



# Bereavement Policy

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# Bereavement Policy

## 1. Bereavement Policy Statement

The loss of someone close through death can be a traumatic and painful event. For many children and young people the death of a parent, sibling, friend or relative can be extremely difficult and they may find the emotions that they are experiencing to be frighteningly intense.

As children spend the vast majority of their time at school, teachers and staff members will be one of the primary sources of care and support in the event of a death. Bereaved children may see school as a safe haven away from the turmoil of emotions at home and will look to trusted staff members for help. Advice for staff on dealing with bereaved pupils is detailed in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

The purpose of this Bereavement Policy is to help everyone in our schools/Trust at a time when there may be shock, upset and confusion, ensuring that there is as little disruption as possible, that effective communication takes place and that each member of our school community is supported to help them through a very difficult time. The policy applies in the event of the death of any member of the school community, including students, members of staff, parents and family members, and other members of the school community.

Every 22 minutes in the UK a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 41,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, and, sadly, around 12,000 children die in the UK each year.

Within our school community there will almost always be some recently bereaved children who are struggling with their own situation – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil. We would hope to not encounter such circumstances, but the statistical inevitability of such an occurrence implies the necessity of having a Bereavement Policy in place in order that we might be proactive, rather than reactive, when responding to these sensitive situations.

Please refer to Appendix 3 for specific checks to be carried out in the event of a bereavement.

**NB.** *In this policy, all mentions of ‘the family’ refer to the family of the deceased individual. The wishes of the family will always be considered when carrying out any of the actions outlined in this policy. If the family objects to any of the procedures, the school will work to ensure reasonable adjustments are made.*

## 2 Legal framework

3.1. This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Children Act 1989
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Equality Act 2010
- DfE (2018) ‘Mental health and behaviour in schools’
- DfE (2022) ‘Keeping children safe in education’
- Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (2018) ‘Good Work Plan’
- The Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay Regulations 2020
- Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act 2018

3.2. This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure

### **3 Roles and Responsibilities**

3.1. The Trust will be responsible for:

- Formulation of the policy.
- Reviewing this policy with the Headteacher on bi-annual basis to ensure its effectiveness.
- Providing support for the Headteacher and the school on the implementation of the policy.
- Liaising with the media as required.
- Monitoring media and social media activity regarding the death.
- Respecting the family's wishes in relation to what information can be provided to the media.
- Carrying out formal duties relating to statutory notification.
- Ensuring staff have the necessary training to support bereaved pupils and to deliver sensitive news.

3.2. The Headteacher will be responsible for:

- The overall implementation of this policy.
- Liaising with external agencies, as appropriate
- Informing governors and staff when a death occurs and arranging for pupils to be informed, as appropriate and with approval from the family (this duty may be delegated or shared with the Trust).
- Establishing a first point of contact for staff, pupils and parents directly involved in a death, or designating this role to another appropriate member of staff.

*NB. The Headteacher may choose to delegate any of the duties in this policy to be carried out by an appropriate member of staff.*

*NB In the event of the death of the Headteacher, all the duties of the Headteacher set out in this policy will be the responsibility of the Trust CEO.*

3.3. Pastoral staff will be responsible for:

- Undertaking bereavement support training and conducting in-school training to share their knowledge with other staff.
- Supporting the Headteacher in carrying out the procedures outlined in this policy.
- Supporting other staff members with communicating the news of a death.
- Making referrals pupils, staff and other members of the school community to receive support.

3.4. All staff members will be responsible for:

- Undertaking any bereavement support training arranged by the Headteacher or pastoral staff.
- Seeking support from pastoral staff as appropriate.
- Supporting their colleagues and pupils following a death, as appropriate.

### **4. The initial response**

4.1. If the family or member of staff contacts the school to inform them of a death, the member of staff that answers the phone will transfer the call to the Headteacher or the most senior member of staff available.

- 4.2. If the school is made aware of the death through a source other than the family, the Headteacher or a senior member of staff will contact the family either by phone or through a home visit.
- 4.3. The Headteacher will gather factual information about what has happened and establish the family's wishes with regards to what information will be communicated to the school community and how.
- 4.4. If a death affects the entire school, e.g. the death of a pupil or member of staff, the Headteacher will inform the family that staff and pupils will be informed as soon as possible, in accordance with the wishes of the family.
- 4.5. If the death affects an individual member of staff, e.g. the death of a relative, the Headteacher will ask the member of staff if they would like this to be communicated to any of their colleagues. If it is decided that the death will be communicated, the Headteacher will discuss with the staff member what information will be communicated and how they would like it to be delivered.
- 4.6. If a death affects an individual pupil, e.g. the death of a parent, the Headteacher will ask the family if they would like this to be communicated to the school community. If it is decided that the death will be communicated, the Headteacher will discuss with the family, and the pupil if possible, what information will be communicated and how the family would like it to be delivered.
- 4.7. If the death of a pupil's family member occurs while the pupil is at school, a member of the pupil's family will be asked to come to the school to inform the pupil of what has happened and to take them home. If this is not possible, arrangements will be made for a member of staff to take the pupil home.
- 4.8. The Headteacher will make contact with any other agencies as required, e.g. the police.
- 4.9. The Headteacher will decide if any temporary variation needs to be made to the school timetable, e.g. rearranging or cancelling certain lessons.
- 4.10. In the event of the death of the Headteacher, the deputy headteacher will be responsible for the duties outlined above.

