



Bereavement and Loss Policy

Chair's signature Mrs E Surtees

Head's signature Mr MJ Tipple-Johnson

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Bereavement Policy

School Background:

Merrydale Infant School is openly inclusive, welcoming all children from the whole community to a caring and happy environment where they can achieve to the very best of their abilities. At Merrydale Infants we believe that all children are unique and we encourage them to develop their strengths and creativity as individuals. We emphasise the development of the whole-learner physically, intellectually, emotionally and ethically.

Rationale:

Every 22 minutes in the UK a child is bereaved of a parent, making up some 24,000 a 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 recently bereaved children who are struggling with their own situation – 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 sensitive 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. Additional information and resources can be accessed 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 LA, 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/b_section2).

All intentions of this policy endorse that aim as we endeavour to counter any adverse effects of bereavement and maintain pupils' emotional well-being.

The role of the governing body

- To approve policy and ensure its implementation, to be reviewed in three years.

There will be a nominated Governor with responsibility for bereavement issues. Their responsibilities are:

- To contribute to generating and updating the policy.

- To support the Head Teacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is managed.
- To support the Head Teacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is tackled in the curriculum.
- To review practice.

The role of the head teacher

The Head Teacher has overall responsibility for the policy and its implementation; for liaison with the Governing Body, parents/carers, the Local Authority and appropriate outside agencies.

- To monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.
- To respond to media enquiries.
- To be first point of contact for family/child concerned.
- To keep the governing body fully informed.

There will be a designated person within the school who has overall responsibility for support and liaison in event of a death or traumatic loss. In the event that this person is absent then another named person will take responsibility.

Their responsibilities are:

- Policy development and review, involving pupils, staff, governors, parents/carers and relevant local agencies.
- Implementing the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities.
- Co-ordinating the planned action to manage school-related incidents in and beyond the school; decide who will be responsible for communicating with the family directly involved, decide who gives news to the school community and if necessary who will communicate with the press.
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies.
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary schools.
- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff.

The role of the LA

- To advise and support staff. Consult on referral pathways and identification of complex grief.

Curriculum

Children and young people explore the concept of loss, bereavement and grief as part of the PSHE curriculum. In our school this is taught as part of the 'Relationships' theme using the SEAL materials as well as other PSHE resources. It is also addressed through cross curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles, as well as through art, literacy and Religious Education. Assemblies may also be used to address aspects of death e.g. Remembrance Day or commemorative occasions.

Any questions relating to loss or death will be answered in a sensitive and age-appropriate yet honest and factual way.

Children are given the opportunities to learn about and discuss cultural and religious issues around death as well as being encouraged to express their own responses and feelings.

Covid 19

SUPPORTING BEREAVED CHILDREN DURING THE OUTBREAK

The outbreak of Covid-19 means that many aspects of children's lives are changing. School is closed for most, lots of parents are working from home, and families are having to spend time apart when they would like to be together. The news is full of talk of the virus and the effect it is having.

Many children will have questions and worries about the virus, but those who have experienced the death of someone important or who have an ill family member might be particularly worried.

- [Child Bereavement UK](#) have guidance films and information to support families and schools in supporting children during the outbreak, including staying in touch with someone who is seriously ill, supporting bereaved children during difficult times and supporting pupils.
- [Winston's Wish](#) have produced guidance on topics including talking to bereaved children about coronavirus, telling a child that someone has died from coronavirus, and saying goodbye when a funeral isn't possible
- Cruse Bereavement Care have produced some [tips about talking to children](#) among their wider resources about [grief and coronavirus](#)
- Grief Encounter are running activities for bereaved children and families on their [Instagram](#) page

Procedures in the event of a death:

1. Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the Head teacher and their wishes respected in communicating with others. Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion, whilst being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations.
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 who are affected should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them.
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 also offers a sense of security and familiarity.
6. Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate, as directed by the Human Resources Department or Individual union bodies, or the bereavement agencies listed under useful websites.
7. In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance may be clarified, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances.
8. Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Head Teacher

9. 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.

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.

Sample letter on death of a pupil:

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 an illness called 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 lots of different feelings like 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 needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and 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

<Name> Head Teacher

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 quite 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

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.

Yours.....

Useful Websites:

www.griefencounter.org.uk

www.winstonswish.org.uk

www.childbereavement.org.uk

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

www.thelauracentre.org.uk

www.rd4u.org.uk

www.rip.rap.org.uk

www.penthaligonsfriends.org.uk