

# Honeybourne Primary Academy



Turning Potential  
into Success

## Policy for Bereavement for 2020/2021 Covid-19

This policy is reviewed at least annually by the Governing Body	
Co-Ordinator	Elaine Huntington
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Governor Link	All Governors

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is going to affect daily life for some time, as the government and the NHS take necessary steps to manage the pandemic, reduce transmission and treat those who need medical attention.

How a child or young person reacts can vary according to their age, how they understand information and communicate, their previous experiences, and how they typically cope with stress. Adverse reactions may include thinking about their health or that of family and friends, fear, avoidance, problems sleeping, or physical symptoms such as stomach ache.

Support from teachers and school staff is crucial for bereaved children and young people, especially during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic when children are isolated from their usual support networks. Although you probably won't see them face-to-face, there are plenty of ways you can support children and young people during this difficult time.

Around 41,000 children are bereaved of a parent every year in the UK. That's nearly two children under 16 every hour. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person. These figures continue to increase due to the coronavirus.

Living through this pandemic, with social distancing and measures in place to halt many every day activities, like seeing family and friends, going to school, shopping and going on holiday, can present similar feelings and symptoms as those associated with a death. Bereavement can be experienced with any kind of loss; loss of family and friends, even if they are alive and well, loss of routines and social activity, and these can be hard to deal with. Those with additional needs, such as autism, will find this interruption to routine, for an extended period of time, will need the same support as when there is a death of someone close. Even those children and adults who are usually resilient, can experience difficulties coping with everyday life and may not perform academically as well as they have in the past.

We recognise that members of the school community will be affected by a range of losses including separation and divorce. Some aspects of this policy may also be helpful in these cases.

Experiencing a bereavement can make children more vulnerable. Bereavement, whether it is an expected death because of illness or a sudden and unexpected death or suicide, is something that can impact on members of our school community at any time.

Our 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 prepares pupils for coping with bereavement.

This policy is for all staff, pupils, parents and carers, governors, visitors and partner agencies working within the school. It provides guidelines and procedures as to how our school can best prepare for, and respond to, bereavement in the school community.

### **Purpose of the policy**

This bereavement policy supports us to provide effective support to pupils and staff before and after bereavement. It covers both expected and unexpected deaths.

Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children and staff require. However, we also need to be prepared to call on more specialist support where there is a sudden and unexpected death, or where the impact of a bereavement is complex.

The objectives of this policy are to:

- enhance effective communication at a difficult time
- clarify the pathway of support between school, family, community and services
- make best use of the support available in school, the council's families, children and learning department and the wider community.

### **Our charter for bereaved children and young people**

To help us meet the objectives of this policy we have adopted the [Winston's Wish Charter for Bereaved Children](#).

<b>B</b>	<b>Bereavement support</b> Bereaved children need to receive support from their family, from their school and from important people around them. We will signpost them to specialist support if needed.
<b>E</b>	<b>Express feelings and thoughts</b> We will help bereaved children to find appropriate ways to express all their feelings and thoughts associated with grief, such as sadness, anxiety, confusion, anger and guilt.
<b>R</b>	<b>Remember the person who has died</b> We understand that bereaved children have the right to remember the person who has died for the rest of their lives. We will support them to share special and difficult memories.
<b>E</b>	<b>Education and information</b> All children, particularly bereaved children, are entitled to receive answers to their questions. They also need information that clearly explains what has happened, why it has happened and what will be happening. We will strive to enable children to have their questions answered, through the PSHE

