



HOLY  
TRINITY

C.E. PRIMARY ACADEMY (HANDSWORTH)

# Bereavement Policy

Approved by:  
LAB

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At Holy Trinity CE Primary Academy our distinctive Christian values are at the heart of all we do. Our children develop independent curiosity, acquire a life-long appetite for learning and become well-rounded individuals who achieve their full potential, both personally and academically.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*

*Jeremiah 29:11*

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## 1. Introduction

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. This policy will provide guidelines to be followed after a bereavement. 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.

Every death and the circumstances in which it occurs is different and this policy has been constructed to guide us on how to deal sensitively, compassionately and professionally 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 the loss of a loved one, either through death, divorce or separation.

## 2. Aims

At Holy Trinity CofE Primary Academy we aim to meet the needs of all children and staff within a Christian context. When home circumstances are changed because of a death in the family and all around is 'different', our school aims to be a place that both child and family can rely on, and gain some much needed support. If the death is of a child or member of staff, the whole school community will work together; with outside agencies as appropriate, to support each other.

### 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.

### 3. Procedures

Within school we work in partnership with parents. When children join the 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. 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 and as a school we state our commitment to any such family as may need practical, emotional and ongoing support.

#### a. Family Bereavement

When school is informed of bereavement or loss the following action should be considered:

- The family should be contacted for appropriate support. (See Appendix 1 for addresses and relevant telephone help lines)
- The family should be asked how much and what the child already knows and how they have been involved.
- It should be explained to the family how the school can be involved to support the child and family.
- The importance of working together and liaison will be explained – both parties assessing any changes in behaviour. (Eating and sleeping patterns may change or behaviour in school may deteriorate or the child become withdrawn.)
- Involve outside agencies as appropriate e.g. the school nurse, an appropriate counselling/psychological service, Barnardos).
- **For a member of staff experiencing close family bereavement**, absence will be arranged for attendance at a funeral and appropriate time off in line with the Absence Management Policy. Additional time may be given through sick leave as appropriate.

#### b. Death of a child or member of staff

When the school is informed of the death of a child or member of staff, 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.
- 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. It is important that staff avoid adding worry – 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.
- Counselling should be available if necessary e.g. in cases of sudden or violent death (outside agencies should be involved with this e.g. Pause or Edwards Trust).
- 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.
- Staff and children should be supported throughout the grieving period; anyone displaying signs of stress should be offered appropriate support.
- The class most affected might like to write down their thoughts and feelings; these could then 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.
- The school should ensure that all people who are close to the child/ staff member 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
  - Previous school staff who worked closely with the child/ staff member
  - 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 letter to parents informing them of the loss, and they may need to support or comfort their children.

### c. Terminally Ill pupils/staff

- In the event of a child or member of staff becoming terminally ill, their wishes and those of their parents/guardians/next-of-kin should always be respected.
- Should the child wish to attend school, the class teacher may need to inform the class of the child's condition.
- Should the member of staff wish to attend school- a discussion with themselves and the Trust should be had and any risk assessments/support plans put in place. The support plan will be drawn up in a meeting with the staff member/DSL/HT/Gov and if possible the CSIO/CEO.
- Occasionally, the child may wish to talk to their fellow classmates about their predicament themselves. Honesty about death and dying may be the best line of approach. Sometimes there is just no other way.

### d. Return to school (*see Appendix 3*)

- For the bereaved child or member of staff, returning to school may be traumatic, meeting should be arranged with the class teacher, DSL, class support staff and the parents/carers. This meeting will be to discuss the support the child may need/want both in school and at home. A plan of support is then drawn up and this is shared with the child so they know what is going on and can make some decisions themselves.
- Where there has been a close family bereavement, in most cases everyone (teaching, support staff, volunteers and pupils **if appropriate**) should be made aware of the situation before the pupil returns (providing the parents/guardians of the bereaved pupil agree- can also ask pupil if/how they would like to share news to peers).
- 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, and 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.