## **5 Informing staff and governors**

- 5.1 Wherever possible, staff and governors will be informed of the death before pupils
- 5.2 Absent staff and governors, including part-time and peripatetic staff, will be identified so they can be informed as soon as possible.
- 5.3 Absent staff and governors, including part-time and peripatetic staff, will be identified so they can be informed as soon as possible.
- 5.4 As far as is practicable, information provided to staff and governors during the meeting will have prior approval from the family.
- 5.5 During the meeting, the Headteacher, with the support of pastoral staff, will:
  - Explain what happened leading up to the death.
  - Give a factual explanation of how the death occurred.
  - Allow time for staff and governors to discuss what has happened and how they feel.

- Identify what internal and external support is available to staff and governors.
  - Discuss the arrangements for informing pupils, including whether all pupils will be told and who will be responsible for informing them.
- 5.6 Staff members that will be responsible for informing pupils about the death will be provided with a script which sets out what pupils should be told and includes information on how to answer some difficult questions.
- 5.7 The Headteacher and relevant pastoral staff will create the script, with input from the family if possible.

## **6. Informing pupils**

- 6.1 The Headteacher will have a discussion with the family about whether all pupils need to be informed about the death.
- 6.2 If the death affects the whole school, e.g. the death of a staff member or pupil, the headteacher will strongly recommend to the family that all pupils should be informed; however, if the death does not affect the whole school, it may be more appropriate to just inform certain groups of pupils.
- 6.3 The Headteacher will make the final decision regarding which pupils will be informed.
- 6.4 Where possible, pupils will be informed about the death in small groups by a member of staff that is familiar to them at the same time, e.g. during form time.
- 6.5 Pupils with specific needs that may influence their response to being informed about the death will be identified and told separately. These needs include the following:
- Pupils that had a long-term and/or close relationship with the individual who has died
  - Pupils with a history of loss
  - Pupils with SEND
  - Pupils who have difficulty managing their emotions or behaviour
- 6.6 Staff responsible for informing pupils will use the script provided to them.
- 6.7 To ensure all pupils are told about the death in an age-appropriate way, a number of scripts may be created and distributed to staff with clear instructions of which script to use for which year group.
- 6.8 Where possible, a member of pastoral staff will be present when pupils are told about a death so they can help with answering any questions.
- 6.9 Pupils will be given time to ask questions about what has happened and to talk about how they are feeling.
- 6.10 Any questions that are asked by pupils will be answered factually.
- 6.11 Pupils will be told where they can go to in school for support and will also be directed to any external support.
- 6.12 If it is not possible to inform pupils about a death in small groups, the Headteacher, in communication with the family, will decide if it would be appropriate to inform pupils in a large group, e.g. during an assembly.

- 6.13 Where an individual pupil has been bereaved, they will be asked if they want to attend the assembly and, if they do not want to be involved, appropriate support will be arranged for the pupil during and after the assembly. The Headteacher will tell the family and, where relevant, the bereaved pupil exactly what they will say and to whom.
- 6.14 The Headteacher, with support from relevant pastoral staff, will deliver the information to pupils.
- 6.15 After pupils have been informed, they will go to their tutor groups and be given time to express any thoughts or feelings about what they have been told.

## **7 Informing parents**

- 7.1 After pupils have been informed, they will go to their tutor groups and be given time to express any thoughts or feelings about what they have been told.
- 7.2 The Headteacher will have a discussion with the family about whether any parents need to be informed about the death.
- 7.3 If the death affects the whole school, e.g. the death of a staff member or pupil, the Headteacher will strongly recommend to the family that all parents should be informed; however, if the death does not affect the whole school, it may be more appropriate to just inform parents that are directly affected, if any.
- 7.4 A nominated member of staff will compose a letter to parents about the death. The letter will contain the basic, factual information about the death, information about how the school is supporting pupils, how they can support their children, and who to direct questions or concerns to. This will be approved by the family before distribution.

