

Shipbourne School



Bereavement and Loss Policy

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Aims and rationale

Shipbourne School is a family and it is inevitable that at some point members of our school will be impacted by bereavement.

By adopting a planned and considered approach, we will promote positive outcomes for all members of our school and those in the wider school community.

The school will

- Have clear expectations about the way it will act, not simply react.
- Promote a sense of unity, support and identity in the whole community.

Staff will

- Feel equally valued.
- Have an opportunity to prepare themselves for the challenging role they face.
- Be given time and space to work through their own feelings.
- Become aware of the skills needed, and be offered training, to develop them. Be in a position to provide support to those in need.

Pupils will

- Be offered support by sensitive, trained staff working in unison.
- Grow as a result of this experience and be supported to come to terms with their feelings.
- Develop a sense of perspective about their own lives and the fears that they may experience.

The bereaved family will

- Have real support to draw on.
- Be given an opportunity to reinforce feelings of worth rather than a sense of loss.

The parents/carers will

- Be drawn into a closer partnership with the school.
- Be given guidance on how to support their sons and daughters.
- Have time to prepare their own responses to loss and bereavement.
- Be offered the support they need.

Curriculum

We will prepare for bereavement by ensuring that it is incorporated into planned programmes of study within the school's curriculum. Some opportunities may include:

RE

The spiritual dimension relating to loss and bereavement can be explored within themes dealing with:

- Rites of Passage
- Worship
- Key beliefs and values within the major world religions.

PSHE

There are numerous opportunities to think in depth about relationships, feelings and how to manage change.

Science

The reality of death can be included in schemes of work dealing with:

- Ourselves
- Life processes.

English

There are a number of opportunities where books can be used to explore bereavement and loss.

In planning for such experiences there must be a continuity of practice which is consistent with the rationale explicitly stated in this policy.

Parents/carers

In acknowledging the role of the school in dealing with bereavement and loss, the school must not undermine the place of parents/carers in this process.

Parents/carers remain the most significant support to young people trying to come to terms with death. The school can support parents/carers in this by:

- Sharing with parents/carers the intentions of the school to act in a particular way in the event of a death.
- Offering guidance to parents/carers on how they might act. Schools may even wish to do this formally by running training sessions and workshops.
- Keeping parents/carers fully informed about the actions of the school throughout the immediate period of grieving.
- Where appropriate, parents/carers will be invited to be involved in any school response that occurs after the death, e.g. a memorial service. The format of any memorial service will take into account the beliefs of the bereaved family.

Co-ordinated response to the death of a member of the school community

The school will act in a planned and agreed manner, so that all staff know what is expected and can contribute their part in a way that is consistent with our school values and ethos.

- Someone of significance to all in the school community will prepare themselves for the inevitability of loss. They will have already thought through the way in which they intend to respond so that their thoughts and actions are ordered. This named person, probably the Headteacher, will co-ordinate the school's response and be fundamental in creating the most appropriate atmosphere.
- As far as possible, all staff will be told of the death together. By creating a list of people to be told, the school can be sure that no one close to the situation will find out by chance.
- All of the pupils and parents/carers will be told at the same time and as promptly as circumstances will allow. Pupils in school will be told face-to-face, parents/carers by letter the same day. Absentees from school will also need to be informed. The school will have procedures to track who is informed, when and by whom, to ensure that no one is missed. Roles and responsibilities for those involved in this aspect will be clearly stated.
- The school will have a range of strategies that it may adopt in the days and weeks that follow any significant loss. Decisions about which to undertake will be determined following discussions with the family concerned and will take into account the cultural/religious beliefs of the family and members of the community.
- An individual or small group of school staff will be identified to keep in touch with the family so contact from the family's point of view is manageable but also does not come to an abrupt end.
- The school will decide corporately on the best way to mark the bereavement as a community and which members of staff should make home visits or attend services or remembrance. It is possible for all staff to attend services if they wish to – alternative pupil supervision arrangements will be made or in extenuating circumstances, the school may be closed and remote learning protocols adopted.

Response when a pupil suffers a family bereavement

If a pupil is suddenly bereaved, we will commit to supporting both them and their family in the following ways.

