“Learning, Caring and Achieving Together”

“A child can live through anything so long as he or she is told the truth and is allowed to share the natural feelings people have when they are suffering” Eda Le Shan, The Compassionate Friends Newsletter.

Introduction
From time to time every school is touched by the death of a student, member of staff or an extended family member. Individuals and families react to bereavement in their own very unique ways. The trauma of bereavement can have a profound effect on the school community. The main aim of this policy is to provide a framework for all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, to give guidance on how to deal sensitively and compassionately in difficult and upsetting circumstances.

Background
The Education Act (2002) emphasises the importance of promoting the Personal, Social and Health Education of children and young people. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) policy and the Religious Education policy. Our school is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and pupils. We are dedicated to the continual development of a ‘healthy school’.

Roles and Responsibilities
The Head Teacher has overall responsibility for the policy and its implementation; for liaison with the Governing Body, parents/carers, the Local Authority and appropriate outside agencies.

Responsibilities include:
- Policy development and review, involving pupils, staff, governors, parents/carers and relevant local agencies.
- Implementing the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities.
- Co-ordinating the planned action to manage school-related incidents in and beyond the school; decide who will be responsible for communicating with the family directly involved, decide who gives news to the school community and if necessary who will communicate with the press.
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies.
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary school.
- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff.

Staff support and training
It is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for pupils and mutual support for each other and in implementing this policy. We will ensure that members of staff are regularly consulted as to their training needs and training is provided as appropriate to keep up to date with developments.

Curriculum
Children and young people explore the concept of loss, bereavement and grief as part of the PSHE curriculum. In our school this is taught as part of the ‘Relationships’ theme using the SEAL materials. It is also addressed through cross curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles. Assemblies may also be used to address aspects of death e.g. Remembrance Day or commemorative occasions.

Any questions relating to loss or death will be answered in a sensitive and age-appropriate yet honest and factual way.
Children are given the opportunities to learn about and discuss cultural and religious issues around death as well as being encouraged to express their own responses and feelings.

**Teaching and Learning**

Our teaching will be based on an understanding of the principles stated above and that a variety of approaches should be used to meet the needs of our pupils and show sensitivity to their age and experience.

Teaching methods adopted in the classroom include:

- A range of teaching and learning styles including individual and group discussions, role play and drama.
- Introducing supporting resources – photographs, mementoes, stories, poetry and music.
- Giving clear, truthful and accurate information, not trying to soften the blow with ambiguous language which does not tell the truth.
- Practising the collaborative social skills necessary to help cope with the feelings of loss.
- Giving relevant and appropriate advice and support.
- Providing continuity and progression by visiting and revisiting issues as pupils develop and their needs and understanding change.
- Considering the attitudes and values of pupils

**Procedures**

Many of the guidelines in this policy are only appropriate when the school community as a whole has experienced a death, for example a member of staff or a pupil.

Perhaps a more common experience for teaching staff is that of a pupil experiencing the death of a parent. Whole school or class activities will not normally be appropriate in this situation, but the needs of that individual pupil should still be given careful consideration.

If a child has been bereaved it is important to involve them in decisions about how the school manages issues relating to their loss. Talk to the child about their preferred way of informing their peers about what has happened and about the support they need.

**Breaking news to staff, pupils and families when member of staff or pupil has died**

- Speak to the family, offer them condolences and support before ascertaining what they would like to happen. Give them a direct telephone number for someone they can contact in school.
- Obtaining factual information should be made a priority. Think through how this might be done, remembering that contact with those directly involved may be difficult. It is vitally important not to make assumptions or repeat what has been heard through rumour. This will only add to distress. It is essential that all staff are informed straight away, ideally before pupils.
- Identify ways of doing this sensitively. See suggested list of people/agencies to contact.
- Decisions need to be made about where pupils will be told if this is necessary. Identify the most vulnerable pupils and what support they might need.
- Pupils should be told as soon as possible. This is best done in familiar groups by someone they know. Staff may well need guidance on words to use and the approach to take. Have something pre-prepared.
- If necessary send a letter to families the same day if possible. A pre-prepared script will be very helpful; it is difficult to find the right words when emotional and in shock.
- Consider including guidelines for parents on supporting bereaved children with the letter.

**The first few days.**

- Map out the first few days after an incident. It is usually best to have minimum disruption to the timetable, but some flexibility may be required.
- Consider what the school approach will be if pupils or staff are too upset to attend lessons.
The funeral

- It is essential to sound out the family’s wishes. The family may well welcome involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to keep things private.
- Identify which staff and pupils may want to attend and the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport.
- Flowers may need to be sent and/or a collection made. Involve staff and pupils in the decision.
- Cultural and religious implications need consideration.

