

IncludEd Learning

Independent Specialist Education Provider



BEREAVEMENT AND LEARNING POLICY

Rational

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 children who are struggling with bereavement – 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 challenging 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.

Objectives

The core intentions of the policy are:

- To support students and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and community.
- To identify key staff within the school and the Local Authority, and clarify the pathway of support.

The Children Act 1989 aimed to ensure that the welfare of the child was paramount, working in partnership with parents to protect the child from harm (<http://www.careandthelaw.org.uk/eng/bsection2>). All intentions of this policy endorse that aim as we endeavour to counter any adverse effects of bereavement and maintain students' emotional well being.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Sadly, bereavement and loss are an inevitable part of learning and growing. No matter how prepared we think we are, the death of a student or a member of staff is often traumatic and unexpected. Its unpredictability can severely unbalance a school whose normal working environment is one based on routine.

1.2 As a school, we strongly believe that the subject of bereavement and loss is one that is sensitively handled and discussed. As a school, we endeavour to:

- Find out as much as possible about every child to tailor the academic, social and emotional teaching in school to match their needs. Parents are asked about any previous changes that might have profoundly affected their child (Divorce, bereavement, moving, new babies etc.).
- Provide an environment that is compassionate and sensitive to the needs of those wishing to grieve, whatever their cultural or religious beliefs;
- Provided a commitment to an education about death and the associated rituals and traditions of mourning;
- Provided opportunities for discussion that help lessen the stigma attached to death, reducing its status as a taboo topic.

2. GUIDELINES

2.1 Whilst it is impossible to know how a school will respond in cases of bereavement and loss, it is important that a plan is in place whilst understanding that each situation will need to be dealt with on an individual basis depending upon the circumstances.

2.2 In the case of a death of a student or a member of staff, the school's Head with appropriate staff will coordinate the school's response and be vital in creating a calm atmosphere. The Head will be the first point of contact and will liaise with all parties concerned and affected. The Head will also allocate a specific person to support the bereaved. This person would, in the later stages of bereavement, offer support and check on the progress of any students / staff involved.

2.3 The Head (or an appropriate representative) will inform all staff.

2.4 Students and parents or carers will be informed at the same time and as promptly as circumstances will allow. Students in school will be informed face-to-face, parents or carers by letter on the same day. (see appendix 1)

The wishes and feelings of the family will be carefully considered when sharing information.

2.5 Absentees from school will be noted to ensure that they are also informed on their return by the Pastoral Lead. Staff who are absent will be informed by their line manager.

2.6 In living in a multi-ethnic and multi-faith society it is necessary to be aware of the differing cultural and religious traditions of grieving and mourning. The school should ensure that they do not deny young people the opportunity to grieve and mourn within the traditions of their own culture and religious beliefs.

2.7 The Head will liaise with the media and possibly the police where this is appropriate.

3. DEATH OF A STUDENT'S FAMILY MEMBER

3.1 Based on statistics from Child Bereavement UK, every 22 minutes in the UK a parent of dependent children dies. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend, other significant person or a much-loved pet.

3.2 A parent or relative coming into school to break the news, possibly with support from a member of staff, would normally be the best and usual approach.

3.3 If no parents, relatives or carers are able to attend, the Head will need to decide who is best suited/qualified to deal with the situation. This will likely be the Pastoral Lead or a member of the Safeguarding Team.

3.4 The allocated person should gather all details surrounding any death. It is vital to have all the facts. If the death/s have been particularly traumatic, the media may be involved which will need to be handled carefully. It is essential that correct information is disseminated to all staff.

3.5 A member of the Safeguarding Team will offer the appropriate pastoral support in school following the bereavement.

3.6 Parents and carers often feel that teachers are experts on their children. They may invariably therefore turn to the school for advice and information, especially on matters of bereavement. It is important to remember that the family, friends and the immediate community often best support those suffering from bereavement, as is the case with other stressful life events.

