



# Oswald Road Primary School Staff Policy

## **Bereavement Policy**

Policy ratified by Richard Price and Yogita Patel: April 2020

Headteacher: Deborah Howard  
Chair of Governors: Richard Price

**To be reviewed every two years: April 2022**

Every 22 minutes in the UK a child is bereaved of a parent, making up some 24,000 a 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 at Oswald Road Primary School 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 means 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.

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 or staff member, it can be particularly difficult. Pupils need to be supported when they experience family bereavements and other significant losses in the course of their lives while they are at school. They are also affected by social media and news.

This policy will provide guidelines to be followed when a bereavement has happened or is likely to happen. The aim is to be supportive to both pupils and adults, and for staff to have greater confidence and be better equipped to cope when bereavement happens or in anticipation of a bereavement. 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 pupils. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that support and prepare pupils for coping with separation or loss of a loved one.

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](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)

## **Policy Objectives**

The objectives 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 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. All intentions of this policy endorse that aim as we endeavour to counter any adverse effects of bereavement and maintain pupils and staff emotional well-being.

## **Key Roles**

### **The role of the Governing Body**

- To approve policy and ensure its implementation, to be reviewed every two years. Yogita Patel is the nominated Governor within this policy.
- To support the Headteacher and SLT when dealing with a bereavement.
- To ensure that funds are made available for appropriate staff training.
- To review practice

### **The role of the Headteacher**

- Overall responsibility of policy and review
- To use expertise within school and sharing the responsibilities
- 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
- To authorise relevant staff training

In the event of the Head's absence, another Senior Leader will take responsibility.

### **The role of Pastoral staff**

- To source and have bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff.
- To support the child/family as appropriate.
- To establish and co-ordinate links with external agencies
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary schools
- To signpost additional support.
- To maintain their training and keep up to date with developments.
- To access and co-ordinate training and support for staff

**Other Support** – [www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)

- To provide confidential support, information and guidance to families and professionals. Professionally trained bereavement support workers are available to take calls 9am - 5pm Monday-Friday. Tel: 0800 02 888 40. The support team can also be contacted at: [support@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:support@childbereavementuk.org)

## **Procedures for Managing a Bereavement**

1. Contact with the family of the deceased should be established by the Headteacher and their wishes respected in communicating with others. Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion, whilst being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations.
2. Staff should be informed before pupils and be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.
3. Pupils who are affected should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them. Opportunity to answer questions about death generally and a provision of sign posting will be available. School will endeavour to identify loss coping strategies with the children/staff.
4. 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.
5. 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. Children should be encouraged to talk about how death affects them.
6. Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate.
7. 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.
8. Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Head Teacher
9. 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.
10. Parents will be supported and signposted to appropriate pathways. Parents will be given an appropriate literature regarding the most recent evidence of managing a bereavement well.

A universally accepted procedure outline will, in itself, not enable everyone to feel comfortable in dealing with the practicalities of death and bereavement. Each bereavement is unique and comes with its own specific challenges; however, it is helpful to have a framework on which to build. One of our main concerns must be the immediate family of the deceased at the time of the bereavement and as a school we state our commitment to any such family as may need practical, emotional and ongoing support.

The support for the bereaved and the impact of the bereavement is wider than the immediate family. The school recognises the need for support for many people and is an ongoing bases.

### **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 – if possible, of their own choice.
  - 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.

### **Transition**

It is vitally important to ensure that if a child has experienced bereavement that this information is passed on to the relevant persons when they move on to a new class or school. Children will need to revisit and review loss coping strategies at each development stages.

### **Sharing information**

It is important to agree, with the parent, before the school can take on the role of informing concerned parties within, or outside, the school community. Evidence from many schools has shown that parents are often happy to have this burden taken away from them, as they have many people unconnected with the school to contact. There can be no definitive list of people to contact and, therefore, it will be different for each child. The school should ensure that all people who are close to the child are told in a sensitive and supportive manner rather than risk them hearing it 'on the grapevine'. The school needs to ensure it does not add to the sorrow by leaving people feeling marginalised.

The following people should be considered:

- Current school staff not in school that day – including therapy staff
- Previous school staff who worked closely with the child
- Social Work team if applicable
- SEN team
- Health team – the school nurse for example
- Chair of Governors
- Other professionals who work with the child – Ed Psych

- Other parents – if children have been informed, the school needs to send a note to parents informing them of the loss, and they may need to support or comfort their children. Some parents may need to be telephoned if their relationship is closer but who may not have been informed by the family.

