

Bourne Education Trust Bereavement Policy

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Background

Whenever the loss of a friend or loved one happens, it can be an extremely difficult and challenging time. This is likely to be even more so for those experiencing bereavement and grief during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Bereaved people may struggle with the shock, not just of the bereavement, but that social distancing measures mean that they cannot say goodbye in the way that they would have wanted. This could be particularly hard for those isolating alone, and it may be harder to connect with usual support networks.

Those who are bereaved are likely to feel waves of intense emotions as they come to terms with loss. These can include sadness, guilt, shock and anger. All are common and there is no right or wrong way to feel. Grief affects everyone in different ways but the important thing is to grieve and to have the right support to do this.

Within our school community there will almost inevitably be children or colleagues who are struggling with bereavement; sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff, a pupil or a parent. This is particularly the case when the cause of death itself contributes to the distress.

We would hope not to encounter such circumstances, but the statistical likelihood 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. There is no national data in the UK on the number of children that experience the death of a parent, but studies show that by the age of 16 at least one child in every classroom (1 in 29) will have experienced the death of a parent or sibling (Penny and Stubbs, 2015).

The death of a parent or similar figure is one of the most fundamental losses that a child will ever experience and without the right support it can lead to a range of problems, some of which can persist into adulthood. Other deaths may also affect a family, with one study showing that 78% of secondary school pupils felt that someone significant in their lives had died. Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children or staff require but during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we may be unable to provide our community with even this level of support. In all cases, referral to more specialist support should be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex.

For staff, the Trust provides counselling support through the Employment Assistance Programme. For all situations, sources of additional information and resources are listed in Appendix A.

Objectives

The core intentions of the policy are:

- To support pupils, parents 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
- To endorse the aims of the Children Act 1989 that the welfare of the child is paramount as we endeavour to counter any adverse effects of bereavement and maintain pupils' emotional well-being

The role of the Trust

- To approve the policy and ensure its implementation as an active document. To be reviewed every three years reflecting on the effectiveness of the policy in practice
- To utilise the expertise within our schools and effectively share responsibilities
- To appoint a key contact from the Trust to work with affected schools who will advise and support staff, consult on referral pathways and help with the identification of more complex grief
- To identify from within the Trust individuals to support affected schools
- To appoint, where necessary, a contact for media enquiries

The role of the Headteacher

In our schools, the Headteacher has overall responsibility for the policy and its implementation, for liaison with the local governing committee, parents/carers, the Local Authority and other relevant outside agencies where necessary. The Headteacher will:

- Consider the level of bereavement training required amongst the staff taking into account personal circumstances (see [Educare](#): Dealing with Bereavement and Loss)
- Monitor progress and liaise with external agencies and internal specialist staff
- Keep the local governing committee informed
- Be first point of contact for family/child concerned or appoint a first point of contact
- To liaise with the Trust and/or other Trust schools if appropriate

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 all school staff have some awareness of bereavement through a whole-school training session if possible.

Procedure

This is an outline suggested procedure. No loss will be the same and it is expected that schools will need and want to adapt this to their individual situation. In general, the procedure should be applicable to the bereaved whether it is a member of our staff, pupil or family.

1. Nominated person makes contact with the bereaved person or family to:

- acknowledge what has happened
- express support
- discuss how to share the news with the rest of the school community
- check if the bereaved person or family want their contact information shared

The bereaved's wishes must be respected in communicating with others and this may have an impact on the other stages of this procedure. Factual information is an essential consideration. We need to be mindful of the use of social media sites and their impact throughout such times as rumour to avoid gossip, rumour and confusion and be sensitive to cultural and religious differences.

2. Where appropriate, the Trust Leader/Headteacher shares the information with rest of staff and, where possible, follows family choice on how this news is shared more widely with a) children b) peers and c) the rest of the school. (There are a few exceptions, for example, when the death is known about and already widely discussed within the school community).
3. Where appropriate, the Headteacher shares information with the governors.
4. The nominated person makes contact with the affected person (child, family or staff member) through a written card or letter to acknowledge what has happened and express support.
5. One (or two) contacts are agreed with the bereaved person or family to liaise with them and, where applicable, the child. This may be a senior member of staff but may be a less obvious supporter requested by the child, family or staff member.
6. The information is shared with the school community, as agreed with the family or staff member.
7. The impact of this news on any other children or staff in the school who have been bereaved or whose relative is seriously ill should be considered and direct contact made by a nominated person. Any death can trigger other remembered griefs and, at this time of crisis, a sense of helplessness in not being able to respond as wished. Where the bereaved is a child, schools should be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life; information should be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points. The school should be aware of any ongoing bereavement issues for new pupils. To this end, it is important to have effective communication with feeder schools.
8. In circumstances where pupils should be informed, 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.
9. Where it is appropriate to inform pupils, this should be in small groups if possible 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. 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.