### e. Talking to the bereaved pupil

When talking to pupils:-

- Be honest
- Use clear language

- Expect questions
- Recognise every death and reaction to it is unique
- Don't assume
- Allow time
- Acknowledge that some days will be better than others

Additionally:-

- Try to be available to listen and support if possible, arrange a one-to-one session with the Pastoral Manager/ Learning Mentor as soon as possible after the pupil returns to school
- 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 eg “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 their 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

Deny your pain and feelings



Point out things for which they should be grateful

Be frightened of sharing your own feelings

#### **f. If a child dies in school:**

- If any member of staff has concerns regarding a child's health they will follow the academy procedures: contact a first aider and ideally the Head Teacher or Deputy Head Teacher.
- In the case of serious concern, the school will call for an ambulance. Due to the seriousness of the situation, this decision can be taken by the first aider or a member of the SLT.
- 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.
- If the child stops breathing a trained school staff member will administer CPR. In some cases, parents may have given the school a protocol to be followed in the event of a serious health incidence. In rare cases, this may include a request that mechanical resuscitation is not administered. However, whilst the school respects the parents' preference in this matter, due to the statutory responsibility imposed on the school regarding "duty of care", the need for school staff to administer manual CPR overrides such preference.
- Once the ambulance has arrived at school, the child is given over to their care and it is the ambulance team's decision as to where the child is taken or which form of treatment is administered.
- 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.
- Any change in circumstance following the first call to parents should be reported to them as soon as possible. **NB:** Staff must not impart shocking or worrying news to a parent if they are travelling in a car alone.
- 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 CEO (BDMAT) & the LA if there is a death in school at the earliest opportunity. All press enquiries are to be rooted through the Head Teacher, Chair of Governors and BDMAT Central Team.( See BDMAT guidance).

#### **g. 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 off sites visits protocols give guidance for such situations and should be followed. The school will notify the CEO/ LA, at the earliest opportunity, if there is a death out of school. The above procedures and protocols will then apply.

## **h. 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 Head Teacher, who will make a considered response after seeking assistance from BDMAT & the Local Authority Press Office.

## **i. The death of a member of staff**

All of the principles and procedures listed above apply to the death of a staff member. *For a letter template see Appendix C.*

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

## **j. Memory Assemblies**

It may be appropriate to hold a memory assembly for the child/ staff member. 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, prayers, and remembering can be shared in a manageable way together.

## **k. 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.

- The Educational Psychology team offer counselling support and staff will be reminded about this service.
- Availability of information about accessing bereavement support outside of school, eg: CRUSE

#### **For Pupils:**

- Experience in many special 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 Pastoral Manager has 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 Educational Psychology team can offer support to pupils who may need more help.

#### **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/family at an appropriate time, and pupils informed where it has gone.
- If the parents/family 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. 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'/family's wishes. It will then be for the family 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.

## 4. Responsibilities

**The designated person** within the school who has overall responsibility for support and liaison in event of a death or traumatic loss is the **Head Teacher**. In the event that this person is absent then another Senior Leader (Deputy Head in the first instance) will take responsibility.

### **His/Her responsibilities are:**

- Policy development and review, involving pupils, staff, governors, parents/carers and relevant local agencies.
- Implementing the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities.
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies.
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary school.
- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff.

**The nominated Governor** with responsibility for bereavement is: David Willey

### **His/Her responsibilities are:**

- To contribute to generating and updating the policy.
- To support the Head Teacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is managed.
- To support the Head Teacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is tackled in the curriculum.
- To review practice.

## **Appendix 1**

### **List of Online Resources and Information**

[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk) A useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community. Winston's Wish Family Line - 0845 2030405

[www.keech.org.uk](http://www.keech.org.uk) The website of Keech Hospice Care, our local Children's Hospice. Gives details of its facilities and the support it offers.

[www.chums.info](http://www.chums.info) A bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

[www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk) A bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss Childhood Bereavement Network - 020 7843 6309

[www.juliesplace.com](http://www.juliesplace.com) A support resource for bereaved siblings

[www.bhf.org.uk/smallcreature](http://www.bhf.org.uk/smallcreature) British Heart Foundation site to help children come to terms with loss using cartoon creatures. An animated film and we have a printed pack to go with it.

