

# **Gorse Hall Primary and Nursery School**



## **Bereavement and loss policy**

**Date: November 2021**

**Review Date: November 2023**

## **1. Introduction**

The main aim of this policy is to provide a framework for all staff, both teaching and nonteaching, to give guidance on how to deal sensitively and compassionately in difficult and upsetting circumstances.

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

- Winston's Wish (2019) 'A Guide to Supporting Grieving Children and Young People in Education'
- Winston's Wish (2019) 'A Strategy for Schools: Positive Responses to Death'
- Salford and Tameside Educational Psychology Service (2020) 'Guidance for Educational Settings on Supporting Those Bereaved during Covid-19'

## **2. Aims**

At Gorse Hall Primary and Nursery School we aim to meet the needs of all children and staff. When home circumstances are changed because of a death in the family and all around is 'different', our school aims to be a place on which both child and family can rely and gain some much needed support. If the death is of a child or member of staff, the whole school community will work together; with outside agencies as appropriate, to support each other.

## **3. Roles and responsibilities:**

### The role of the Head teacher

- To have overall responsibility for the implementation of the policy
- To liaise with external agencies as appropriate.
- To respond to media enquiries as appropriate. Where necessary, guidance from LEA will be sought.
- To be first point of contact for family/child concerned or nominate a familiar key adult if more appropriate for family
- To inform all staff and arrange for the children to be informed, as appropriate, in line with the family's wishes.
- To keep the governing body up to date and fully informed as appropriate.

### The role of nominated lead

- To oversee bereavement work
- To share key messages about support following a bereavement with all staff in setting
- To support key adults who are liaising with families.
- To undertake head teacher's responsibilities if directed.
- To provide or direct staff to Bereavement training.

### The role of Staff

- To support the Head teacher and nominated lead in carrying out the procedures outlined in this policy.
- To support staff, children and parents following a death, as directed by the Head teacher.
- To support other staff members with communicating the news of a death.

- Where necessary, to make referrals for children, staff and other members of the school community to receive support and counselling.
- Where requested, undertake bereavement support training and share this knowledge with all other staff members.

### The role of Governors

- To ensure the policy is implemented.
- To offer support to families if appropriate.

### The role of the Local Authority

- To advise and support staff.
- To provide pastoral staff e.g. counsellors

## **4. Procedures**

Within school we work in partnership with parents. When children join the school, we find out as much as possible about every child to tailor the academic, social and emotional teaching in school to match their needs. Parents are encouraged to make teachers aware of any previous changes that might have profoundly affected their child (divorce, bereavement, moving, new babies etc.). If there has been bereavement, information on what the child was told should be sought, in order that the school does not say anything that could confuse or upset the child or family. Through our PSHE curriculum, children are taught how to prepare and cope with loss.

### Family Bereavement

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

- The family should be contacted by the Headteacher, the Nominated Lead or a familiar key adult who knows the family well. The family can be offered appropriate support. See **Appendix 1** for addresses and relevant telephone help lines. These resources are also accessible on the school website.
- The key adults should contact the family to acknowledge the death and pass on their condolences, initially by telephone. Information should be sought so as to support the family as appropriate and to consider and respect their wishes as to who the news should be shared with. See **Appendix 2** to help guide the conversation.
- It should be explained to the family how the school can be involved to support the child and family. **Appendix 3** can be used to gather important information.
- Involve outside agencies as appropriate e.g. health workers, Educational Psychological Service, Healthy Young Minds).
- If agreed with the family, a letter will be sent to the child. (**Appendix 4**). If circumstances differ, this may be sent via email.
- Work with the family on the best way to support a child or staff member on their return to school/work.
- Consider cultural differences.

For a member of staff experiencing close family bereavement, absence will be arranged for attendance at a funeral and appropriate time off discussed. Additional time may be given through sick leave as appropriate.

### **Death of a child or member of staff**

When the school is informed of the death of a child or member of staff, the following action should be considered:

- 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. **(Appendix 2)**
- The headteacher or nominated Lead will consider how best to share with the school community. This may be through a whole school assembly or as a class depending on the wishes of the family. The information should be factual, clear and consistent. Pupils and staff should be offered support after the news if needed.
- Counselling should be available if necessary e.g. in cases of sudden or violent death (outside agencies should be involved with this e.g. Salford and Tameside Psychological Service).
- The school may be closed, or as many people as possible released to attend a funeral or memorial services should it be appropriate and they wish to do so.
- Staff and children should be supported throughout the grieving period; anyone displaying signs of stress should be offered appropriate support.
- Pupils and staff may express a wish to attend, or take part in the service, but they should only do so with the prior agreement of the deceased's family, relatives or next of kin, as well as the agreement of their own parents/carers.
- The class most affected might like to write down their thoughts and feelings; these could then be given to the bereaved family to assist in the planning of the service.
- After the service, staff and pupils should be encouraged to meet and express their thoughts and feelings as such services are important in the grieving process.

