

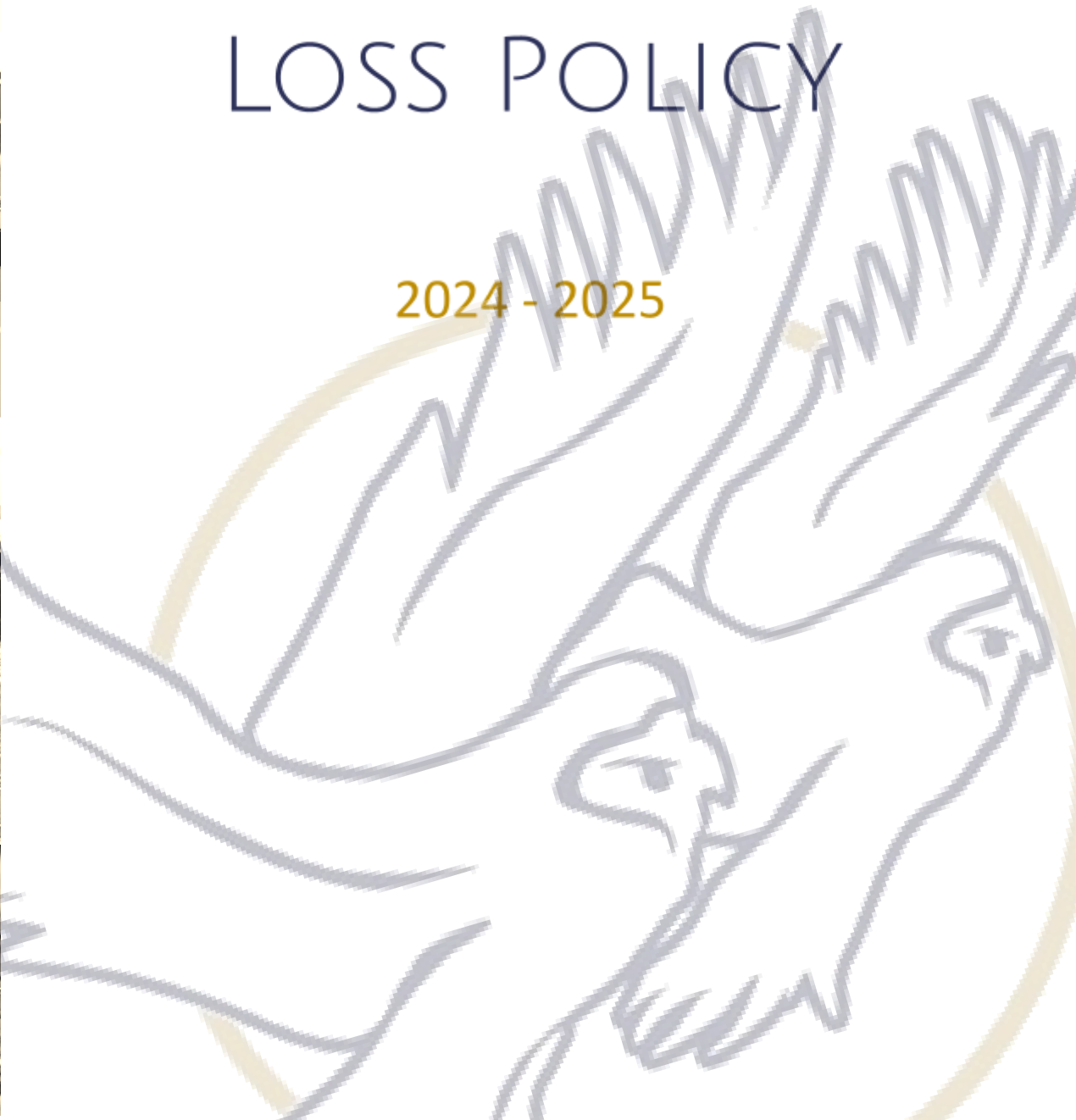


Bengeworth
Multi Academy Trust

Brilliant People • Better Schools • Bright Futures

MANAGING BEREAVEMENT AND LOSS POLICY

2024 - 2025



INTRODUCTION

Death is a subject that is difficult to address. It is almost inevitable though, that at some point the school community will be affected by a death. This might be the death of a pupil, staff member, pupil's family member or of someone connected with the school.