- 3.7 A death in the family will disrupt the family for many months; in fact, the family will never be the same again. Family members are grieving, relationships alter, and members may take on new roles. Sometimes there is a change of carer, house or school, all of which add to the disruption and distress experienced by the young person. To support the young person, it is helpful to minimise, if possible, changes and disruptions in their normal daily routine and life in school.
- 3.8 The bereaved family members may emotionally and physically withdraw from the young person, to protect themselves from more distress. Some adults will deny the bereaved person is grieving, as it will be distressing for them to acknowledge the young person's pain. This may cause distress and confusion, causing grief, reactions of anger, withdrawal or psychosomatic behaviours such as headaches, stomach ache or sickness.
- 3.9 The bereaved young person may regress in behaviour, becoming attached, difficult or withdrawn. Their schoolwork may suffer. These changes will be partly due to grief but also to the disruption and changes within the family, causing the young person to feel confused and unsafe. Even the simple withdrawal of attention from the young person can lead to problems; the young person may feel resentment, jealous or guilt towards the dead person. The expression of this verbally can cause the remaining family members distress and shock. Parents and carers need to know this is normal and will decrease as the young person and the family become more stable and settled.
- 3.10 Parents and carers need to be informed of the benefits that a young person gains in being involved in the ceremonies and rituals that follow the death. An explanation as to how mourning practices help young people to express their feelings and come to terms with and accept the reality of their loss can be very beneficial.
- 3.11 Teachers need to remember that parents and carers will often use them as role models, counsellors or extended family, looking to them for support for themselves as well as finding appropriate ways of supporting and talking with their children. In these cases, staff at IncludEd Learning will signpost the relevant support from outside agencies who are best trained to deal with bereavement.

3.12 Teachers may require their own support structures, so they too can turn to others for emotional support, advice and information if needed. Supporting bereaved families, whilst rewarding, can also be emotionally draining.

3.13 In some cases, the death of a parent / family member may be high profile in the local community and in the media. In all cases, the Head at IncludEd Learning will seek advice on how to handle such cases to protect the family and to not cause any further emotional harm to the student.

4. DEATH OF A STUDENT

4.1 The death of a fellow student is probably the most demanding situation a young person might be forced to face whilst in school. Comprehending and coming to terms with such an event is going to be equally difficult and will require great emotional support from the school staff.

4.2 If faced with a sudden death, the Head should contact the deceased parents/carers/next of kin as soon as possible thus enabling compliance with any of their wishes.

4.3 The immediate identified friends and siblings of the deceased should be gathered and the news, if not already known, be broken before an announcement is made to the rest of the school, thus allowing private grief.

4.4 To avoid rumours, an announcement should be made to the whole of the school as soon as practically possible. Additional support from fellow teaching colleagues may well be required as well as the assistance of the school's Safeguarding Team.

4.5 In the event of a young person becoming terminally ill, their wishes and those of their parents or carers should always be respected. Should the young person wish to attend school, staff may need to inform students of the young person's condition. Occasionally the student may wish to talk to their fellow classmates about their predicament themselves. Honesty about death and dying is the best line of approach.

5. DEATH BY SUICIDE

5.1 Nobody likes to think about a death in school. Yet suicide is a leading cause of death for young people in the UK. Sadly, it is always a possibility that a student, parent or member of staff might choose to take their own life.

5.2 However upsetting this is, schools play an important role in reducing the likelihood of copycat behaviour and helping recovery by preparing and responding to the situation properly.

5.3 When a school is faced with a tragic incident such as a suicide, the school needs to know how to act in a both professional and sensitive way. In order to overcome the crisis situation, keep control and do what's best, IncludEd Learning has a crisis plan prepared and ready, including communication guidelines for communicating with all people involved: parents, students, staff and the media (where appropriate).

5.4 In the case of a death by suicide, IncludEd Learning will follow a 7-Step Crisis Plan.

→ **Step 1: Coordination of the crisis** – The school's Head should immediately take action to coordinate the crisis and set up a first meeting with a crisis team. This will include key members of the Safeguarding Team as well as experts from the local authority.

→ **Step 2: Get the facts and consult the family** – The school's Head should check the facts and be sure of the official cause of death. How this information is received will depend on the situation. Information about the cause of death should not be disclosed to other staff and students until the family has been consulted.

In cases where the death has been declared a suicide but the family does not wish to disclose this, a staff member who has a good relationship with the family should be designated to make contact to explain that students may already be aware and that having an open dialogue about suicide and its causes can help keep students safe. Ultimately, the wishes and feelings of the family will remain a priority.

