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# MAST Bereavement Guidance

Date last reviewed:

November 2023

## BEREAVEMENT GUIDANCE

One of the most difficult jobs we face can be managing and supporting those who have been bereaved. The aim of this guidance is therefore to:

- Outline how the death of a member of the school community will be managed.
- Identify best practices for supporting pupils and/or members of staff experiencing bereavement.

## MANAGING A BEREAVEMENT

In terms of breaking the news of a death, contact should be made to the family of the bereaved by the Principal or other Senior Leader in the first instance. This contact should express sorrow for the bereavement and support on behalf of the school as well as discussing if and how the news can be shared with the wider school community, including agreement on what facts can be disclosed, and with whom. The family may also wish others to know if or when contact from others would be acceptable.

If there is a need for interaction with the media this process should be managed by the Principal in conjunction with Executive Leaders. There may also be a requirement for the Principal to participate in multi-agency meetings relating to the death.

Staff should then be informed, as appropriate. Where a child has died, identified staff members may be nominated to inform the parents/carers of close friends. These conversations may take place ahead of the knowledge being made known to the wider community so a note of discretion may be needed. Any arrangements regarding contact with the family may also need passing on.

There may be a need to share information with a group of children or staff by letter. Again, this should be discussed and agreed with the family of the bereaved.

At this time, the type of remembrance ceremonies that might otherwise have taken place may not be possible. However, there are some activities which children and/or adults might want to undertake to support the bereaved child or family including:

- Making drawings, writing letters or creating a music playlist which can be submitted to an adult, who can then arrange for these to be passed on to the bereaved child or family
- Setting up an online fundraiser in memory of the deceased (with the family's permission).

There may be a need to provide support to those affected by bereavement and to carefully consider how their return to school or work is managed. Adults will be supported through the systems and processes within the MLT Leave of Absence Policy. There may be a need for a gradual return which for children is undertaken in partnership with their family.

If a child is still struggling with their emotions following a period of time since the bereavement, it may be worth speaking to safeguarding officers to seek additional support for them. If an adult is similarly struggling, they can be signposted to the Westfield EASE programme of support or MAST by their line manager.

## PROVIDING SUPPORT

The experience of bereavement is unique to each individual; there is no set timeframe for coming to terms with a death and everyone has different support needs. Those who have been bereaved may exhibit a range of emotions and behaviours as they begin to process their grief. While it can be difficult at times to know what to say, it is usually better to acknowledge that a death has occurred rather than ignore it. For those who seem to be handling it well, it is still worth checking in with them over a period of weeks to ensure they are feeling well and coping. It may also be necessary to be aware of anniversaries and milestone dates.

These are some principles for supporting those who have been bereaved:

- **Listen and validate** – Let the bereaved person know that whatever they're feeling, it is normal and understandable. Many people feel guilty that they aren't crying all the time – this is normal too.
- **Acknowledge their fears** – Children's fears especially, no matter how irrational, are real. It is important not to undermine these fears. Those who have been bereaved need to know that they can trust the person they confide in to take their feelings seriously.
- **Reassure, but only as much as you can do so honestly** – Children particularly are often afraid of other family members dying as well. It's unhelpful to try to calm someone's fears by saying that won't happen when it already has, and it can also diminish trust. It would be better to acknowledge the possibility but counter with facts about how rare this is.
- **Check their understanding** – Children particularly can be very literal, and what might seem obvious to us may not be so clear to them. As you talk to them, regularly check that they understand what you've said. Use clear, unambiguous language wherever possible.
- **Share your own feelings** – It's perfectly reasonable to let others know that you're also sad and upset; it can help to reassure them that what they feel is normal. However, avoid phrases such as 'I know how you're feeling' as this moves the focus away from them and onto you, and devalues their own experience of bereavement.

## BEING SUPPORTED

If you are in the position of supporting another person with bereavement, it is important that you have a support network too. Supporting the mental health of another person, particularly around bereavement can be mentally draining. Make sure that you are checking in regularly with your line manager and looking after your own mental health.

If you are worried about a colleague who has been bereaved, or who is struggling with the demands of supporting another person who has been bereaved, speak to your line manager or contact HR so that additional support can be considered.

You may also find it useful to watch the 'Bereavement and Loss' video produced by Rotherham Educational Psychology Service during the COVID-19 pandemic:

<https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/download/245/training-to-support-staff-through-the-covid-19-crisis-bringing-safety-and-hope>

Rotherham Educational Psychology also provide a critical incident prompt sheet.

## RESOURCES

Amparo Listening Ear: <https://amparo.org.uk/refer/>

Child Bereavement UK: [https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Winstons Wish:](https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Winstons_Wish)  
<https://www.winstonswish.org/>

Cruse Bereavement Care: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/>

Winstons Wish School Information Pack:  
[file:///C:/Users/admin/Documents/Returning%20to%20school%20-%20Covid-19/Bereavement/resource\\_beareavement-and-loss-assembly-plans.pdf](file:///C:/Users/admin/Documents/Returning%20to%20school%20-%20Covid-19/Bereavement/resource_beareavement-and-loss-assembly-plans.pdf)

NHS: Grief After Bereavement or Loss: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/coping-with-bereavement/>

NHS: Children and Bereavement: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/children-and-bereavement/>

Papyrus: [Papyrus UK Suicide Prevention | Prevention of Young Suicide \(papyrus-uk.org\)](https://www.papyrus-uk.org/)

The Samaritans Step by Step team Freephone: 0808 168 2528  
<https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/step-step/contact-step-step-team/>

SOBS National support line: 0300 111 5065  
[Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide – Overcoming the isolation of people bereaved by suicide \(uksobs.org\)](https://www.uksobs.org/)

Suicide Bereavement UK [Immediate Support Resources - Suicide Bereavement UK](https://www.suicidebereavementuk.org/)

## REFERENCES

The Key for School Leaders: [Bereavement policy: model and examples | The Key Leaders \(thekeysupport.com\)](https://www.thekeysupport.com/)

Tes online: <https://www.tes.com/news/how-support-bereaved-children-comprehensive-guide>