



# Bereavement Policy

Date Approved: Autumn 2023

Date for Review: Autumn 2026

Approved By: Senior Leadership Team (Level 5)



## The Blidworth and Rainworth Primary School Partnership

### **Rationale**

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. We also understand that children experience loss in other ways that need school to understand their emotional needs – e.g. family separation and divorce, family members serving a custodial sentence, family members staying in hospital.

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/loss happens. Every death/loss, and the circumstances in which it occurs, is different but needs to be dealt with professionally, sensitively and compassionately.

The schools in the Blidworth and Rainworth Primary School Partnership are committed to the emotional health and well-being of children and staff, and we provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that supports and prepares pupils for coping with separation or loss of a loved one, either through death, divorce, illness or other circumstances.

We believe that children and adults alike have the right to:

- be given space and time to grieve,
- be given their own choice of support from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate,
- a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgment.

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 or staff member within our community has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/care team of that child and every effort should be taken to deal sensitively with the far-reaching contacts.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

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.

The Executive Head Teacher, Mr Shaun Walker and Heads of School, Jodi Ince at Blidworth Oaks, Sally Morgan at Heathlands and Emma Watson at Lake View, have overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation working alongside the Governing Body, parents/carers, and appropriate support organisations outside the school.

The Executive Head Teacher and Heads of School named above are also the designated persons with responsibility for support and liaison in the event of a death or traumatic loss.

The responsibilities of the designated people are:

- Policy review and development working with staff, governors, parents/carers, pupils.
- Reflecting on the effectiveness of the policy and practise.
- Co-ordinate the planned action to manage school related incidents in and beyond school, decide who will communicate with a family directly, who will give information to a school community.
- Establish and co-ordinate links with external agencies.
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary/secondary schools.
- Access and co-ordinate training for staff / governors.

### **Staff Support and Training**

Bereavement awareness training will be provided for all staff as necessary. Training can be accessed through a number of providers/agencies e.g. CAMHS, Education Psychology, Sherwood Area Partnership.

### **Curriculum**

Children within the Blidworth and Rainworth Primary School Partnership explore the concept of loss, bereavement and grief as part of the wider curriculum. For example, death may be discussed when learning about body changes or life cycles, as well as when discussed through art, literature and RE. Assemblies may also be used to address specific themes around death and loss e.g. Remembrance Day or commemorative occasions.

Children and young people are given opportunities to learn about, and discuss, cultural and religious issues around death and loss as well as being encouraged to express their own feelings and responses. Any questions relating to death or loss are answered in a sensitive, age-appropriate, honest and factual way. Ambiguous language is discouraged as it can lead to confusion for children (e.g. use of phrases such as 'passed away') which may lead to misunderstanding.

### **Supporting Children Through Bereavement**

Not all children will need the support of specialist practitioners, they need familiar people who care. School will offer:

- a routine and sense of normality,
- space, if needed, away from emotional intensity,
- a neutral environment to share feelings without fear of upsetting a loved one,
- time to be themselves without guilt (be with friends, play, laugh),
- regular correspondence with home, monitoring behaviour and emotional well-being,
- preparation for how they want a death to be shared in school and how they want school to respond,
- a named person identified by the child who acts as their support through grief,
- a suitable place in school for pupils to go if they feel overwhelmed,
- a coordinated response from all school staff that ensures all staff respond with understanding and awareness at the time of the bereavement and in the future,
- a planned response to transition to ensure that information is passed across schools,
- access to external agencies who may offer specialist advice and support

### **Support for Staff**

Supporting bereaved pupils can be stressful for staff who may also be dealing with their own emotions. School will offer informal, mutual support for staff to share feelings and reactions e.g. in the staffroom at the end of the day. When needed, more formal arrangements will be put in place e.g. additional support and supervision sessions with line managers. The Executive Head Teacher will make staff aware of external agencies that can support staff dealing with bereavement.

### **Transition**

Use of a Bereavement Narrative Document will allow a new staff member, or a new school, to access relevant information regarding a bereavement and will prevent children and families from repeating a narrative to different staff over time.

### **Confidentiality**

Sensitive information around a death should only be shared with the rights and needs of individuals carefully considered. Discuss with the family what information they want to share, who with and how. All disclosures should follow procedures in line with the school Safeguarding Policy.

### **Inclusion and Equality**

There are a range of cultural and religious procedures around death which schools may need to understand and respond to. This will be done by communicating with families around their own responses to a death. The 'Missing You: Helping children and young people see beyond Bereavement' publication has information for schools about religious considerations and beliefs.

### **Responding to the Media**

Some deaths attract media attention. All members of staff are advised not to respond to media, including social media, and to pass on all enquiries to the Executive Head Teacher who will make a considered response after seeking advice from the Trust/ Local Authority.

