

South Bank Multi Academy Trust

Bereavement Guidelines

Approved by Trustees: February 2023

Version: 1.0

Review Timetable: 3 years

Renewal Date: February 2026

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Every year over 40,000 children under the age of 17 experience bereavement of a parent ¹and many more will experience the death of someone else special in their life. In addition to these individual pupils, schools may also experience the death of a child at school or a staff member. It is almost inevitable, therefore, that at some time all schools will have to deal with a death that affects the school community.
- 1.2 As children spend the vast majority of their time at school, teachers and staff members are the primary source of care and support. Bereaved children will see school as a safe haven away from the turmoil of emotions at home and will look to trusted staff members for help.
- 1.3 Death is something that most people choose not to think about so when faced with it we often find ourselves ill prepared.

2. PURPOSE

- 2.1 The Trust has developed bereavement guidance to provide support and guidance at a time when there may be shock, upset and confusion.
- 2.2 The purpose of these guidelines is to help each school within the Trust develop a bereavement plan that:
 - Sets out guidelines for how the school will respond appropriately to a death in our school community.
 - Sets out a plan for communicating deaths in a timely manner that balances our school community's interests and transparency with the wishes of the family of the deceased.
 - Provides pastoral support for pupils, members of staff and parents experiencing bereavement.
 - Understands the impact of loss and grief on children and young people's physical and emotional health.
 - Defines the roles and responsibilities of key staff members and the governing board.
 - Provides a roadmap and framework for pupils or staff returning to school following bereavement.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- 3.1 Local governing body (LGB): The role of the LGB is to support the school in the development of a bereavement plan and ensure its implementation as an active document. This includes:
 - Reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
 - Utilising the expertise within the school and sharing responsibilities.

¹ Key statistics childhood bereavement network.org.uk

- Ensuring that the school has considered and is respectful of religious and cultural values and beliefs.
- Ensuring that staff are given appropriate opportunities for training, reflection and access to support if they need it.

3.2 Headteacher: The headteacher has overall responsibility for the bereavement plan and its implementation and for liaising with the LGB, parents/carers and other relevant outside agencies. The headteacher will:

- Monitor progress with external agencies in the case of sudden death, unexpected death or suicide.
- Respond to media enquiries.
- Keep the CEO and LGB informed.
- Be the first point of contact for family/child concerned.
- Designate liaison and support to other trained members of staff when appropriate.

3.3 Pastoral support staff: The role of pastoral staff is to:

- Liaise with the headteacher to lead a whole-school approach to the effective management of loss and bereavement including ensuring appropriate training and support is provided for staff.
- Record bereavements affecting children on the relevant systems.
- Monitor progress in supporting those impacted by a bereavement and liaise/coordinate with external agencies.
- Consider cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary schools as appropriate.

3.4 All staff: The role of all staff within the school is to:

- Inform the headteacher at the earliest possibility if they hear about a death of someone in the school community.
- Know how to report a concern if the bereavement or sudden and unexpected death has placed a child at significant risk of harm.
- 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.
- Have a basic understanding of a child's needs when facing loss.
- Know how to support a child when they are distressed and who to speak to in school to refer to specialist support if this is needed.
- Dependent on their role within school, teach about loss and bereavement as part of the planned curriculum.

4. GENERAL PROCEDURES

4.1 Pre-bereavement

- 4.1.1 In some situations, it is known in advance that a death is going to occur. This is usually because of a long illness.
- 4.1.2 In cases where this is an adult within the school community, individual conversations should be held with the headteacher in terms of support, information exchange and practical considerations.
- 4.1.3 When the expected death is of a child or a member of a child's family.
Consideration should be given to:
 - Contacting the family to confirm factual information and explore what support could be provided to them.
 - Identifying a key point of contact in school in terms of information exchange and to update this person when things change.
 - Ensuring that all relevant adults are clear about what information has and needs to be shared with the student.
 - Keeping lines of communication open to ensure that all information is received in a timely fashion.
 - Exploring the possibility of signposting to other organisations such as Winston's Wish or a local hospice.
 - Looking to involve faith or community leaders when appropriate and with the agreement of the family.
 - Exploring what support for the student affected might look like in practice.
 - Arranging training for specific members of staff to ensure all involved are confident in their ability to support the student.
 - If appropriate, reflecting on how to communicate with the wider school community, for example; the student's class mates.
 - If appropriate, beginning conversations around practical considerations in the events leading up to the death and following the death.