[www.bbc.co.uk/.../bereavement/bereavement\\_helpchildren.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/.../bereavement/bereavement_helpchildren.shtml)

Information on the way bereavement affects children

<http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk> An organisation offering local bereavement support to both adults and children CRUSE Bereavement Care (0870) 167 1677

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/index.htm> Federation of organisations

[www.edwardstrust.org.uk](http://www.edwardstrust.org.uk) Supporting children and families facing loss and surviving bereavement across the West Midlands

## **Appendix 2**

### **Books dealing with death and loss (check the Bereavement box- kept in Pastoral office)**

- **Beyond the Rough Rock** - Supporting a Child who has been Bereaved through Suicide - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley
- **As Big As It Gets** - Supporting a Child when Someone in their Family is Seriously Ill - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley
- **The Secret C** - Straight Talking about Cancer - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley
- **I Miss You** - First Look at Death - Pat Thomson
- **Grandpa**- John Burningham
- **Always and Forever** – Alan Durant
- **The Huge Bag of Worries** – Virginia Ironside
- **What on Earth Do you Do When Someone Dies?** – Trevor Romain
- **Badger's Parting Gifts**- Susan Varley
- **Saying Goodbye to Daddy** – Judith Vigna
- **Waterbugs and Dragonflies** – Explaining Death to Young Children
- **When Dinosaurs Die** – L & M Brown
- **Liplap's Wish** – Jonathan London And Sylvia Long
- **The Memory Tree** – Britta Teckentrup

## **Appendix 3**

### **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 4

### Developmental Stages relating to an understanding of death

| Age  | Understanding of Death   | Child's Needs  | Phrases/Techniques  |
|--|--|--|---|
| <b>Infancy</b><br>Birth – two years  | Death as separation and /or abandonment<br>Careful listening and watching<br>Death is when the body stops working  | Brief simple, honest explanations with familiar examples<br>Reassurance of safety, parental support and attention  | "We'll be here to take care of you."  |
| <b>Pre- school</b><br>2 – 6 Years<br>Uses magical and intuitive thinking               | Death as sleep, temporary, reversible, impersonal.<br>Or as a person who comes to get you, can be catching<br>Egocentric thinking causes feelings of responsibility or guilt | Clarification and expanded answers.<br>Permission to attend funeral with assistance<br>Acceptance of feelings without qualification, corrections or judgement.   | Avoid euphemisms such as sleep, lost.<br>Check and see if explanations are understood<br>Expect repeat questions<br>Acknowledge everyone's feelings of sadness and loss.<br>Anticipate and counteract guilt<br>Look out for unusual or subtle expressions |
| <b>School Years</b><br>6- 11 years<br>Uses concrete thinking, begins rational thinking | Death is final, perhaps not inevitable<br>Occurs to others<br>Perhaps retaliatory  | Reassurance that grief is OK, to feel bad is normal<br>Open communication and opportunity to express feelings when ready.<br>Encouragement to attend the funeral | Acknowledge adult feeling, including anger and guilt.<br>It's OK to cry<br>Accept fluctuating grief   |



## Appendix 5

### Template letters to parents and carers

*NOTE: Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil or staff member permission must be gained from the child's parents/ family.  
The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the parents/family and school.*

#### A. Letter to parents after death of their child

<Address>

<Date>

Dear .....

We are so very sorry to hear the sad news of <Name's> death. 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 <Name> very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to <his/her> friends, classmates and teachers.

<Name> was a <valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly> member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help as you plan <Name's> funeral, please let us know.

Appropriate Bible quote.....

We will continue to keep in touch and will support you in any way we can. Our thoughts and prayers are with you.

With sympathy

<Name> Head Teacher

## B. Letter informing parents of the death of a pupil

<Address>

<Date>

Dear Parents,

Your child's class teacher/ phase lead had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>.

*(<Name> died from an illness called cancer. As you may be aware, many children who have cancer get better but sadly <Name> had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday/ died suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness yesterday/last week/over the weekend/during half term.)*

<Name> was a <valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly> member of our school family 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 or anger. Some may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

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.

For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Child Bereavement UK website [childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)

*(We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating <Name.. 's> life.)*

*Appropriate Bible quote....*

Yours sincerely

<Name> Head Teacher

## C. Letter informing parents of the death of a staff member

<Address>

<Date>

Dear Parents,

I am sorry to inform you that a <well-respected/long-standing/well-loved/popular/ well-known> member of our staff, <Name>, died <suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness>.

The pupils were told today by their <class teacher/ phase lead> 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.

Children are likely to ask questions about the death that need to be answered honestly and factually in terms that they will understand. We have tried to answer their questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language. 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.

For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Child Bereavement UK website [childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)

Our thoughts and prayers are with <Name's> family at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember <Name's> life.

Bible quote..

Yours sincerely

<Name> Head Teacher