

## **Bereavement Policy**

**June 2023**  
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## 1 Introduction

Southgate School strives to ensure that all children feel safe when with us and preparing them for adult life is a priority. All of our pupils have complex needs and therefore the support we offer in response to a bereavement will be personalised for each pupil.

Around 41,000 children are bereaved of a parent every year in the UK. That's nearly two children under 16 every hour. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant people. We recognise that members of the school community will be affected by a range of losses including separation and divorce. Some aspects of this policy may also be helpful in these cases.

Experiencing a bereavement can make children more vulnerable. Bereavement, whether it is an expected death because of illness or a sudden and unexpected death or suicide, is something that can impact members of our school community at any time. Our school is committed to providing an ethos, environment and curriculum that prepares pupils for coping with bereavement.

This policy was based on an exemplar developed by the national charity Winston's Wish and guidance from Kirklees Educational Psychology Service.

## 2 Safeguarding, confidentiality and recording

We follow our school's safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure that the welfare of the child remains paramount throughout and that all children are protected from harm. It is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure. However, pupils will need to be made aware that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. To retain the trust of pupils and parents and carers, we will ensure that the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. If a child is suffering from trauma, we will share this as appropriate with staff, but not necessarily the details of their experience. We will discuss with the bereaved child and their family which adults in the school community they would like made aware of the experiences impacting on the child.

We will use CPOMS to record when a child has experienced a close bereavement, is at risk of suicide or has made a suicide attempt.

## 3 Roles and responsibilities in dealing with bereavement

All staff at Southgate School will:

- access bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff if appropriate
- know how to access support for themselves, for other staff and for the family, if advice or information is needed
- know how to report a concern if the bereavement or sudden and unexpected death has placed a child at significant risk of harm
- know how to support a child when they are distressed and how to refer to specialist support if needed
- have a basic understanding of a child's needs when facing loss and change
- provide individual support as and when needed and in consultation with the Senior Leaders and Intervention and Pastoral Team
- teach about loss and bereavement as part of the planned curriculum
- inform the head teacher at the earliest possibility if they hear about a death of someone in the school community

Members of the Senior Leadership Team, Mental Health First Aiders and Pastoral and Intervention Team have had more advanced training about bereavement. They can offer professional support to other members of staff and can make referrals to appropriate external services such as Educational Psychology Service, Child and Adult Mental Health Services, Education Safeguarding Service, Children's Social Care, Employee Health Care and other appropriate organisations.

## **4 Actions to Support Bereavement**

We will consider each individual situation carefully to ensure that the response from the school is sensitive, accurately reflects the situation, and involves those affected as appropriate.

### **Pre-bereavement**

In some situations, it is known in advance that a death is going to occur. This is usually because of a long illness.

In cases where this is an adult within the school community, individual conversations will be held with the head teacher in terms of support, information exchange and practical considerations.

When the expected death is of a child or a member of a child's family we could:

- contact the family to confirm factual information and explore what support could be provided to them
- identify a key point of contact in school in terms of information exchange and to update when things change
- ensure that all relevant adults are clear about what information has and needs to be shared with the pupil
- keep lines of communication open to ensure that all information is received in a timely fashion
- explore the possibility of signposting to other organisations such as Winston's Wish or a local hospice
- look to involve faith or community leaders when appropriate and with the agreement of the family
- explore what support for the pupils affected might look like in practice
- arrange training for specific members of staff to ensure all involved are confident in their ability to support the pupil
- offer support to the staff affected, either internally or externally
- if appropriate, consider and reflect on how to communicate with the wider school community for example the pupil's class mates
- if appropriate, begin conversations around practical considerations in the events leading up to the death and following the death

### **Following a bereavement**

**As an immediate response we could:**

- contact the deceased's family with the aim to establish the facts and avoid rumours (in most cases this will be undertaken by the Head Teacher)
- consider any religious beliefs that may affect the timing of the funeral or impact on other aspects of the bereavement process
- find out, if possible, how the family would like the information to be managed by the school

