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## BEREAVEMENT POLICY

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This policy relates to all sections and activities of the school e.g. the Senior School, the Junior School (including EYFS), Wrap Around Care, Offsite Activities and School run Holiday Activities or Clubs.

### 1 RATIONALE

- 1.1** Red House School is fully committed to the emotional health and wellbeing of our young people and staff. We are dedicated to the continual development of a thriving school community and strive to work towards this in all aspects of school life. We are passionate about providing an ethos, environment and curriculum that can provide support during difficult times, including a time of death or dying.
- 1.2** More than 100 children and young people are bereaved of a parent every single day in the UK and every 22 minutes a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 42,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, particularly during the recent COVID-19 pandemic, and, sadly around 12,000 children die in the UK each year.
- 1.3** 1 in 29 children and young people aged 5-16 have experienced the death of a parent or sibling – that's at least one in every classroom. Within our school community there will almost always be some children who are struggling with bereavement – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil.
- 1.4** 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, for example, the School Counsellor or external support, should be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex.

### 2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1** The core principles of the Bereavement 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 clarify the pathway of support.

### 3 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- 3.1** The Head has overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation, for liaison with the Board of Governors, parents and other relevant outside agencies.
- 3.2** The Head, or a member of the Senior Management Team, Head of Year or Key Stage Coordinator delegated by her, will:
- Monitor pupil and staff welfare and liaise with external agencies.
  - Respond to media enquiries.
  - Keep the Board of Governors fully informed.
  - Be first point of contact for family/child concerned.
  - Have bereavement support training.
  - Cascade relevant learning to all staff so that all feel confident in delivering support for pupils, supporting each other and implementing this policy.
  - Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary schools, where applicable.

### 4 THE IMPACT OF BEREAVEMENT ON A CHILD

- 4.1** The impact of death upon children should not be underestimated. While it is true that their understanding of death develops over a prolonged period of time, it is clear that:
- Young children can suffer deeply as a result of the death of a member of their family, or a close friend.

- This suffering is more intense when they do not have opportunities to talk or to grieve openly, and do not feel that those close to them recognise their feelings - even though they themselves may not yet have the words to express them.

**4.2** In particular, for teenagers, there is sometimes a tendency not to talk about how they feel, as they do not wish to place an extra burden on, for example, the remaining parent if their father or mother has died. They in effect try to manage on their own, which can be very difficult for them.

**4.3** Reactions to bereavement can include:

- Withdrawal
- Open distress
- Tears
- Panic
- Aggression
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Other signs of stress

**4.4** Bereaved children may act out this stress in unexpected ways, such as:

- Nervous giggling
- Stoical bravery
- Untypical aggression
- Becoming the class clown
- Or total denial

**4.5** They may also become extremely tired, to the point of exhaustion, as so much emotional energy goes into dealing with the loss and the stress of the changes in the family.

**4.6** For some children, there may be additional terrors; if the death has been referred to as 'falling asleep' or 'being taken', then it is sometimes the case that children become afraid of sleep; words like 'loss' or 'lost' can put fear into a young child's mind, too, and they are afraid of losing other family members. Children can become particularly clinging and attached to the members of the family who remain.

## **5 AN EXPECTED BEREAVEMENT**

**5.1** The death of a terminally ill pupil or member of staff can be planned for with extensive support being given before the actual event.

**5.2** Often pupils will want to create a memory board to allow their emotions to be shared with others. Open discussion and realistic language are often the best way to deal with issues that arise.

**5.3** Once the pupil or member of staff dies then it is important that all emotional support is given and the need to mourn is recognised.

## **6 DEATH OF A PUPIL OR A STAFF MEMBER**

**6.1** On hearing the news of the death of a pupil or staff member, the Head, or member of the Senior Management Team delegated by her, will make contact with the deceased's family to ensure that their wishes can be respected in the School's communication with others. Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion, whilst being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations.

**6.2** The School will at all times be mindful of the use of social media sites and their impact throughout this time as rumour and gossip spread quickly.

**6.3** Staff will be informed before pupils, so that they can be prepared to share the information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance. See Appendix 1 for guidance on breaking the news of a death to staff.

**6.4** A decision will 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 of the news. See Appendix 2 for guidance on breaking the news of a death to pupils.

**6.5** Pupils will be informed in small groups by someone known to them.

**6.6** 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. Permission will always be sought from the deceased's family before this letter is sent, and the content of the letter agreed by the family prior to sending. Please refer to Appendix 5 and Appendix 6 for letter templates.