Through providing a curriculum that acknowledges and addresses loss, death, bereavement and grief, we can improve the skills of children and young people to deal with and emerge positively from them.

Our school is well-placed to help children and young people to explore and develop an awareness and understanding of death, as well as to support those personally affected by it.

An important part of this is the ability to support pupils, families and staff at times of loss and bereavement, as well as helping children and young people to support their peers, decreasing the sense of isolation that can be part of it. 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.

At Bengeworth Multi Academy Trust, we are committed to the emotional health and well-being of all staff and pupils. We are dedicated to the continual development of a 'healthy school'. 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, either through death or divorce.

This policy is for all staff, pupils, parents/carers, governors, trustees, visitors and partner agencies working within the Multi Academy Trust.

AIMS

The main aim of this policy is to provide a framework for all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, to give guidance on how to deal sensitively and compassionately in difficult and upsetting circumstances. We acknowledge that death, while being the inevitable end of life, is often unexpected and traumatic. Its unpredictability can cause severe distress and can shock and disturb the whole school community. At Bengeworth Multi Academy Trust we aim to meet the needs of all children and staff within a Christian and pastoral context.

Our aims are:

- to support all those affected by loss and death in a supportive and caring environment in which everyone can respond appropriately to individual circumstances;
- to offer understanding of the impact of loss and grief on children and young people's physical and emotional health;
- to gain insight into children and adult reactions to loss and grief and how we should respond in order to meet the needs of grieving pupils, parents and staff
- to give pastoral support for pupils, parents and staff;
- to provide effective support for all members of the school community and access to relevant support materials.

This policy outlines practical measures to be taken when people are in shock, or upset, especially with sudden or multiple deaths or traumatic circumstances.

PROCEDURES

Within school and MAT, we work in partnership with parents. When children join a school, we find out as much as possible about every child to tailor the academic, social and emotional teaching in school to match their needs. Parents are encouraged to make teachers aware of any previous changes that might have profoundly affected their child (divorce, bereavement, moving, new babies etc). If there has been bereavement, information on what the child was told (in terms of religious beliefs etc.) should be sought, in order that the school does not say anything that could confuse or upset the child or family. We understand that the communication of any death within our community must be planned and handled with great sensitivity. While recognising the need to act speedily, we will ensure that the immediate family of the deceased have been consulted prior to any wider communication through the school website, text, telephone, email, or social media sites.

A School Bereavement Team will be created and led as necessary by an appropriate school leader, overseen by the Headteacher or Head of School. Members of the team should be considered on the basis of appropriate skills, training and relationships with those affected. We acknowledge our responsibility to all those who grieve as a result of a life changing significant loss in their lives. We will provide opportunities for pupils to share their feelings in the school environment supported by trained staff. Appropriate support will also be offered to staff.

In the event of a death within the school community

We will ensure that school office staff are prepared to receive the news of a death within the community and respond in an appropriate manner. Should we receive the news of a death, in **ALL** cases the person receiving the news will:

- Confirm the information, check it, record it and check it again. (It is essential to have the facts confirmed)
- Share the news as soon as possible with an appropriate senior member of staff and a member of the Bereavement Team.

The senior member of staff and the members of the Bereavement Team will:

- Consider the action required, follow the agreed procedures, take notice of the guidance and examples and be aware of the impact of shock on each other and on the wider community.

The sudden death of a parent or close relative

We acknowledge that in the case of the death of a pupil's parent or close relative, it is best that a family member breaks the news with the support of an appropriate member of staff. If this is not possible the Bereavement Team Leader will decide on action to be taken.

The news of the death will be given to all relevant staff as soon as possible.

- The family should be contacted with appropriate support (See Appendix 1 for helpline numbers & websites)
- The family should be asked how much and what the child already knows/understands about what has happened.
- It should be explained to the family how the school can be involved in the support of the child and the family.

- The importance of working together with the parents/carers to assess any changes in behaviour; eating and sleeping patterns may change and behaviour in school may deteriorate or the child may become withdrawn.
- Involve outside agencies as appropriate; school nurse, psychological services.

