

Warton Nethersole's C.E. Primary School



Bereavement Policy

Policy Owner: HT and LAB

Version no: 1

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Sign off signatory: Mrs Linda Buckingham LAB Chair

We welcome children of all faiths, backgrounds and beliefs into our inclusive community. We seek inspiration from the life and teaching of Jesus Christ to help our children achieve their full potential. We uphold the distinctive Christian ethos and values of the Birmingham Multi Academy Trust (BDMAT) when making all decisions and implementing policy and practice. We aim to provide a caring and stimulating environment which promotes a love of learning whilst seeking to inspire every pupil to become a well-motivated, independent and resourceful learner.

Rationale:

Every 22 minutes in the UK a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 41,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, and, sadly, around 12,000 children die in the UK each year. Unfortunately, due to the current climate and the unprecedented threat of Covid19 to our community, we are aware that many more children and families may well experience bereavement.

At Warton, we could have individual children who are recently bereaved and struggling with their situation or our entire school community could be impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil. We hope that we will not encounter such circumstances but the statistical inevitability of such an occurrence implies the necessity of having a Bereavement Policy in place in order that we might be proactive, rather than reactive, when responding to these sensitive situations. Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children – or staff – require, though referral to more specialist support should be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex.

Objectives:

The core intentions of the policy are:

- To support pupils and their families and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and community.
- To identify key roles and responsibilities and clarify the pathway of support.
- The Children Act 1989 aimed to ensure that the welfare of the child was paramount, working in partnership with parents to protect the child from harm

(<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/section/1>). All intentions of this policy endorse that aim as we endeavour to counter any adverse effects of bereavement and maintain pupils' emotional well-being.

Roles and Responsibilities.

The role of The Local Academy Board:

- To approve the policy and ensure and monitor its implementation. This will be reviewed in three years.

The role of the Head Teacher:

- To monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.
- To respond to media enquiries after consultation with and guidance from BDMAT.
- To be first point of contact for family/child concerned.
- To allocate staff / resources within school to support the bereaved where applicable and monitor this.
- To keep The Local Academy Board fully informed.

The role of BDMAT:

- To advise and support staff. Consult on referral pathways and identification of complex grief.

The role of all teaching staff:

- To have bereavement support training.
- To support and advise the children and families using resources and training available.

Procedures:

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. A member of the SLT will prepare a response sheet for staff to use as a support. Headteacher will be the only person who responds to the Press. Headteacher will take advice from BDMAT.

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 SLT member. The Head Teacher will consider the action required, follow the agreed procedures, take notice of the

guidance and be aware of the impact on the family and child and on the school and wider community.

- Share information with school Governors and BDMAT.
- The news of the death will be given to all relevant staff as soon as possible.
- 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.

Family bereavement of a parent or close relative.

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

- The family should be contacted for appropriate support. (See Appendix 2)
- 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 will be explained
- Involve outside agencies as appropriate e.g. the school nurse, Educational Psychologist, FTB, Pause, MIND, Emotional Health and Wellbeing Practitioner, Barnardos, Winston's Wishes).

The death of a child

When the school is informed of the death of a child, the following action should be taken.:

- Head Teacher will contact parents.
- Head Teacher will meet with parents if and when appropriate.
- Head Teacher will inform the staff.
- Head Teacher will make the decision of who will inform the child's class.

Should we receive the news of a child's death, we will call appropriate colleagues together having consulted with the family of the child to ascertain their wishes,

- 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.
- Remember that the grief is shared but that it is primarily the family's grief and their wishes need to be respected.
- Encourage staff to voice their concerns they have about telling the rest of the children in the class. The class teacher will be supported during this time by the Headteacher, SENDCO, Educational Psychologist and Emotional Health Wellbeing Practitioner.
- Consider the most appropriate way of communicating the news within school, following the parent's wishes and guidelines; be that a year or small groups, or to class
- 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 with the child's parents, 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.
- If the child's parent agrees, inform parents the same day in the most appropriate way via text, website, email, phone or newsletter depending on the circumstances.
- Ensure time for corporate grieving amongst the staff and enable them to share how they feel about what has happened.
- Counselling should be available if necessary e.g. in cases of sudden or violent death (outside agencies should be involved with this e.g. Educational Psychologist). Staff and children should be supported throughout the grieving period; anyone displaying signs of stress should be offered appropriate support.
- The team around the child and family will be asked if they want to attend the funeral or memorial services should it be appropriate.

Death of a member of staff

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

Should we receive the news of the death of a member of staff; the Headteacher or SLT will call together colleagues (where possible).

We will use the guidance notes below:-

- Gather together (where possible) the staff and inform them of the news, in agreement with the family members if possible.
- Allow time for corporate grieving amongst the staff.
- Allow the staff to share how they feel about what has happened.
- Inform the teachers that they may need to address what has happened in their classes. Teacher will be provided with guidance and support on how to share the news.
- Impress on the staff what facts are to be announced to the children. 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 e.g. class or small group.
- It must be remembered that such news will be greeted with a mixture of feelings. Some will deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some may show feelings of 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 and measures will be put in place to support their mental health and wellbeing.

- Counselling should be available if necessary e.g. in cases of sudden or violent death (outside agencies should be involved with this e.g. Educational Psychologist). Staff and children should be supported throughout the grieving period; anyone displaying signs of stress should be offered appropriate support (e.g. Staff Well-being Health Assured).
- The team around the child and family will be asked if they want to attend the funeral or memorial services should it be appropriate.