→ **Step 3: Take care of the staff / Communication & Support** – As soon as possible, a meeting for all school staff must be held in which the facts are communicated clearly. The staff will be informed about next steps and where they can access emotional support, if needed. Staff can access support with the school therapist as well as support from the local authority. The Admin Team will ensure Arbor is updated to ensure letters to the family are not sent out or phone calls made.

- **Step 4: Take care of the students / Communication & Support** – As soon as possible, make arrangements for how students will be informed. How the information is communicated will depend on the situation. In some cases, friends of the deceased may be spoken to first or the Head may choose to speak to the school as a whole. The crisis team will make a decision on how best to do this. Once students have been informed of the facts, explain to them where they can access support; taking care of the students is an important aspect of prevention, facilitates the mourning process and reduces the risk of copycat behaviour.
- **Step 5: Communication with the Community** – Informative communication should be sent to all parents of all students to inform them about the incident and to make them aware of possible risks. Helplines and support options should be communicated in the letter. The wording of the letter should reflect the wishes and feelings of the family. A suicide of a student or member of staff can get a lot of attention therefore; staff will be advised to not speak to the media or post anything on social media.
- **Step 6: Funeral and Memorialisation** – Depending on the family's wishes, help disseminate information about the funeral to decide who are the most appropriate people to attend. School communities often wish to memorialise a student who has died; as a school, the crisis team will need to think carefully about how to do this appropriately without increasing the risk to other vulnerable students. In the long term, memorials can be organised and small gestures to the family one year after the incident can mean a lot.
- **Step 7: Follow up & evaluate** – Within the crisis team, it is important to evaluate the response, learn from obstacles and adapt procedures accordingly.

5.5 In responding to a death by suicide, the crisis team will refer to the document published by the Samaritans: *How to prepare for and respond to suicide in schools and colleges*: [Help when we needed it most](#)

5.6 Members of the Safeguarding and Pastoral Team have received accredited training with Papyrus.

6. MULTIPLE DEATHS / DEATH IN SCHOOL / SCHOOL TRIP

- 6.1 In the event of multiple deaths, a death in school or on a school trip, additional support and resources will be required. In these cases, the Head and members of the Senior Leadership Team will meet to agree a planned course of action and form a critical incident plan.
- 6.2 It is likely that there will be considerable (if unwanted) media interest. The Principal will decide what information needs to be shared.
- 6.3 If information is to be shared in the media, it is important that one individual is pre-selected and briefed by the team, and acts as a spokesperson, relaying consistent information. Another consideration might be the setting up and running of an emergency school hotline with one point of contact.
- 6.4 It may be necessary to retrieve the personal belongings of the deceased for their return to the next-of-kin. The school will also write to parents / carers to explain the implications of the event.

7. FUNERALS, MEMORIAL SERVICES / STUDENT PARTICIPATION

- 7.1 Following the death of a student or family member, it is probable that students and staff will express a wish to attend the funeral or take part in the service. They should only do so with the agreement of the deceased's family or relatives as well as the agreement of their own parents/carers (if a student wishes to attend). The Head, and/or an appropriate representative should be the only person representing the school and in contact with the family/relatives to discuss funeral arrangements.
- 7.2 If the bereaved family wish students and staff to attend, the team should be available to offer support before and after the service. If they do not wish the school to attend, their wishes should be respected and the school should consider arranging an alternative way to memorialise the student.
- 7.3 In the case of a death by suicide, please refer to section 5.

8. DEATH OF A MEMBER OF STAFF

- 8.1 When such an event occurs it is usually extremely traumatic, especially for members of staff forced to deal with their own grief as well as comforting students. Planning how a school manages such an event is important. In all situations, the school Head or an appropriate representative will carefully consider the wishes and feelings of the family in how this is communicated to students and parents/carers.

- 8.2 To avoid rumours (and in consultation with the family) it is advisable that the news is broken as soon as possible. A gathering together of staff to allow them to grieve in private before announcing the news to the rest of the school is something that should be considered.
- 8.3 Generally such news is broken in form groups in a space where students should be allowed the opportunity to express their grief individually with the support of the form teacher. Some students may have already experienced death and their way of coping with such events is sometimes observed in emotional outbursts. Some may express feelings of anger, panic or relief. It is important to try to remember that this is a time when everyone is hurting.
- 8.4 An informative letter should be sent to all parents of all students to inform them about the death; the wording of the letter should reflect the wishes and feelings of the deceased family. Helplines and support options should be communicated in the letter.
- 8.5 For a community as close knit as a school, a memorial service in keeping with the ethos and ethnic beliefs of the school is normally a good idea. The coming together of the whole school collectively for one purpose helps each individual come to terms with his/her own grief in a shared experience – i.e. helping to initiate the grieving process. Such services also offer the opportunity for those who may have been unable to attend the funeral to express themselves.
- 8.6 Appropriate support will be put in place to support staff and students who will have been particularly affected by the death of a close colleague and teacher.

9. SELF CARE FOR THOSE WORKING WITH THE BEREAVED

- 9.1 It's easy to overlook the stressed and anxieties placed on those dealing with the bereaved. In many instances these can be quite exacting and yet because our sympathy and attention naturally rests with those grieving, we can easily forget the emotional weight resting on the shoulders of those offering support. To assist, the following points will need to be considered:
- Staff should try to anticipate possible reactions they may experience with grief and loss. Each person is likely to react differently depending on age, personality, experience of grief as well as cultural and religious background.

- Staff should be aware that such cases may trigger strong emotional reactions and thoughts of their own bereavements. In such cases, emotional support is available via the Safeguarding Team as well as signposting outside agencies who specialise in bereavement and grief.
- Staff working with the bereaved need to remember not to take on too much. If staff find they are having difficulty in managing to cope, they should look to others to offer support - it is important to remember that one person alone cannot carry other peoples' grief.

10. MANCHESTER'S PROCEDURES FOR A CHILD DEATH

- 10.1 Regardless of the circumstances, all child deaths are reported to Manchester Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP), [Manchester Child Death Overview Panel \(CDOP\)](#). The responsibility of the Panel is to collate information from all of the services the child and family were known to in order to review the circumstances of the child's death and identify any learning and "modifiable factors" which reduce the potential for a death in similar circumstances in the future.
- 10.2 A small number of child deaths occur outside the area where the child lives. For example, when children are visiting family in another part of the country/overseas or when the child is on holiday. In these circumstances, the family will often contact the educational provision that their child attended in the first instance to inform them of the death. This may be before any other agency is aware that the child has died.
- 10.3 In order to ensure prompt reporting of deaths in such circumstances, Manchester Safeguarding Partnership have a pathway for reporting child deaths for education providers to follow.
- 10.4 In the first instance, all child death notifications must be reported electronically via the Greater Manchester eCDOP system.
- 10.5 This will then begin the process of informing agencies and gathering information. One of the benefits for the family of early notification of a child death is that agencies are able to cancel any appointments for the child, which can cause undue distress to the bereaved family.
- 10.6 Appendix 2 is a flowchart from Halton to show the pathway for reporting a child death that occurred outside of the area as well as an embedded copy of the notification form.

APPENDIX 1 - INFORMING PARENTS OF STAFF DEATH

These are two examples of a letter to parents. Please feel free to change them according to the needs of the situation:

Example 1:

IncludEd Learning

<Date>

Dear Parent/carer,

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the tragic death of <Name>, who has been a teacher at this school for <number> years. Our thoughts are with <Name> 's family at this time and in an effort to try and respond to their death in a positive, all children have been informed.

The children were told that <Name> died from an asthma attack on <Date>. A number of students have been identified as being asthmatic and <Name>, the School Nurse has today reassured them that it is unusual for a person to die from asthma.

When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of feelings - sadness, anger, and confusion - which are all normal. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school, but I have made available some information which may help you to answer your child's questions as they arise. You can obtain this from the School Office.

The funeral will take place at <Named Church or Crematorium> on <Day and Date>at <Time>. Your child may wish to attend the funeral. If this is the case, you may collect your child from school and accompany them to the church.

Yours sincerely

<Name> Head of Centre

Example 2: INFORMING PARENTS OF STUDENT DEATH

IncludEd Learning

<Date>

Dear Parent/carer,

Your child's tutor had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>. They were told that <name> died from an illness called cancer. Sometimes people who have cancer can get better, but other times people die from it. <Name> had been ill with cancer for a long time and died at home yesterday.

When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of feelings of sadness, anger, and confusion - these are all normal. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school, but I have made available some information which may help you to answer your child's questions as they arise. You can obtain this from the School Office.

The funeral will take place at <Named Church or Crematorium> on <Day and Date> at <Time>. Your child may wish to attend the funeral. If this is the case, you may collect your child from school and accompany them to the church. Please inform your child's tutor if this is the case.

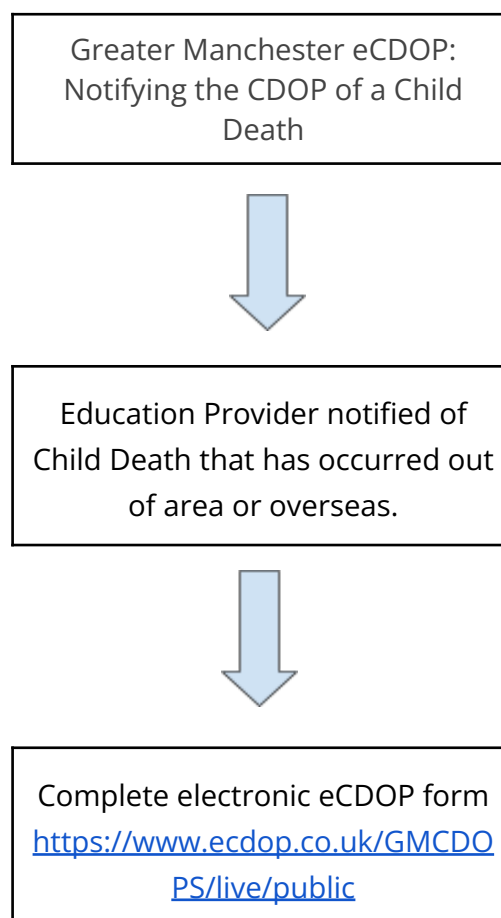
Yours sincerely

<Name> Head of Centre

Appendix 2 - Manchester Safeguarding Partnership: Process for Education providers when notified of a Child Death that occurred out of area.

Partners must make arrangements to review each death of a child normally resident in the area, including if they die overseas. Often partners learn about such a death from a variety of sources but unfortunately sometimes this can be delayed. Education providers can be pivotal to a prompt notification, which would result in a more timely review of the death. It would ensure support for additional family members is also offered sooner.

The flowchart below has been developed to enable educational establishments to complete a notification:



All notifications will be forwarded to the relevant parties who will ensure that a full statutory review of the death is undertaken by Manchester Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP).

APPENDIX 3 – SUPPORT RESOURCES

Winston's Wish

Tel: 01242 515 157

Helpline: 0845 203 0405

E-mail: info@winstonswish.org.uk

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Mind

Tel: 01284 764 4808

Info Line: 0845 766 0163

midcheshiremind@uwclub.net

Child Bereavement UK

Tel: 0800 02 888 40

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org>

Childline

Tel: 0207 239 1000

0800 1111 (24-hour helpline) Fax: 0207 843 6053

www.childline.org.uk

Papyrus – Suicide Support

Helpline number: 0800 068 4141

Text: 07786 209 697

Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org

Cruse Bereavement Care

Tel: 01284 767 674

Helpline: 0844 477 9400

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

The **Compassionate Friends (TCF)** is a website for child and young people - an organisation of bereaved parents and their families offering understanding, support and encouragement to others after the death of a child or children. We also offer support, advice and information.

Website: www.tcf.org.uk

Tel 0808 808 1677 (young person's contact)

National Association of Widows

Tel: 02476 634 848

Website: nawidows.org.uk

48 Queens Road

Coventry CV1 3EH

SUGGESTED BOOK LIST

Younger Children

Water Bugs and Dragonflies – Doris Stickney

Questions Children Ask – Miriam Stoppard

A Child's Parent Dies – Edna Furman

Helping Children Cope with Grief – Rosemary Wells

Badger's Parting Gift – Susan Varley

I'll Always Love You – Hans Wilhelm

The Huge Bag of Worries – Virginia Ironside

Older Children

Supporting a Child who has been Bereaved through Suicide – Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley

Supporting a Child when Someone in their Family is Seriously Ill – Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley

The Secret C – Straight Talking about Cancer – Julie Stokes – Diana Crossley I Miss You – First Look at Death – Pat Thomson

USEFUL WEB LINKS

www.childbereavement.org.uk

www.millfieldsessex.sch.uk/bereavement.htm

www.winstonswish.org.uk

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Ratified: November 2024

Next Review Date: November 2025

Link: Ms N. Khan