## **8 Funerals**

- 8.1 If appropriate, the Headteacher will discuss with the family whether any staff, governors or pupils are able to attend the funeral.
- 8.2 With the family's approval, the Headteacher will arrange for the school to be represented at the funeral and identify which staff and pupils may want to attend.
- 8.3 The Headteacher and chair of governors will decide if it is necessary for the school to be fully or partially closed.
- 8.4 Necessary cover arrangements will be made for staff attending the funeral.

## **9 The media and social media**

- 9.1. Any communication with the media or social media activity will be agreed with the family.
- 9.2. Only staff designated by the Trust or the Headteacher will deal with media enquiries and communications. Staff, governors and pupils will not respond to any media enquiries themselves or make any public statements about the death.
- 9.3. Staff, governors and pupils will not post any information about the death on social media.
- 9.4. If information about the death is circulated on social media prior to the school making an official statement, the Headteacher and media spokesperson may decide to release a statement on the school's social media channels, with the agreement of the family, to prevent rumours from spreading.

- 9.5. Comments and other activity on school-posted social media statements will be monitored and moderated by the Trust Communications Manager.
- 9.6. If staff, governors or pupils find any false, negative or malicious information being posted about the death on social media, they will report this to the headteacher or the Trust Communications Manager.
- 9.7. If a pupil is found to have been posting content on social media or providing information to the media that is false, negative or malicious, action will be taken in line with the Behavioural Policy.

## **10 Support for the family**

- 10.1. The Headteacher will be the main point of contact between the school and the family, or will appoint another member of staff to this role where necessary.
- 10.2. The Headteacher will discuss with the family how the school can best support them.
- 10.3. The family's wishes and feelings will always be considered and respected when making decisions and conducting activities relating to the death.
- 10.4. Any support that is put in place will be decided on a case-by-case basis, depending on the family's needs and wishes. Support could include the following:
  - Sending a letter of condolence;
  - Giving the family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died;
  - Inviting the family to commemorative events held by the school.

## **11 Support for staff**

- 11.1. Staff directly affected by the death, e.g. if they are a relative or close friend of the individual that has died, will be identified and the appropriate support will be put in place.
- 11.2. The level of support will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the Headteacher, and may include the following:
  - Ensuring the staff member is not left on their own
  - Arranging for lessons or other duties to be covered
  - Organising bereavement leave
- 11.3. Staff who lose a child under the age of 18, or suffer a stillbirth from 24 weeks of pregnancy, irrespective of how long they have worked at the school, will be given a minimum of two weeks' paid Parental Bereavement leave. (Please refer to the Trust policy on Annual Leave and Leave of Absence for full details of Parental Bereavement leave).
- 11.4. Staff may take Parental Bereavement leave as either a single block of two weeks, or as two separate blocks of one week, each taken at different times across the first year after their child's death.
- 11.5. Any member of staff who loses a child under the age of 18 and has been employed at the school for 26 weeks or more, will be able to claim full pay for the period of bereavement leave.
- 11.6. Any member of staff who loses a child after 24 weeks of pregnancy, or during maternity leave, will not lose their entitlement to maternity leave and pay.

- 11.7. Staff members will be given information about the in-school and external support they can access.
- 11.8. A designated venue / room will be made available to staff where they can go during break and lunchtimes to meet with other staff and share their thoughts and feelings.
- 11.9. Staff will be vigilant to the signs that indicate their colleagues have been affected by bereavement and will offer them support or make a referral to a member of pastoral staff.

## **12 Support for pupils**

### **Pupils that have experienced a significant bereavement, e.g. of a family member**

- 12.1. A member of staff that is familiar with the pupil will be appointed to act as their main point of contact – the pupil will be made aware of who the staff member is. This is likely to be the Form Tutor.
- 12.2. The Headteacher will contact the pupil's family to discuss whether the pupil will be attending school.
- 12.3. Any support put in place for a pupil will be pupil-led, based on their needs and wishes.
- 12.4. When deciding what support will be put in place for a pupil, the impact the death will have on the pupil will always be considered in the context of pre-existing factors. The following contextual factors will be considered:
  - The circumstances surrounding the death, e.g. was it under traumatic circumstances, was the death expected, or did multiple people die?
  - The relationship between the pupil and the person who has died.
  - The ability of the pupil's family to support them following the death, e.g. if a pupil's parent has died, how able is the surviving parent to support the pupil?
  - Family factors such as size, financial state, structure, style of coping, communication and stressors that affect the child.
  - The support the pupil has from their peers and other organisations and people.
  - Characteristics of the pupil, including their age and any SEND they have.
- 12.5. The pupil will be a part of discussions regarding who should be informed about the death and how, where appropriate.
- 12.6. If a pupil chooses to attend school immediately after a bereavement, they will be allowed a flexible timetable and staff members will be made aware that the pupil may not be able to work to their usual capacity. The designated staff member will keep in communication with the pupil's family to inform them about how the pupil is doing.
- 12.7. If the pupil is absent from school following the bereavement, they will be made aware of who has been informed about what has happened and what they were told.
- 12.8. The designated staff member will make regular contact with the pupil during their absence.
- 12.9. The Headteacher, designated staff member, pupil and the pupil's family will make arrangements for the pupil's return to school, e.g. a phased return.
- 12.10. If a death occurs soon before or during a time where the pupil will take an exam, the Headteacher will report the circumstances to the exam board who will decide if special considerations apply.

