

# Conatus federation

## Bereavement Policy

We recognise that bereavement and grief is experienced very differently by different people and children at different ages and stages of development, some of which may be further compounded by the type of death experienced. Almost all pupils will experience a bereavement in some way during their education.

### Aims

This bereavement policy aims to:

- Set out a guideline for how the school will respond to a death in our school community
- Set out a plan for communicating deaths in a timely manner that balances our school community's interests and transparency with the wishes of the family of the deceased
- Identify best practices for supporting pupils and/or members of staff experiencing bereavement
- Define the roles and responsibilities of key staff members and the governing board
- Provide a roadmap and framework for pupils or staff returning to school following bereavement

### Roles and responsibilities

#### The head of School / DSL

The Head of School has overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy and for delegating any responsibilities under this policy to other members of staff.

The headteacher will:

- Liaise with the family of the deceased
- Where appropriate, communicate details of a death to pupils and staff as set out in this policy, or activate communication teams
- Respond to media requests for information in the case of a publicised death
- Participate in any multi-agency reviews as requested
- Lead the school involvement in any police or safeguarding investigations
- Lead reintegration meetings for pupils or staff returning to school after a bereavement
- Arrange for monitoring and support for any individual staff members who are supporting bereaved pupils or staff
- Ensure affected staff access supervision as required from EP / CAMHS services
- Ensure clear record keeping is in place for any such incidents, including recording key dates to support the family over time as required
- Set up any memorial gathering/ items required for the school, e.g. temporary tributes, books of condolences, memorial web pages
- Arrange for the attendance and supervision of pupils at funerals (where permitted)

#### Senco and support staff

The wider Support staff team under the direction of the SENCO has responsibility for monitoring and supporting bereaved pupils and staff members (including before their bereavement, where relevant – for example, in the case of terminal illness).

The support staff team and SENCO will:

- Provide direct support to bereaved pupils and staff
- Signpost to external support available to bereaved pupils and staff
- Organise safe spaces for bereaved members of the school community to take a time out
- Provide additional support during significant transitions e.g. when moving up to the next year group or transitioning to a new school

#### Governing board

The governing board is responsible for monitoring the implementation of this policy, and supporting the headteacher.

The governing board will:

- Undertake regular monitoring of how the school is supporting the bereaved, and the staff who support them, for example through meeting with the Head of School / Senco, receiving reports and presentations in Business committee (for staff) and Standards committee for pupils

- Monitor the executive headteacher's emotional wellbeing, for example through regular communication and or meetings between the headteacher and chair
- Assist the Head of School, where required, in responding to media requests for information in the case of a publicised death
- Where necessary, arrange for another staff member to take the lead if the head of school is not available to respond to a death immediately

#### **Provision for supporting staff who support the bereaved**

- As a school we expect all staff to work to provide pupils staff and families support in the following ways:
- Provide Familiar routines
- Be Supportive and understanding as staff; listening and acknowledging their feelings and validating feelings
- Staff that will just be there if required, rather than talking
- Provide reassurance as required
- Provide Safe familiar surroundings,
- Provide comfort, including appropriate physical touch as required
- Be allowed to express how they are feeling, this may include talking, engaging in sensory activities
- Provide and allow pupils to engage in projects that's supports remembering as and when they feel safe to do so such as making memory boxes, telling stories through puppets, writing letters or stories.
- Have access to appropriate external support such as specialist counselling, Candle project
- Support and understanding over significant periods of time to follow the stages and reoccurrence of significant feelings of grief
- Direct use of language, death, dead.
- Be aware of important dates
- Be aware that experiencing grief can limit memory and concentration
- Avoid the use of euphemisms such as loved ones going on a long journey, that they are in a better place, that loved ones are in a better place or assuming a religious belief is held about death.
- Avoiding telling others that we understand how they feel
- Look out for a change in behaviour such as aggression, high risk-taking behaviours, substance and alcohol misuse (usually in adults) copying behaviours of the deceased, expressing a wish to join the deceased, depression, significant lack of engagement and enjoyment in normally preferred activities over time

Supporting pupils and staff who are grieving can be painful. Those staff members who carry out this essential work will be monitored and supported by:

- Having regular check in meetings with the Head of School and Senco.
- Supervision from Educational Psychology service as required
- Training – from National Online College or other external providers
- Links with Cruise, Candle Project, child bereavement UK.