### **Death of a Pupil**

- The person receiving the news will inform the Executive Head Teacher, who will then be responsible for leading the response to the family and within school.
- The Executive Head Teacher or Heads of School will speak to the family, if possible, offer condolences and support before ascertaining what the family wish to happen. They will be given the name, email and direct contact number of the member of staff who will be point of contact.
- The Executive Head Teacher or Heads of School will try to obtain factual information. Direct contact with parents/carers may not be possible, but the family may identify a wider family member/friend to act as a point of contact for school.
- The Executive Head Teacher will notify the Trust/ Local Authority if there is a death in school at the earliest opportunity. All press enquiries are to be routed through the Executive Head Teacher, Chair of Governors and Trust/Local Authority.
- If the death is sudden, or traumatic, the Education Psychology Service may be contacted to offer support in dealing with a critical incident within a school community.
- Actions will be agreed with the parent/family member, before the school take on the role of informing concerned parties within, or outside, the school community. The school should ensure that all people who are close to the child are told in a sensitive and supportive manner rather than risk them hearing it 'on the grapevine'. The school needs to ensure it does not add to the sorrow by leaving people feeling marginalised.
- The following people should be considered:
  - Current school staff not in school that day - including therapy staff
  - Previous school staff who worked closely with the child
  - External agencies
  - Medical professionals - the school nurse for example
  - Chair of Governors
  - Before / After School Club staff
  - Other parents - if children have been informed, the school needs to communicate with parents informing them of the loss, as they may need to support or comfort their children.
- The process for telling the other pupils will be decided by the Executive Head Teacher following consultation with the Heads of School and teaching staff. This is best done in familiar groups by someone the children know. A whole school assembly is not ideal. Prepare a guide for all staff so that staff feel supported by a prompt and there is consistency of message across the school. 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 using clear language.
- A letter home to parents the same day as the children can be helpful and act as a script for parents. Include guidelines for parents on supporting bereaved children.

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- Map out the first few days – avoid disruption to the timetable where possible but be flexible if needed.
- Plan for what will happen if individual members of staff or pupils become distressed and are not able to be in a lesson.
- The Executive Head Teacher or Heads of School will ascertain the family's wishes about the funeral. The family may well welcome involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to keep things private. The Executive Head Teacher and/or the Head of School will make arrangements for the school to be represented at the funeral, and identify which staff and pupils may want to attend, together with the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport. For some schools it is appropriate to close, for others it is not, consequently difficult decisions will sometimes have to be made concerning attendance. Will flowers be sent and/or a collection made? Involve staff and pupils in the decision. Cultural and religious implications need consideration. If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed.
- Following the funeral give parents/family the opportunity to collect personal belongings. Ask when the best time would be – when children are not in school? Are there school photos, pieces of work etc that the family might like to have?
- It may be appropriate to hold a memory assembly for the child. Staff need to be able to show pupils that it is perfectly normal to feel upset at the loss of a friend, and that helpful rituals, prayers, and remembering can be shared in a manageable way together.
- Invite the family to any commemorative events held by the school at the time and in subsequent years.
- Note the date of the death in the school calendar and in next year's calendar – a message from school on the first anniversary of a death may be comforting.
- If memorial work is completed e.g. remembrance photo book, remembrance wall, this should be returned to the parents at an appropriate time and the pupils informed where it has gone.
- A member of staff may be asked to attend a Child Death Review Meeting, as part of a team of professionals who knew the child before their death.

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

All of the principles and procedures listed for death of a child apply to the death of a staff member. The Executive Head Teacher and Heads of School will support each other in practical support if needed e.g. support each other in telling staff if they feel unable to do this alone or is too distressed; support in arranging staffing.

**Appendix A**

**Bereavement Narrative and Support Plan**



This document should be used to record details of a bereavement that is significant to a child and will assist school in recording information that may be needed in order to support a child in managing grief. It should be completed with parental consent and awareness that it will be used to communicate information at the present time and in the future

<b>Bereavement Narrative</b>	
Child's name	
Date of the bereavement	
Age, school year, class teacher at time of bereavement	
Name of the person who died/ known as	
Relationship to the child	
Family structure	Parent / guardian  Siblings  other significant adults who will support
How often did the child see the person who died? (whilst this is not an indication of the feelings a child will experience it may offer an indicator of how much change to routines a child may experience)	Daily  Often  Rarely
Information about the illness/loss/death (brief summary only)	
What has the child been told about the death? (words / explanations that the family are using with the child that can be used in school to avoid confusion/contradiction)	
Date of funeral  Child's involvement in the funeral/cremation/memorial arrangements	

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Religious / cultural / spiritual considerations	
Key person identified by the child to support	

<b>Support Plan - Information gained from child/ family, to support child to create action plan</b>		
<b>Information</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Actions</b>
Do you feel you need any support in school?		
Who would you like your key supporting person to be?		
Who else could support you including other adults and children?		
Who do you feel needs to know about your bereavement?		
How much information do you wish to share? What words shall we use to talk to others?		
What are the plans for the first day back? Do you want to go straight into class or do want someone to meet you first?		
Are there any changes to routines around the school day/ after school that you want to share and school may need to know about?		
How can we support you? How often? When? Where? By whom? Safe areas to go? Mentoring? Counselling? Learning support? Time-away card If no support is requested / needed ensure that key person regularly ensures child and family are aware that support can be offered in the future		
Are there any topics or subject areas that you know may come up which might be difficult to cope with?		