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- allocate member(s) of staff to be the key point(s) of support for the affected child / young person or children / young people and ensure there is support in place for the staff members if required
  - send letters or cards of condolence to families or individuals directly affected
  - prepare a press statement, with support from the council's communications team if required and with due regard to the family affected (in most cases this will be undertaken by the Head Teacher)
  - inform staff of the death before pupils are informed, recognising that some pupils may have found out through other means. Where possible, staff will be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate and developmentally-appropriate ways. Where this has not been possible, staff will be supported to share the information.
  - inform pupils who are most directly affected (such as a friendship group), preferably in small groups, by someone known to them and in keeping with the wishes of the family and expertise of the school
  - inform the wider school community in line with the wishes of the family. We would normally do this through assemblies and / or letters to parents.
  - Provide appropriate support to staff, pupils and other members of the school community. This may be internal support or through signposting or referring to external services such as Care First or a charity.
  - make small changes to the school timetable to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of the child or children affected by the situation. However, we will aim for minimal disruption to the timetable as this can offer a sense of security and familiarity.

## **For the funeral we could:**

- find out the family's wishes and follow these in terms of the involvement of members of the school community (or not)
- identify which staff and pupils may want to attend if invited by the family and the practicalities of issues such as risk assessment, staff cover and transport. In some rare circumstances it may be appropriate to close the school
- organise tributes such as flowers or a collection in line with family wishes and the wishes of staff and pupils
- be sensitive to religious and cultural issues.

## **After the funeral we could:**

- consider whether it is appropriate to visit the child and family affected at home and plan a return to school
- ensure friendships are secure – peer support can be particularly important for a bereaved child or young person
- continue regular contact with the family and show we still care about them and their child over time
- monitor the emotional needs of staff and pupils and provide listening time and ongoing appropriate support
- consider practical issues and make thoughtful and sensitive updates to parental and other contact details when needed
- continue to assess the needs of children most affected, and record and plan for support accordingly.

## **Longer term we could:**

- be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life. So, we will record information and share with relevant people, particularly at transition points. This could include ensuring significant dates and events for the child are recorded and shared with appropriate staff for future reference.
- signpost families to bereavement support including that provided by Winston's Wish <https://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/>
- ensure that learning about loss and bereavement is embedded into appropriate curriculum areas including PSHE education. When teaching about loss and bereavement we will give careful thought as to how to support those directly affected by loss and bereavement.

## **Following a sudden and unexpected death – suicide**

Suicide is not just a really difficult event to deal with, it also presents the unique risk of potentially being the trigger for another suicide.

We will seek advice from the Local Authority about the most appropriate way to respond, but we will aim to respond to a sudden death within 2 days. It is necessary to maintain the structure and order of the school routine, while facilitating the expression of grief, and reducing the risk of imitative suicide.

In the case of suicide, we will refer to The Samaritans Step by Step Guide.  
<https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/step-step/>.

Information provided to the school community in the immediate aftermath of a sudden and unexpected death will depend on the age and developmental stage of the pupils but should be based on and reinforce:

- facts (not rumours)
- an understanding that death is permanent
- an exploration of normal and wide-ranging reactions to sudden and unexpected death – expressions of anger and guilt are entirely normal
- an understanding that, with support, people can cope
- an understanding that fleeting thoughts of suicide are not unusual
- an awareness of suicidal warning signs and resources available to help
- an understanding of expectations around funerals.

When discussing any suicide that has occurred, we will ensure that the information given is age appropriate and personalised to account for the complex needs of the pupils. We will ensure information:

- is factually correct but does not include detail of the suicidal act itself does not romanticise, glorify or vilify the death
- does not include details of any suicide note
- does not include speculation over the motive for suicide
- takes care with the language used – for example using phrases such as 'died by suicide' or 'ended his / her life' rather than 'committed suicide' or 'successful suicide', and saying 'attempted to end his / her life' rather than 'unsuccessful suicide' or 'failed attempt at suicide'.

## **Following a sudden and unexpected death – homicide**

The Childhood Bereavement Network and Winston's Wish estimate that around one child every day is bereaved of a parent or sibling through murder or manslaughter in Great Britain.