- 6.7** If appropriate, an adjustment to the school timetable may be made to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of children affected by the situation, bearing in mind that minimal disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security and familiarity.
- 6.8** Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate.
- 6.9** 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.
- 6.10** Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Head.
- 6.11** The School will remain mindful of the fact that bereavement can follow a child throughout their school life, so information should be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points.
- 6.12** The School should be aware of any ongoing bereavement issues for new pupils.
- 6.13** The date of the bereavement should be recorded in ISAMS so staff are aware of anniversaries and can provide appropriate support.

## **7 DEATH OF A PARENT**

- 7.1** It is recognised that a more common experience for staff is that of a pupil experiencing the death of a parent. Whole school or class activities will not normally be appropriate in this situation, but the needs of that individual pupil will still be given careful consideration.
- 7.2** If a child has been bereaved, the School, through a member of staff trusted by the child, will involve them in decisions about how the School manages the issues relating to their loss, including their preferred way of informing their peers about what has happened and about the support they need.

## **8 THE IMPACT OF THE DEATH OF A PET OR LOVED ANIMAL**

- 8.1** The School should also be aware of the emotional impact the death of a family pet or, for example, a horse or farm animal, might have on a pupil or a member of staff.
- 8.2** Emotional support can be offered through the normal channels (Teachers, Form Teachers, Heads of Year/Key Stage Coordinators, members of the Senior Management Team, the School Counsellor, peers, etc.) and discussion and honesty are vital.
- 8.3** Terminology is again important. Pupils and staff should be encouraged to be honest with their emotions and talk about their memories of their pets. Whilst much of the Bereavement Policy deals with the death of people, we should not underestimate how important the death of a pet can be to pupils and staff.

## **9 SUPPORTING BEREAVED CHILDREN**

- 9.1** Young children mature at different rates and their understanding and responses to bereavement are likely to be based on as much as their experience of life as on their chronological age.
- 9.2** By secondary school age, most pupils will understand the inevitability and permanence of death. They may have difficulty in coming to terms with their own mortality, as well of those close to them. They may possibly refuse to contemplate the possibility of death by becoming involved in risk-taking behaviour.
- 9.3** A young person may challenge expectations of others about how they 'should' be behaving or feeling.
- 9.4** Death can also increase anxiety about the future and they may question the meaning of life.
- 9.5** Adults naturally want to protect, but young people have a greater capacity to deal with death than we realise, as long as they are told in an age-appropriate way. Even a very sad truth will be easier to manage than uncertainty. A young person will search for the truth and may find it very difficult if they hear details from outside their own family.
- 9.6** It may feel harsh, but avoid using euphemisms such as 'lost' or 'gone to sleep' as this can cause confusion and misunderstanding.
- 9.7** Young people will grieve in different ways and their responses to a bereavement will depend upon their age, understanding and relationship with the person who has died. It is important to avoid making assumptions about how a young person is feeling.
- 9.8** Be aware of changing relationships and friendships: a bereaved pupil may find their peers do not know what to say or how to act and this can, inadvertently, lead to isolation and loneliness.
- 9.8** Ask a bereaved pupil to think about what they need and want from their friends, teachers and other adults in the school. This will offer them an element of control and give some clarity to those wanting to help and

support the bereaved pupil. Provide the opportunity to leave a lesson if they unexpectedly become overwhelmed by their grief as well as a space they would like to use.

**9.9** Signpost bereaved pupils to support from within school, external agencies and online support.

## **10 EXTERNAL SOURCES OF SUPPORT**

- Winston's Wish - <https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus/>
- Grief Encounter - <https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/serviceupdate/>
- Childhood Bereavement Network - <http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/>
- Hope Again (youth section of Cruse) - <https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/>

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November 2023

Ratified by: The Board of Governors  
November 2023

## **APPENDIX 1: GUIDELINES FOR BREAKING NEWS ABOUT A DEATH TO STAFF**

- 1.1** Arrange a staff meeting which should take place as soon as possible
- 1.2** Impart factual information. Never make assumptions or repeat what has been said by rumour
- 1.3** Give news sensitively and empathetically, being aware that people may react in different ways
- 1.4** Be cognisant of the relationships staff may have had with the person who has died.
- 1.5** Ensure that there is someone responsible for telling people who are unable to attend the staff meeting i.e. part time staff, peripatetic staff, and lunch time supervisors. Consider the best way of imparting the information to those absent e.g. by doing home visit, by telephone, text or email etc.
- 1.6** Identify individual members of staff who feel able to:
  - Support members of staff.
  - Support groups of children (the most appropriate person to support the children should be well known to them and trusted).
  - Identify a member of staff who will liaise with the individual's family, to deal with staff condolences and any funeral arrangements (if necessary).
- 1.7** Identify an appropriate member of staff who will take phone calls and/or direct them as appropriate. Try to establish a 'protected' telephone line to ensure free flow of accurate information.
- 1.8** Identify a member of staff who will provide a letter for parents, which should be sent the same day.
- 1.9** Arrange a staff meeting at the end of the day to ensure staff are coping with the situation.
- 1.10** Identify any unresolved problems or ongoing issues.
- 1.11** Ensure that those staff that live alone have contact numbers of friends in case of need.
- 1.12** Identify sources of advice and support to access for help in coming to terms with the bereavement (see bereavement toolkit in Appendix 4).