- 12.11. If a pupil misses an exam due to the death of a close family member or friend, the headteacher will report this to the appropriate exam board who will then make a decision as to whether special considerations can be applied.
- 12.12. Any safeguarding concerns regarding a bereaved pupil will be dealt with in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

### **Support for all pupils**

- 12.13. All pupils, even those not directly affected by the death, may need to be supported following a death, particularly if the death affects the whole school community, e.g. the death of a staff member.
- 12.14. Pupils will be given the opportunity to speak to a member of pastoral staff.
- 12.15. Staff will talk to pupils about what has happened using age-appropriate and developmental stage appropriate language.
- 12.16. Following a death in the school community, pupils will be invited to take part in remembrance activities, e.g. remembrance assemblies.
- 12.17. Staff will identify any pupils that may need more direct support and make a referral to the headteacher who will assess what support might be required in collaboration with pastoral staff.

## **13 Behaviour and SEMH issues**

- 13.1. Staff will remain vigilant to the following behaviours that a pupil may display immediately after the death of someone close to them:
- Inability to concentrate
  - Lack of motivation
  - Tiredness and irritability
  - Heightened sensitivity to comments and remarks
  - Inability to take others' feelings into account
  - Anger, frustration or aggression
  - A general change in behaviour, e.g. becoming unnaturally quiet or withdrawn
  - Anxiety
  - Being easily upset by events that would normally be trivial to them
  - Physical complaints, such as headaches, stomach aches and a general tendency to be prone to minor illness
- 13.2. The pupil's designated staff member will keep in contact with the pupil's family and share information about how the pupil is behaving at school and home.
- 13.3. Any challenging behaviour displayed by bereaved pupils will be addressed using an individual graduated response in line with the Behaviour Policy.
- 13.4. A record will be made of anniversaries and days with regards to the death which may act as a trigger for challenging behaviour.

- 13.5. Any incidents of bullying, where a bereaved pupil is the victim or perpetrator, will be addressed in line with the Anti-bullying Policy, taking into account the pupil's needs and circumstances.
- 13.6. All staff members will remain vigilant to signs that a bereaved pupil is facing difficulties in relation to their psychological, physical and social development and will refer the pupil to pastoral staff who will put appropriate support in place.
- 13.7. The school's relevant policy and procedure will be followed to ensure pupils that may be vulnerable to developing or experiencing SEMH issues following a bereavement can be identified and appropriately supported.

## **14 Specific circumstances**

- 14.1. The procedures outlined in this policy will be followed for all deaths affecting the school community and individual pupils; however, specific measures will be implemented for certain circumstances.

### **Pre-bereavement – when a family member is not expected to live**

- 14.2. If a pupil has an illness where they are not expected to live, their family will make the school aware of the situation and the school will ensure the appropriate support is in place.
- 14.3. A member of pastoral staff will meet with the pupil regularly to provide an opportunity to talk about what is happening and how they are feeling.
- 14.4. All staff will remain vigilant to signs that the pupil is facing challenges in relation to their psychological, physical and social development and will refer any concerns to pastoral staff who will ensure appropriate support is put in place.

### **Pupils with a life-threatening illness**

- 14.5. Pupils with life-threatening illnesses will be encouraged to take part in school routines as much as possible, and the school will continue to expect the usual standards of behaviour as appropriate.
- 14.6. The Headteacher, the pupil and their family, and other relevant staff members (e.g. a member of pastoral staff) will decide how to share the news that a pupil is terminally ill with the school community.
- 14.7. Other pupils will be informed about how they can best support the pupil in the most appropriate way.
- 14.8. If the pupil is receiving treatment from a local hospice or hospital, the key professional responsible for the pupil will be identified and the headteacher will contact this person for advice and support as necessary.

### **Suicide**

- 14.9. The school will respond to a suspected suicide within 48 hours.
- 14.10. The Headteacher, or other appointed member of staff, will contact the police or the family as soon as possible to confirm the death and whether it is being treated as a suicide.
- 14.11. If the family does not wish the cause of death to be disclosed to the school community, the school will state that the nature and cause of death are still being determined and that additional information will be forthcoming.