	curriculum, on an individual basis, working with parents and carers or through support services.
<b>A</b>	<b>Appropriate response from schools and colleges</b> Bereaved children need understanding and support from their teachers and fellow students without having to ask for it. We will provide training to ensure this happens. Children need an open and honest explanation, and answers to their questions, phrased in age appropriate ways.
<b>V</b>	<b>Voice in important decisions</b> We will work with families to encourage them to involve bereaved children in important decisions that have an impact on their lives such as planning the funeral and remembering anniversaries.
<b>E</b>	<b>Enjoyment</b> We will support the bereaved child's right to enjoy their lives even though someone important has died.
<b>M</b>	<b>Meet others</b> We will try where possible to enable bereaved children to benefit from the opportunity to meet other children who have had similar experiences.
<b>E</b>	<b>Established routines</b> We will endeavour, whenever possible, to enable bereaved children to continue activities and interests so that parts of their lives can still feel 'normal'.
<b>N</b>	<b>Not to blame</b> We will help bereaved children to understand that they are not responsible, and not to blame, for the death.
<b>T</b>	<b>Tell the story</b> We will encourage bereaved children to tell an accurate and coherent story of what has happened. We know this is helpful to them particularly if these stories are heard by those important people in their lives.

### 3 Safeguarding, confidentiality and recording

Our school's safeguarding policies and procedures apply in the usual way, to ensure that the welfare of the child remains paramount throughout, and that all children are protected from harm. To retain the trust of pupils and parents and carers, we will ensure that the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. Sensitive information will only be disclosed internally or externally with careful attention to the rights and needs of individuals and in line with general data protection regulation.

If a child is suffering from trauma, we will share this as appropriate with staff, but not necessarily the details of their experience.

We will discuss with the bereaved child and their family which adults in the school community they would like made aware of the experiences impacting on the child.

We will use MyConcern to and our vulnerable pupil tracking system, to record when a child has experienced a close bereavement, is at risk of suicide or has made a suicide attempt.

## **Roles and responsibilities in dealing with bereavement**

### **The role of the governing body is to:**

- approve the bereavement policy and ensure its implementation
- ensure the policy is reviewed every three years or when national or local policy directs a change
- ensure that appropriate attention is given to how bereavement issues are addressed within the curriculum
- ensure that approaches to bereavement are respectful of religious and cultural values and beliefs
- ensure that staff are given appropriate opportunities for training, reflection and access to support if they need it.

### **The role of the headteacher and senior leadership team is to:**

- lead a whole-school approach to the effective management of loss and bereavement including ensuring appropriate training and support provided for staff
- contact key professionals to be involved where appropriate - e.g. link Educational Psychologist alongside relevant teachers and mentors
- be the first point of contact in school, for the family/child/staff directly affected by a bereavement
- record bereavements affecting children
- designate liaison and support to trained members of staff when appropriate
- monitor progress in supporting those impacted by a bereavement and liaise with external agencies
- keep the governing body appropriately informed
- deal with media enquiries (depending on circumstances)

### **The role of all staff in our school is to:**

- access bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff if appropriate
- know how to access support for themselves, for other staff and for the family, if advice or information is needed
- know how to report a concern if the bereavement or sudden and unexpected death has placed a child at significant risk of harm

know how to support a child when they are distressed and how to refer to specialist support if needed

- have a basic understanding of a child's needs when facing loss and change
- provide individual support as and when needed and in consultation with the headteacher and SLT
- teach about loss and bereavement as part of the planned curriculum
- inform the headteacher at the earliest possibility if they hear about a death of someone in the school community

### **The role of the local authority/Honeybourne Primary Academy Trustees**

- offer specific support when there has been an incident affecting a section of the school community, and / or a critical incident, suicide or sudden death of an adult or child, initially meeting with the headteacher and key lead staff in the school to discuss the immediate plan of action, with timeline outlined where possible for follow up actions
- inform appropriate colleagues within the local authority on a need to know basis
- advise and support staff who are supporting bereaved children and young people including offering and providing training on request
- advise on referral pathways and offer triage to support pathways of support, through identification of those requiring more specialist support and those whose needs can be met through the Whole School Approach on request
- ensure that any staff significantly affected by a death are made aware of the support that's available to them.

## **Procedures**

### **1. Pre-bereavement**

In some situations, it is known in advance that a death is going to occur. This is usually because of a long illness.

In cases where this is an adult within the school community, individual conversations will be held with the headteacher in terms of support, information exchange and practical considerations.

