

Learning for Ourselves, Respect, We Can



# SCHOOL BEREAVEMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURES:

Responding to a death within the school community

**RRS**

**Article 3:** All adults should do what is best for you. When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children.

**Article 12:** You have the right to give your opinion and for adults to listen and take it seriously.

**Article 16:** You have the right to privacy.

**Reviewer:** Nicky Rix (SENCO)

**Reviewed:** September 2022

**Reviewed and Approved by Governors:** 21.09.22

**Next update:** September 2025

*All staff and governors are aware of our policy and procedures. This policy and the accompanying procedures will be reviewed annually or in the event of a death within the school community.*

## **Aims and ethos**

Lyndhurst Infant School will follow this policy and will provide a caring and nurturing environment to support children and adults through bereavements. We will demonstrate an empathic understanding of bereavement and will support children, members of staff or the wider community. School will engage with outside agencies to gain specialist support, if needed.

## **Rationale**

We understand that bereavement is faced by members of our school community at different times and that when the loss is of a member of our school community, such as a child, family member or staff member, it can be particularly difficult and traumatic. Children need to be supported when they experience family bereavements and other significant losses in the course of their lives while they are at school. This policy will provide guidelines to be followed after bereavement. The aim is to be supportive to both children and adults, and for staff to have greater confidence and be better equipped to cope when bereavement happens. Every death and the circumstances in which it occurs is different and this policy has been constructed to guide us on how to deal professionally, sensitively and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances. This school is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and children. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that support and prepare children for coping with the death of a loved one. This policy is based on practice that has grown over time as the school has previously experienced bereavements, and provides a resource as a working document to support our community.

## **Communication with our community.**

We acknowledge that the communication of any death within our community must be planned and handled with great sensitivity. While recognising the need to act speedily, we will ensure that the immediate family of the deceased have been consulted prior to any wider communications. We have a bereavement team that consists of Mrs South, Mrs Rix, SLT and Kim Halford, the Family Engagement Support Officer, who support the team around the child. Appropriate support will also be offered to staff.

We acknowledge our responsibility to all those who grieve as a result of a life changing significant loss in their lives. We will provide opportunities for children to share their feelings in the school environment supported by trained staff and when appropriate, through the use of age-related resources such as Winston Wish (See *appendix 1 & 2*).

**Objectives - How will our policy help to create a bereavement aware culture.**

**Procedures to be followed in the event of a death within the school community.**

We will ensure that school office staff are prepared to receive the news of a death within the community and respond in an appropriate manner. SENDCo will prepare a response sheet for staff to use as a support. Headteacher will be the only person who responds to the Press. Headteacher will take advice from WSCC.

Should we receive the news of a death, in **ALL** cases the person receiving the news will:

- Confirm the information, check it, record it and check it again. (*It is essential to have the facts confirmed*)
- Share the news as soon as possible with an appropriate SLT member. The Headteacher will consider the action required, follow the agreed procedures, take notice of the guidance and be aware of the impact on the family and child and on the school and wider community.
- Share information with school Governors and local authority.
- The news of the death will be given to all relevant staff as soon as possible.
- Differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment.

### **Family bereavement of a parent or close relative.**

When school is informed of bereavement or loss the following action should be considered:

- The family should be contacted for appropriate support. (See Appendix 1 for addresses and relevant telephone help lines)
- The family should be asked how much and what the child already knows and how they have been involved.
- It should be explained to the family how the school can be involved to support the child and family.
  - The importance of working together will be explained
- Involve outside agencies as appropriate e.g. the school nurse, Psychological Service, Winstons Wish, Barnardos).

### **The death of a child**

When the school is informed of the death of a child, the following action should be taken:

- Headteacher will contact parents.
- Headteacher will meet with parents if and when appropriate.
- Headteacher will inform the staff.
- Headteacher will make the decision of who will inform the child's class.