For a member of staff experiencing close family bereavement, absence will be arranged for attendance at the funeral and appropriate time off in line with the Absence Management Policy. Additional time may be given through sick leave as appropriate.

The death of a pupil

When the school is informed of the death of a pupil the following action should be considered;

- Discussion should take place with the family and their wishes taken into account before decisions are taken on how and what to tell the children in school.
- Encourage staff to voice any concerns they have about telling the rest of the pupils/school.
- Consider the most appropriate way to communicate the news within school; be that a full school assembly, year groups or a smaller, bespoke groups.
- Inform parents the same day in the most appropriate way depending on the circumstances; via text, email, website, telephone.
- Give pupils opportunities to express their feelings at the time they are informed and over the following days and weeks.
- Avoid rumours, exaggerations and embellishment of the event by agreeing the facts which will be stated openly and honestly without assumptions or judgements.
- Remember that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotions and feelings. Some may deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some may show feelings of anger. There may well be tears and distress. Planned support will be available.
- Staff and children should be supported throughout the grieving period; anyone displaying signs of stress should be offered appropriate support. Counselling should be available if necessary.
- Ensure time to incorporate grieving amongst the staff and enable them to share how they feel about what has happened.
- Books to help on hand to support (See Appendix 2 for a list of books/authors)

The death of a member of staff

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

Should we receive the news of the death of a member of staff; the appropriate senior member of staff will call together colleagues from the Bereavement Team.

We will use the guidance notes below:

- Gather together the staff and inform them of the news.
- Allow time for grieving amongst the staff and allow them to share how they feel about what has happened.
- Inform the teachers that they may need to address what has happened in their classes.
- Impress on the staff what facts are to be announced to the pupils. To avoid rumours, exaggerations and development of the event, the agreed facts should be stated simply.
- Communicate to the staff how the announcement will be made. Should it be a full school assembly, year groups etc.

- It must be remembered that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotional feelings, some will deny or disbelieve the announcement, others may feel panic or anger. There may be tears and distress; everyone will react in their own way.
- Under such circumstances some staff may have difficulty coping with the loss themselves. Colleagues will need to be aware of those staff who seem particularly affected by the death.

Terminally ill pupil/member of staff/close family member

We acknowledge that the anticipated death of a member of our school community, whilst very difficult to manage, enables us to establish appropriate communication with the family to support those likely to be most affected before and after the death. Our responsibility is to support adults, children and young people who have to face the painful reality that a parent or someone close to them is terminally ill.

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

- Respect the feelings and wishes of the parents/guardians/next-of-kin at all times.
- Confirm the facts concerning the illness with members of staff.
- Should the pupil wish to attend school, the class teacher may need to inform the class of the child's illness/condition.
- Allow the child to speak freely about the sick person in an appropriate setting. Allow them to talk about their feelings/how they are feeling. Never give false hope to the child.
- Occasionally, the pupil/member of staff, may wish to talk to their fellow classmates/colleagues about their predicament themselves. Honesty about death and dying may be the best line of approach. Sometimes there is no other way.

Funeral and Memorial services

Following the death of a pupil/member of staff/person from the school community we will need to consider our involvement in any funeral and/or memorial services. We will need to plan/organise the following;

- The school may be closed, or as many people as possible, released to attend a funeral or memorial service should it be appropriate and they wish to do so.
- Pupils and staff may express a wish to attend, or take part in the service; this should only be done once we have had the prior agreement from the deceased's family, as well as the agreement of their own parents/carers.
- The class most affected might like to write down their thoughts and feelings; these could be given to the bereaved family to assist in the planning of the service.
- After the service, staff and pupils should be encouraged to meet and express their thoughts and feelings as such services are important in the grieving process.

Returning to school

We acknowledge our responsibility to 'keep a special watch' on pupils who have been bereaved, especially on their return to school and for at least a two-year period and at times of transition. We further acknowledge our responsibility to prepare staff and pupils appropriately before a bereaved member of our community returns. Members of our Bereavement Team will advise an appropriate response, depending on the individual's circumstances.

- For the bereaved child, or member of staff, returning to school may be traumatic.