The process for telling the other pupils will be decided by the Head teacher following consultation with the teaching staff. For example, with different aged pupils there will be different decisions made and the class teacher of the class with the loss will usually be the best person to tell the rest of the children in that class. Staff can avoid worry by answering questions and avoid unnecessary information overload. – For example, if the child died in hospital, we do not want to give children a fear of hospitals.

Although the finality of death cannot be diminished, if there are mitigating circumstances that may help - such as that the child was in pain and now is free of pain - this can be used to help alleviate sorrow. Children must be told that, while they may feel sad, they do not have to feel guilty if they go on to have fun and pleasure in their day ahead. They must not feel obliged to assume a burden of grief. Children must be allowed to ask questions at this time or at any point in the following days or weeks. Staff must answer honestly and to the best of their knowledge. We need to follow GDPR regulations.

### **Death of a pupil**

The school may be notified in a number of ways. Upon notification of the death of a pupil:

- Past experience has shown that if death occurs parents usually let the school know directly and the person answering the phone will put them through to the most senior member of staff on site.
- Where death occurs in the holidays or at weekends the parents will contact school via email.
- In that instance the member of staff who takes the call or gets the email will immediately contact the Headteacher who will then assume responsibility for the dissemination of the information.

### **If A Child Dies In School:**

- In the case of serious concern, the school will call for an ambulance.
- Immediately inform the Head teacher or, in her absence, the most senior member of staff on site.
- The Head Teacher will then ensure that the parents are contacted and seek their agreement to meet the ambulance at the hospital.
- Where the parents have given the school a protocol to be followed in the event of an emergency medical issue occurring - e.g. no resuscitation - this protocol will be handed to the paramedics.

- Once the child is placed in the ambulance a member of staff will be appointed to travel to the hospital either in the ambulance or in their own transport. The purpose of this is to be a familiar face to the child's family on their arrival at the hospital. This person will remain in regular contact with Head teacher and/or the Deputy Head teacher.
- The school will notify the LA if there is a death in school at the earliest opportunity. All press enquiries are to be routed through the Head teacher, Chair of Governors and LA Media Team.

### **If a Child Dies on a School Trip**

If a crisis situation occurs whilst a child is out on an educational trip, then the adult with the child - or the teacher in charge - should telephone for an ambulance first and then contact the school to inform the Head teacher. The school will then take the responsibility of contacting the parents. Once the ambulance team reaches the child, the child becomes the responsibility of the ambulance team and they will direct any subsequent actions. The school will notify the LA, at the earliest opportunity, if there is a death out of school. The above procedures and protocols will then apply.

### **Sudden Death within School:** Responding to the media

Some deaths, particularly those in sudden or traumatic circumstances, attract media attention. All members of staff are advised not to respond to journalists and to refer all enquiries to the Headteacher, who will make a considered response after seeking assistance from the Local Authority.

### **The funeral**

- It is essential to sound out the family's wishes. The family may well welcome involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to keep things private.
  - The Head teacher and/or the Deputy Head teacher will make arrangements for the school to be represented at the funeral, and identify which staff and pupils may want to attend, together with the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport. For some schools it is appropriate to close, for others it is not, consequently difficult decisions will sometimes have to be made concerning attendance.
    - Will flowers be sent and/or a collection made? Involve staff and pupils in the decision.
    - Cultural and religious implications need consideration.
    - If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed. Past experience has shown that this can be helpful in their grieving.

## **Memory Assemblies**

It may be appropriate to hold a memory assembly for the child. Staff need to be able to show pupils that it is perfectly normal to feel upset at the loss of a friend and that helpful rituals, thoughts, and remembering can be shared in a manageable way together. Following the event the school may decide to hold events to remember the person in different ways at a later time.

## **The Death of a Member of Staff**

All of the principles and procedures listed above apply to the death of a staff member.

In addition to the above, the school will notify the LA as employer. Where appropriate to the wishes of the staff member's family, the Headteacher will seek permission from the Chair of Governors to close the school so that all members of staff can attend the funeral.

## **On-Going Support**

### **For staff:**

Following bereavement, it is only to be expected that some members of staff will be emotionally affected and would benefit from the provision of some time for reflection. The following support may be helpful

- A specific room could be allocated- e.g. the Meeting Room - for the duration of a lunchtime to enable staff to meet and share their thoughts over a coffee or tea. It should be emphasised that anything shared on such occasions should be held as confidential and not for public airing.
- Access to one to one time with a member of staff who is trained in bereavement support.
- SAS offer counselling support and staff will be reminded about this service.
- Availability of information about accessing bereavement support outside of school, e.g. Child Bereavement UK
- School will sign post those concerned to appropriate support.