### **Terminally ill Pupils/Staff**

- 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.

### **Return to School**

- 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, volunteers if appropriate and pupils) should be made aware of the situation before the pupil 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, yet disciplined.
- Family life at this traumatic time, can be particularly distressing, routines upset, relationships strained, and 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.
- Staff will consider using a range of resources to support the pupil (memory box, memory book). Refer to 'A Guide to supporting Grieving children and Young People in Education' – Winston's Wish.
- Pupils can be offered stories that support bereavement (**Appendix 5**).

### **Talking to the Bereaved Pupil**

- Try to be available to listen and support if possible, arrange a one-to-one session with the Nominated Lead or Key Adult as soon as possible after the pupil 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.

### **Do**

- Let the child know that you genuinely care
- Make time to be available and listen
- Accept all that the child is saying
- Allow them to express their feelings their way
- Let them know their feelings are normal
- Let them know that it is OK to cry
- Talk honestly and share your feelings
- Be honest
- Have eye contact
- Have appropriate physical contact
- Let them know that it is not their fault
- Be aware of the home situation

## **Don't**

- 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

School should take into account the developmental stages relating to children's understanding of death. **(Appendix 6)**

## **Factors that Affect Response**

### **Child**

- Relationship with deceased person
- Past experience of loss
- Resilience
- Developmental level and SEN

### **Environment**

- Home and family/community
- Support from family/community
- Faith and cultural perspectives

### **Circumstances**

- Opportunities to express grief
- How the news was given
- Covid-19

### **Extra stresses**

- Routines suddenly changed
- Adults so upset they are not available to support children
- New situations to deal with (e.g. funerals, moving house/schools)
- They are asked to be different (e.g. be quiet, be helpful, be good)

## **Covid-19 Related deaths**

For guidance on supporting those bereaved during Covid -19 **(Appendix 7)**.

**Appendix 1**  
**Bereavement resources for parents**

**Helpline telephone numbers:**

**Winston's Wish**  
(08088 020 021)

**Child Bereavement UK**  
(0800 02 888 40)

**Websites with information and guidance for schools and families to support bereaved children:**

**Winston's Wish**

<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-supporting-bereaved-children-and-young-people/>

*Coronavirus: information and guidance for supporting bereaved children and young people.*

<https://www.winstonswish.org/telling-a-child-someone-died-from-coronavirus/>

*Information and scripts to use if someone the child knows has died from Covid-19.*

<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-funerals-alternative-goodbyes/>

*Saying goodbye when children cannot attend the funeral.*

**Child Bereavement UK**

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=bc9f3d7d-7b43-421a-8ed4-4335f9c23b35>

*Downloadable information sheet with tips for supporting bereaved children through difficult times.*

*Get in touch via our Helpline on [0800 02 888 40](tel:08000288840) | [helpline@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:helpline@childbereavementuk.org) or Live Chat via this website and we can help you find the support that suits your needs.*

*Child Bereavement UK also have a drop-in facility for families and professionals in the Salford Royal Hospital on the fourth Thursday of each month.*

*Contact email [sarah.smith@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:sarah.smith@childbereavementuk.org) or [salforscancerinfo@srft.nhs.uk](mailto:salforscancerinfo@srft.nhs.uk) .*

**CRUSE**

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

*Support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies.*

**Gaddum**

*Gaddum provides a needs-led therapeutic service for Manchester and Salford children and families. The Gaddum Centre offers Children's Bereavement Counselling and works with*

individuals following a bereavement. Initially it has to be a young person who is referred. Once that referral has been accepted, they can also provide support to the adults who are caring for the child or young person.

<https://www.gaddumcentre.co.uk/> - **limited services at present. Contact via website or 0161834 6069 to access support and services.**

**Appendix 2: A conversation guide for first responders to bereavements, tragic news and critical incidents (Guidance from Salford and Tameside Psychology Service)**

This document provides some additional guidance for those who may be responding to bereavements, tragic news and critical incidents, either in person or by other methods of communication (e.g. by telephone). This document should be read alongside the 'Guidance for Educational Settings on Supporting Those Bereaved During Covid-19, Salford and Tameside Educational Psychology Service' that has been circulated to educational settings.)

