

Bereavement Policy including Death of a Child
Stanley Grove Primary and Nursery School
June 2021



This document is a statement of the aims, principles and procedures regarding Bereavement at Stanley Grove Primary and Nursery School.

This document outlines the basic principles and procedures that underpin the schools approach to supporting members of the school community affected by bereavement.

Bereavement affects everybody at some time, and as a close community, our school aims to provide the best support for those experiencing bereavement.

We recognise that every bereavement is unique, and that any guidelines we have will need to take account of individual circumstances and the wishes of those most closely involved.

We aim to have suitably trained staff in school who understand the complexities surrounding bereavement, and can help support families at times of bereavement to ensure that the school does what it can to best meet the needs of the bereaved.

It is important that children are helped to understand bereavement in clear and unambiguous ways, and given opportunities to experience the full range of emotions that may accompany bereavement within a safe and supportive atmosphere.

The school recognises the importance of long term support for those who are bereaved, and will endeavour to provide opportunities for memorials and remembrance where appropriate.

Procedures

To best support staff and pupils during times of bereavement, it will be necessary to ascertain sensitive and potentially distressing information regarding the nature of an illness or cause of death. We will always ensure that any meetings with families are conducted in a comfortable, private space, in an unhurried manner. If this information must be shared, we will always be clear with parents beforehand about how we will respect confidentiality and share information sensitively, only where it is in the interests of the bereaved and the school community.

In the case of terminal illness, the school will liaise with the family to arrange for a member of staff to be the main point of contact throughout the illness. This member of staff will support the family regarding school procedures to support them during the illness and will help keep the pupil informed about events at school during any prolonged periods of absence. A member of staff will support the pupil during their time in school, and be available to the family before, during, and after the death. Staff members will also co-ordinate attendance at the funeral, and any memorials the family may wish the school to facilitate. Where possible, this may be a staff member who has an existing relationship with the family. In turn, this staff member will be given close support by the Headteacher, and will be supported in developing their professional practice in this regard.

At times of bereavement, it is important that rumour and speculation are avoided. We will take time to talk to the affected family or staff member about the circumstances surrounding the bereavement. Knowing the background will help us provide the best support for those affected by bereavement. We will discuss with the family the extent to which the circumstances should be shared with other staff members and pupils, in order to provide the best support for the grieving child.

To help pupils understand bereavement, we will typically aim to inform groups of children of the death of a pupil or staff member in small groups, supported by staff with whom they are familiar. We will allow children to ask questions, and will endeavour to answer sensitively, factually and using unambiguous

language to help all children understand what has happened. We will seek to involve the bereaved family in these decisions, and will offer to draft a letter to parents explaining the situation.

In the event of the pupil being bereaved of a loved one or close friend, we will discuss what the pupil has already been told in order to provide clarity and consistency for the pupils. Where there are religious considerations, we will also seek the views of family, and endeavour to respect those beliefs. We will allocate a member of staff to whom the pupil relates well to be a mentor in school and encourage the pupil to feel free to express themselves when and how they choose, by providing time-out space and a range of activities and channels through which the pupil may wish to express their feelings.

Subject to the wishes of the family, in the event where a pupil or staff member has died, the school may be closed if necessary in order to allow staff and pupils to attend the funeral.

Where a member of the school community has died, the school will endeavour to provide additional space and time for those staff or pupils most likely to be particularly affected. Staff will be expected to be particularly vigilant regarding the emotional wellbeing of pupils close to the deceased.

We will ensure long term support for the pupil by keeping a diary of significant days and ensuring that this information is communicated (with consent) to the pupils next school. We will endeavour to include the child in commemorative days such as mother's/father's day, by sensitively providing time for reflection and remembrance where appropriate.

Where there is media interest, no member of staff should engage with the media. All comments should be made through the Headteacher or Chair of Governors if needed.