#### **Immediate actions following a death**

- Ensure factual information is gathered from direct sources / the family to ensure sharing the news of the death fits with Family wishes
- Speak with the family, child, staff member affected and offer support
- Brief staff accordingly
- Contact appropriate services
- Take advice from LA as required
- Liaise with Chair of Governors
- Manage community communications
- Prepare as assembly for the school community as required
- Manage communications from the Press in alignment with RBG comms team
- Prepare for the return to school
- Liaise with any professionals involved in the Death.
- Consider the need for some in school counselling

#### **Sharing the news with staff**

- The head of school, executive head teacher or another senior leader be responsible for sharing the news with staff and explaining what support will be available to those who need it
- This will be done as soon as is reasonably possible, ideally face to face in a meeting. If not a phone tree or school comms may be used depending on the circumstances.

### **Sharing the news with pupils**

- Consideration will be given as to who will be the most appropriate person to share the news with children. This may be led by the head of school in assembly or by senior leaders or class teachers depending on the individual circumstances and individual death. Parents will be advised of this in order that they are well prepared to answer any necessary questions. Appropriate books may be shared with the class and further bespoke support as listed above will be available as the need arises for affected individuals.
- This will be done as soon as is reasonably possible, ideally face to face in a meeting or using school emergency notification systems to alert parents of where to find important news online if your school is closed

### **Informing parents/carers**

- Parents/carers will be notified of a death by sending a letter through Parentmail explaining the steps the school has taken to inform pupils of the death, what additional support has been made available and where to go for more help and information.

### **Responding to specific causes of death**

Some deaths need to be handled more sensitively due to their potential to cause fear, anger or imitation. Guidance will be sought appropriately:

- suicide -Samaritans provides a [step-by-step programme](#)
- homicide or family violence - Child Bereavement UK has a guide to 'Supporting children and young people bereaved by murder or manslaughter'
- If the death is due to contagious disease, we will follow procedures as determined by our local health protection team

### **Responding to the media**

In the event that a death that affects the school raises media interest, we will respond in the following manner:

- The executive headteacher is responsible for responding to requests from the media, other staff members should not respond to media requests, and should instead refer enquiries to this responsible person
- In the first instance RBG comms team will be consulted before communication is prepared and then shared.

### **Follow-up actions and support following a death**

Pupils and staff may require support to grieve in the initial days and weeks following a death. Support will include:

- Peer to peer support
- Access to EP / CAMHS supervision
- Access to bereavement website
- Senior leaders will take the time to listen
- Counselling sessions for pupils 1:1 or as a peer group
- Assemblies that cover the experience

### **Tributes and condolences**

- The family directly affected will be consulted on in relation to an appropriate memorial by HOS or Executive Headteacher.
- Flowers will be sent to those directly affected
- Trees, benches, plaques, trophies will be considered with the family to create permanent memorials.

### **Funerals**

We will consult the family as appropriate, to confirm:

- Whether members of staff and/or pupils are welcome to attend the funeral or memorial service
- How condolences should be made and how staff and pupils can contribute
- Whether the pupils can watch the funeral procession

If staff are welcome to attend the funeral and wish to do so:

Staff should request leave to attend through the pink form system. The availability of cover, numbers and closeness will be the determining factors in granting permission to attend the funeral in order that the school does not overwhelm the event.

If pupils are welcome to attend the funeral and wish to do so:

- Parents will inform the school office of the absence pupils should request leave to attend

### **Support for pupils returning to school after bereavement**

Whether a pupil has been away from school following a personal bereavement or after a death affecting the whole school community, the school will support them in their return to school and for as long as necessary afterwards.

The Head of School or appropriate senior leader/teacher will meet with the bereaved pupil and their parents/carers to discuss how best to manage a return to school.