- Where there has been a close family bereavement, in most cases everyone (teaching, support staff, volunteers if appropriate and pupils) should be made aware of the situation before the pupil returns (providing the parents/carers of the bereaved pupil agree).
- Staff should show appropriate compassion and allow expression to those suffering grief.
- Teachers should try to foster an environment that is compassionate, yet disciplined.
- Family life at this traumatic time, can be particularly distressing, routines upset, relationships strained, the future uncertain. For this reason, school routines should be kept as normal as possible in order to provide a respite.
- Staff should be aware of anniversaries as this can spark a revival of feelings of bereavement.
- Staff might keep an eye on those particularly affected by the death of a close associate.

Support with/talking to the bereaved

- Try to be available to listen and support, if possible, arrange a one-to-one session with the Home School Link as soon as possible after the pupil returns to school (See Appendix 3 for 'Support and further suggestions for teachers')
- Be calm and show them that you are listening and understanding by occasionally repeating what they have said and by acknowledging their emotions.
- If people feel like crying, they should cry – crying is not a sign of weakness, but often a sign of deep feeling.
- Beware of using platitudes e.g. "I know how you feel", (young people may feel offended that you presume how they feel).

Do

- Let the child know that you genuinely care
- Make time to be available and listen
- Accept all that the child is saying
- Allow them to express their feelings in their own way
- Let them know their feelings are normal
- Let them know that it is OK to cry
- Talk honestly and share your feelings
- Be honest
- Have eye contact
- Have appropriate physical contact
- Let them know that it is not their fault
- Be aware of the home situation

Don't

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

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Useful Websites and helpline numbers for dealing with loss and bereavement for parents, children and staff

<https://talktofootsteps.co.uk/> Support for bereaved children, young people and their families in Worcestershire.

www.childbereavement.org.uk Child Bereavement Network – 0800 02 88840 – a network of child bereavement services

www.cruse.org.uk CRUSE Bereavement Care - 0808 808 1677

<https://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/> Winston's Wish Family Line – 08088 020 021 – national helpline offering guidance, information and support to anyone caring for a bereaved child, including professionals and family members

www.mind.org.uk Mental Health information and support -0300 123 3393

http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20594/end_of_life_care_and_bereavement/1539/bereavement_support Worcestershire County Council bereavement support

<https://touchstones-support.org.uk/> Child bereavement support 07547 367267

Appendix B - Support and Further Suggestions for Teachers

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

- A death will disrupt the family for many months; in fact, the family will never be the same again. Family members are grieving, relationships alter, and members may take on new roles. Sometimes there is a change of carer, house or school, all of which add to the disruption and distress experienced by the child. To support the child, it is helpful to minimise, if possible, changes and disruptions in their normal daily routine and life in school.
- Bereaved family members may emotionally and physically withdraw from the child, to protect themselves from more distress. Some adults will deny the bereaved child is grieving, as it will be too distressing for them to acknowledge the child's pain. This may cause distress and confusion, causing grief reactions of anger, withdrawal or psychosomatic behaviours such as headaches, stomach-ache or sickness.
- The bereaved child may regress in behaviour, becoming clingy, difficult or withdrawn. His/her schoolwork may suffer. These changes will be partly due to grief but also to the disruption and changes within the family, causing the child to feel confused and unsafe.

- The child may feel resentment, jealousy or guilt towards the dead person or child. The expression of this verbally can cause the remaining family members distress and shock. Parents and carers need to know this is normal and will decrease as the child and the family become more stable and settled.
- Parents and carers need to be informed of the benefits that a child gains in being involved in the ceremonies and rituals that follow death. An explanation as to how mourning practices help children to express their feelings and come to terms with and accept the reality of their loss can be very beneficial.
- Teachers should remember that parents and carers will often use them as role models, counsellors or extended family; looking to them for support for themselves as well as finding appropriate ways of supporting and talking with their children.
- Teachers may require their own support structures. Supporting bereaved families, whilst rewarding, can also be emotionally draining.

Appendix C - Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a member of staff

Date

Address

Dear Parents/Carers

Your child's class teacher/form tutor/head of year had the sad task of informing the children of the tragic death of **<Name>** who has been a teacher at this school for a number of years.