- 14.12. If the death is subject to an ongoing investigation, the Headteacher will check with the police before speaking about the death with pupils who may need to be interviewed by the police.
- 14.13. Staff will be told about the death first, in line with [section 4](#) of this policy.
- 14.14. The script that staff will use to inform pupils of the death will be factual while avoiding excessive detail about the suicidal act itself.
- 14.15. Immediate emotional support will be arranged for any pupils and staff who require it.
- 14.16. A designated room will be set up where pupils and staff can go to if they are struggling with the news.
- 14.17. Liaison with the media will be handled in line with [section 8](#) of this policy.
- 14.18. Any information distributed to the school community and media regarding the death will:
- Be factually correct but not include detail of the cause of death or method used.
  - Not romanticise, glorify or vilify the death.
  - Not include details of any suicide note.
  - Not include speculation over the motivation for suicide.
- 14.19. Research indicates that pupils that have been directly affected by suicide are at an increased risk of taking their own life. Staff will report any concerns about pupils to the Headteacher and the appropriate support will be put in place or a referral to specialist services will be made.
- 14.20. Pupils and staff will be warned about the risks of un-moderated online memorials (e.g. those on social media), such as their comments becoming public without their permission and online memorials attracting negative comments.

### **Cultural and religious behaviours**

- 14.21. The school will keep in mind the cultural attitudes and behaviours relating to a death and will make sure these needs are taken into consideration when putting support in place for those affected, including the length of bereavement leave for members of staff.

### **Forces' families**

- 14.22. The needs and feelings of bereaved forces' pupils will always be considered prior to any school activities relating to the armed forces, e.g. commemorating Armed Forces Day, and additional support will be put in place for pupils as required.
- 14.23. Appropriate support will be implemented for bereaved forces' pupils, particularly during times of change.
- 14.24. Bereaved forces' pupils will be protected from any unwanted media attention and there will be a designated area in school that the pupil can go to if they are feeling overwhelmed.

### **A death involving murder or manslaughter**

- 14.25. The Headteacher will contact the police or the family to establish the facts about what has happened.
- 14.26. A designated staff member will be available to talk to the pupil to help them to answer any questions they may get from their peers about what has happened.

- 14.27. Research indicates that pupils that have been bereaved due to murder or manslaughter can be at significant risk of developing PTSD. Any concerns relating to the pupil will be addressed in line with the relevant policies and procedures.

## **15 Remembrance activities**

- 15.1. Following a death in the school community, the school may conduct some remembrance activities, e.g. a remembrance assembly.
- 15.2. The family will always be consulted prior to any remembrance activities being planned and will be invited to take part in the activities.
- 15.3. All members of the school community, including staff, governors, pupils and parents, will be invited to take part in remembrance activities.
- 15.4. All remembrance activities will be planned so that they are respectful of the culture and religious beliefs of the family.

## **16 Managing transitions**

- 16.1. Information about pupils that have been bereaved will be recorded in their pupil record.
- 16.2. This information will be shared with relevant parties at key transition points, including the following:
- If the pupil moves school;
  - When the pupil moves to the next phase of education;
  - If the pupil moves class;
  - When the pupil will be taught by a new teacher.
- 16.3. Good communication will be established with feeder schools so pupils that have experienced bereavement can be identified.

## **17 Teaching about bereavement and grief**

- 17.1. Different aspects of the curriculum will be used to discuss relationships, feelings and emotions, and to think about how to manage these in relation to family events and death.
- 17.2. Before delivering any lessons that cover topics of death and bereavement, the teacher will consider how the lesson may affect the bereaved pupils they are teaching.
- 17.3. Bereaved pupils and their families will be consulted over whether it is appropriate for them to attend lessons about death or bereavement, and alternative arrangements or additional support will be put in place as required.
- 17.4. Where appropriate, the teacher will discuss what the lesson is going to cover with the pupil and will work with the pupil to design activities that the pupil feels they are able to get involved with.
- 17.5. Any lessons covering topics of death or bereavement will take account of religious and cultural beliefs.

## **18 Staff training.**

- 18.1. Whole-school training on the implementation of this policy will be provided for all staff bi-annually

- 18.2. If any members of staff are not confident in delivering some level of bereavement support to pupils or other staff members, or in implementing this policy, they will speak to the Headteacher who will arrange for the staff member to undergo the appropriate training. Any lessons covering topics of death or bereavement will take account of religious and cultural beliefs.

## **19 Monitoring and review**

- 19.1. This policy will be reviewed on an bi-annual basis by the Trust Board.
- 19.2. The next scheduled review date for this policy is July 2025.
- 19.3. Any changes to this policy will be communicated to all staff members.

## Appendix 1

### Advice to staff

In the past, people have sometimes underestimated the impact of death upon young children and young people. 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. 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.

Reactions to bereavement can include withdrawal, open distress, tears, panic, aggression, anxiety, fear or other signs of stress. 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 - all these are normal grief reactions. 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.

