



# BEESTON HALL SCHOOL

## Bereavement Policy

This policy applies to the whole school, including the EYFS.

### 1.1 Introduction

This policy is written because Beeston is a caring community, underpinned by Christian values, based on the concept of an extended family. Therefore we aim to cater for their needs of each child in a secure atmosphere where empathy is encouraged and children feel able to share.

1.2 Teachers are a very important part in the life and development of a child and they play a crucial role in responding to the life of children at home but there is and must be a clear division between the two areas, just as the teacher's private life remains separate from his or her life at school. This may become a very delicate issue in the event of a tragedy, illness, bereavement or accident which may befall a child at the school, someone with a strong link to the child or indeed a member of staff, or someone similarly linked. Equally, this incident may be intense sudden and life-changing, or simply a sad part of the journey of life.

1.3 The purpose of the Bereavement Policy is to lay out the commitment and intention for Beeston Hall School to respond in an as appropriate way as possible, and to set out guidelines for all staff to become familiar with, which is consistent with Beeston's policy of partnership between home and school,

1.4 This might be included in aspects of PSHE lessons and the ebb and flow of school life, where this is the development of trusting relationships, so that children feel able to talk and share anxieties they may have. However, it may remain entirely outside the school curriculum.

## 2 Responding to Tragedy or Bereavement

2.1 Needless to say we hope that tragedy through illness or accident will never strike at Beeston Hall School, but we must be prepared for the possibility and the following document is less a policy – because we are sensible to the fact that every circumstance will be different and we should have faith in our own innate professionalism and humanity to respond in an instinctive and intuitive way to each situation as it arises – and more a guide to help colleagues prepare for such an eventuality.

2.2 It is intended as a framework rather than something prescriptive, and that is why it should be read in advance by all staff. It aims to:

- a) Be a checklist of what to do in a crisis
- b) Improve our confidence in how best to support those people affected

- c) Help us to understand the impact of loss and help children in our care deal with bereavement and/or trauma
- d) Provide direction and resources for colleagues dealing with bereavement

### **3 Checklist**

- 3.1 Meet as a staff using this document as a starting point and obtain accurate facts about the situation. Everyone will be unique and every response different. The tragedy may be immediate and a dramatic event, over soon, yet with a long tail of effects. It may be on-going, such as a degenerative illness, with people having time to 'grow used' to a situation. It maybe private, or highly public or publicised and involved many people including police and other professionals.
- 3.2 Identify the key people who will form the 'team' within the school (this may vary according to event as well as age /gender/positions of persons involved) and allot roles and responsibilities;
- 3.3 With the family's consent, all staff to be informed (including part-time and peripatetic staff), ideally before pupils. Pupils should be told as soon as possible. This is best done in small familiar groups by someone they know.
- 3.4 A letter should go to families the same day and - if appropriate, include guidelines for parents on supporting bereaved children within the letter.
- 3.5 Liaise with Child Bereavement Charity/ Winston's Wish - check on help offered from outside is appropriate before accepting. Pupils may find it difficult to be receptive to support or counselling from families of fellow pupils.
- 3.6 Initially the school will probably benefit from continuity. Ideally we should aim for minimum disruption to the timetable, but some flexibility may be required. Provide a quiet room (e.g. Library) where an alternative activity can take place.
- 3.7 Adapt and work from template documents for letters to parents, media, other agencies. – Refer to CBC 'Schools Information Pack' for guidance.
- 3.8 If appropriate, set up a time for informal mutual support, for example, in the staffroom at the end of the school day, to give staff an opportunity to share feelings and reactions. Provide list of outside agencies for support (Appendix 1)
- 3.9 Identify pupils who may be particularly vulnerable or likely to experience PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). For example, anyone who witnessed the death.
- 3.10 Remembering: This is difficult to plan in advance, but careful thought is required. The dead person's family needs to be consulted.

### **4 In the case of a Funeral**

- 4.1 The family may well welcome involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to keep it private.

- 4.2 Identify which staff and pupils may want to attend and the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport.
- 4.3 Irrespective of other arrangements, the community will want to 'do something'.
- 4.4 HM to sound out those with closest relationship to subject and suggest and carry out a fitting memorial. (Cultural and religious implications need consideration.)

## 5 Notes to Help Teachers in the Event of a Crisis

### 5.1 Supporting a bereaved pupil

*"My Mum died and my life changed for ever. It was the biggest thing that ever happened to me and my teacher never mentioned it."*

We are often at a loss to know what to say to a child or young person who has been bereaved and what we can do to help them. They may want to avoid the topic too because you/school represent 'normality' which they want to retreat into.

The following are brief guidelines on how to offer support.