When the expected death is of a child or a member of a child's family we will:

- contact the family to confirm factual information and explore what support could be provided to them
- identify a key point of contact in school in terms of information exchange and to update when things change
- ensure that all relevant adults are clear about what information has and needs to be shared with the pupil
- keep lines of communication open to ensure that all information is received in a timely fashion

- explore the possibility of signposting to other organisations such as Winston's Wish or a local hospice
- look to involve faith or community leaders when appropriate and with the agreement of the family
- explore what support for the pupils affected might look like in practice
- arrange training for specific members of staff to ensure all involved are confident in their ability to support the pupil
- if appropriate, consider and reflect on how to communicate with the wider school community for example the pupil's class mates
- if appropriate, begin conversations around practical considerations in the events leading up to the death and following the death

## **Following a bereavement**

We will consider each individual situation carefully to ensure that the response from the school is sensitive, accurately reflects the gravity of the situation, and involves those affected as appropriate.

### **As an immediate response we will:**

- contact the deceased's family with the aim to establish the facts and avoid rumours (head teacher)
- consider any religious beliefs and current Covid 19 guidance that may affect the timing of the funeral or impact on other aspects of the bereavement process
- find out, if possible, how the family would like the information to be managed by the school
- allocate member(s) of staff to be the key point(s) of support for the affected child / young person or children / young people and ensure there is support in place for the staff members if required
- send letters or cards of condolence to families or individuals directly affected
- will prepare a press statement, with support from the LA's communications team, if required and with due regard to the family affected (head teacher)
- inform staff of the death before pupils are informed, recognising that some pupils may have found out through other means. Where possible, staff will be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways to make sure all staff have the same version of the event. Where this has not been possible, staff will be supported to share the information.
- inform pupils who are most directly affected (such as a friendship group), preferably in small groups, by someone known to them and in keeping with the wishes of the family and expertise of the school
- inform the wider school community in line with the wishes of the family. We would normally do this through assemblies and / or letters to parents.
- make small changes to the school timetable to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of the child, children or adults affected by the situation. However,

we will aim for minimal disruption to the timetable as this can offer a sense of security and familiarity.

### **For the funeral we will:**

- be aware of the fact that many family and friends may not be able to attend the funeral and may be offered the opportunity to join an online live feed of the service.
- find out the family's wishes and follow these in terms of the involvement of members of the school community (or not)
- identify which staff and pupils may want to attend (dependent on funeral guidelines due to Coronavirus) if invited by the family and the practicalities of issues such as risk assessment, staff cover and transport. In some rare circumstances it may be appropriate to close a class or the school
- organise tributes such as flowers or a collection in line with family wishes and the wishes of staff and pupils - bear in mind that these may be limited due to coronavirus measures in place
- be sensitive to religious and cultural issues.

### **After the funeral we will:**

- consider whether it is appropriate to visit the child and family affected at home and plan a return to school (these could be arranged via Zoom during the pandemic)
- ensure friendships are secure - peer support can be particularly important for a bereaved child or young person. Explore how this can be done with social distancing in place
- continue regular contact with the family and show we still care about them and their child over time
- monitor the emotional needs of staff and pupils and provide listening time and ongoing appropriate support
- consider practical issues and make thoughtful and sensitive updates to parental and other contact details when needed
- continue to assess the needs of children most affected, and record and plan for support accordingly.

### **Longer term we will:**

- be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life. So, we will record information and share with relevant people, particularly at transition points. This could include ensuring significant dates and events for the child are recorded and shared with appropriate staff for future reference.
- signpost families to bereavement support including that provided by Winston's Wish <https://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/>

- ensure that learning about loss and bereavement is embedded into appropriate curriculum areas including PSHE education. When teaching about loss and bereavement we will give careful thought as to how to support those directly affected by loss and bereavement.

### **Following a sudden and unexpected death - suicide**

Suicide is not just a really difficult event to deal with, it also presents the unique risk of potentially being the trigger for another suicide. It is necessary to maintain the structure and order of the school routine, while facilitating the expression of grief, and reducing the risk of imitative suicide.

In the case of suicide, we will refer to The Samaritans Step by Step Guide.

<https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/step-step/>.