Returning to school following a bereavement

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 child, staff member or member of our community returns.

- 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 and wider community) should be made aware of the situation before the child returns (providing the parents/guardians 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.
- 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.

Managing anticipated death and the terminally ill.

We acknowledge that the anticipated death of a member of our 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.

- 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.
- 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.

We acknowledge our responsibility to support adults, children and young people within our community 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:

- Confirm the facts concerning the child's sick relative or friend
- Communicate the information as appropriate (in line with school procedures and the family's wishes)
- Never give false hope to the child or young person
- Discover what the pupil has been told of the illness
- Allow the child to talk freely about the sick person in an appropriate setting e.g. with their trusted adults within school.
- Enable the pupil to talk freely daily about how he/she is feeling
- Be honest. If we do not know the answer to a question we will say so
- Not inform the child about any progression concerning the illness unless the family have given permission and requested us to do so.

Talking to the bereaved child.

- Try to be available to listen and support if possible, arrange a one-to-one session with the SENDCo/ Headteacher/ SLT as soon as possible after the child 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 e.g. "I know how you feel", (young people may feel offended that you presume how they feel).

Do

- Provide a sensitive, companionate, nurturing, safe and supporting environment.
 - Let the child know that you genuinely care
 - Make time to be available and listen throughout their time at Warton Primary School.
 - Accept all that the child is saying
 - Allow them to express their feelings their way. (Children/adults may not show any outward signs of grieving but all staff need to be mindful of their bereavement.)
 - Let them know their feelings are normal
 - Let them know that it is OK to cry or feel angry.
 - Talk honestly and share your feelings
 - Be honest. Give the news stating simple facts, use the words dead/died.
 - Have eye contact
 - Have appropriate physical contact
 - Let them know that it is not their fault
 - Be aware of the home situation
- Bereaved children may need time to grieve and manage overwhelming feelings, being able to leave a classroom and take time out in a safe space.

Do not

- 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

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.
- 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.
- We acknowledge the importance of remembering anniversaries of death.
- The child will continue to grieve for the rest of their life and may require ongoing support. Significant dates or anniversaries, Mother's/Father's Day etc... may be particularly difficult.
- Regular contact with the family/carers and reviews with the pupil will help to build up an overall picture of how the pupil is coping.

Supporting for staff who support bereaved children and colleagues

We will ensure that all staff are familiar with this policy and these procedures for responding to bereavement and will offer training as part of our staff training or resources. Whenever necessary, we will request additional support from colleagues or from external support agencies (e.g. Staff Well-being Health Assured).

Appendix 1: Suggested template for letters to parents

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.

Sample letter on death of a pupil:

Dear parents/carers,

We have some very sad news to share.

We have just learned that [name], a pupil in [year group / name of class], has died [brief details of the cause, if appropriate, e.g. in a car accident, of complications arising from the coronavirus].

We have been in contact with the family to express how sad we are about this news and to offer our support. Understandably, the family is still coming to terms with what has happened and appreciates having some privacy for now.

You can express your condolences by [insert the method requested by the family, e.g. by post, and insert an address or direct families to send condolences to the school to be forwarded to the family].

We will be in touch soon with details about:

- *How we will come together as a school to celebrate [name]'s life*
- *How we will provide support for children as they grieve*

If you have concerns about how your child is coping with this news, please contact the school and we will signpost you to appropriate support.

Thank you for your help and understanding at this difficult time.

[Sign off]

Sample letter on death of a staff member:

Dear parents/carers,

We have some very sad news to share.

We have just learned that [name], a [insert role, e.g. teacher] in [year group / name of class], has died [brief details of the cause, if appropriate, e.g. in a car accident, of complications arising from the coronavirus].

We have been in contact with the family to express how sad we are about this news and to offer our support. Understandably, the family is still coming to terms with what has happened and appreciates having some privacy for now.

You can express your condolences by [insert the method requested by the family, e.g. by post, and insert an address or direct families to send condolences to the school to be forwarded to the family].

Please share this news with your child now, so they can hear it from you rather than from their friends or through social media. We regret that we cannot be there to break the news ourselves.

We will be in touch soon with details about:

- *How we will come together as a school to celebrate [name]'s life*
- *How we will provide support for children as they grieve*

If you have concerns about how your child is coping with this news, please contact the school and we will signpost you to appropriate support.

Thank you for your help and understanding at this difficult time.

[Sign off]

Appendix 2: Resources for schools

Winston's Wish

- [Bereavement support for schools](#)
- [Talking to children about coronavirus](#)
- [How to say goodbye when a funeral isn't possible](#)
- [Supporting bereaved children with SEN](#)

Child Bereavement UK

- [Supporting a bereaved pupil](#)
- [Supporting pupils who've been affected by coronavirus](#)
- [Supporting a bereaved child in an early years setting](#)
- [Supporting a bereaved pupil in a primary school](#)
- [Supporting a bereaved student in secondary school](#)

Child Bereavement UK together with London Grid for Learning (LGfL):

[Managing a sudden death in the school community](#) – includes advice on managing social media and media relations.

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/home.aspx>

Appendix 3: Resources for schools

Books dealing with death and loss (also check the 'purple box' kept in the library)

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

Appendix 4 -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 5
Developmental Stages relating to an understanding of death

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