Children may experience profound and lasting shock, enormous anger at what has happened, rage at the person who caused their relative to die, deep fear at the perceived insecurity of the world around them. Sadly, in many cases, the person who caused the death is also known to the child, resulting in great confusion and a double loss, for example, if one parent kills the other and is then imprisoned. In some families, the child may have to move to a new house, school, area – away from familiar and comforting places and routines.

Winston's Wish recommend taking an honest and consistent age appropriate approach to talking with children about what has happened. It is not possible to shield them from what has happened completely. Winston's Wish can provide support to families bereaved in this way and further information can be found on their website: <https://www.winstonswish.org/death-through-homicide/>

## **5 Equality and inclusion, values and beliefs**

We recognise that there is a range of cultural and religious beliefs, customs and procedures concerning death. It follows that bereaved children and families may have differing expectations.

Some of these may affect matters of school organisation. We will source training and guidance to develop our understanding of the range of beliefs to best support pupils.

We will present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. We will make pupils aware of differing responses to bereavement, and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

## **6 Young asylum seekers and refugees**

Many young asylum seekers and refugees have experienced the death of family members or friends, often in traumatic circumstances. This, and further traumatic experiences and losses, can have a devastating effect on their emotional and physical health, behaviour, learning and relationships.

Sudden traumatic death complicates the process of grief and mourning, as usual ways of coping may be overwhelmed. We will consult specialist mental health services where appropriate.

## **7 Supporting staff**

### **7.1 Support for bereaved staff**

We are aware that staff also experience bereavement. When this happens, we will ensure they are provided with support to take care of themselves, and to know where they can go for additional help should they need it.

This could include:

- their GP
- Access to counselling, information and advice through Care First and Employee Health Care
- Cruse Bereavement Care <http://www.cruse.org.uk/>

We will work within our leave of absence policy and if necessary, with the council's Employee Healthcare Service and Human Resources Service to ensure staff are provided with appropriate leave and support at a time of bereavement.

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Staff who are dealing with their own bereavement are encouraged to speak with their line manager about any areas of the curriculum which they feel uncomfortable to teach or want support to teach.

## 7.2 Staff training

We will ensure that regular training is provided to staff to support staff in meeting their roles and responsibilities as identified in this policy. All staff have access to and are asked to complete the Educare course on Dealing with Bereavement and Loss. Additional training is available to specific staff from the Education Psychology Service or through Mental Health First Aid courses. Any staff who wish to undertake this additional training are encouraged to speak to their line manager. Winston's Wish also offers [training courses](#) and also a [free online training course for school staff](#).

## 8 Curriculum

Children and young people explore the concept of loss, bereavement, and grief as part of the statutory elements of our PSHE curriculum, which is covered in our Identity and Wellbeing curriculum. It is also addressed through cross-curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles, and may be covered within the Creative Thinking, English and Communication, Healthy Living and Our World curriculum areas.

We also use assemblies to address aspects of death – such as Remembrance Day, Holocaust Memorial Day or commemorative occasions. We also observe national minutes of silence and explain the purpose of this, where this is appropriate for pupils.

When appropriate, we respond to a tragedy or serious incident by discussing this in class having discussed as a staff team the language we will use to respond to the incident. Philosophy 4 Children (P4C) lessons are a useful way to explore these concepts in a safe environment.

Teachers are provided with training on how to deliver this sensitive area of the curriculum within a safe, learning environment e.g. P4C training. We also point parents and carers towards appropriate advice on how to talk to their children about these events when necessary.

We will answer any questions relating to loss or death in a sensitive, age-appropriate, developmentally-appropriate, honest and factual way. Children and young people will not be expected to disclose any personal experiences but will be signposted to support if they want it.

We give children opportunities to learn about and discuss cultural and religious issues around death and encourage them to express their own responses and feelings.

## Appendix 1: Our charter for bereaved children and young people

To help us meet the objectives of this policy we have adopted the [Winston's Wish Charter for Bereaved Children](#) and will display this in appropriate staff areas and on our website. This charter will be differentiated for each pupil to account for their cognition and learning, social and emotional, communication and interaction needs.

