a bereavement

Most grieving pupils do not need a 'bereavement expert', they need the support of familiar and trusted adults. School, with its familiar environment and routines, can be a place of comfort for a bereaved young person.

On returning to school following a bereavement, especially after the death of a parent or sibling, the pupil and their family/carers will meet with PST/Class Teacher/SLT to establish what has happened and to discuss their return to school. The purpose of the meeting will be to

- Acknowledge the death.
- Find out how the pupil would like to share their news.
- Organise a safe space for the bereaved pupil to go if they feel overwhelmed by their grief and need a 'time-out'. How will they inform staff of this? For example, a 'time-out' card, a non-verbal signal or message. How will this be communicated to all staff?
- Set guidelines for communication – with the pupil, between members of staff and between home and school.

When a classmate has experienced a death, it is usual for children and young people of ages to be anxious about what they should say and how they should treat them. Class teachers are often themselves apprehensive about how to support all the children in their care. Once it is known when the student is returning to school Class Teacher with the support of PST will have, if appropriate a class discussion about death and how grief affects different people. This will be delivered in an age appropriate way but will cover the following points:

- Encourage the sharing of feelings, possibly through thinking about other types of losses or deaths that students have experienced and what helped them cope.
- Explore what difficulties the student may experience when they return to school through thinking about how they might like others to treat them. Would they like to be left alone or want to talk about it? The idea that someone is likely to want both at different times or from different people can be introduced.
- Discuss how students might reach out to their classmate. Encourage them to think about this in the context of their friendship before the death. Would they want to offer to talk or make plans outside of school? Or would it be more appropriate for them to offer to help them catch up with schoolwork?
- Make students aware that their classmate may act differently when they return. They may seem withdrawn and unfriendly or they may be aggressive and moody. They should understand that this is normal and nothing to do with them.
- Be aware that the bereavement may have an impact on other students, stirring up their own feelings of loss and separation. Close friends of the bereaved and his/her family may also need additional support to help them cope with feelings of helplessness or being 'shut out'.

A short film is available on the Child Bereavement UK website: <http://childbereavementuk.org/for-teachers-when-a-pupil-returns-to-school-after-being-bereaved>

### **Longer term support**

A bereaved pupil can continue to grieve for the rest of their life, especially after the death of a parent/carer/sibling and may require ongoing support. Significant dates or anniversaries, Mother's/Father's Day, etc. may be particularly difficult and the pupil may need extra support at these times and alternative activities may be required if making cards etc for these days.

PST/Class teacher will have regular contact with the family/carers, if necessary, to build up an overall picture of how the pupil is coping, and discuss what support school can offer.

The grief may impact the pupil's progress. Some pupils work really hard and may put themselves under extra pressure to succeed, while others may find it difficult to focus in class and on their work. There may be changes in their behaviour, if this is the case class teacher will work with PST to plan how best to manage the behaviour

Bereaved young people can find change difficult, so class teacher will prepare them in advance (where possible) for any changes e.g. supply teacher, change of timetable. This may help them to voice their worries and ease the process.

A record of the pupils bereavement will be made on CPOMS and the pupil's records that are passed onto the next years class teacher. The information will also be passed on at transition to high school.

## **Appendix 1 -List of Online Resources and Information**

[www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org) A useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community.

[www.childbereavement.org](http://www.childbereavement.org) A bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

[www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk) A bereavement support service for both adults and children

[www.griefencounter.org.uk](http://www.griefencounter.org.uk) A bereavement support service for children and young people

## Appendix 2 -Template letters to parents

*Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the child's parents.*

*The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the parents and the school.*

### Template letter to parents and carers - death of a pupil:

Dear Parents and Carers,

Your child's class teacher/ head teacher had the sad task of informing the pupils of the death of <name>, a pupil in <year>.

<Name> died suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness yesterday/last week/over the weekend/during half term.

He/She was a valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well liked/popular/friendly member of the class/school community 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 pupils 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. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the following websites [www.childbereavement.org](http://www.childbereavement.org), [www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org) , [www.griefencounter.org.uk](http://www.griefencounter.org.uk), [www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk).