### Some advice on dealing with those who have suffered bereavement:

It is always a good idea to acknowledge the death when you first come into contact with the bereaved person. It is also important to deal with any immediate physical reactions should someone display signs of shock when informed of a death, such as anxiety, impaired judgment, confusion, detachment, and depression. Signs of panic anxiety (tachycardia, sweating, flushing) may also be present. The symptoms usually appear within minutes of the impact of the stressful stimulus or event. The symptoms show great variation but typically include an initial state of "daze", with some narrowing of attention, inability to comprehend, and disorientation. This may be quickly followed by either further withdrawal from the surrounding situation or by agitation and over-activity.

- Use clear language. Failure to do so can frustrate older children and confuse younger ones. A six-year-old who hears that her Dad has been lost will try to find him, because that is what you do when someone is lost. Simply use language which is real and clear; "I was really sorry to hear that your Dad died last week. How are you feeling?"
- Expect questions, but don't feel pressured to provide immediate answers. Death often throws up many questions for us all. Some of these may seem straightforward and obvious under the circumstances, such as 'How does smoking cause cancer?' to the more complex 'Why do some people die so young without warning?' If there are questions that you are unable to answer, feel able to say so, and promise to look into providing an answer at a later point.
- Recognise that every death and every reaction to it is unique. The way in which a child reacts to a death is dependent on their relationship with the person who died, the time of death in that child's development, the nature of the death (was it expected after a long fight against an illness or was it sudden?), the child's understanding of death, their support network and many other factors. Don't assume anything. Ask the pupil how they feel, rather than projecting feelings that you might expect them to have. Also, expect that other children in a class might be affected by a death in an immediate family other than their own.
- Moving on - expect children (especially younger ones) to 'move on' fairly quickly. As adults we tend to remain in a feeling or thought for a lot longer than children. If we are sad and reflective, we may be so for many hours. Children may be distraught one moment and then fine the next – asking what's for lunch, for example. Although this sometimes shocks us, this is completely normal, so do not overreact to it.
- Try to normalise the feelings that a bereaved young person shares with you. They are probably very worried that they are the only person who has ever felt this way. Assure them that feelings

of anger, fatigue, fear, worry, stress, sadness, exhaustion, guilt, anxiety, frustration, loneliness, lack of focus etc, are all a normal reaction to grief.

- Acknowledge that some days will be better than others. A bereaved pupil may arrive for registration one morning and seem totally fine. The next day, for an obvious reason, or for no apparent reason at all, they may seem completely different.
- If a bereaved pupil is absent, keep them informed about what is going on. Include what the class have been studying, but also some other news; try to keep the bonds between you and the pupil strong, as well as keeping them up-to-date with their school life; they will probably be quite worried about falling behind. Electronic means can be useful here.
- It can be an idea to organise their first day back to be a little out of the ordinary. Get them to come in at break time and this way they can talk to who they want to rather than be subjected to all kinds of questioning before school. Maybe have some of their best friends meet them and chat together before class. Ideally discuss with the pupil beforehand what they would like as a routine.
- Make arrangements with the pupil to enable them to seek help whenever they need to. An identified member of staff is crucial to this. Put in place an arrangement which enables the pupil to leave class should they feel overwhelmed or upset at any time. There must be a named person to whom they report and the class teacher should alert this member of staff when the pupil needs support.
- It is also important though that normal rules and expectations of behaviour are maintained. This can feel harsh in some circumstances, but a routine actually helps, and a lack of it will cause more problems within the class and amongst peers.

## **Appendix 2: Support Materials**

These materials can be shared with pupils and families)

There are help lines and websites available to help people coping with loss.

Some you may find useful are:

### **Winston's Wish**

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

Offering practical support and guidance to bereaved children, their families and professionals.

Telephone: Family Line 08088 020 021

National services include

- national helpline for all those caring for a child or young person who has been bereaved
- website with activities for children and young people and facility to ask questions of a trained clinician
- programme of direct support for families bereaved through suicide, murder or manslaughter
- resources including books and memory boxes

### **Grief Encounter**

[www.griefencounter.org.uk](http://www.griefencounter.org.uk)

Helping children through bereavement. Support services range from a supportive voice at the end of a phone, Grief Groups and Remembrance Days, to long-term one-to-one counselling.

Telephone: 0808 802 0111

National services include

- GriefTalk call, email or instant chat support for bereaved children and young people and those caring for them 9am-9pm Monday to Friday
- resources for bereaved children and young people, families and professionals
- training courses and bespoke training including Good Grief training course.

### **childline**

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

If you're under 19 you can confidentially call, email, or chat online about any problem big or small. Freephone 24h helpline: 0800 1111

National services include

- free national helpline for children and young people on any issue or problem 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year
- freepost service
- schools outreach programme.

### **Child Bereavement UK**

[www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)

Tel: 0800 02 888 40

National services include

- confidential information and support line for families and professionals when a child has died and when a child is bereaved
- web discussion for families and for professionals
- resources for bereaved children and young people, families and all professionals  
training courses on bereavement for health care and other professionals

### **Cruse Bereavement Care**

Freephone National Helpline: 0808 808 1766

Administration: 020 8939 9530

Website: [www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk) [www.hopeagain.org.uk](http://www.hopeagain.org.uk)

Many local branches of Cruse offer individual or group support for bereaved children. Those that are members of the Childhood Bereavement Network are listed in the map above: others can be accessed by ringing the helpline or visiting the Cruse website.

Cruse has a special website for young people. A special feature of this site is a message board where young people can share their experiences and receive replies from trained young supporters.

[www.widowedandyoung.org.uk](http://www.widowedandyoung.org.uk) (The WAY Foundation for those widowed under 50)

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org) (free calls day or night on 116 123)

### **Appendix 3: Support in a multi-faith / multicultural context**

The Aspire Multi-Academy Trust serves a religiously and culturally diverse community and this resource is designed to assist staff to address some of the religious needs of pupils and families in their care.

#### **Christianity**

Bereaved families of all Christian denominations may wish the services of the appropriate chaplain. It is important that whenever possible Roman Catholics receive the sacrament known as the sacrament of the sick before death. A priest or minister usually performs a funeral service in a church and there is no time constraint after death. Christians can be either cremated or buried.

#### **Hinduism**

Hinduism originated near the river Indus over 5,000 years ago, although elements of the faith are much older. The Hindu tradition is best understood as a group of closely connected religious traditions rather than a single religion. It represents a complete way of life and is practised by over 900 million followers.

After death the family take responsibility for the care of the body. Sacred objects will not be removed. Relatives will wish to wash the body and put on new clothes before taking it from the hospital. Traditionally the eldest son of the deceased should take a leading part in this, however young he may be. If a post mortem is unavoidable, Hindus wish all organs to be returned to the body before cremation (or burial for children under five years old). Hindu funerals can be marked by flowers (always sent in advance) and dressing 'down' in white. Many families celebrate the life on the twelfth or thirteenth day after the funeral with a feast.

#### **Islam**

Islam is a world religion that originated in the Middle East in the seventh century CE5. It is practised by about a fifth of the world's population.

The next of kin will want to arrange to wash the body before burial. In Islam the body must be buried as quickly as possible (cremation is forbidden). A post mortem must be avoided if legally possible, as this is not allowed and causes considerable distress; organs should all be buried with the body. Normally a three day mourning period follows.

#### **Judaism**

Judaism is an ancient religion that has been practised for over 5,000 years and is based on the belief in one universal omnipotent God.

Jewish law forbids Jews to do anything to hasten a person's death and at the same time requires everything possible to be done to comfort the dying.

Some families will want to ensure that someone from the Jewish community remains to sit with the body. Psalms may be recited during this time. While Orthodox Jews are buried, not cremated, Reform and Liberal Jews may choose either method of disposal of the body. Immediately after death, close relatives may make a tear in one of their garments. Shiva is a week-long mourning ritual for first degree relatives (immediate family) and is referred to as 'sitting shiva'. Family members gather in one home and receive visitors. Mirrors are covered, cleansing rituals are minimised, cooking is done by others and it is customary to sit low near the floor to symbolise being brought low by grief.

## **Sikhism**

The Sikh faith is a distinct religion revealed through the teachings of ten Gurus. Most Sikhs are cremated although babies may be buried. Cremation should take place as soon as possible after death, and friends and relatives will prepare the body the night before the cremation at the funeral parlour. The post-cremation service takes place at the Gurdwara. Because Sikhs believe the soul never dies there is no mourning at the death of Sikhs. There is most praying at a funeral so the soul can be released from the bonds of reincarnation and to become one with God.

## **Chinese**

Although there is a variety of Chinese belief systems (including Christianity and Islam), the most prevalent influences are Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism and veneration of ancestors.

Funeral and mourning customs vary widely in the Chinese tradition, making it difficult to generalise for all Chinese. In the case of a child some Chinese prefer things to be kept quiet and simple, with little or no fuss. In some instances a coffin may not be used – simply a sheet. There is no formal funeral service for a child and many Chinese do not like to mention a child who has died at all, so counselling may be difficult. Chinese families do not like to be given back any of the child's belongings as it is considered bad luck. On the death of a child, the burial takes place at once with no special ceremony. In the case of adults, the body is simply bathed and covered in a white sheet. Some Chinese still follow the custom of clothing the body in white or old-fashioned Chinese dress. The only Chinese who object to post mortems are Muslim Chinese.

