



Bereavement Policy

Approved by Governors.....

To be reviewed.....



Bereavement POLICY

School Background:

Watermill School welcomes pupils with special educational needs from across Stoke-On-Trent and its surrounding area. Our pupils range in age from 2-19 and each and every one of them is truly unique.

Our staff team are dedicated to understanding the needs of the individuals they work with, supporting our pupils as they progress and achieve in all elements of the curriculum.

Through the carefully tailored programmes our pupils receive and the emphasis we all place on nurturing their social, emotional and personal wellbeing and development our aim is to help our students be secure, happy, ambitious and successful members of society.

Rationale:

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. 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 should be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex. Additional information and resources can be accessed at www.childbereavement.org.uk



Objectives

The core intentions of the 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 wider agencies, and clarify the pathway of support.
- The Children Act 1989 aimed to ensure that the welfare of the child was paramount, working in partnership with parents to protect the child from harm (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/section/1>). All intentions of this policy endorse that aim as we endeavour to counter any adverse effects of bereavement and maintain pupils' emotional well-being.
- Section 19 of the Children and Families Act 2014 makes clear that local authorities, in carrying out their functions under the Act in relation to disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs (SEN), must have regard to:
 - the views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person, and the child's parents
 - the importance of the child or young person, and the child's parents, participating as fully as possible in decisions, and being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions
 - the need to support the child or young person, and the child's parents, in order to facilitate the development of the child or young person and to help them achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes, preparing them effectively for adulthood<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/part/3/enacted>

The role of the governing body

- To approve policy and ensure its implementation, to be reviewed in three years.



The role of the head teacher

- To monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.
- To respond to media enquiries.
- To be first point of contact for family/child concerned.
- To keep the governing body fully informed.

The role of the LA

- To advise and support staff. Consult on referral pathways and identification of complex grief.

The pastoral role of staff

(including i.e. spiritual advisors, school counsellors, mentors, support staff)

- To have bereavement support training and understanding of wider issues.

Procedures:

1. Contact should be established by the Head teacher with the deceased's family and their wishes respected in communicating with others. Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion, whilst being sensitive to a grieving family's requirements.
2. Cultural and religious considerations should be taken into account (see appendix A)



3. A clear process of communication should be followed, giving consideration to the multi-agency involvement families may have (see appendix B)
4. Staff should be informed before pupils and be prepared (through prior training) to share information in ways appropriate to the students' understanding, as agreed for each individual circumstance.
5. Pupils who are affected should be informed, preferably in small groups (or individually when necessary), by someone known to them. (see appendix C)
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.
7. The school should be aware that the school timetable may need a degree of flexibility to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of children affected by the situation. However, minimal disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security and familiarity.
8. Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate.
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.
10. Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Head Teacher
11. Appropriate memorialisation activities should be discussed with families and students, bearing in mind that any future deaths will require the same response. (see appendix D)



12. School should be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life so information should be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points.



Suggested template for letter to parents

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

Sample letter on death of a pupil:

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 an illness called 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 willing 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
<Name> Head Teacher



Sample letter on death of a staff member:

Dear parents

I am sorry to have to tell you that a much-loved member of our staff [name] has died. The children were told today and many will have been quite distressed at the news. No-one wants to see children sad, but we are very aware that factual information and emotional support are the best means of helping children deal with bereavement. I am sure there will be many parents who are also saddened by the news. Children respond in different ways so may dip in and out of sadness, and questions, whilst alternately playing or participating in their usual activities. This is normal and healthy.

You may find your child has questions to ask which we will answer in school in a way appropriate to their level of understanding, but if you feel you would like more support and advice yourself, please do not hesitate to contact the school office. You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at www.childbereavement.org.uk

We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Children who wish to attend will be welcome to do so, though it will not be compulsory. It is likely that school will be closed on the morning or afternoon of the funeral as staff will, of course, wish to pay their respects to a very popular colleague.

I am sorry to be the bearer of sad news, but I appreciate an occurrence like this impacts the whole school community. I am so grateful for the thriving partnership we have with parents and trust that we, together, will be able to guide and support the children through what may be, for many, a very new experience in their lives.

Yours.....



Sample letter to bereaved family

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear of *Toby's* death. There are no words to express the sadness of losing a child and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through.

Clearly, as a school community, we will miss *him* very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to *his* friends and classmates. *He* was a much loved member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help as you plan *Toby's* funeral service or other memorial opportunities, please let us know. In time, we will also ensure that anything of *Toby's* that remains in school is returned to you, including photographs we may have on the school system.