### **For Pupils:**

Experience in many schools has shown that most pupils can be supported by the school staff.

- In most cases, each child will have a favoured member of staff to approach.
  - The PSHE co-ordinator will ensure that we have suitable books and other materials to help children discuss death and come to terms with loss.
  - Social Stories may be one way to help pupils to understand loss.
  - The Counselling team may offer support to pupils who may need more help.
  - Signposting to external support agencies may also be appropriate.

### **For The Family:**

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support. Send a letter of condolence from the school.
  - Give parents and family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died.
  - Send a representative to the funeral.
  - Hold a collection /flowers to be sent as appropriate.
  - Invite parents/family to any commemorative events held by the school, both at the time and in subsequent years.
  - If memorial work has been completed, for example a remembrance wall or book, then this should be returned to the parents at an appropriate time, and pupils informed where it has gone.
    - If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed.

Parents will be told that they are welcome in the school and will be encouraged to come and visit. Past experience has shown that this can be helpful in their grieving. The first visit to the school is often difficult and will be arranged sensitively in accordance with the parents' wishes. It will then be for the parents to decide if they wish to maintain on going links. Each family will be different, with differing needs. Therefore, the school will always be there to act as a source of support and information.

## **Support services for parents and children dealing with the loss of a child or sibling**

**The Child Death Helpline:** This is a free phone helpline for anyone affected by the death of a child, of any age and under any circumstance. Calls are heard in confidence and the helpline is staffed by volunteer parents who have also experienced the loss of a child. The free phone number is 0800 282 986. The helpline is open every evening, from 7 – 10pm. It is also open from 10am – 1pm on Mon, Thurs and Fri, and from 10am – 4pm on Tues and Wednesday. Website: <http://childdeathhelpline.org.uk/?www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk>

**The Child Bereavement Charity:** The CBC provides specialised support, information and training to all those affected when a baby or child dies, or when a child is bereaved.

Telephone number 01494 446648/0800 02 888 40

Website <http://www.childbereavement.org>

**Childhood Bereavement Network:** The CBN seeks to ensure that all children and young people in the UK, together with their families and other caregivers, including professional carers, can easily access a choice of high-quality local and national information, guidance and support to enable them to manage the impact of death on their lives.

Telephone number is 020 7843 6309

Website <http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk>

**Foundation for the study of Infant Deaths (FSID):** The Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths is the UK's leading baby charity aiming to prevent unexpected deaths in infancy and promote infant health.

Advice and leaflets are available from the FSID Website

24 hour helpline 020 7233 2090.

Website <http://www.sids.org.uk>

**Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society (SANDS):** Provides support for bereaved parents when their baby dies at, or soon after, birth

Telephone (10am – 3pm, Monday – Friday) 020 7436 5881

Website <http://www.uk-sands.org>

**Winston's Wish:** Winston's Wish is the leading childhood bereavement charity and the largest provider of services to bereaved children, young people and their families in the UK.

It offers practical support and guidance to families, professionals and anyone concerned about a grieving child, as well as telephone help and advice for bereaved children and siblings.

Telephone number 08452 03 04 05

## **Suggested templates 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/had the sad task of informing the children of the death of ....., a pupil in year .....

..... died from an illness called ..... As you may be aware, many children who have ..... get better but sadly ..... had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday. He/she was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her. When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try to answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we would be more than happy to help you. Children will be encouraged to put forward ideas about how to remember the special person.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher

### **Sample letter home about a member of staff**

Dear parent/carer

Sadly today I had to tell the children that a much loved member of staff ..... has died. The children were told today and many will have been quite upset at the news. It is normal for children to see a wide range of feelings over an extended period of time and to revisit questions around death and dying as they grow and develop. We are very aware that factual information and emotional support are the best means of helping children deal with bereavement.

I am sure that there will be many parents and carers who are also saddened by the news. Children respond in different ways so may dip in and out of sadness and ask questions, whilst alternatively playing or participating normally in their usual activities. This is normal and healthy.

You may find that your child has questions to ask which we will answer in an age-appropriate way in school, 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 useful guidance and resources online at:  
[www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://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 is not compulsory. It is likely that the school will be closed in 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 and I appreciate an occurrence like this impacts on the whole school community. I am 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. If you or your child wish for support from the school to manage a grief or celebrate this person's life please contact the school and ask for the Pastoral Team who will be dealing with this.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher