



Full Governors

08.07.26

Signed 

Bereavement Policy

Statement of intent

At Portway Infant School, we understand that bereavement is faced by members of our school community at different times, whether this is the death of a family member, a friend or a member of the school community. We understand the importance of providing support to children, staff, governors and the wider school community during and after bereavement.

This policy provides a framework whereby this support is provided and outlines how the school will respond to these sensitive situations.

In this policy, all mentions of 'the family' refer to the family of the deceased individual. The wishes of the family will always be considered when carrying out any of the actions outlined in this policy. If the family objects to any of the procedures, the school will work to ensure reasonable adjustments are made.

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Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Children's Act 1989
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Equality Act 2010
- DFE 'Keeping children safe in education'
- Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (2018) 'Good Work Plan'
- The Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay Regulations 2020
- Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act 2018
- Paternity Leave (Bereavement) Act 2024

The policy has been created with due regard to the following guidance:

- Winston's Wish 'A Guide to Supporting Grieving Children and Young People in Education'
- Winston's Wish 'A Strategy for Schools: Positive Responses to Death'
- Samaritans 'Help When We Need it Most'
- Child Bereavement UK 'Schools' Information Pack'

The policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Anti-bullying
- Attendance
- Behaviour
- Contracted staff leave of absence for short periods
- Child Protection and Safeguarding
- Disciplinary
- Emotionally Healthy Schools
- SEMH

Roles and responsibilities

The governing body will be responsible for:

- Overseeing the implementation of the policy.
- Reviewing this policy with the Headteacher every 3 years to ensure its effectiveness.

The Headteacher will be responsible for:

- The overall implementation of this policy.
- Liaising with external agencies, as appropriate.
- Informing governors and staff when a death occurs and arranging for children to be informed, as appropriate and with approval from the family.
- Being the first point of contact for staff, children and parents directly involved in a death, or designating this role to another appropriate member of staff.
- Responding to any enquiries from the media or the wider school community
- Ensuring staff have the necessary training (available from Winston's Wish) to support bereaved children and to deliver sensitive news.
- Liaising with the media as required.
- Respecting the family's wishes in relation to what information can be provided to the media.

All staff members will be responsible for,

- Undertaking any bereavement support training arranged by the headteacher
- Seeking support as appropriate
- Supporting their colleagues and children following a death, as appropriate

The initial response

If the family or member of staff contacts the school to inform them of a death, the member of staff that answers the phone will transfer the call to the headteacher or the most senior member of staff available.

If the school is made aware of the death through a source other than the family, the headteacher will contact the family either by phone or through a home visit.

The headteacher will gather factual information about what has happened and establish the family's wishes with regards to what information will be communicated to the school community and how.

If the death affects the entire school, e.g., the death of a child or member of staff, the headteacher will inform the family that the staff and children will be informed as soon as possible.

If the death affects an individual member of staff, e.g., the death of a relative, the headteacher will ask the member of staff if they would like this to be communicated to any of their colleagues. If it is decided that the death will be communicated, the headteacher will discuss with the staff member what information will be communicated and how they would like it to be delivered.

If the death affects an individual child, e.g., the death of a parent, the headteacher will ask the family if they would like this to be communicated to the school community. If it is decided that the death will be communicated, the headteacher will discuss with the family, and the child, if possible, what information will be communicated and how the family would like it to be delivered.

If the death of a child's family member occurs while the child is at school, a member of the child's family will be asked to come to the school to inform the child of what has happened and to take them home. If this is not possible, arrangements will be made for a member of staff to take the child home.

The headteacher will make contact with any other agencies as required e.g., the police.

The headteacher will decide if any temporary variation needs to be made to the school timetable.

In the event of the death of the headteacher, with the support of the governing body and following the agreement of the assistant headteacher, the assistant headteacher will be responsible for the duties outlined above.

Informing staff and governors

Staff and governors will be informed of the death before the children. All staff and governors will either receive an individual phone call or be called to a meeting by the headteacher as soon as is practicable.

Absent staff and governors, including part-time staff, will be identified so that they can be informed as soon as possible. If it is not possible for absent staff to be told in person, a phone call will be arranged.

Any information provided to the staff and governors during the meeting will have prior approval from the family.

During the meeting the headteacher will use their discretion and,

- Allow time for staff and governors to discuss what has happened and how they feel. Identify what internal and external support is available to staff and governors.
- Discuss the arrangements for informing children, including whether children will be told and who will be responsible for informing them.

The school will liaise with the family where appropriate.

Informing children

The headteacher will have a discussion with the family about whether all ~~childs~~ need to be informed about the death.