## **APPENDIX 2: GUIDELINES FOR BREAKING NEWS OF THE DEATH TO THE PUPILS**

- 1.1** Inform the pupils as soon as possible about the death.
- 1.2** Where possible, the pupils should be informed in small groups i.e. class or tutor groups.
- 1.3** Identify those children who had a long term and/or close relationship with the person who has died so they can be told separately.
- 1.4** If appropriate, a special assembly could be held at a later time in the day to remember the person who has died.
- 1.5** Allow the pupils to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.
- 1.6** Allow the pupils to verbalise their feelings.
- 1.7** Allow the pupils to discuss the situation and share their experiences of death.
- 1.8** Be honest about your own feelings and talk about your relationship with the person.
- 1.9** Avoid using euphemisms.
- 1.10** Those pupils who have had more involvement with the person should be given the opportunity to share their feelings and experiences either within the group or in a one-to-one situation.
- 1.11** Reassure them that not all people who are ill or have had an accident will die and that many people get better.
- 1.12** Put an appropriate time limit on the discussion. It is preferable to resume normal school activities as soon as possible thus ensuring minimal disruption within the school.
- 1.13** Conclude the discussion with a prayer or special poem to remember the person who has died and their family.
- 1.14** Be available for any pupil who needs additional help and support.
- 1.15** Refer to the bereavement toolkit in Appendix 4 for further guidance.

### **APPENDIX 3: THINGS TO CONSIDER IN THE DAYS FOLLOWING THE NEWS OF A DEATH**

- 1.1** It is important to consider any cultural or religious implications and seek advice if necessary.
- 1.2** Ensure nominated staff with responsibilities for supporting staff and children, are available to do so.
- 1.3** It may be necessary temporarily to provide staff cover for their normal activities.
- 1.4** Identify an allocated quiet place where children, young people and staff can go if necessary (the School Library would be an obvious place).
- 1.5** It is preferable for there to be minimum disruption to the timetable, but some flexibility may be required.
- 1.6** Try to engender an awareness of when people need help and support, particularly those who worked closely with the person who has died and secretaries/administrative staff who are taking telephone calls, dealing with parents, etc.
- 1.7** Through the nominated staff member who has responsibilities for liaising with the individual's family, ascertain their wishes about the school's involvement in the funeral, if any.
- 1.8** Putting an obituary in the paper, sending flowers to the home or to the funeral, making a collection, etc.
- 1.9** Who will attend the funeral, making a collection, etc.
- 1.10** Cover for any staff who may be going to the funeral.
- 1.11** Transport to and from the funeral.
- 1.12** Informing the parents of those pupils who will be involved.
- 1.13** Possible closure of the school. If this is the case remember to tell appropriate staff in advance.

## **APPENDIX 4: BEREAVEMENT IN SCHOOL TOOLKIT**

The Bereavement in School Toolkit is a resource to be used at Red House School offering guidance, examples and possible solutions to problems encountered on a day to day basis when trying to help bereaved children. It also includes a list of resources and useful contact details when looking for help and support.

### **1 How the school can help**

#### **1.1 Make sure that the right people are informed**

It is essential that all staff, including support staff, know about the bereavement, so that they can respond sensitively.

#### **1.2 Make sure that children are given an opportunity to discuss their feelings of bereavement with an adult that feels confident in this area and is able to give each child space for their different and normal feelings.**

When the report of the death first comes to school, it may be appropriate for the relevant staff (for each bereaved sibling), to talk to the year-group within it, to create opportunities for them to ask questions and discuss how they can help their bereaved classmate. On the child's return to school, even close friends may need encouragement to voice difficult feelings, to say, 'I'm sorry your brother died'. One of the key 'hurts' which bereaved children recall is the feeling that few people, if any, acknowledged their loss.