Information provided to the school community in the immediate aftermath of a sudden and unexpected death will depend on the age of the pupils but should be based on and reinforce:

facts (not rumours)

- an understanding that death is permanent
- an exploration of normal and wide-ranging reactions to sudden and unexpected death - expressions of anger and guilt are entirely normal
- an understanding that, with support, people can cope
- an understanding that fleeting thoughts of suicide are not unusual
- an awareness of suicidal warning signs and resources available to help
- an understanding of expectations around funerals.

When discussing any suicide that has occurred, we will ensure that the information given is age appropriate and:

- is factually correct but does not include detail of the suicidal act it self does not romanticise, glorify or vilify the death
- does not include details of any suicide note
- does not include speculation over the motive for suicide
- takes care with the language used - for example using phrases such as 'died by suicide' or 'ended his / her life' rather than 'committed suicide' or 'successful suicide', and saying 'attempted to end his / her life' rather than 'unsuccessful suicide' or 'failed attempt at suicide'.

### **Following a sudden and unexpected death - homicide**

The Childhood Bereavement Network and Winston's Wish estimate that around one child every day is bereaved of a parent or sibling through murder or manslaughter in Great Britain.

Children may experience profound and lasting shock, enormous anger at what has happened, rage at the person who caused their relative to die, deep fear at the perceived insecurity of the world around them. Sadly, in many cases, the person who caused the death is also known to the child, resulting in great confusion and a double loss, for example, if one parent kills the other and is then imprisoned. In some families, the child may have to move to a new house, school, area -away from familiar and comforting places and routines.

Winston's Wish recommend taking an honest and consistent age appropriate approach to talking with children about what has happened. It is not possible to shield them from what has happened completely. Winston's Wish can provide support to families bereaved in this way and further information can be found on their website:<https://www.winstonswish.org/death-through-homicide/>

## **Equality and inclusion, values and beliefs**

We recognise that there is a range of cultural and religious beliefs, customs and procedures concerning death. It follows that bereaved children and families may have differing expectations.

Some of these may affect matters of school organisation. We will source training and guidance to develop our understanding of the range of beliefs to best support pupils.

We will present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. We will make pupils aware of differing responses to bereavement, and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

## **Supporting staff**

### **Support for bereaved staff**

We are aware that staff also experience bereavement. When this happens, we will ensure they are provided with support to take care of themselves, and to know where they can go for additional help should they need it.

This could include: their GP; Cruse Bereavement Care <http://www.cruse.org.uk/>; or staff counselling, information and advice from our Educational Psychologist. Talking to the bereaved person is important, do not avoid talking about the death/names associated with it, but support and reassure them that this is a co-ordinated approach.

Teachers who are dealing with their own bereavement are encouraged to speak with their line manager about any areas of the curriculum which they feel uncomfortable to teach or want support to teach.

## **Staff training**

We will ensure that regular training is provided to staff to support staff in meeting their roles and responsibilities as identified in this policy. Winston's Wish offers free online training course for school staff: <https://www.winstonswish.org/bereavement-training-courses-schools/>

## Curriculum

Children and young people explore the concept of loss, bereavement, and grief as part of the statutory elements of our PSHE curriculum. It is also addressed through cross-curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles, as well as through art, literacy, and religious education.

We also use assemblies to address aspects of death - such as Remembrance Day, Holocaust Memorial Day or commemorative occasions. We also observe national minutes of silence and explain the purpose of this.

When appropriate, we respond to a tragedy or serious incident by discussing this in class having discussed as a staff team the language we will use to respond to the incident.

Teachers are provided with training on how to deliver this sensitive area of the curriculum within a safe, learning environment. We also point parents and carers towards appropriate advice on how to talk to their children about these events when necessary.

We will answer any questions relating to loss or death in a sensitive, age-appropriate, honest and factual way. Children and young people will not be expected to disclose any personal experiences but will be signposted to support if they want it.

We give children opportunities to learn about and discuss cultural and religious issues around death and encourage them to express their own responses and feelings.

St Richard's Hospice and staff have provided excellent training and resources for schools to use and are available for further advice and for referrals for counselling.

