

Gorse Hall Primary and Nursery School



Bereavement and loss policy

Date: March 2024

Review Date: March 2027

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 :

- Discussions with key family members should be had to see how they and/or child can best be supported. 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.
- Involve outside agencies as appropriate e.g. health workers, Educational Psychological Service, Healthy Young Minds.
- Work with the family on the best way to support a child or staff member on their return to school/work e.g. making of a memory box. School provides a bereavement pack for parents/carers to support the child with bereavement or loss.
- Ensure staff know the correct guardian and that key adults/class teachers know the circumstances where the child has a loss of either a parent or sibling. This may include a parent who is still alive but estranged from family/child.
- 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 3**).

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 4)**

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

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)

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 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 or 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: 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 4: Development stages relating to children's understanding of death

Level	Understanding
< 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