Be assured that you are in our thoughts at this very sad time and do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of support in any way.

With sympathy,



This policy was presented to the Governing Body and agreed on.....

Head teacher _____ Date _____

Chair of Governors _____ Date _____



Appendix A: Cultural and religious considerations

Different Cultures and Beliefs

Schools have to function within an increasingly multi-cultural society, in which various beliefs, religious and non-religious, require to be taken into account. Respect for the differing needs, rituals and practices is essential when acknowledging a death. It is this diversity that enriches our lives.

General points for Eastern Faiths:

Within a faith there are often many variations and it is wrong to be prescriptive- beliefs can be moderated by life in a Western Culture.

This is especially so for the younger generation, who may find it difficult to fit in with the stricter requirements of older members of a family or community.

Families tend to be much more involved in preparing the body and the funeral arrangements than in Christian faiths.

Because of belief in an afterlife, it is important that the whole body is retained. Postmortems therefore tend to be viewed as unwelcome procedures.

The coffin is likely to be kept at home until the funeral and may well be open. All who wish to pay their respects will be very welcome.

The following descriptions merely give an overview of the major religions and belief systems that are found in the UK.

Islam

Muslims believe in life after death when, on the Last Day, the dead will come back to life to be judged by Allah. The good will reside in Paradise, the damned in Hell.

Muhammad teaches that all men and women are to serve Allah and that they should try to live perfectly, following the Qur`an. Devout Muslims believe that death is a part of Allah's plan and open expressions of grief may be viewed as disrespectful to this belief.

As cremation is forbidden, Muslims are always buried, ideally within 24 hours of the death. Ritual washing is usually performed by the family or close friends at the undertakers or mortuary. They will wrap the body in a clean cloth or shroud. The coffin is often very plain as traditionally one would not be used. The grave is aligned



to enable the head of the deceased to be placed facing the holy city of Mecca. Muslim graves are unmarked but to meet UK requirements, a simple headstone is used as a compromise.

There is an official mourning period of three days when the family will remain at home and be brought food by friends and relatives. For forty days after the funeral relatives may wish to make regular visits to the grave on Fridays.

Hindu

Hindus believe in reincarnation and a cycle of rebirths. When a person dies, the soul is reborn in a new body, returning to earth in either a better or worse form. What a person does in this life will influence what happens to them in the next, the law of Karma. Those that have performed good deeds in this life will be reborn into higher order families, those whose behaviour has been bad will be born again as outcasts.

A Hindu funeral is as much a celebration as a remembrance service. Hindus cremate their dead as it is the soul that has importance, not the body which is no longer needed. White is the traditional colour and mourners usually wear traditional Indian garments. If attending, it may be worth asking what will be appropriate dress. During the service, offerings such as flowers or sweetmeats may be passed around and bells rung so noise is a part of the ritual. The chief mourner, usually the eldest son, and other male members of the family, may shave their heads as a mark of respect. In India, the chief mourner would light the funeral pyre. Here, he will press the button to make the coffin disappear and in some instances, may be permitted to ignite the cremator. Ashes may be taken back to India to be scattered on the River Ganges. In the UK, some areas of water have been designated as acceptable substitutes.

The mourning period lasts between two and five weeks.

Sikhs

Sikhs believe the soul goes through a cycle of rebirths, with the ultimate objective being to reach perfection, to be reunited with God and, as a result, break the cycle. Thus death holds no fear and mourning is done discretely. The present life is influenced by what happened in previous ones and the current life will set the scene for the next.

The deceased is cremated as soon as possible after death. The coffin is taken to the family home where it is left open for friends and family to pay their respects. It is then taken to the Gurdwara where hymns and prayers are sung. A short service follows at a crematorium, during which the eldest son presses the button for the coffin to move behind the curtain. In India, the eldest son would light the funeral pyre and no coffin



would be used. After the funeral, a meal may held at the Gurdwara. The ashes may be taken back to India to be scattered. Here they may be sprinkled in the sea or river.

The family remain in mourning for several days after the funeral and may listen to readings from the Guru Granth Sahib (Holy Book).

Buddhist

Buddhists believe that nothing that exists is permanent and everything will ultimately cease to be. There is a belief in rebirth but not of a soul passing from one body to another. The rebirth is more a state of constantly changing being rather than a clear cut reincarnation. The ultimate objective is to achieve a state of perfect peace and freedom. Buddhists try to approach death with great calmness, and an open minded attitude of acceptance.