## **BEREAVEMENT GUIDANCE FOR WHEN THE SCHOOL IS CLOSED OR THE CHILD IS NOT ATTENDING**

This is a time of great uncertainty and potential anxiety for all of us, and for teachers and pupils the huge change in circumstances and the loss of 'normal' daily contact can be very hard to manage.

### **1. Keep in touch**

Where possible, the provision of some contact and support from teaching staff can be hugely helpful to children and young people who may be feeling anxious and

uncertain, or who may be experiencing the illness or death of a loved one. Keep in touch, perhaps offering scheduled points of contact with you during the week, using social media, apps, and phone calls. For pupils who are known to be vulnerable, offer additional opportunities, including a school place, to check in with a key member of staff and keep in touch with parents and carers especially if you are concerned about their child.

## **2. Keep a routine**

Try and bring an element of 'normality' to their days by encouraging pupils and parents to continue the school routine from home, and to create some structure to their days, including during school holidays.

## **3. Listen and reassure**

Acknowledge how strange and difficult this situation is, rather than trying to make it better. Listen to their worries and fears: these are real and we can't take them away, but it will help children if someone they know and trust hears them. Reassure them when you are able to do so honestly.

Be as clear as possible what help is available, both from school pastoral staff and externally within the wider community.

## **Initial Response**

1. Head teacher (or SLT/class teacher) makes contact with the family to:

- acknowledge what has happened and offer support
- discuss how to share the news with the rest of the school community - check if the family want their contact information shared

2. Head teacher shares the information with rest of staff and, where possible, follows family choice on how this news is shared more widely with a) the child's peers and b) the rest of the school. (There are a few exceptions, for example, when the death is known about and already widely discussed within the school community).

3. Head teacher shares information with the governors.

4. Head teacher (or class teacher) makes contact with the young person through a written card or letter to the child/young person to acknowledge what has happened and express support.

5. Contacts are agreed with the family to liaise with them and the child. This may be the head teacher and class teacher, or a less obvious supporter requested by the child.

6. The information is shared with the school community, as agreed with the family. A simple form of words that parents can share with their children is appreciated.

7. The impact of this news on any other children in the school who have been bereaved or whose relative is seriously ill should be considered and direct contact made by their class teacher.

8. Check in on staff response. Any death affecting a student can trigger other remembered griefs and, at this time of crisis, a sense of helplessness in not being able to respond as wished.

## Further support

1. Keep the support-at-a-distance coming through the chosen contact/s.
2. Consider compiling condolences for the child from their peers. This could include collected messages and compiling an electronic book of condolence to email to the family. Other people might choose to send photos or drawings to remember them by. Once school is open again, you could offer a memorial of these drawings to display in school and then give to the family afterwards.
3. Obtain, if possible, resources for the family, for example: the free Helpline number for Winston's Wish (08088 020 021), information about grief and children, suggested books and resources.
4. When schools re-open, remember the support needs of bereaved children in planning their return to the classroom. A mini pastoral support plan may need to be put in place, depending on circumstances.

## National support services and support resources

As part of PSHE and our safeguarding work we will also signpost to appropriate sources of support for pupils and adults in the school community.

The Christopher Winter project is used in school to teach about relationships and PSHE

**Reverent Scott Watts**, our local vicar is available as a befriender and supporter through difficult times for staff and children. Please contact the school office for his contact details. He is happy to support all faiths or those with no faith.

**Winston's Wish:** [www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org) Support information and guidance for bereaved children, young people and for those caring for bereaved families.

**Cruse Bereavement Care:** [www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk) Support for anyone who has been bereaved.

**Childhood Bereavement Network:**

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk> Find childhood bereavement support in your local area.

**Hope Again:** <http://hopeagain.org.uk/> A website for young people who have been bereaved.

**Papyrus:** <https://papyrus-uk.org/> Support and advice for young people struggling with thoughts of suicide, and anyone worried about a young person.

**Samaritans:** <http://www.samaritans.org/your-community/supporting-schools> A range of guidance and support for schools.