

Lady Margaret Primary School



Where children come FIRST

Bereavement Policy

Approved by:

Resources Committee

Date: 30th April 2020

Last reviewed on:

April 2020

Next review due by:

April 2022

Signed by:

Our school is fully committed to the emotional health and wellbeing 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 serious illness.

Rationale

Every 22 minutes in the UK, a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 41,000 bereaved children/young people 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 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 surrounding 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. The Schools Counselling Partnership (tel: 07554 008179) are able to offer additional support and a selection of resources can be found at www.childbereavement.org.uk

Objectives

The core intentions of the policy are:

- To support pupils 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 school and the Local Authority, and clarify the pathway of support
- The Children Act 1989 aims to ensure that the welfare of the child is paramount, working in partnership with parents to protect the child from harm (http://www.careandthelaw.org.uk/eng/b_section2). All intentions of this policy endorse the aim as we endeavour to counter any adverse effects of the bereavement and maintain pupils' emotional wellbeing.

The role of the Governing Body

- To approve policy and ensure its implementation as an active document. To be reviewed every three years.

This includes:

- Reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
- Utilising the expertise within the school and sharing responsibilities.

The role of the headteacher

The headteacher has overall responsibility for the policy and its implementation, for liaison with the governing body, parents/carers, the Local Authority and other relevant outside agencies.

The headteacher will:

- Monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.
- Respond to media enquiries.
- Keep the governing body fully informed.
- Be first point of contact for family/child concerned.

Headteacher: (name)

The role of the Local Authority

- To advise and support staff, consult on referral pathways and help with the identification of more complex grief.

The role of pastoral staff

(This includes spiritual advisers, school counsellors and mentors)

- To have bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff.

NB: It is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for pupils, supporting each other and implementing this policy. To this end it is desirable that the whole school staff have some awareness of bereavement through whole school training if possible.

- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies.

- Cross-phase liaison with other primary and secondary schools.

Procedures

1. Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the headteacher and the family's wishes respected in communicating with others. Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion, whilst being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations.

NB: We need to be mindful of the use of social media site and its impact throughout this time as rumour and gossip spread quickly.

2. Staff should be informed before pupils and be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.
3. Pupils should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them. A decision should be made as to whether this information should be given as part of a whole school approach or if only certain groups of pupils need to be informed.
4. A letter to all school families affected should be composed at the earliest opportunity and a decision made as to whom, and how, it should be distributed.
5. The school should be aware that the school timetable may need a degree of flexibility to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of children affected by the situation. However, minimal disruption to the timetable offers a sense of security and familiarity.
6. Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate.
7. In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for the funeral attendance maybe clarified, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances.
8. Where necessary, a press statement should be prepared by the headteacher.
9. The 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. The subsequent schools should be aware of ongoing bereavement issues for new pupils. To this end it is important to have effective communication with 'feeder' schools.

NB: Many of this policy's guidelines are only appropriate when the school community as a whole has experienced a death, for example a teacher, pupil or another staff member.

Perhaps a more common experience for teachers and learning support staff is that of a pupil experiencing the death of a parent. Whole school or class activities will not normally be appropriate in this situation, but the needs of that individual pupil should still be given careful consideration.

If a child has been bereaved it is important to involve them in decisions about how the school manages issues relating to their loss. Talk to the child about their preferred way of informing their peers about what has happened and about the support they need.

Suggested template for 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.

Dear parents and carers,

You child's class teacher/form tutor/had the sad task of informing children today of the death of <name>, a pupil in <Year>.

<Name> died from cancer. As you may be aware, many children who have cancer get better but sadly <Name> had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday.

He/she was a very popular member of the class and will be greatly missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies it is normal for their friend and family to experiences lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school. We would be more than happy to help you.

We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating <Name's> life.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

Sample of a letter to bereaved parents

Dear....

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

Clearly, as a school community, we will miss him/her very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to his/her friends and classmates. He/she was a much-loved member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help you plan <Name's> funeral service or other memorial opportunities, please let us know. In time, we will also ensure that anything of <Name's> that remains in school be returned to you, including photographs we may have on the school system.

Be assured that you are in our thoughts at this very sad time and do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of support in any way.

With our heartfelt sympathy,

Headteacher

Sample letter on the death of a staff member

Dear parents and carers,

I am sorry to have to tell you that a much-loved member of our staff, <Name>, had died. The children were told today and many will have been quite distressed by the news. No-one wants to see children sad, but we are very aware that factual information and emotional support are the best means of helping children deal with bereavement. I am sure there will be many parents who are also saddened by the news. Children respond in different ways so may dip in and out of sadness, and questions, whilst alternately playing or participating in their usual activities. This is normal and healthy. You may find your child has questions to ask which we will answer in an age-appropriate way in school, but if you feel you would like more support and advice yourself, please do not hesitate to contact the school. You may also find some useful advice and resources online at www.childbereavementuk.org.uk.

We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Children who wish to attend will be welcome to do so, though it will not be compulsory. It is likely that school will be closed on the morning or afternoon of the funeral as staff will, of course, wish to pay their respects to a very popular colleague.

I am sorry to be the bearer of such sad news but appreciate an occurrence like this impacts the whole school community. I am so grateful for the thriving partnership we have with parents and trust that we, together, will be able to guide and support the children through what may be, for many, a very new experience in their lives.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

This policy was presented to the Governing Body and agreed on:

Headteacher _____

Date _____

Chair of Governors _____

Date _____