There are few formal traditions relating to funerals and they tend to be seen as non-religious events. Cremation is the generally accepted practice and the service is kept very simple. It may be conducted by a Buddhist monk or sometimes family members.

Christianity

Christians believe that there is just one God and that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. They believe that Jesus died on the cross (The Crucifixion), and that three days later, God raised him from the dead (The Resurrection).

Christians believe in an afterlife and also the idea of resurrection but the details around what actually happens at the time of death and afterwards, varies within the different denominations. For some, as soon as a person dies, he or she is judged by God and will immediately go to Heaven or Hell, dependent on how good or bad a life they led. For Roman Catholics, there is a half-way place called Purgatory, where an impure soul can stay until fit to enter Heaven. Others believe in the Day of Judgement, when the world will end and the dead will return to life to be judged by God.

Within the different Christian denominations, there are many variations on what happens at a funeral. When someone dies, the body is taken to an undertaker who will carry out the necessary preparations for the body to be laid out. This is to enable those who wish to view it before it is placed in a coffin. The funeral, organised by an undertaker, is about one week after the death. This usually takes place in a church, but sometimes a crematorium, or a combination of the two. The coffin will remain closed. Wreaths or bunches of flowers may be placed on the coffin. It is traditional to wear black but this custom varies. If held in a church, the funeral service may include a Holy Communion, Eucharist or Mass. The body will either be buried or cremated, dependent on the wishes of the deceased and the family. A churchyard grave is often marked by a headstone but for a cremation, the family may choose a more informal way to mark where the ashes are buried or have been scattered.



Humanist

Humanists are non-religious. They follow the principle that this life is the only one we have and therefore when you are dead there is no moving on to another one. The focus of a Humanist funeral is on celebrating the life of the deceased. The person people knew is talked about, stories shared, and memories recalled. Their favourite music may be played, whatever it is. This is done by friends and family who are supported by an Officiant. The ceremony, usually a cremation, will be tailored to meet the family's wishes rather than following a set pattern.