Most children welcome the opportunity to talk privately to an adult about their loss. Even if the child cannot verbalise his or her feelings, it is helpful for a trusted teacher to show sympathy (without saying 'I know how you feel'), and to use words like sad, lonely, upset, afraid, so that the child realises the school knows about the death. The family may be so overwhelmed by the trauma that little individual acknowledgement is given to the child's feelings when they are at home.

Some children need a retreat when grief overtakes them, and it helps if the school accepts a pupil's need to express their grief, providing a 'safe place' and a trusted adult to be with them. Once the bereaved child returns to school routine, it is helpful to share concerns with parents so that they know how he or she is coping in school. Most families appreciate some sort of direct communication from the school, especially if the child who has died was a former pupil.

Be prepared to create exceptional circumstances for particular children who need particular help. Set up clear boundaries and make it clear that you have allowed certain behaviours to happen. When the child is ready you can reverse these arrangements. A bereaved child for example may well need to be allowed to behave in a special way according to how they are dealing with the situation. The key is to try to create a normal environment for them by asking what they want to do. Talking, sharing with the School Counsellor, writing or drawing are very common forms of expression which can help. It is always best to talk this through and share ideas with the Pastoral Team or the Designated Safeguarding Lead. They will help you to decide what to share with other children.

#### **1.3 Seek creative, but sensitive ways of constructively moving the child forwards.**

Books, stories, music and art can be very helpful in exploring loss, both with other pupils and with the bereaved child. There are many excellent books written on bereavement for different ages of children, both in the fact and fiction sections, now available from shops, libraries or the web, and many school libraries have a selection of such recommended publications. Sensitivity is needed so that deep grief is not triggered at an inappropriate time. For example, a school assembly using literature on the subject might help the school to explore grief and loss, but not when a newly bereaved child is present.

#### **1.4 Be aware that this is likely to take a long while and be prepared to allow for anniversaries and gestures over time.**

The grief caused by the death will be long-lasting, and schools need to recognise that anniversaries and celebrations will be difficult – especially the first birthday and Christmas or other religious festivals. It will help if key dates and times are noted and passed on to the next class teacher or next school, along with other records and information. As children mature, the death is felt and questioned at new levels, both emotionally and intellectually, often causing renewed grief and distress.

Close friends of the bereaved boy or girl, or of the child who has died, will suffer varying grief reactions. Their teachers will probably need the support of colleagues at this time; they might need to be reassured that their ideas for giving comfort to the children are wise, and that they will be of benefit to those in their care. Many younger teachers themselves may not have experienced bereavement, especially of this kind, before.



If the person who died was a pupil at your school, you might feel it appropriate to send a representative to the child's funeral or a Memorial or Thanksgiving service – if the family are in agreement with this idea. Also, in these circumstances, the child's books and work should be kept carefully and returned to the family by a teacher at a suitable time.

It is very important to keep details of the date of a bereavement on ISAMS, so that key staff can be made aware of anniversaries, which will frequently result in emotional challenges for the pupil or pupils affected.

### **1.5 Helping the school recover**

This is a long-term issue. You can help a school recover through a memorial service or assembly and through the use of counsellors. Recognise that those who go to counsellors may well not be those whose need is greatest. A brother or sister may well have intense needs that appear later. It is very difficult for the school to know when to stop making allowances.

## **APPENDIX 5: TEMPLATE OF A LETTER INFORMING PARENTS OF DEATH OF STAFF MEMBER**

<Date>

Dear Parents

I have had the sad task of informing the children of the tragic death of <Name> who has been a teacher at this school for a number of years.

Our thoughts are with <Name .....’s> family at this time. All the pupils have been informed. Many will have known <Name....> for many years and have been taught by him / her. They will have different memories, but will share the common bond that one of their teachers has passed away. He / she has given so much to the school and will be sadly missed

When someone dies it is normal for family and friends to experience many different feelings such as sadness, anger and confusion, and young people can sometimes become quiet or withdrawn, angry, seek the company of their immediate friends, or ask questions about the meaning and purpose of life, and the nature of death.

The pupils have been told that their Form Tutor, Head of Year, or any member of the teaching staff, will provide support and help if they wish to discuss their feelings. The school can offer counselling support for those most deeply affected.

We will of course keep you informed as to the funeral arrangements and the date and time of any memorial service. I am very sorry to have to write to you in this way.

Yours sincerely

**Dr Rebecca Ashcroft**  
**Head**

## **APPENDIX 6: TEMPLATE OF A LETTER INFORMING PARENTS OF DEATH OF A PUPIL**

Important note: 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.

<Date>

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 the illness we know as 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

**Dr Rebecca Ashcroft**  
**Head**