Should we receive the news of a child's death, we will call appropriate colleagues together having consulted with the family of the child to ascertain their wishes.

- Discussion should take place with the family and their wishes taken into account before decisions are taken on how and what to tell the children in school.
- Remember that the grief is shared but that it is primarily the family's grief and their wishes need to be respected.
- Encourage staff to voice their concerns they have about telling the rest of the children in the class. The class teacher will be supported during this time by the Headteacher, SENDCO and FEO.
- Consider the most appropriate way of communicating the news within school, following the parent's wishes and guidelines; be that a year or small groups, or to class
- Give pupils opportunities to express their feelings at the time they are informed and over the following days and weeks.
- Avoid rumours, exaggerations and embellishment of the event, by agreeing the facts with the child's parents, which will be stated openly and honestly without assumptions or judgements.
- Remember that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotions and feelings. Some may deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some may show feelings of anger. There may well be tears and distress. Planned support will be available.
- If the child's parent agrees, inform parents the same day in the most appropriate way via text, website, email, phone or newsletter depending on the circumstances.
- Ensure time for corporate grieving amongst the staff and enable them to share how they feel about what has happened.
- Counselling should be available if necessary e.g. in cases of sudden or violent death (outside agencies should be involved with this e.g. Psychological Service). Staff and children should be supported throughout the grieving period; anyone displaying signs of stress should be offered appropriate support.
- Inform WSCC through Link Advisor of any death within the school community.
- The team around the child and family will be asked if they want to attend the funeral or memorial services should it be appropriate.

### **Death of a member of staff**

We acknowledge that if such a death occurs it is doubly traumatic for the staff; supporting the children but also grieving on a personal level for a colleague.

Should we receive the news of the death of a member of staff; the Headteacher or Deputy Head will call together colleagues.

We will use the guidance notes below:-

- Gather together the staff and inform them of the news, in agreement with the family members if possible.

- Allow time for corporate grieving amongst the staff.
- Allow the staff to share how they feel about what has happened.
- Inform the teachers that they may need to address what has happened in their classes. Teacher will be provided with guidance and support on how to share the news.
- Impress on the staff what facts are to be announced to the children. To avoid rumours, exaggerations and development of the event, the agreed facts should be stated simply.
- Communicate to the staff how the announcement will be made e.g. class or small group.
- It must be remembered that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotional feelings. Some will deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some may show feelings of anger. There may be tears and distress; everyone will react in their own way.
- Under such circumstances some staff may have difficulty coping with the loss themselves. Colleagues will need to be aware of those staff who seem particularly affected by the death and measures will be put in place to support their mental health and wellbeing.
- Counselling should be available if necessary e.g. in cases of sudden or violent death (outside agencies should be involved with this e.g. Psychological Service). Staff and children should be supported throughout the grieving period; anyone displaying signs of stress should be offered appropriate support.
- The team around the child and family will be asked if they want to attend the funeral or memorial services should it be appropriate.

### **Returning to school following a bereavement**

We acknowledge our responsibility to 'keep a special watch' on pupils who have been bereaved, especially on their return to school and for at least a two year period and at times of transition. We further acknowledge our responsibility to prepare staff and pupils appropriately before a bereaved child, staff member or member of our community returns.

We will acknowledge that(see Appendix 3):

- For the bereaved child or member of staff, returning to school may be traumatic.
- Where there has been a close family bereavement, in most cases everyone (teaching, support staff and wider community) should be made aware of the situation before the child returns (providing the parents/guardians of the bereaved pupil agree)

Staff should show appropriate compassion and allow expression to those suffering grief.

- Teachers should try to foster an environment that is compassionate.
- Family life at this traumatic time, can be particularly distressing, routines upset, relationships strained, the future uncertain. For this reason, school routines should be kept as normal as possible in order to provide a respite.
- Staff should be aware of anniversaries as this can spark a revival of feelings of bereavement.

- Staff might keep an eye on those particularly affected by the death of a close associate.