4.2 Following a bereavement

- 4.2.1 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.
- 4.2.2 *As an immediate response guidance would be to:*
 - Contact the deceased's family to offer condolences and with the aim to establish the facts so that rumours may be avoided. This should be done by the headteacher, or the deputy headteacher if the headteacher is not available.
 - Consider any religious beliefs 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.
- Inform staff of the death before students are informed, recognising that some students may have found out through other means. Where possible, staff will have been prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways and 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 students who are most directly affected (such as a friendship group) in small groups, by someone known to them. A member of the pastoral team should also be present to offer support.
- Inform the wider school community in line with the wishes of the family. This could be done through assemblies and/or letters to parents.
- Make small changes to the school timetable to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of the child or children affected by the situation. However, aim for minimal disruption to the timetable as this can offer a sense of security and familiarity.
- Discuss the bereavement support plan and further ways the child/family can be supported.
- Send letters or cards of condolence to families or individuals directly affected.

4.3 For the funeral

- 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 students may want to attend if invited by the family and the practicalities of issues such as risk assessment, staff cover, agreement from parents and transport. In some rare circumstances it may be appropriate to close the school fully or partially.
- Organise tributes such as flowers or a collection in line with family's wishes and the wishes of staff and students.
- Be sensitive to religious and cultural issues. The school should ensure that they do not deny young people the opportunity to grieve and mourn within the traditions of their own culture and religious beliefs.

4.4 After the funeral

- Consider whether it is appropriate to visit the child and family affected at home and plan a return to school.
- Continue regular contact with the family and show that the school still cares about them and their child over time.

- Consider practical issues and make thoughtful and sensitive updates to parental and other contact details when needed, ensure friendships are secure – peer support can be particularly important for a bereaved child or young person.
- Monitor the emotional needs of staff and students and provide listening time and ongoing appropriate support.
- Continue to assess the needs of children most affected, and record and plan for support accordingly.

4.5 Longer term

- Be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life. So, 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 e.g. Winston's Wish, Cruse Bereavement Support.
- Ensure that learning about loss and bereavement is embedded into appropriate curriculum areas. When teaching about loss and bereavement, give careful thought as to how to support those directly affected by loss and bereavement.
- Consider appropriate ways to remember the individual.

4.6 Reintegration back into school after a bereavement

- a key member of staff should contact the student/family and discuss their wishes regarding coming back to school. The student's bereavement plan may or may not be discussed at this time
- discussion should take place covering the student's bereavement plan, students' needs and support that can be offered to the student and their family. This discussion should include headteacher, member of staff who has been in contact with the family, class teacher/form tutor.
- the student has a return to school meeting with a named person to determine any change to support they require on their return. Create or revisit the student's bereavement plan
- on the day of the return the student is met by a named member of staff to determine if they still want to go ahead with the support agreed in the previous meetings
- teaching staff should be informed of the student's return. Relevant strategies on the student's bereavement plan should be cascaded down to staff.
- key staff to check in with the student at regular intervals. The effectiveness of the student's bereavement plan should be monitored and discussed regularly, at least by those involved in the original discussion.

4.7 Multiple deaths and death in school

4.7.1 In the event of multiple deaths, additional support and resources will probably be required.

- A plan of action should be agreed by the senior leadership team.
- One individual, pre-selected and briefed by the team should act as spokesperson, relaying consistent information to the media (normally the headteacher).
- If appropriate ensure an emergency school hotline is set up and running
- Retrieve the personal belongings of the deceased for their return to the next-of-kin.
- Information on the school's database, including references and addresses will probably need to be amended and updated.
- The school may decide to write to parents to allow them to explain to their children the meaning and implications of an event.

4.8 Death of a member of staff

4.8.1 When such an event occurs it is usually extremely traumatic, especially for members of staff forced to deal with their own grief as well as comforting students. Planning how a school manages such an event is important. To avoid rumours, it is advisable that the news is broken as soon as possible and the following guidance considered:

- Senior Leaders should be informed of the news by the headteacher.
- Close colleagues to the deceased should be informed privately.
- All staff should be gathered collectively and informed, giving them privacy to grieve before announcing the news to the rest of the school.
- Classes of the deceased are informed before the news is broken in assembly and where possible in a space where everyone maybe told simultaneously.
- Students will be given the opportunity to express their grief individually with the support of the form tutor or class teacher.
- School mentors and/or counsellors are available to those who need it.
- Some students may have already experienced death and their way of coping with such events is sometimes observed in emotional outbursts. Some may express feelings of anger, panic or relief. It is important to try to remember that this is a time when everyone is hurting.
- Consideration should be placed on ways to remember the member of staff for example a memorial service with drama, poems and letters, a memorial garden or rewards honouring their memory.