The purpose of the meeting will be to:

- Determine whether the pupil is emotionally ready to return to the classroom either full-time or with adjustments to the timetable to allow for a phased return
- Address any concerns the pupil and their parents/carers have about the return to school
- Consult with the pupil about how or even if they want their classmates to know of the death (where relevant)
- Open lines of communication between the pupil and relevant staff to ensure support should the pupil feel overwhelmed
- Open lines of communication between the school and the pupil's parents/carers to coordinate support
- Consider any additional support needed for a pupil who is vulnerable or has special educational needs (SEN) or a disability

### **Ongoing support**

- We will maintain regular contact with the pupil's parents/carers to monitor how the pupil is coping
- We acknowledge significant dates or holidays may be especially difficult
- We know that grief may impact a pupil's progress and affect their behaviour. To manage this, we will ensure the pupils' needs are well met and liaise with parents and other agencies effectively, to take advice.
- We will take care to manage changes for bereaved pupils by preparing them in advance (where possible) and taking extra steps to support necessary transitions

### **Support for staff returning to school after bereavement**

Whether a staff member has been away from school following a personal bereavement or after a death affecting the whole school community, the school will support them in their return to school and for as long as necessary afterwards.

#### **Reintegration meeting**

Head of school will meet with the bereaved staff member to discuss how best to manage a return to school.

The purpose of the meeting will be to:

- Determine whether the staff member is ready to return to work and the best way to make that return (e.g. a phased return to work or a temporary change in duties)
- Address any concerns the staff member may have about the return to school
- Consult with the staff member about how or even if they want their pupils and colleagues to know of the death (where relevant)
- Set guidelines for communication between the staff member and their line manager to monitor and support the staff member

### **Ongoing support**

We acknowledge that grief can have an impact on a staff member's physical and mental health, which can then go on to impact their performance.

We also recognise that grieving is highly personal and that there can't be a one-size-fits-all solution for monitoring and supporting a bereaved person.

We will work with each individual to create a system of monitoring and support that works for that person.

This may include:

- Extra support - grief symptoms affecting their performance, for example not being able to sleep, think or concentrate

- Depression or another mental health condition
- Acknowledging extra responsibilities, for example helping a dependant

This policy was agreed by..... on .....

Next review date Autumn 2024

This policy is linked to our:

- Child protection policy
- Behaviour policy
- Attendance management policy

## Appendix A: Bereavement Response Plan

If a pupil, staff member, or someone within our school community is affected by a death, our response will be guided by the table below.

There may be situations where it is more appropriate for another person, in place of the one stated, to carry out that role.

Action	By Whom
Confirm facts regarding death from a reliable source e.g. family member, professional services	Head Teacher or nominated Deputy/Assistant Head Teacher.
Agree with the family who will be informed of the death, and the manner in which it will be carried out	Head Teacher or nominated Deputy/Assistant Head Teacher.
Inform ALL Staff and consider absent staff	Head Teacher or nominated Deputy/Assistant Head Teacher.
Brief all staff about possibility of press involvement and potential for the matter to appear on Facebook	Headteacher to delegate e.g AHT – relevant year group responsibilities.
Contact bereaved family and send letter of condolence	Head Teacher or nominated Deputy/Assistant Head Teacher.
If appropriate, visit family	Head Teacher or nominated Deputy/Assistant Head Teacher.
Liaise with family regarding school's response, including funeral	Head Teacher or nominated Deputy/Assistant Head Teacher.
Inform pupils - In Primary settings, inform parents first to allow them the opportunity to tell their children - Consider smaller friendship groups first - Use a prepared format - Identify any vulnerable pupils & those with any complex needs - Consider absent pupils	Class Teacher of class or, of those siblings or family in school.
Notify parents (refer to model letters within policy (Appendix C) - By telephone - By letter	Head Teacher.
Make contact with Local Education Authority for additional support	SENCO/ Pastoral Lead
For a child returning to school arrange a meeting with them to discuss return to school and support needs	Head Teacher, SENCO or Pastoral Lead
Liaise with family regarding special remembrance event/memorial	Headteacher or Class Teacher if appropriate.
Monitor on-going needs of pupil/family	Class Teacher.