- This conversation requires a calm, steady, quiet and sensitive approach. It will be important to allow the person to tell their story, and to listen.
- You might want time to take a breath and steady yourself. It is okay to ask for a pause, for example to get something to note down contact details and important information.
- Demonstrate that you are listening through occasional gentle responses. These could be empathetic sounds or short phrases like "Oh I'm so sorry", "I'm listening", "Take your time".
- Leave pauses so that the caller does not feel hurried and has time to gather their thoughts.
- Allow the caller to tell their story in their words and in their own time and avoid asking questions.
- You can check that you have heard and understood by paraphrasing back, for example "You said that he died at home last night, is that right?" and again leave pauses so that the caller can correct you.
- When the conversation reaches a natural break, explain that you need to take clear notes of the important information.
- It may become apparent that there are additional complexities and/or that there is likely to be an impact on the wider community. Therefore, it might be important to obtain as much accurate, factual information about the critical incident as possible. Bear in mind that it is very easy for rumours to spread. Uncertainty or misinformation can greatly add to distress levels, create confusion and will take time and effort to correct.
- Before ending the call, check that you have collected sufficient factual information and the personal and contact details of the person you are talking to. The table on page 2 may provide a guide for the sort of information it might be helpful for first responders to gather.
- After alerting others it is important that you give yourself time to process the information and your own thoughts and feelings before getting back to work. It may be helpful to share your reaction with a colleague. Please refer to the checklist on page 3 for suggested steps to take to meet your own needs after responding.

### Appendix 3: Template for gathering information

Gorse Hall Primary and Nursery School	
	
First or given name:	Surname:
Position:	Relationship with the person or family affected:
Who has called?	
What happened?	
What is the nature of the incident?	
When did it happen?	
Who has been affected? For example, note the names and ages of children attending the school	

Who else has been contacted?	
Who else is offering support?	
What else is it important for you to tell us?	
Contact details for getting in touch later:	

#### Appendix 4: Template letter



Dear Bobby,

I am so sorry that your grandma has died.

I am wondering how you are feeling. It might be a strange and confusing time for you. All feelings are normal and OK. There is no right way to feel when someone has died.

I am thinking about you. Mr Fish, Miss Dean and Mrs Kazemi are thinking about you too. I will be thinking about your kindness, because I've noticed how caring and helpful you are to the younger children on the playground. I will also be thinking about your wonderful singing voice. At the moment, you might feel like singing sometimes, and sometimes you might not. I am looking forward to hearing you singing in assembly when we are all back together in school.

I plan to phone you and your family, to find out more about how you are doing. You can choose whether you would like to speak to me.

I hope to speak to you soon.

Best wishes,

Miss Flood

## **Appendix 5: Stories to support bereavement**

As Big As It Gets - Supporting a Child when Someone in their Family is Seriously Ill - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley  
Muddles, Puddles, and Sunshine – Diana Crossley  
We all Grieve (for children with SEND) – Winston’s Wish  
The Secret C - Straight Talking about Cancer - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley I Miss You -  
First Look at Death - Pat Thomson  
Sad Isn't Bad: A Good-grief Guidebook for Kids Dealing with Loss Michaelene Mundy  
Beyond the Rough Rock - Supporting a Child who has been Bereaved through Suicide -  
Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley  
The Goodbye Boat - Mary Joslin  
Extra Special: For When Someone You Love Dies - Anna Payne  
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 6: Development stages relating to children’s understanding of death**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Understanding</b>
< 2 years	No cognitive understanding Fear of separation
3-5 years	Magical thinking Vaguely associated with sleep
6-7 years	May be some magical thinking Death is final Personification of death
8-11 years	Realise it can happen to them Lack full understanding Perhaps more anxiety, bravado, jokes Want to know all the details
Adolescence	Understand death in a logical manner Ask more questions

## Appendix 7: Responding to bereavements during Covid-19

### Things to do to prepare for bereavements during Covid-19

- Have a small team of nominated leads who can take responsibility for sharing key messages with staff about the principles of how to support children with loss and grief and co-ordinate responses to bereavements e.g. supporting members of staff who are acting as key adults when contacting bereaved families. This means there will always be a nominated lead available to oversee bereavement support work for families and staff if some of the nominated leads are affected by their own bereavements. The nominated leads can be supported by the EPS through group consultations. It is also suggested that all school staff take time to familiarise themselves with the information, advice and guidance provided on the Winston's wish website: (<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus/>).
- Consider which staff members might take up a role as a key adult and point of contact for bereaved children and families; this would usually be the head teacher or someone that knows the family well. Guided by one of the nominated leads, a key adult should be prepared to support the family to make decisions about how best to support their child, including how to talk to them about the loss and mourning processes.
- Have a notice on your website or email to prepare parents for your bereavement protocol.
- Invite parents to let school know if they are impacted by a loss; explain how they can do so.
- Let families know what you will then do e.g. identify a key person to maintain contact with the family/ send the child a letter/ card/ let other members of the school community know who might be impacted or want to support the grieving child or family.
- Organise a virtual book of condolences for relevant school community members to sign.
- Plan a memorial assembly for when the children are back in school to remember lost loved ones.
- Make sure class teachers are made aware of children impacted by a loss so they can welcome them back to school appropriately when the time comes.