4.9 Following a sudden and unexpected death – suicide

- 4.9.1 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. As a school community we should aim to make a response to a sudden death within two school days.
- 4.9.2 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.
- 4.9.3 In the case of suicide, please refer to The Samaritans Step by Step Guide.
<https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/step-step/>
- 4.9.4 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 reinforced by:
- 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.
- 4.9.5 When discussing any suicide that has occurred, ensure that the information given is age appropriate and:
- Is factually correct but does not include detail of the suicidal act itself, 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’.

4.10 Following a sudden and unexpected death – homicide

- 4.10.1 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.
- 4.10.2 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.

4.10.3 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/>

4.11 Public health pandemics

4.11.1 Bereavement during a pandemic presents a special set of challenges. Some aspects of the normal school bereavement strategy will be difficult to implement but will need to be complemented using virtual space.

4.11.2 On discovering a child or family experiencing a loss due to a public health pandemic:

- Stay in regular contact with the bereaved child.
- Appoint 1 or 2 people to liaise with the child.
- Schedule regular points of contact during the week. The frequency depends on the needs of the child. If it's a vulnerable child, also schedule regular contact with the parents or carers.
- Record support and discuss the needs of the child during pastoral meetings.
- Discuss with the student prior to their return the plan on how their return to school will be managed.

5. **SUPPORTING STAFF**

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

5.2 The Employee Assistant Programme Helpline is available on 0800 030 5182.

5.3 Schools should work within the leave of absence policy to ensure staff are provided with appropriate leave and support at a time of bereavement.

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

5.5 Ensure that regular training is provided to all staff to support them in meeting their roles and responsibilities as identified in this guidance.

6. **THE MEDIA**

6.1 On some occasions there will be media interest. Where this occurs the headteacher should inform the CEO to decide if a press statement is appropriate. Any press statement will have due regard to the family affected.

7. EQUALITY AND INCLUSION, VALUES AND BELIEFS

- 7.1 It should be recognised that there are a range of cultural and religious beliefs, customs and procedures concerning death and that bereaved children and families may have differing expectations. The school should present a balance of different approaches to death and loss and make students aware of differing responses to bereavement, and that these all should be valued and respected.

8. YOUNG ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

- 8.1 Many young asylum seekers and refugees have experienced the death of family members or friends, often in traumatic circumstances. This, and further traumatic experiences and losses, can have a devastating effect on their emotional and physical health, behaviour, learning and relationships.
- 8.2 Sudden traumatic death complicates the process of grief and mourning, as usual ways of coping may be overwhelmed. Where appropriate the school should consult specialist mental health services to provide support for students.

9. CURRICULUM

- 9.1 Children and young people explore the concept of loss, bereavement, and grief as part of the statutory elements of the 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.
- 9.2 Assemblies are also used to address aspects of death – such as Remembrance Day, Holocaust Memorial Day or commemorative occasions. Schools should observe national minutes of silence and explain the purpose of this.
- 9.3 Any questions relating to loss or death will be answered 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.
- 9.4 Students should be provided with opportunities to learn about and discuss cultural and religious issues around death and encourage them to express their own responses and feelings.

10. ADDITIONAL SUPPORT AND LINKS

Winston's Wish: 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 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.

Grief Encounter <https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/> Support and information for children and young people, including a free helpline.

Bereaved Children Support York www.bcsy.org.uk Supports bereaved children and families in the York area

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.

APPENDIX 1

Template letter to parents and carers of deceased pupil

Dear.....

We are so very sorry to hear the sad news of the death of..... There are no words to express our sadness and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through. As a school community, we will miss..... very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to friends, classmates and teachers.
..... was a member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help as you plan the funeral, please let us know. We will continue to keep in touch and will support you in any way we can.

With sympathy,

Sign-off headteacher

APPENDIX 2

Template letter to parents and carers - death of a pupil

Dear parents and carers,

Your child's class teacher/form tutor/headteacher/head of year had the sad task of informing the pupils of the death of a pupil in.....

..... died suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness yesterday/last week/over the weekend/during half term.

..... was a valued/cherished/well-liked/popular member of the class/school community and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some pupils may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal. We have tried to answer their questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language.

For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, look at the links below:

Winston's Wish: 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 Support for anyone who has been bereaved.

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Bereaved Children Support York www.bcsy.org.uk Supports bereaved children and families in the York area.

Our thoughts are with family and friends at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember life.

Sign-off headteacher

APPENDIX 3

Template letter to parents and carers - death of a member of staff

Dear parents/carers,

I am sorry to inform you that a well-respected/long-standing/well-loved/popular member of our staff..... has died suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness. The pupils were told today by their..... and many will be reacting to this news.

When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some pupils may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal. We have tried to answer their questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language.

For more information about speaking to children and young people about death look at the following links:

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Find childhood bereavement support in your local area.

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

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Our thoughts are with family at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember life.

Sign-off headteacher