**Support record – if required**

Many children do not need additional support through bereavement just the support of adults and peers who care. Some children may need additional support from a school or specialist service and often this need occurs a period of time after the bereavement. Record any additional support below

Date	Delivered by	Name of organisation if not school	Details

Provision	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
Before School					
Break					
Lunch					
After School					

<b>Future Planning</b>	
Key dates that school should be aware of	Anniversary of death Anniversary of funeral Birthday of the person who died Other (e.g. Mother's Day, Father's Day)
Will the child experience a change in routines at home now and / or into the future?	
Are there areas of the curriculum / school life that school should consider?  e.g. themes in stories, celebrations, parents evening arrangements	

**Transition**

This form holds sensitive information that should be passed on to relevant staff at transition points within school and when moving to a new school. It should be stored in the child's personal file.

## **Appendix B**

### **List of Supporting Organisations and Resources**

[www.childrensbereavementcentre.co.uk](http://www.childrensbereavementcentre.co.uk)

Children's Bereavement Centre in Newark provides bereavement support. Also lots of guides on this website around how to speak to children about death and bereavement.

[www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)

A useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community.

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

A useful website and bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/>

An organisation offering local bereavement support to both adults and children

[www.hopeagain.org.uk](http://www.hopeagain.org.uk)

Youth website of Cruse Bereavement Care

### **Books to Support Bereavement**

GRANPA John Burningham

Designed to stimulate discussion rather than to tell a story, the book has a series of scenes of a little girl and her grandad, with comments from each or both of them. At the end, she is shown staring at his empty chair, without comments. The book allows the adult to direct discussion about not only the good things that the child remembers, but also the not so happy memories.

WHEN DINOSAURS DIE L & M Brown

Charming busy anthropomorphic pictures of dinosaurs illustrate topics and questions and a range of answers about death: Saying Goodbye; Customs and beliefs about death; Why do people die? What does "dead" mean?. It is also quite acute psychologically, acknowledging that disbelief, anger, fear, and sadness are common feelings when someone dies. Attractive and appealing to children.

MY GRANDAD IS A STAR Lucy Thatcher

"Always twinkling and brightening my life from near and far, I know this to be true because my grandad is a star" A rhyming tale of love, loss and the everlasting beauty of the relationship between grandparent and grandchild. Follow along as a young girl and her grandad enjoy fun adventures and learn what it means to love your family.

FRED Posy Simmons

When Fred the cat dies, his owners Nick and Sophie attend his funeral and learn about his secret life as a famous singer. The story raises the idea of celebrating a life in a good-humoured and touching way, with entertaining pictures and not much text.

GRANDAD, I'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER YOU De Bode and Broere

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A picture book about loss and memories, and potentially a good stimulus to talk about a bereavement.

LIFETIMES the beautiful way to explain life and death to children Bryan Mellonie

This book places human life and death firmly in the natural world, and the tone is quietly reflective: "All around us everywhere, beginnings and endings are going on all the time. It may be sad, but it is the way of all things. For plants; for people; and for birds".

BADGER'S PARTING GIFTS Susan Varley

An old favourite, a charming illustrated book in which a very old and much-loved badger dies. The forest animals gather and reminisce about the important part Badger played in their lives, and as time passes memories of Badger make them smile. These memories were different for each of them, including very recognisable things like a favourite recipe or showing someone how to knot a tie - Badger's "parting gifts"

WE LOVE THEM Martin Waddell

Death is seen very much as part of life in this nicely illustrated story of life in the country, which conveys the idea that life goes on and that old creatures give way to young ones.

I'LL ALWAYS LOVE YOU Hans Wilhelm (Hodder & Stoughton, 1985)

A touching story of the love between a little boy and his dog, who have grown up together. When the dog dies, the boy says that, although he is very sad, it helps that he used to tell the dog "I'll always love you" every night. An opportunity to discuss the importance of telling how you feel. Aimed at 4 to 7 year olds and delightfully illustrated.

A BIRTHDAY PRESENT FOR DANIEL Juliet Rothman

This story of a little girl whose brother has died is intended for children aged 8-12. "A difficult subject handled very well and movingly".