## Responding to bereavements during Covid-19

Your setting's response to Covid-19 related bereavement can be viewed as being at one of three levels, depending on the impact on your setting's community:



<b>Level 3: Bereavement/s that impact the whole setting and wider community and where there are additional complexities and safeguarding concerns.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Contact Claire Jackson / Rona Taylor and EPS inbox (see pg. 11 for contact details)</li><li>• EPS will be part of a multi-agency response</li></ul>
<b>Level 2: Bereavement/s impacting a large proportion of the community around the setting. This is likely to be through a cluster of bereavement and loss issues.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Contact school EP and EPS inbox</li><li>• Initial support over telephone and follow up virtual meeting</li></ul>
<b>Level 1: Bereavement impacting a small number of people e.g. one family, one member of staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Refer to Bereavement Guidance document for best practice guidelines</li><li>• Contact school EP and EPS inbox if follow up required</li></ul>

Following your preparation, we envisage that in most cases, settings will have the skills and experience to respond to bereavements at level 1 themselves. Best practice guidelines at level 1 are provided below. For further information about best practice at levels 2 and 3 and how the EPS can support you at each level, see Appendix.

**Best practice at level 1 is likely to include:**

- Selecting a familiar key adult who will be the main point of contact between the education setting and family or staff member; this would usually be the head teacher or someone that knows the family well. They may need to talk through their role with one of the nominated leads.
- The key adult should contact the family or staff member to acknowledge the death and pass on their condolences, initially by phone. You could ask how family members are and how they are coping. Consider recommending contacting Winston's Wish (08088 020 021) or Child Bereavement UK helpline (0800 02 888 40) if they wanted to speak to somebody about their bereavement. Ask if there are other people school should share the news with;
- The key adult should support the family to talk to their child about loss and mourning processes.
- Support the family to make decisions about how best to support their child. Do this collaboratively, drawing on the family's knowledge of their child and the unique circumstances of their family situation and your knowledge of general principles of supporting bereaved children.

- Check with the family that it would be okay to send a letter to the child. Due to guidance related to physical distancing, restrictions on movement and concerns that people might have about sending and receiving post at this time, a letter emailed as an attachment would be recommended. An example is provided on page 8 of this document. The letter should be personal and should cover:
  - Acknowledging the death of the relative;
  - Acknowledging how the child might be feeling;
  - Telling the child that you (the key person) and other staff are thinking about them;
  - Offering to check-in with them by phone.
- Check-in/s by phone. The key adult could ask how the family is doing since the bereavement and check if they have been able to access helpful information from any of the specialist websites. When speaking to the child, the key adult could ask for an update as to how the child is and listen to any thoughts and feelings they would like to share. The key adult could also ask about whether the child has had contact with their friends and if the setting could support with this. You could ask permission to share information with their friends.
- Consider the impact of 'trolling' on social media. It may be helpful to check in with young people to see if they have received any negative comments.
- Prepare other children and staff for the return of a grieving child or staff member. Ensure class teachers are aware of children impacted by a loss so they can welcome them back to school appropriately when the time comes. This might be overseen by one of the nominated leads.

#### **Supporting leaders, nominated leads and key adults**

- People who have been bereaved may need reassurance that their response is 'normal'. One of the helpful things that leaders, nominated leads and key adults can do is to listen to the bereaved speaking about painful issues. Those staff in direct contact with bereaved families or staff will need support around them to debrief and process their own feelings and may experience bereavement themselves. As a result, leaders and nominated leads will be holding and containing levels of anxiety from across different parts of their community and will need to think about where they get their own emotional support. You may wish to contact the EPS to support with this.
- If you would like support from the EPS to think together about developing your setting's response to bereavements due to Covid-19 please contact both your school EP and the EPS inbox ([EPS@salford.gov.uk](mailto:EPS@salford.gov.uk)).

#### **Responding at level 2 and 3**

Level 2 is likely to be a cluster of bereavement and loss issues. It's important that there is containment through structure and that the welfare of individuals who are likely to be triggered are monitored in enhanced ways following further triggering news. Level 3 would be when the whole school community is impacted by bereavement issues that may have led to challenges to cohesion that need a broader multi-agency response. Further details of best practice and how the EPS will support you can be found in the Appendix.

**\*This guidance has been taken from Salford and Tameside Educational Psychology Service –'Guidance for Educational Settings on Supporting Those Bereaved During Covid-19'.**