Our thoughts are with **<Name>** family at this time and in an effort to try to respond to his/her death in a positive way, all the children have been informed.

When someone dies it is normal for family and friends to experience many different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion, and children are likely to ask questions about the death that need to be answered honestly and factually, in terms that they will understand.

The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school but if there is anything else you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we will be more than happy to help you.

Yours sincerely

(Name)

Head Teacher

Appendix D - Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a pupil

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.

Date

Address

Dear Parents/Carers

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 <illness>. As you may be aware, many children who have <illness> 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 happy to help you.

We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating life.

Yours sincerely

(Name)

Head Teacher

Appendix E - Guidelines for breaking news about a death to staff and Governors

- Arrange a staff meeting which should take place as soon as possible.
- Impart factual information. Never make assumptions or repeat what has been said by rumour.
- Give news sensitively and empathetically, being aware that people may react in different ways. Be cognisant of the relationships staff may have had with the person who has died.
- Ensure that there is someone responsible for telling people who are unable to attend the staff meeting, i.e. part time staff, peripatetic staff, lunch time supervisors. Consider the best way of imparting the information to those absent, e.g. by doing home visit, by telephone, text or e-mail etc.
- Identify individual members of staff who feel able to:
 - support members of staff
 - support groups of children the most appropriate person to support the children should be well known to them and trusted.
- Identify a member of staff who will liaise with the individual's family, to deal with staff condolences and any funeral arrangements (if necessary).
- Identify an appropriate member of staff who will take 'phone calls and/or direct them as appropriate. Try to establish a "protected" telephone line to ensure free flow of accurate information. Telephone line providers may provide an additional line if the situation requires one.
- Identify a member of staff who will provide a newsletter for parents (see examples of letter templates) which should be sent the same day.
- Ensure staff are coping with the situation by checking on individuals regularly.
- Identify any unresolved problems or ongoing issues. Ensure that those staff that live alone have contact numbers of friends in case of need.
- Identify sources of advice and support to access for help in coming to terms with the bereavement.

Appendix F - Guidelines for breaking news of the death to the children/young people

- Inform the children/young people as soon as possible about the death.

- Where possible, the pupils should be informed in small groups, i.e. class or tutor groups. Identify those children who had a long term and/or close relationship with the person who has died so they can be told separately. If appropriate, a special assembly could be held at a later time in the day to remember the person who has died.
- Allow the children/young people to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.
- Allow the children/young people to verbalise their feelings.
- Allow the children/young people to discuss the situation and share their experiences of death.
- Be honest about your own feelings and talk about your relationship with the person.
- Avoid using euphemisms.
- Those children/young people who have had more involvement with the person should be given the opportunity to share their feelings and experiences either within the group or on a one-to-one situation.
- Ensure the children/young people understand that the death is nothing to do with anything they have said or done. It is in no way their fault.
- Reassure them that not all people who are ill or have had an accident will die and that many people get better.
- Put an appropriate time limit on the discussion. It is preferable to resume normal school activities as soon as possible thus ensuring minimal disruption within the school.
- Conclude the discussion time for reflection or special poem to remember the person who has died and their family.
- Ensure there is support available for any child/young person who needs additional help and support.

Appendix G - Things to consider in the days following the news of the death

- It is important to consider any cultural or religious implications and seek advice if necessary.
- Ensure nominated staff, with responsibilities for supporting staff and children, are available to do so. It may be necessary temporarily to provide staff cover for their normal activities.
- Identify an allocated quiet place where children, young people and staff can go if necessary. It is preferable for there to be minimum disruption to the timetable but some flexibility may be required.
- Try to engender an awareness of when people need help and support, particularly those who worked closely with the person who has died and secretaries/administrative staff who are taking telephone calls, dealing with parents etc.
- Through the nominated staff member who has responsibilities for liaising with the individual's family, ascertain their wishes about the school's involvement in the funeral, if any.
- Consider practical issues like:-
- Putting an obituary in the paper, sending flowers to the home or to the funeral, making a collection etc;
- Who will attend the funeral, making a collection etc;
- Cover for any staff who may be going to the funeral;
- Transport to and from the funeral; possible closure of the school. If this is the case remember to tell lunchtime supervisors, site manager etc. in advance

Bengeworth

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