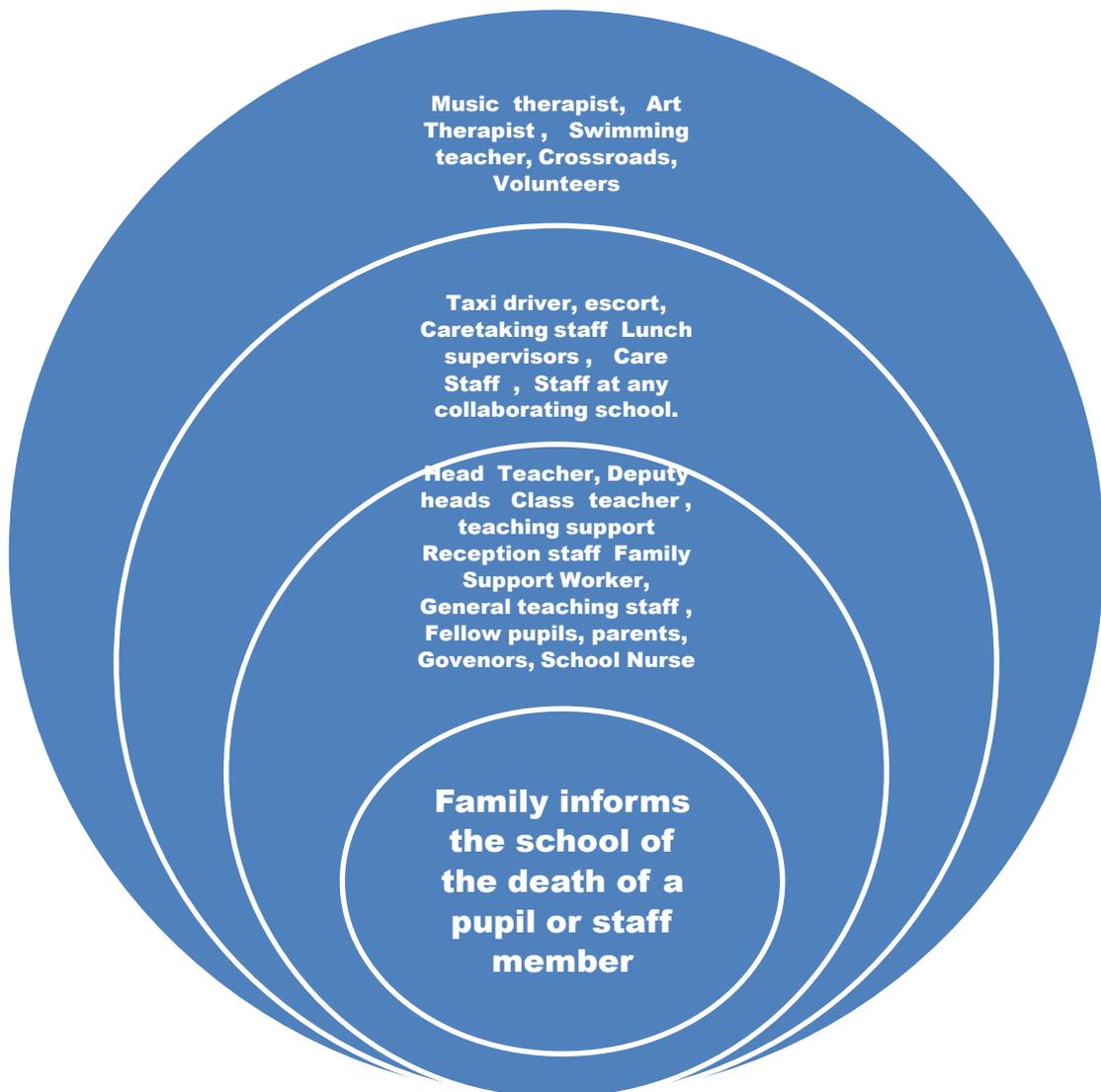
Resources

Death and Bereavement Across Cultures by Murray, Laungani, Pittu and Young
Covers rites, rituals and mourning traditions for adults and children from the major religious and secular belief systems. Published by Routledge.
Cost £18.99.

Supporting Young People Coping with Grief, Loss and Death by Weymont and Rae.

A programme designed to be delivered to groups or whole classes of secondary school students which includes a section on Beliefs and Customs. The session encourages students to explore how the concept of death varies according to different religions and cultures. Information is given on the main world religions and belief systems. Photocopiable work sheets and handouts are included. Includes a CD-ROM. Can be ordered online from www.luckyduck.co.uk.
Cost £17.99.

Appendix B: Communication process





Appendix C: Talking about death to children with learning difficulties

TALKING ABOUT DEATH WITH CHILDREN WHO HAVE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

When talking about death and bereavement with a child with learning difficulties it might be helpful to consider: -

- WHO should be key worker working with the child and family - inform parents who this person will be and keep in contact.
- WHERE is the child most receptive to new ideas? – quiet room, pool, outside. Use this space for talking with the child.
- WHAT should be talked about? (as agreed with parents). Ensure that you use the same language and ideas as the family to avoid confusing the child.
- HOW is new information normally given? - signs, verbally, pictures. Use the same format to talk about illness and death.
- HOW is new information normally backed up? – you will probably need to repeat information a number of times over a long period.
- PROCEED at a level, speed and language appropriate to the child
- BUILD on information given – small bites of the whole, given gradually will be easier to absorb.
- REPEAT information as often as needed.
- WATCH for reactions to show the child understands – modify and repeat as needed.
- FOLLOW child's lead – if indicating a need to talk or have feelings acknowledged, encourage as appropriate.
- WATCH for changes in behaviour to indicate the child is struggling more than they can say and offer support as needed.
- LIAISE with other agencies involved with the child to ensure accuracy and continuity of information.

All children benefit from being given simple, honest “bite size” pieces of information about difficult issues - often repeated many times over. For some children with special needs, it might be more appropriate for symbols to be used to convey ideas rather than language.

(SeeSaw, Oxford)



Appendix D: Memorialisation ideas

Be aware of significant dates – Christmas, Mothers' Day etc. – but also anniversaries, birthdays.

Memory boxes can be constructed to contain mementoes and items of significance.

Family trees and Life Story work can help to reiterate and reinforce the child's experiences.

Art and craft work – memory mobiles; salt jars; decorating photo-frames; creating a collage; 'comfort cushions' made from a favourite item of clothing.... many ideas to express feelings and assist understanding.

Releasing balloons; celebrating special days; lighting candles; visiting a memorial site.

Collate group responses to a loss to help in understanding of shared grief.

Plant flowers; create a memory garden.

NB. In an environment where further deaths may be experienced (schools with children with life-limiting conditions) it would be wise to consider a realistic approach to memorialisation, eg. Names on stones to be added to a water feature – rather than naming rooms after a specific person.