## **The Baha'i faith**

The Baha'i faith is an independent world religion that originated in Persia (now Iran) in the 19th century. The spiritual and administrative centre of the Baha'i faith is in modern Israel.

Baha'is treat the body of a deceased person with great respect. Baha'i law prescribes that burial should take place at a distance of no more than one hour's journey from the place of death. The body should not be cremated or embalmed. Baha'i relatives or friends will wish to say prayers for the dead. Autopsies and post mortem examinations are acceptable if necessary. Because they believe life begins at conception, a miscarriage is a great loss and the foetus should be treated with respect. Wherever possible the remains should be returned to the parents or local Baha'i community for burial.

## **Buddhism**

There are various Buddhist traditions and it remains deeply influential in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Korea, Japan and the countries of the Himalayas; as well as in areas of India settled by Tibetans in exile.

After death, in many schools of Buddhism there is no ritual requirement. However, some Buddhists hold strong views about how the body is treated after death. After death, the main Buddhist tradition is for the family to request prayers from the sangha (usually a monk, lama, nun, priest or order member) of the appropriate school of Buddhism and to perform certain actions and dedicate them to the dead person. Particularly for practitioners of Vajrayana Buddhism – most commonly in Britain, Tibetan Buddhism – an experienced Buddhist practitioner may perform the special Buddhist practice of Powa or ejection of consciousness.

Some patients and relatives may object to a post mortem due to the belief that the mind may stay in the body for some time after the heart has stopped, and interfering with internal organs may undermine the optimal dissolution of consciousness; therefore the body should not be moved for 72 hours.

Buddhists can dispose of a dead body by any of the four elements (earth, air, fire and water) whichever is appropriate to the country and people. Traditions vary as there are different schools of thought. However, most Buddhists are cremated and the body should be disposed of within three to seven days.

### **Supporting Gypsy and Traveller Families**

For many families, religion may be an important aspect of Traveller life and traditionally funerals in these communities take place quickly. This may limit the amount of time available to discuss how different family members would like things to be done.

Whilst each family is individual and will have their own ways of doing things, certain traditions held amongst Gypsies and Travellers may have an impact on the way each person grieves. Traditionally, the trailer (caravan) and all the possessions of the person who had died would have been burnt. Today they are more likely to be sold. This removing of memories and possessions means that any connection with the person who has died has gone. Children and young people can find the absence of reminders of someone who they may have been close to very difficult. The practice of 'sitting up', of not leaving the person who has died alone from the time of death until the funeral, is common and may impact on family members in different ways.

As with any family, when supporting Gypsy and Traveller families it is important to keep in mind the cultural attitudes and behaviours relating to death. Each family experiencing a death will have their own way of managing the bereavement and each individual within the family may differ greatly in terms of the kind of support they need.

### **Supporting Forces Families**

Bereaved Forces children experience multiple losses. Service children may have already faced disruption to their schooling due to postings every two years or so. Therefore, having to move to a new house, or even country, quite quickly as the result of a death is doubly hard at what is already a very difficult and stressful time. Leaving familiar surroundings, schools and friends can be stressful and isolating for the children and their families at a time when understanding from those around them is crucial.

A death in action can often be totally unexpected, sudden and traumatic, heightening the sense of shock and disbelief. This disbelief may be strengthened by the death happening far away from home. Visiting the scene after a traumatic death can help those affected to make some sense of what has happened and to start to work out answers to 'how?' and 'why?'. The opportunity to do this is limited if it happens in a distant or inaccessible place.

For any grieving child, school offers an opportunity to forget about their grief for a while. This is even more the case for children of Forces families, who face regular reminders in the media of a conflict or military action. Be aware of this and try to create space and time in school for them to escape from overwhelming emotions.

Encourage resilience by helping bereaved Forces pupils to practice a response to questions or comments from peers such as 'how did your dad / mum die?'

Sensitively remind peer groups that talking about what they see in the media about any conflicts might be particularly upsetting for their friends from Forces families.

Any positive feedback and recognition of their achievements, however small, will be helpful.

**Appendix 4: Checklist**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Done</b>
Inform Trust CEO / Leadership Team and school SLT		
Agree information sharing and wording with family		
Prepare media statement if needed		
School Counsellor available for Pupils		
Staff counsellor available for Staff/Wellbeing support		
Agree on support rooms for pupils and for staff		
Agree on support rooms for staff		
Consider which staff and pupils may need special consideration in advance eg recent bereavement		
Inform staff		
Inform pupils per year group		
Inform small groups if required		
Inform parents by email as soon as pupils are told		
Ensure staff are visible around school in the immediate aftermath of any info sharing		
Inform Trust of any changes to records – as soon as possible.		
Offer counselling sessions around 5-6 weeks post event/remind staff about support available from SAS		