- **Check out the facts** and familiarise yourself with the circumstances surrounding the death. Communicate with the family and make sure that what you say will not conflict with the family's wishes.
- **Acknowledge what has happened** and do not be afraid to use the word dead: "I was very sorry to hear of the death of your..... " If you find words difficult you can say a lot with just a touch.
- **Children and young people need honesty.** Although sometimes difficult, it is better to answer awkward questions truthfully.
- **Be prepared to listen**, again and again and again.
- **Allow them to express emotion** and feelings and do not be afraid to share your own feelings of sadness.
- **Do talk about the dead person** and share any memories. The bereaved child may well need to do this. Ignoring the dead person is a denial that they ever existed.
- **Recognise the full tragedy.** Do not try to comfort with comments such as "at least it is not as bad as....." You might think this is helpful, it is not.
- **Reassure them that they are not responsible.** It is very common for children and young people to feel that in some way they caused the death.
- **Give bereaved pupils' time.** It may be many months before they can fully cope with the pressures of school work. Remember that they will be grieving for life and the loss will always be with them.
- **Don't assume that a lack of reaction means that they do not care.** Initially, the full reality may not have sunk in. Young people can feel that they have to be seen to be coping as a sign of maturity.
- **Try not to judge.** Grief is a very personal experience, every child and young person will do it their way.
- **Remember:** Supporting bereaved pupils will be very stressful for staff who may well be already struggling with their own reactions and emotions. See: "Looking After Yourself" (found in the complete Schools Information Pack.)

## **5.2 Understanding Loss: These are guidelines only and responses will vary, but this is useful preparation in advance to consider how to respond:**

### **2-5 Years**

Young children may be beginning to understand the concept of death, but do not appreciate its finality. Some may expect the dead person to reappear –“shall we dig granny up now?” They think in literal and concrete terms and so will be confused by euphemisms for death such as “gone away” or “gone to sleep”. Children of this age may well require repeated explanations of what has happened. As their thinking is very much centred on themselves, they may consider that something they did or said caused the death. They are prone to fantasize at this age and if not told what is happening may dream up something scarier than reality.

### **5-8 Years**

At about five years of age most children realize that dead people are different from those that are alive, that they do not feel, they cannot hear, see, smell or speak and they do not need to eat or drink. By seven years of age the majority of children accept that death is permanent and that it can happen to anyone. This can result in separation anxiety. They are more able to express their thoughts and feelings but may conceal them and outwardly appear unaffected. They need to be given an opportunity to ask questions and to be given as much information as possible to allow them to adjust. They are likely to be very interested in the rituals surrounding death.

### **8-12 Years**

At this age children’s understanding of death almost matches that of an adult, although they find it difficult to grasp abstract concepts. An important factor is their deepening realisation of the inevitability of death and an increasing awareness of their own mortality and the fear and insecurity that this can cause. The need to know details continues and may seek answers to very specific questions.

### **Adolescence**

The struggle for independence at this age may cause bereaved teenagers to challenge the beliefs and expectations of others as to how they should be feeling or behaving. Death increases anxieties about the future, they may question the meaning of life and experience depression.

## **Bereavement Policy - Appendix A - Contacts**

### *The Child Bereavement Charity*

They have an excellent ‘Schools Information Pack’ as well as a more detailed pamphlet entitled ‘Understanding Bereaved Children and Young People’

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/schools-information-pack-primary-schools>

Information and Support 0800 02 88840

Training Courses: 01494 568926

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

### *Winston’s Wish*

Resources and activities 01242 515157

Family Support Freephone line 08088 020021 (email to a bereavement counsellor)

[ask@winstonswish.org](mailto:ask@winstonswish.org)

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

## **Bereavement Policy - Appendix B – Support Ideas and Resources**

### **Time Out Cards**

The pupil is given permission to leave class if beginning to feel out of control or just to get some "personal space" when upset. A card is carried in their pocket and the pupil may leave the room without having to ask. It is important that staff are made aware to avoid embarrassing scenes for either the pupil or the teacher. It is essential that the pupil does not just wander around the school but goes to a designated place and person.

### **Pocket Comforter**

A pupil can discretely carry in their pocket a soft piece of fabric or a pebble or stone. Holding onto something solid can help a pupil to remain grounded and in control if upset. Equally, touching a piece of garment that belonged to the dead person can provide a comforting memory.

### **Secret Diary**

A way to communicate with a bereaved child who finds it difficult to verbalise feelings. The pupil leaves it somewhere mutually agreed having written or drawn whatever they wish. The teacher responds in the diary and either leaves it to be picked up or discretely returns it to the pupil.

### **Happy/Sad Faces**

The bereaved pupil has a sheet of paper/paper plate with two drawings of faces on either side, one happy, one sad. The pupil shows the side that reflects how they are feeling on a particular day. This gives the teacher an idea of how they are and therefore what approach to use.

### **I Can.....You Can...**

A series of four postcards with ideas of how others can help. Titles include TO MY TEACHER...what you can do. A helpful communication tool.

Available from The Childhood Bereavement Network Tel: 020 7843 6309

### **Childhood Bereavement: Developing the curriculum and pastoral support** by Job and Francis.

Using case studies and drawing on best practice, this resource aims to help those in schools address death, dying and bereavement from both a pastoral care and educational perspective. Available from The National Children's Bureau, Tel: 020 7843 6029 [www.ncb.org.uk](http://www.ncb.org.uk) Cost £15.50

### **Then, Now and Always** by J Stokes

Includes a chapter on enabling a school community to respond positively to a death. Good for those with pastoral care responsibilities. Available from Winston's Wish Tel:01242 515157 [www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk) Cost £15.00

### **Grief in Children: A Handbook for Adults** by A Dyregrov

A short book which looks at children's understanding of death and outlines practical ways in which adults can respond. Good as a general resource for teachers and support staff. Available from Jessica Kingsley Publishers Tel: 020 7833 2307. Cost £12.99