1. Establish a core group of staff responsible for communication and co-ordination of support offered. This will include a main point of contact.
2. In the days after the death, but before a suddenly-bereaved pupil returns to education, a nominated person with experience and skills in listening and empathetic support, will contact the family to:
 - a) Acknowledge the bereavement, offer the school's condolences, and listen to their story of bereavement, if they want to tell it, in confidence;
 - b) Establish the family's initial wishes regarding what the child, wider school community, and media (if applicable) should be told about the death;
 - c) Offer time for the family to reflect on information they may wish to keep private, and a future time to talk about it further, if necessary;
 - d) Offer a point of contact and explain ongoing support the school can offer; and listen to the family's views on the pupil's emotional needs;
 - e) Offer future availability, as required, to discuss anything the family may wish to, relating to the pupil's welfare, and explaining days and times available;

- f) Offer bereavement resources that are age-appropriate and signpost to online advice and relevant agencies;
 - g) Offer the opportunity, at a time and place agreed with the family, for a teacher (or other school representative who the pupil knows and trusts), to meet with the pupil directly, accompanied by any family member/s, to explain what will happen when the pupil returns to school, and who will support them in school;
 - h) Signpost to agencies that can support families bereaved in sudden ways,
 - i) Make clear the names of anyone else who is available to communicate with the pupil's family, and find out who, within the family, wishes to liaise with the school.
3. In the days after the death, we will inform staff members and pupils. This will be done in an age-appropriate and sensitive way, considering confidentiality, potential stigma surrounding the cause of death and the family's wishes (as established with them).
4. When the pupil returns to school we will:
- a) Determine the date of that return in discussion with the family, reflecting on the needs of the pupil;
 - b) Acknowledge their bereavement directly with them;
 - c) Discuss collaboratively with the pupil, family and our staff what we can do to best support them; and
 - d) Work to enable the pupil's re-integration into 'normal' school routines and create a safe and secure environment for them.
5. For a bereaved pupil's remaining time in our school we will:
- a) Ensure significant dates (such as death anniversaries, birthdays and culturally-significant dates such as annual festivals) are recorded and considered;
 - b) Allow opportunities for reflecting on the death, through encouraging an ongoing and open dialogue with the pupil, and with their family; and
 - c) Consider a pupil's bereavement when planning school activities that might trigger thoughts or feelings about the bereavement and engage the pupil and their family in discussions regarding the pupil's involvement, providing information and choice.
6. When helping a bereaved pupil we will:
- a) Ensure they know who they can reach out to for support and how to access this help in ways that are easy and discreet;
 - b) Offer them opportunities to express their reactions, feelings and emotions about their bereavement, in ways they want to, safely and confidentially;
 - c) Offer a safe and supervised space where a pupil can go if they need time out from a classroom or playground because of their bereavement;
 - d) Use age-appropriate bereavement resources available to us from child or youth-specific bereavement charities;
 - e) Be aware of the pupil's family circumstances, including their cultural background, and its relevance to their bereavement;
 - f) Be on the lookout for changes in behaviour that may be a sign of a mental health condition, or other illness or risk to health and safety; and
 - g) Signpost to support for the wider family, as well as the pupil, through the local authority, in order that the family unit work together where necessary.

7. To enable and support our staff, we will:
 - a) Ensure staff involved in planning school activities and lessons are helped to:
 - i. identify content that may be triggering for children/young people who are suddenly bereaved; and
 - ii. consider whether to avoid this content or manage its delivery with care and sensitivity, in line with point 5 9c) above.
 - b) Provide bereavement training and refresher bereavement training, specific to supporting children/young people, and specific to sudden bereavement care and mental health; and
 - c) Give supportive HR management and peer support to staff who liaise with suddenly-bereaved families.

8. If a suddenly-bereaved child or young person is showing signs of suffering from a mental health condition, or other illness, or any indicators or risks of harm, we will ensure that information is shared with the family, appropriate agencies and managed appropriately.

Monitoring and review

This policy was written by the Headteacher. It will be reviewed at least annually and discussed at each bereavement in order to plan the most appropriate and supportive response.