If the death affects the whole school, e.g., the death of a staff member or ~~child~~, the headteacher will strongly recommend to the family that the parents should be informed so that they can have the conversation at a level they feel appropriate with their children. If the death does not affect the whole school, it may be appropriate to just inform certain groups of children. The headteacher will make the final decision regarding which children will be informed.

Childs will be given time in school to ask questions about what has happened and to talk about how they are feeling. Any questions asked by children will be answered factually.

Informing parents

The headteacher will discuss with the family about whether the parents need to be informed about the death.

If the death affects the whole school the headteacher will strongly recommend to the family that all parents should be informed so that they can speak to their children in a way they feel appropriate. However, if the death does not affect the whole school, it may be more appropriate to just inform parents that are directly affected.

A letter will be sent to parents about the death. The letter will contain the basic, factual information about the death, information about how the school is supporting children, how they can support their children, and who to direct questions or concerns to.

Funerals

If appropriate the headteacher will discuss with the family whether any staff, governors or children are able to attend the funeral. With the family's approval, the headteacher will arrange for the school to be represented at the funeral and identify which staff and children may want to attend.

The headteacher and chair of governors will decide if it is necessary for the school to be fully or partially closed. Necessary cover arrangements will be made for staff attending the funeral.

The media and social media

Any communication with the media or social media activity will be agreed with the family.

Only the appointed media spokesperson (through the Local Authority - LA) will deal with media enquiries and communications. Staff and governors will not respond to any media enquiries themselves or make any public statements about the death.

Staff and governors will not post any information about the death on social media. If information about the death is circulated on social media prior to the school making an official statement, the headteacher will release a statement on the school's social

media channels, with the agreement of the family, to prevent rumours from spreading.

Comments and other activities on school-posted social statements will be monitored by the headteacher. If staff or governors find any false, negative or malicious information being posted about the death on social media, they will report this to the headteacher.

If a member of staff is found to have been posting content on social media or providing information to the media that is false, negative or malicious, action will be taken in line with the Disciplinary Policy.

Support for the family

The headteacher will be the main point of contact between the school and the family, or will appoint another member of staff to this role where necessary. The headteacher will invite the family into the school or visit their home to discuss how the school can best support them. The family's wishes and feelings will always be considered and respected when making decisions and conducting activities relating to the death. Any support that is put in place will be on a case-by-case basis, depending on the family's needs and wishes.

Support could include the following:

- Sending a letter of condolence
- Giving the family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died.
- Inviting the family to commemorative events held by the school.

Support for staff

Staff directly affected by the death, e.g., if they are a relative or close friend of the individual that has died, will be identified and the appropriate support will be put in place. The level of support will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the headteacher, and may include the following:

- Ensuring the staff member is not left on their own.
- Arranging for lessons and/or other duties to be covered.
- Organising bereavement leave.

Staff members will be given information about any in-school and external support they can access. A designated room will be made available to staff where they can go during break and lunchtimes to meet with other staff and share their thoughts and feelings. Staff will be vigilant to the signs that indicate their colleagues have been affected by bereavement and will offer them support or make a referral to the headteacher.

Support for children

Children who have experienced a significant bereavement, e.g., of a family member

A member of staff that is familiar with the child will be appointed to act as their main point of contact – the child will be made aware of who the staff member is. The headteacher will contact the child's family to discuss whether the child will be attending school.

When deciding what support will be put in place for a child, the impact the death will have on the child will always be considered in the context of pre-existing factors.

The following contextual factors will be considered:

- The circumstances surrounding the death, e.g., was it under traumatic circumstances, was the death expected etc.
- The relationship between the child and the person who has died.
- The ability of the child's family to support them following the death, e.g., if a child's parent has died, how able is the surviving parent able to support the child?
- Family factors such as size, financial state, structure, style of coping, communication and stressors that affect the child.
- The support the child has from their peers and other organisations and people.
- Characteristics of the child, including their age and any SEND they have.

The child will be a part of discussions regarding who should be informed about the death and how, where appropriate and following discussions with the family.

Where the child attends the school immediately after a bereavement, they will be allowed a flexible timetable and staff members made aware that the child may not work to their usual capacity. The designated member of staff will keep in communication with the child's family to inform them how the child is doing.

If the child is absent from school following the bereavement, the designated member of staff will make regular contact with the child during their absence. The headteacher, designated staff member and child's family will make arrangements for the child's return to school, e.g., a phased return.

Any safeguarding concerns regarding the bereaved child will be dealt with in line with Child Protection and Safeguarding policy.