10. The school should be aware that the school timetable may need a degree of flexibility to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of children or staff affected by the situation. However, minimal disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security and familiarity.
11. In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance should be clarified. In exceptional circumstances this could mean consideration of full or partial school closure.
12. Bereaved staff or staff affected by a death in the school community will be offered ongoing support as appropriate and access to the Trust's Employment Assistance Programme and a modification of the procedure above should be followed to ensure staff concerned are supported to the degree that they wish. We need to be sensitive to individual ways of dealing with grief and to religious and/or cultural differences.
13. If the deceased is a member of staff's close relative, the Trust believes that it is entirely appropriate that schools would like to support colleagues with a gift of flowers and a card at such a momentous time and support the bereaved at any funeral or memorial. The needs of the bereaved must be foremost in the school's mind when making these decisions. Please refer to the Trust's Gifts & Hospitality Policy, which has been amended to reflect these uncertain times to allow leaders to make a judgement on the definition of close relative.

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

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.

Template letters can be found in Appendix A

Further support

1. Resources available for the bereaved are listed in Appendix B
2. The circumstances may be such that it would be appropriate to compile condolences. This could include collected messages and compiling an electronic book of condolence to email to the bereaved or the family. Other people might choose to send photos or drawings to remember them by. In current circumstances, once school is open again, you could offer a memorial of these messages/drawings to display in school and then give to the family afterwards.

Crisis Management

A high-profile death, for example a car crash or murder, might involve working with the media. Please contact the Trust who will agree with you a designated person to communicate with the media to give one consistent message.

A useful support guide for managing critical incidents can be found following the link below:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/guide-to-managing-critical-incident-in-schools.pdf>

Appendix A

Template Communications

Suggested templates for letter 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 school:

Dear Parents

We have some sad news to share. We heard today that the [relationship eg father] of [name] in Year [X] has died. S/he died suddenly/had been ill for a long time. We are in touch with the family and have expressed our sadness and our support. The family would appreciate any condolences which can be sent to [contact details]/At the moment, the family would prefer some time to absorb what has happened but will appreciate your condolences in a while. If you have concerns about your child, contact their class teacher/tutor.

Yours sincerely

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher/form tutor had the sad task of informing the children 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 missed by everyone who knew him/her. When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience many different feelings such as sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try to answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child need to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office. 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

Sample letter to bereaved parents:

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear of <>'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.

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

If we can do anything to support you such as providing a memorial opportunity with the school community please let us know.

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 deepest sympathy

Sample letter on death of a staff member:

Dear Parents

I am sorry to have to tell you that a much-loved member of our staff, [name] has died. The children were told today and many will have been distressed at 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 office. You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at: www.childbereavement.org.uk

Depending on the wishes of the bereaved: 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 sad news, but I 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.

Appendix B

Sources of support and information

Child Bereavement UK

Child Bereavement UK helps children and young people (up to age 25), parents and families to rebuild their lives when a child grieves or when a child dies. They also provide training to professionals, equipping them to provide the best possible care to bereaved families.

Child Bereavement UK offers confidential support, information and guidance to individuals, families and professionals throughout the UK.

Helpline 0800 02 888 40 Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm (except Bank Holidays); Live chat via the website <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Pages/Category/child-bereavement-uk-support-services> and email support@childbereavementuk.org
<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

Cruse Bereavement Care

Cruse is a national charity that provides advice, information and support to anyone who has been bereaved (children, young people and adults), whenever or however the death occurred. The service is provided by trained experienced volunteers and is confidential and free. Cruse offers:

- Someone to talk to one-to-one if preferred, face-to-face or on the telephone
- Groups – many bereaved people find it helpful to talk to others in similar circumstances
- Education and information about many aspects of bereavement using publications and other sources of help and support
- Face-to-face support for children and young people

Helpline: 0844 477 9400; Email: helpline@cruse.org.uk; Cruse young people's Helpline: 0808 808 1677; Cruse website: www.cruse.org.uk; Cruse young people's website: www.RD4U.org.uk
<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief>

NHS

The NHS provides advice, guides and links to resources to help with bereavement, grief and loss as well as stress, anxiety and depression:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/coping-with-bereavement/>

Tell Us Once service

The Tell Us Once Service allows the bereaved to communicate once with multiple government agencies for those boroughs and district councils that have registered for the service.

<https://www.gov.uk/after-a-death/organisations-you-need-to-contact-and-tell-us-once>

Surrey also provide a Bereavement Guide

Winston's Wish

Winston's Wish supports bereaved children, young people, their families and those professionals who support them. Winston's Wish offers:

- Someone to talk to via a helpline, email or text services
- Education and information about many aspects of bereavement using publications and other sources of help and support
- Face-to-face sessions

Freephone National Helpline on 08088 020 021. Winston's Wish are open between 9.00am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday. There is an anonymous crisis support text service available 24/7: text WW to 85258.

<https://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/>

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