### **Managing anticipated death and the terminally ill.**

We acknowledge that the anticipated death of a member of our community, whilst very difficult to manage, enables us to establish appropriate communication with the family to support those likely to be most affected before and after the death.

In the event of a child or member of staff becoming terminally ill, their wishes and those of their parents/guardians/next-of-kin should always be respected.

- Should the child wish to attend school, the class teacher may need to inform the class of the child's condition.
- Occasionally, the child may wish to talk to their fellow classmates about their predicament themselves. Honesty about death and dying may be the best line of approach.

We acknowledge our responsibility to support adults, children and young people within our community who have to face the painful reality that a parent or someone close to them is terminally ill.

When supporting children and young people who are experiencing anticipatory grief, we will:

- Confirm the facts concerning the child's sick relative or friend
- Communicate the information as appropriate (in line with school procedures and the family's wishes)
- Never give false hope to the child or young person
- Discover what the pupil has been told of the illness
- Allow the child to talk freely about the sick person in an appropriate setting e.g. with the FEO.
- Enable the pupil to talk freely daily about how he/she is feeling
- Be honest! If we do not know the answer to a question we will say so
- Not inform the child about any progression concerning the illness unless the family have given permission and requested us to do so.

### **Talking to the bereaved child.**

- Try to be available to listen and support if possible, arrange a one-to-one session with the Family Engagement Support Officer/ SENDCo/Headteacher/SLT as soon as possible after the child returns to school
- Be calm and show them that you are listening and understanding by occasionally repeating what they have said and by acknowledging their emotions.
- If people feel like crying, they should cry, crying is not a sign of weakness, but often a sign of deep feeling.
- Beware of using platitudes e.g. "I know how you feel", (young people may feel offended that you presume how they feel).

## **Do**

- Provide a sensitive, companionate, nurturing, safe and supporting environment.
- Let the child know that you genuinely care
- Make time to be available and listen throughout their time at Lyndhurst School.
- Accept all that the child is saying
  - Allow them to express their feelings their way. (Children/adults may not show any outward signs of grieving but all staff need to be mindful of their bereavement.)
  - Let them know their feelings are normal
  - Let them know that it is OK to cry or feel angry.
- Talk honestly and share your feelings
- Be honest. Give the news stating simple facts, use the words dead/died.
- Have eye contact
- Have appropriate physical contact
- Let them know that it is not their fault
- Be aware of the home situation
  - Bereaved children may need time to grieve and manage overwhelming feelings, being able to leave a classroom and take time out in a safe space.

## **Do not**

- Stop the child talking
- Tell them how they should or should not feel
- Avoid contact
- Change the subject
- Deny your pain and feelings
- Point out things for which they should be grateful
- Be frightened of sharing your own feelings

## **Following a Bereavement:**

We believe that children and adults alike have the right to:

- be given space and time to grieve
- be given support from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate.
- encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement.

## **We recognise that:**

- grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real.
- differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment.
- the death of a child has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/care team of that child and every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far reaching contacts.
- We acknowledge the importance of remembering anniversaries of death.

- We will ensure we have approval from the family of the deceased to record the deceased name in our school memorial book / memorial garden / memory tree. We also acknowledge our responsibility to explore issues surrounding death and bereavement within the curriculum.
- The child will continue to grieve for the rest of their life and may require ongoing support. Significant dates or anniversaries, Mother's/Father's Day etc... may be particularly difficult.
- Regular contact with the family/carers and reviews with the pupil will help to build up an overall picture of how the pupil is coping.

### **Supporting for staff who support bereaved children and colleagues**

We will ensure that all staff are familiar with this policy and these procedures for responding to bereavement and will offer training as part of our staff training or resources. Whenever necessary we will request additional support from colleagues or from external support agencies. Further information about training can be found at:

- Child Bereavement UK's Helpline on 0800 02 888 40, [childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org) or **Live Chat** on the website, available 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.