Support for all children

All children, even those not directly affected by the death, may need to be supported following a death, particularly if the death affects the whole school community. Children will be given the opportunity to speak to a member of staff that they feel comfortable with.

Staff will talk to children about what has happened using age-appropriate and developmental stage appropriate language.

Following a death in the school community, children will be invited to take part in remembrance activities.

Staff will identify any children that may need more direct support and make a referral to the headteacher who will assess what support might be required.

Behaviour and SEMH issues

Staff will remain vigilant to the following behaviours that a child may display immediately after the death of someone close to them,

- Inability to concentrate
- Lack of motivation
- Tiredness and irritability
- Heightened sensitivity to comments and remarks
- Inability to take others' feelings into account
- Anger, frustration or aggression

- A general change in behaviour, e.g., becoming unnaturally quiet or withdrawn
- Anxiety
- Being easily upset by events that would normally be trivial to them
- Physical complaints, such as headaches, stomach aches and a general tendency to be prone to minor illness

The child's designated staff member will keep in contact with the child's family and share information about how the child is behaving at school and home.

Where possible, staff will endeavour to be mindful of anniversaries and days with regards to the death which may act as a trigger for challenging behaviour.

Any incidents of bullying, where the bereaved child is the victim or perpetrator, will be addressed in line with the anti-bullying policy, taking into account the child's needs and circumstances.

All staff members will remain vigilant to signs that a bereaved child is facing difficulties in relation to their psychological, physical and social development and will refer the child to the headteacher who will put appropriate support in place.

The school's SEMH and Emotional Healthy school's policies will be followed to ensure children that may be vulnerable to developing SEMH issues following bereavement can be identified and appropriately supported.

Specific circumstances

The procedures outlined in this policy will be followed for all deaths affecting the school community and individual child; however, specific measures will be implemented for certain circumstances.

- **Pre-bereavement – when a family member is not expected to live**
If a child has an illness where they are not expected to live, their family will make the school aware of the situation and the school will ensure appropriate support is in place.

All staff will remain vigilant to signs that the child is facing challenges in relation to their psychological, physical and social development and will refer any concerns to the headteacher who will ensure appropriate support is in place.

Children with life-threatening illnesses will be encouraged to take part in school routines as much as possible, and the school will continue to expect the usual standard of behaviour as appropriate.

The headteacher, the child (where appropriate) and their family will decide how to share the news that a child is terminally ill with the school community. Other children will be informed about how they can best support the child in the most appropriate way.

If the child is receiving treatment from a local hospice or hospital, the key professional will be identified and the headteacher will contact the person for advice and support as necessary.

- **Suicide**

All causes of death will be treated in the same manner

- **Cultural and religious behaviours**

The school will keep in mind the cultural attitudes and behaviours relating to a death and will make sure these needs are taken into consideration when putting support in place for those affected, including the length of bereavement leave for members of staff.

- **Armed Forces**

The needs and feelings of bereaved forces' children will always be considered prior to any school activities relating to the armed forces, e.g., commemorating Armed Forces Day, and additional support will be put in place for children as required.

- **A death involving murder or manslaughter**

The headteacher will contact the police or the family to establish the facts about what happened. A designated staff member will be available to talk to the child to help them to answer any questions they may get from their peers about what happened.

Research shows that children who have been bereaved due to murder or manslaughter can be at significant risk of developing PTSD. Any concerns relating to the child will be addressed in line with the SEMH and Emotionally Healthy Schools policies.

Remembrance activities

Following a death in the school community, the school may conduct some remembrance activities. The family will always be consulted prior to any remembrance activities being planned and will be invited to take part in the activities.

All members of the school community, including staff, governors, children and parents, will be invited to take part in remembrance activities.

All remembrance activities will be planned so that they are respectful of the culture and religious beliefs of the family.

Managing transitions

Information about children that have been bereaved will be recorded. This information will be shared with relevant parties at key transition points, including the following,

- If a child moves school
- When the child moves to junior school
- If the child moves class
- When the child will be taught by a new teacher

Teaching about bereavement and grief

Different aspects of the curriculum will be used to discuss relationships, feelings and emotions, and to think about how to manage these in relation to family events and death. This will be done in line with the SEMH and Emotionally Healthy Schools policies.

Before delivering any lesson that covers topics of death and bereavement, the teacher will consider how the lesson may affect the bereaved child they are teaching. Any lessons covering topics of death or bereavement will take account of religious and cultural beliefs.

Staff training

If any members of staff are not confident in delivering some level of bereavement support to children or other staff members, or in implementing this policy, they will speak to the headteacher who will arrange for the staff member to undergo appropriate training.

Lisa McSherry
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