Our thoughts are with <Name's> family and friends at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember <Name's> life.

Sign-off

Head Teacher

## 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 pupils were told today by their **class teacher/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 pupils 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. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the following websites [www.childbereavement.org](http://www.childbereavement.org), [www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org), [www.griefencounter.org.uk](http://www.griefencounter.org.uk), [www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk).

Our thoughts are with **<Name's>** family at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember life.

**Sign-off**

Head Teacher



## Template letter to parents and carers

Dear **Parent's name**

We are so very sorry to hear the sad news of **<Name's>** death. There are no words to express our sadness and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through.

As a school community, we will miss **<Name>** very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to **his/her** friends, classmates and teachers. **<Name>** was a **valued/cherished/well-liked/popular/friendly** member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help as you plan **<Name's>** funeral, please let us know.

We will continue to keep in touch and will support you in any way we can.

With sympathy

### **Appendix three -How children and young people of different ages may understand and respond to death (taken from Grief Encounter UK)**

The concept of death from a child's perspective is very different from an adult's understanding of death. Furthermore, as the child grows and matures, earlier ways of thinking about death will change. It is essential for the adult to have a sense of how children conceptualize death at different ages so that when the time comes to talk about death the adult can respond in a manner appropriate to the child's developmental age. The ages given below are not meant to be exact but representative of the differing developmental stages.

#### **Infants – Birth to 2 Years**

Although there is no ability to conceptualise death and there is not a memory capacity for specific personal relationships, infants feel loss and separation. The death of the primary caregiver will usually result in displeasure and signs of anxiety such as being fractious and unsettled. In addition, an infant is likely to internalise in some way the grief and emotional responses of the adults around them.

#### **Toddlers – 3 to 4 Years**

Even though young children will not understand the permanence of death they will understand that something serious has happened. It is advisable to let nurseries and other care givers know so they can be understanding about any changes in the child. Young children express fear and confusion through behaviours not words and may therefore become more challenging or have difficulties with sleeping, toileting or feeding. They may also show increased separation anxiety.

Death is viewed as temporary at this age and the child may ask when the dead person is coming back or believe they will return if they are very good. They can appear unconcerned when told of the death which can be distressing for adults. Children of this age understand language in a very literal way so it is important to use simple, factual explanations to avoid confusion. Expressions such as 'lost', 'passed away' and 'sleeping' may reinforce an expectation that the deceased can be found or reawaken.

#### **Children - 5 to 7 Years**

Children in this age group can vary enormously in their understanding of the world and death. Most likely they will know the words death and dying but will probably still not have a real understanding of its permanence, imagining that they can return or are in an actual physical place somewhere, such as heaven. Generally, there is no concept of a personal death; death is something that only happens to other people. They may start to express concerns that other significant adults will also die.

#### **Children - 7 to 9 Years**

Children begin to grasp the finality of death and may develop an increased interest in the physical and biological aspects of death. However, this increased factual understanding of death is often mixed with fantasies such as a preoccupation with skeletons and ghosts. "Magical thinking", believing that thoughts can make things happen such as accidents and death can be confusing and frightening at this time.

There may be little understanding of the impact of the death on others, a denial of the death or a focus on their own feelings all of which can be distressing for adults supporting the child.

#### **Children - 9 to 12 Years**

A more realistic understanding of the permanence and irreversibility of death develops which can bring worries about the future and how they and the family will be impacted. They may repeatedly go over the details of the death and experience irrational thoughts and emotions around how they might have caused the death or could somehow have changed what happened. Some children can become anxious and insecure appearing to regress whilst others can exhibit pseudo-adult behaviour and, if it is a parent who has died, try to assume their role in the family.

#### **Adolescents**

Teenagers will most likely be characteristically unpredictable and volatile in their responses to hearing that a loved one has died. Some may want to be close to the family, ignoring school and social lives whilst others may distance themselves in a way that can feel hurtful and rejecting. The peer group can be very important and 'acting out' behaviours worrying for caregivers. It is important to give young people space to process their changing emotions whilst trying to maintain usual boundaries and rules will help them to feel safe at such a confusing time.