<b>B</b>	<b>Bereavement support</b> Bereaved children need to receive support from their family, from their school and from important people around them. We will signpost them to specialist support if needed.
<b>E</b>	<b>Express feelings and thoughts</b> We will help bereaved children to find appropriate ways to express all their feelings and thoughts associated with grief, such as sadness, anxiety, confusion, anger and guilt.
<b>R</b>	<b>Remember the person who has died</b> We understand that bereaved children have the right to remember the person who has died for the rest of their lives. We will support them to share special and difficult memories.
<b>E</b>	<b>Education and information</b> All children, particularly bereaved children, are entitled to receive answers to their questions. They also need information that clearly explains what has happened, why it has happened and what will be happening. We will strive to enable children to have their questions answered, through the PSHE curriculum, on an individual basis, working with parents and carers or through support services.
<b>A</b>	<b>Appropriate response from schools and colleges</b> Bereaved children need understanding and support from their teachers and fellow students without having to ask for it. We will provide training to ensure this happens.
<b>V</b>	<b>Voice in important decisions</b> We will work with families to encourage them to involve bereaved children in important decisions that have an impact on their lives such as planning the funeral and remembering anniversaries.
<b>E</b>	<b>Enjoyment</b> We will support the bereaved child's right to enjoy their lives even though someone important has died.
<b>M</b>	<b>Meet others</b> We will try where possible to enable bereaved children to benefit from the opportunity to meet other children who have had similar experiences.
<b>E</b>	<b>Established routines</b> We will endeavour, whenever possible, to enable bereaved children to continue activities and interests so that parts of their lives can still feel 'normal'.
<b>N</b>	<b>Not to blame</b> We will help bereaved children to understand that they are not responsible, and not to blame, for the death.
<b>T</b>	<b>Tell the story</b> We will encourage bereaved children to tell an accurate and coherent story of what has happened. We know this is helpful to them particularly if these stories are heard by those important people in their lives.



## Appendix 2: Children's Developmental Understanding of Death

Below is a guide from Child Bereavement UK about how children understand death at different stages in their development.