## **Appendixes**

### **Appendix 1**

Useful Websites for dealing with loss and bereavement in the school community:

- [www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)
- [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)
- [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

Useful telephone numbers and addresses:

- 24 hour helpline from Health Assured to support with any life issues or problems - 0800 030 5182 [www.healthassuredeap.com](http://www.healthassuredeap.com)
- Winston's Wish Family Line - 0845 2030405 – national helpline offering guidance, information and support to anyone caring for a bereaved child, including professionals and family members
- Childhood Bereavement Network - 020 7843 6309 – a network of child bereavement services
- • CRUSE Bereavement Care (0870) 167 1677  
[www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk)

Further information about training can be found at:

- [childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org) or contact Child Bereavement UK's Helpline on **0800 02 888 40** or **Live Chat** on the website, available 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

### **Appendix 2**

#### **Books dealing with death and loss**

- Mum's jumper – Jayde Perkins
- The sunshine cat – Miriam Moss
- What does dead mean? Caroline Jay
- Always and forever – Alan Durant
- Beyond the Rough Rock –
- Supporting a Child who has been Bereaved through Suicide - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley
- As Big As It Gets - Supporting a Child when Someone in their Family is Seriously Ill - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley
- The Secret C - Straight Talking about Cancer - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley
- I Miss You - First Look at Death - Pat Thomson
- Storybooks available in school
- Grandpa- John Burningham
- Always and Forever – Alan Durant
- The Huge Bag of Worries – Virginia Ironside
- What on Earth Do you Do When Someone Dies? – Trevor Romain
- Badger's Parting Gifts- Susan Varley
- Saying Goodbye to Daddy – Judith Vigna
- Waterbugs and Dragonflies – Explaining Death to Young Children
- See Elephant's Tea Party resource on Child Bereavement UK's website

### **Appendix 3**

Support and Further Suggestions for Teachers - Parents and Carers often feel that teachers are experts on their children. They may turn to the school for advice and information, especially on matters of bereavement. It is important to remember that the family, friends and the immediate community often best support those suffering from bereavement, as is the case with other stressful life events. Teachers need not be experts on the subject but they do need to use sensitivity and their skills in understanding children's development and emotional needs. The following are some points that may be helpful to bear in mind when talking to parents/carers:

- A death will disrupt the family for many months; in fact the family will never be the same again. Family members are grieving, relationships alter, and members may take on new roles. Sometimes there is a change of carer, house or school, all of which add to the disruption and distress experienced by the child. To support the child it is helpful to minimise, if possible, changes and disruptions in their normal daily routine and life in school.
- Bereaved family members may emotionally and physically withdraw from the child, to protect themselves from more distress. Some adults will deny the bereaved child is grieving, as it will be too distressing for them to acknowledge the child's pain. This may cause distress and confusion, causing grief reactions of anger, withdrawal or psychosomatic behaviours such as headaches, stomach-ache or sickness.
- The bereaved child may regress in behaviour, becoming clingy, difficult or withdrawn. His/her schoolwork may be affected. These changes will be partly due to grief but also to the disruption and changes within the family, causing the child to feel confused and unsafe.
- The child may feel resentment, jealousy or guilt towards the dead person or child. The expression of this verbally can cause the remaining family members distress and shock. Parents/carers need to know this is normal and will decrease as the child and the family become more stable and settled.
- Parents/carers need to be informed of the benefits that a child gains in being involved in the ceremonies and rituals that follow death. An explanation as to how mourning practices help children to express their feelings and come to terms with and accept the reality of their loss can be very beneficial.
- Teachers should remember that parents/carers will often use them as role models, counsellors or extended family; looking to them for support for themselves as well as finding appropriate ways of supporting and talking with their children.
- Teachers may require their own support structures. Supporting bereaved families, whilst rewarding, can also be emotionally overwhelming, and they should access support from their school community and SLT.