“It is impossible not to communicate with children … The way in which children are helped to deal with loss will have a profound impact on their future emotional development…”
Barbara Monroe (Brief Interventions with Bereaved Children)

Support

Support for bereaved children

Not all children and young people will need the support of specialist practitioners; they need familiar people who care.

Schools can offer children and young people:

- A routine, providing a sense of normality
- Some space, away from an emotional intense atmosphere
- Neutral space and people to share their feelings without the worry of upsetting a loved one (i.e. a surviving parent)
- Time to be themselves without feeling guilty (being with friends, time to play in a safe space outside of the home environment).
- Regular correspondence with home, providing reassurance about behaviours and general well-being, will ensure the child or young person is managing their grief.
- Access to appropriate resources, resource libraries, and Spiral or other support agencies. (see contact details in pack)
- Preparation time for children and young people to discuss what to say and how to behave when the bereaved child or young person returns to school. This can help young people to see death as a common experience for us all at different times and places.
- Time for staff to be aware of changes in behaviour that may be related to the death.
- An individual link person to support the pupils when necessary.
- A suitable place in school for pupils who need some space if too upset to stay in the classroom and people to whom they can go for support.

Support for pupils generally

- It is important to identify pupils who may be particularly vulnerable or likely to experience symptoms associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, for example anyone who witnessed the death.
- Compile and keep updated a list of outside professionals and agencies who can come into the school in the event of a traumatic death to counsel pupils. Make sure that the help offered from outside agencies is appropriate before accepting. Pupils may find it difficult to be receptive to support or counselling from families of fellow pupils.
- Remembering/commemoration: this is difficult to plan in advance, but careful thought is required. The dead person’s family and the young person need to be consulted.

Support for staff

- Supporting bereaved pupils will be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions.
- Plan for some sort of informal mutual support, for example in the staffroom at the end of the school day, to give staff an opportunity to share feelings and reactions.
- Give people time to attend the funeral if appropriate.
• Training before events happen – general for all staff and specific to bereaved children and young people.
• Awareness of available resources and time to become familiar with what is available.

Support for Parents

• Communicate with the family straight away and offer support. Send a letter of condolence from the school.
• Depending on the wishes of the family, give out information to appropriate people.
• Give parents and family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died.
• Send a representative to the funeral.
• Hold a collection /flowers to be sent as appropriate.
• Invite parents/family to any commemorative events held by the school, both at the time and in subsequent years.

Responding to the media

Some deaths, particularly those in sudden or traumatic circumstances, attract media attention. All members of staff have been advised not to respond to journalists and to refer all enquiries to the head teacher, who will make a considered response after seeking assistance from the Local Authority Press Office.

Transition

It is vitally important to ensure that if a child has experienced bereavement that this information is recorded using CPOMS and passed on to the relevant persons when they move on to a new class or school.

Confidentiality

Although it is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure, pupils will be made aware that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. This will help in retaining the trust of pupils and parents/carers and will ensure that the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. Sensitive information is only disclosed internally or externally with careful attention to the rights and needs of individuals.

Inclusion and Equality

We promote an inclusive, caring, supporting ethos and maintain a highly effective pastoral system. We recognise that there is a range of cultural and religious customs and procedures concerning death and that there may be different expectations of the bereaved child and family. Some of these may affect matters of school organisation.
We try to present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. Children will be made aware that there are a range of different responses to bereavement and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

Monitoring and review

This policy will be monitored by the governing body

February 2017

Signed Date Headteacher
Signed Date Chair of Governors
Appendix 1

Bereavement Ideas

Children 3-5 find it difficult to comprehend the finality of loss.
Experts believe children at this age believe death is temporary as if the person who has died has gone away and they are waiting for them to come back.
At this age it is important to use precise terms when talking about death not ‘you’ve lost a love one’ – a child interprets this literally and assumes the person can be found.
Sometimes they blame themselves or believe if they are ‘good’ enough perhaps the parent will come back.
Often they will experience nightmares, confusion, revert to earlier stages of development or even seem unaffected.
Attending funerals help children even the very young accept their loss.
Spending time with family members and sharing memories helps with the pain- strong social support
Providing opportunities to talk
Knowing who will be there
Children benefit from the distraction and normality of school and will be supported by their friends
Grief may resurface at developmental milestones

Appendix 2

Reference documents

Schools Information Pack, Childhood Bereavement Charity
Winston’s Wish online support materials
‘Dignity and Respect, Cultural Awareness: Religion and Belief’ NHS
‘Childhood Bereavement’ National Children’s Bureau 2004
Macmillan Nurses –offer a pack for children and come into school
SEAL Materials –Appendix (Blue Overview) on dealing with sensitive issues

Useful Websites:
www.griefencounter.org.uk
www.winstonswish.org.uk
www.childbereavement.org.uk
www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk
www.thelauracentre.org.uk
www.rd4u.org.uk
www.rip.rap.org.uk
www.penhaligonsfriends.org.uk