## Appendix B: Useful Contacts

ORGANISATION	CONTACT DETAILS
Child Bereavement UK	Helpline: 0800 02 888 40 <a href="https://www.childbereavementuk.org/contact-us">https://www.childbereavementuk.org/contact-us</a>
Winston's Wish	Helpline: 08088 020 021 <a href="https://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/contact-page/">https://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/contact-page/</a>
Cruse Bereavement Care	Helpline: 0808 808 1677 <a href="https://www.cruse.org.uk/about-cruse/contact-us">https://www.cruse.org.uk/about-cruse/contact-us</a>
CHUMS	Helpline: Phone: 01525 863924 <a href="http://chums.uk.com/information-schools/">http://chums.uk.com/information-schools/</a>
Mind	Infoline (information and signposting to further help): 0300 123 3393 Further contacts: <a href="https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/useful-contacts/">https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/useful-contacts/</a>
RBG Educational Psychology Service	020 8921 4818 <a href="https://servicestoschools.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/services/educational-psychology">https://servicestoschools.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/services/educational-psychology</a>

## Appendix C: Example Letter informing parents of a pupil's unexpected death

### School letter head

#### Date

Dear Parent/Carer,

It is with huge sadness that I write to inform you of the death of one of our Year [...] pupils, [insert name] [insert name] was [insert nature of death e.g. unexpectedly taken seriously ill recently and sadly did not recover, involved in a tragic accident and sadly did not recover]. Our hearts go out to [insert name's] family and friends and I have sent condolences on behalf of us all here. [Insert name of school] is a school founded on family and togetherness, and it is always our aim to support our children and our staff to the best of our ability. Therefore, I have already been in contact with a range of bereavement support professionals so that we can draw upon their support to help us all, children and adults alike, to find a way through this difficult time. Please be aware that the school has not told the children of [insert name] passing today, but are providing you with the opportunity to convey this yourself. We will then talk to the children tomorrow, class by class, as appropriate to their age and the capacity in which they knew [insert name]. We realise that many of our pupils, especially those in [insert year groups] may not have known [insert name] and therefore we will not routinely discuss [him/her] with the younger classes in particular. However, we will monitor all children closely and provide relevant support. Over the days and weeks ahead we will continue to provide bereavement support and I will keep you informed as to the nature of this; we are also able to provide you with further information regarding support services should you require further involvement. In addition, as a school we will begin to think of how we can honour [insert name's] memory and celebrate [his/her life], and once again will keep you informed as they emerge. Please do not hesitate to let me know if there is anything further you feel we can do to help.

All best wishes,

Headteacher

## Appendix D: Books and Resources

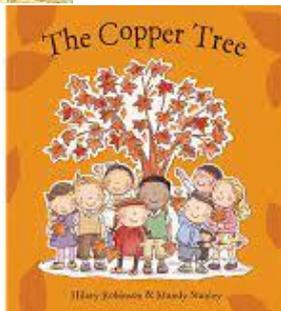
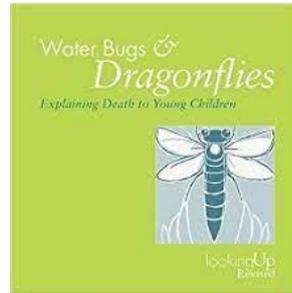
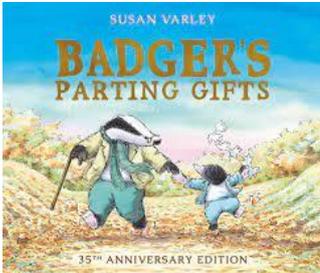
The suggestions below are suitable to use with children (not an exhaustive list)

Books can help children experiencing loss make some sense of confusing and sad emotions.

They can also help children to feel less alone.

KS1

To support the death of a teacher

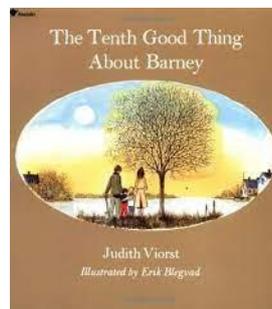
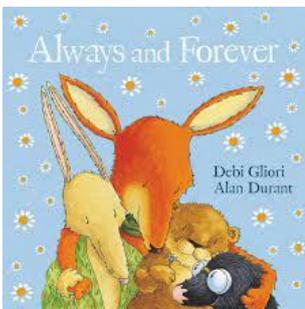


Badger's Parting Gifts  
Copper Tree  
By Susan Varley  
Robinson and Mandy Stanley

Waterbugs and Dragonflies  
By D. Stickney

The  
By Hilary

KS2



Always and Forever  
By Alan Durant

The Tenth Good Thing About Barney  
By Judith Voirst