Talking about death and grieving

When talking to bereaved children:

- **Listen and validate** – children often do not recognise their feelings as grief. Let them know that whatever they are feeling is normal and okay
- **Acknowledge their fears** – children's fears, no matter how irrational, are real and we cannot take them away. Just knowing that someone they trust is listening to them is helpful
- **Reassure, but only as much as you can do so honestly** – for example, a child whose family member has died from COVID-19 will quite rationally be afraid of other family members dying. It's unhelpful to try to calm a child's fears by saying that will not happen when it already has, and it can diminish the child's trust in you. Rather, acknowledge the possibility but counter with facts about how rare this is
- **Check their understanding** – children can be very literal, and what might seem obvious to us may not be so clear to them. As you talk to them, regularly check that they understand what you have said
- **Share your own feelings** – it is okay to let children know that you are also sad and upset. It can be reassuring that what they are feeling is normal

If the bereaved child is struggling to express themselves:

Some helpful resources:

- Sharing 'Lost for words' – a free e-book of advice by grieving children for grieving children
- Sharing 'Thanks on death' – a set of cards designed to open discussion about death and grief
- Completing memory books

Supporting staff who are supporting bereaved pupils:

Working with bereaved children is painful, and those staff members working in this situation will need additional support:

- **Do not let them go at it alone** – make sure more than one staff member is assigned to each bereaved child. It is important to share the load, and it will also ensure that all staff assigned to a child have someone to talk to without breaching confidentiality
- **Check in with them regularly** – be proactive, and be the one reaching out. **Be prepared to step in** – tell them to step back if it becomes clear they are overwhelmed
- **Make bereavement training available** – many organisations offer training for school staff, including:
 - [Child Bereavement UK](#)
 - [Winston's Wish](#)
 - [Cruse Bereavement Care](#)
 - [EduCare](#)

Supporting grief from a distance (Coronavirus Social Distancing)

Under current circumstances normal school bereavement strategies may not be able to be put into action

- Appoint 1 or 2 people to liaise with the child. These could be teachers that are close to the pupil.
- Schedule regular points of contact during the week using whatever mode of communication is appropriate. The frequency depends on the needs of the child. If it's a vulnerable child, schedule regular contact with the parents or carers.
- The length of time you spend on these calls will depend on the age of the child but should mirror that set out in the normal bereavement procedures.
- Provide a space for other children to share their grief and condolences
- Even children who aren't directly affected will want to express their own sadness and provide support and encouragement for their bereaved classmate. – support the bereaved family by: encouraging classmates to make drawings or write letters and deliver them to the bereaved child, encouraging them to create a playlist of music for the bereaved child, considering having older children set up an online fundraiser in memory of the deceased (with the family's permission)

Supporting pupils through the death of a classmate or staff member

- Identify those pupils who require greater support
- Some children who grieve the death of a classmate or staff member will find it harder than others.
- Appoint 1 or 2 people to liaise with these children. These could be teachers that are close to the pupil.
- Schedule regular points of contact during the week using whatever mode of communication is appropriate. The frequency depends on the needs of the child. If it's a vulnerable child, schedule regular contact with the parents or carers.
- The length of time you spend on these calls will depend on the age of the child but should mirror that set out in the normal bereavement procedures.
- Provide a space for children to share their grief

Grief is communal, and sharing grief is one way that we come to terms with death.

- Encourage pupils to make drawings or write letters and deliver them to the bereaved family
- With the family's permission, set up a memorial page online and encourage pupils to submit drawings, letters or pictures (this will only be accessible to our school community)
- Encourage pupils to create a playlist of music that makes them think of the deceased or makes them feel better
- Consider having older pupils set up an online fundraiser in memory of the deceased (with the family's permission)

Supporting Pupils

- Having a designated staff member available by phone at posted times for children to ask questions or talk about how they feel
- We also provide support through bereavement packs, learning mentor sessions and family support.

We will ensure when providing bereavement support remotely, we will follow the same safeguarding principles that apply to remote learning.

Appendix

Resources for parents

Child Bereavement UK

Leeds

Address: Child Bereavement UK, Brooklands Court Business Centre, Tunstall Road,

Leeds LS11 5HL

Tel: [01133 503598](tel:01133503598)

Email: leedssupport@childbereavementuk.org

The NHS

[Children and bereavement](#) – includes lots of resources for parents and children, including helplines and tips for creating a memory box

Child Bereavement UK

- [Telling a child that someone has died](#)
- [Parenting bereaved children - a video](#)

Cruse Bereavement Care

- [Children and young people's physical responses to grief](#)
- [Children and young people's emotional responses to grief](#)

Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families

- [On My Mind](#) is a resource for children to learn how to support their own mental health and wellbeing. It stresses the important of [self-care](#)

Further resources for schools

Winston's Wish

- [Bereavement support for schools](#)
- [Talking to children about coronavirus](#)
- [How to say goodbye when a funeral isn't possible](#)
- [Supporting bereaved children with SEN](#)