## APPENDIX FOUR -SUPPORTING BEREAVED CHILDREN DURING THE VIRUS OUTBREAK

The outbreak of Covid-19 means that many aspects of children's lives are changing. School is closed for most, lots of parents are working from home, and families are having to spend time apart when they would like to be together. The news is full of talk of the virus and the effect it is having.

Many children will have questions and worries about the virus, but those who have experienced the death of someone important or who have an ill family member might be particularly worried. This page has some tips about supporting bereaved children with worries and concerns about the virus.

- Child Bereavement UK have made a short film about [supporting bereaved children during the outbreak](#)
- Winston's Wish have produced guidance on
  - [talking to bereaved children about coronavirus](#)
  - [telling a child that someone is seriously ill](#)
  - [telling a child that someone has died from coronavirus](#)
- Cruse Bereavement Care have produced some [tips about talking to children](#) among their wider resources about [grief and coronavirus](#)
- Grief Encounter are running activities for bereaved children and families on their [Instagram](#) page.

### SAYING GOODBYE AND FUNERALS

The requirements around social distancing mean that some children and young people won't be able to go to the funeral of a loved one during the outbreak. Click below for some suggestions about other ways of saying goodbye from our members at

- [How to say goodbye when a funeral isn't possible](#), from Winstons Wish
- [Guidance for families around funerals](#), from Nelson's Journey
- [Organising a meaningful funeral](#) from Quaker Social Action

### Supporting bereaved children through difficult times (taken from Child Bereavement UK)

Frightening events widely reported in the media, such as the coronavirus pandemic, can cause children to worry about themselves and others. It is normal for children to feel unsettled when something scary is happening or has happened, and many will be upset, sad or fearful at times. Children who have been bereaved are likely to show a stronger reaction and may worry that they or someone they know will die.

**Here are some tips to help you support a bereaved child:**

#### Talk

Children and young people often find it helpful if they can talk about what is happening, helping them to make sense of events and feel less afraid. Even young children are likely to hear reports in the media or overhear adults talking about deaths due to coronavirus, or the risk of death from becoming ill with the virus. It's important to talk about their fears or anxieties honestly and openly in age-appropriate language. It may also help to restrict the amount of media coverage and social media they are exposed to, and balance this with other activities and positive things to focus on. Children's understanding of death varies with their stage of development and it can be helpful to understand why children may respond differently. Our website has information which can help you understand and accommodate these differences and you may find it useful to watch our short guidance film *Children's understanding of death at different ages*.

#### Be honest

Give children honest, factual information in language appropriate to their age and level of understanding, and be guided by their questions. Children tend to pick up when questions are avoided and may then imagine all kinds of things, causing further anxiety. It's not necessary to go into detail but it will be helpful to explain things that affect

them directly, such as why they are being asked to wash their hands regularly and how the virus is spread, why their school has closed, why they can't visit a grandparent or why a parent is working from home.

### **Acknowledge concerns**

Bereaved children may be concerned about someone they know becoming ill or even dying. Explain that some people will have no symptoms and will be fine, most people will experience only a mild form of the virus and will get better, but some people are more vulnerable and so we need to make sure they are protected. Be honest though and don't shy away from explaining that some people may die, as children need to trust that you are being honest and open with them, so that they can ask you other questions with confidence.

### **Create routines**

Currently, keeping to usual, daily routines might be difficult. But routines can be reassuring to children when everything else seems to be disrupted. If you are at home with your child, try to keep to regular routines such as meal times, school work, breaks, play and bedtime.

Children feel more in control, and therefore less fearful, if given simple clear jobs to do, such as washing their hands properly, or simple jobs around the house.

### **Get support**

If you are struggling with your own reactions, try to get support for yourself. Children and young people are quick to pick up on the distress of others around them, even if the adults are trying to hide their feelings.

**REVIEW & AMEND AS NECESSARY ANNUALLY –SEPTEMBER 2025 (MOST RECENT REVISION SEPT 2024)**