<p><b>Under 12 months level</b></p> <p><u>Understanding</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absence of smell/sight/sound/touch of carer</li> <li>• Change in interactions</li> <li>• Change in environment</li> <li>• Sense of abandonment</li> </ul> <p><u>Behaviour</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in sleep and feeding routine</li> <li>• Irritable and unsettled</li> <li>• Increased crying</li> <li>• Clingy to other adults</li> <li>• Lack of interest</li> </ul> <p><u>Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Routines</li> <li>• Love and reassurance</li> <li>• Consistent carers</li> <li>• Surround with familiar sights/sounds/smells</li> <li>• Access to familiar comfort objects</li> </ul>	<p><b>Up to 36 months level</b></p> <p><u>Understanding</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aware that something is missing</li> <li>• Do not understand the finality of death</li> <li>• Notice changes in their lives</li> <li>• React to the emotional state of others</li> </ul> <p><u>Behaviour</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Searching</li> <li>• Emotional, upset and angry</li> <li>• More withdrawn</li> <li>• More anxious and clingy</li> <li>• Change in behaviour and play</li> <li>• Change or regression in routine and skills</li> </ul> <p><u>Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Routines</li> <li>• Love and reassurance</li> <li>• Consistent carers</li> <li>• Surround with familiar sights/sounds/smells</li> <li>• Access to familiar comfort objects</li> </ul>	<p><b>3-to-5-year level</b></p> <p><u>Understanding</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited understanding of what dead means</li> <li>• Expect person to return</li> <li>• Miss the person who has died</li> <li>• Take what is said very literally</li> <li>• Beginning to understand feelings</li> <li>• Blame themselves</li> </ul> <p><u>Behaviour</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask questions repeatedly</li> <li>• Play or act out their feelings</li> <li>• Regression in skills</li> <li>• Emotional outbursts of upset/anger</li> <li>• Increased anxiety about separation or change</li> <li>• Develop physical symptoms</li> </ul> <p><u>Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Routines, boundaries, reassurance</li> <li>• Simple explanations -concrete terms</li> <li>• Encourage questions</li> <li>• Involve in rituals</li> <li>• Share memories</li> <li>• Name feelings</li> </ul>
<p><b>5-to-8-year level</b></p> <p><u>Understanding</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gradually understand permanence and irreversibility of death</li> <li>• Learning that death happens to all living things</li> <li>• Developing conscience and sense of guilt and self-blame</li> </ul> <p><u>Behaviour</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear the death of others</li> <li>• Ask frequent questions</li> <li>• Anxious about change</li> <li>• Withdrawn or emotional outbursts</li> <li>• Struggle to express their feelings and act them out</li> </ul> <p><u>Support</u></p>	<p><b>8-to-12-year level</b></p> <p><u>Understanding</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fuller understanding of concept of death</li> <li>• Aware of impact of death on their life</li> <li>• Beginning to be aware of the meaning of the loss for their future</li> <li>• Worry about own and others' death</li> </ul> <p><u>Behaviour</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty in concentration; distracted by worries and thoughts</li> <li>• Alteration in schoolwork</li> <li>• Frequently seek reassurance</li> <li>• Swings in mood</li> <li>• Can become overwhelmed by distress or anger</li> </ul>	<p><b>13 year+ level</b></p> <p><u>Understanding</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full understanding of concept of death</li> <li>• Aware of feelings; struggle to name</li> <li>• Exploring issues of meaning of life</li> <li>• Sense of being different</li> <li>• Increased focus on self and external relationships</li> </ul> <p><u>Behaviour</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inhibition about expressing feelings</li> <li>• Detached or compulsively caring</li> <li>• Mood swings</li> <li>• Withdrawn or angry</li> <li>• Engage in risk-taking behaviour</li> <li>• Difficulty in planning for the future</li> <li>• Seek support out with the family</li> </ul> <p><u>Support</u></p>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain routines and boundaries</li> <li>• Clear explanations; stress they were not to blame</li> <li>• Discuss worries</li> <li>• Keep informed/ prepare for change</li> <li>• Encourage to share feelings and memories</li> </ul>	<p><u>Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain routines and boundaries</li> <li>• Willingness to listen</li> <li>• Reassure about health, safety, security</li> <li>• Share feelings and memories</li> <li>• Normalise thoughts and feelings and support with safe ways to express these</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain boundaries</li> <li>• Keep involved, allow option/choice</li> <li>• Remain available</li> <li>• Opportunity to share feelings/memories</li> <li>• Provide information on sources of support; discuss peer support</li> </ul>
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## **Appendix 3: National support services and support resources**

**Winston's Wish:** [www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org) Support information and guidance for bereaved children, young people and for those caring for bereaved families.

**Cruse Bereavement Care:** [www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk) Support for anyone who has been bereaved.

**Childhood Bereavement Network:** <http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk> Find childhood bereavement support in your local area.

**Hope Again:** <http://hopeagain.org.uk/> A website for young people who have been bereaved.

**Papyrus:** <https://papyrus-uk.org/> Support and advice for young people struggling with thoughts of suicide, and anyone worried about a young person.

**Samaritans:** <http://www.samaritans.org/your-community/supporting-schools> A range of guidance and support for schools.

## **Local support services**

**Educational Psychology Service:** 01924 483744, [dewsbury.psychology@kirklees.gov.uk](mailto:dewsbury.psychology@kirklees.gov.uk)

**Children's Emotional Well-being Service ChEWS:** 01924 492183, [www.northorpehall.co.uk](http://www.northorpehall.co.uk)

**Employee Health Care, Kirklees:** (01484 221000) [employee.healthcare@kirklees.gov.uk](mailto:employee.healthcare@kirklees.gov.uk)

**Head Teacher Support Kirklees:**

We have carefully considered and analysed the impact of this policy on equality and the possible implications for pupils or staff with protected characteristics, as part of our commitment to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.