

Arksey Primary School

Bereavement Policy

November 2026

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It is inevitable that schools will work with children, young people and adults affected by death in one way or another. The immediacy and enormity of these experiences may vary, but in each situation, schools have a key role to positively support those affected.

For many, death is still a taboo subject that raises anxieties, concerns and a fear that we might 'get it wrong' or say the wrong thing. This is particularly the case in relation to suicide. Suicide is a leading cause of death for young people in the UK, and it is a possibility that suicide will impact on school communities.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and rationale

Arksey Primary is an inclusive school that strives to ensure that all children feel safe when with us. Our values focus on openness, honesty and trust alongside working with the strengths of each individual child to ensure that they achieve to the best of their abilities.

Around 41,000 children are bereaved of a parent every year in the UK. That's nearly two children under 16 every hour. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person.

Experiencing a bereavement can make children more vulnerable. Bereavement, whether it is an expected death because of illness or a sudden and unexpected death or suicide, is something that can impact on members of our school community at any time.

Our school is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and pupils. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that prepares pupils for coping with bereavement.

This policy is for all staff, pupils, parents and carers, governors, visitors and partner agencies working within the school. It provides guidelines and procedures as to how our school can best prepare for, and respond to, bereavement in the school community.

We recognise that members of the school community will be affected by a range of losses, including separation and divorce. Some aspects of this policy may also be helpful in these cases.

This policy was based on an exemplar developed by the national charity Winston's Wish.

1.2 Policy links

This policy also links to the following other policies we hold in school:

- Safeguarding policy
- School emergency procedures
- PSHRSE education policy
- Behaviour policy
- Educational visits policy
- Confidentiality statement and GDPR policy
- Equality policy
- Leave of absence policy
- SEMH and suicide policy
- Health and safety policy

1.3 Purpose of the policy

This bereavement policy supports us to provide effective support to pupils and staff before and after bereavement. It covers both expected and unexpected deaths.

Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children and staff require. However, we also need to be prepared to call on more specialist support where there is a sudden and unexpected death, or where the impact of a bereavement is complex.

The objectives of this policy are to:

- enhance effective communication at a difficult time
- clarify the pathway of support between school, family, community and services
- make best use of the support available in school, the council's families, children and learning department and the wider community.

2 Our charter for bereaved children and young people

To help us meet the objectives of this policy we have adopted the Winston's Wish Charter for Bereaved Children and will display this on our website.

B	Bereavement support	Bereaved children need to receive support from their family, from their school and from important people around them. We will signpost them to specialist support if needed.
E	Express feelings and thoughts	We will help bereaved children to find appropriate ways to express all their feelings and thoughts associated with grief, such as sadness, anxiety, confusion, anger and guilt.
R	Remember the person who has died	We understand that bereaved children have the right to remember the person who has died for the rest of their lives. We will support them to share special and difficult memories.
E	Education and information	All children, particularly bereaved children, are entitled to receive answers to their questions. They also need information that clearly explains what has happened, why it has happened and what will be happening. We will strive to enable children to have their questions answered through the PSHRSE curriculum, on an individual basis, working with parents and carers, or through support services.
A	Appropriate response from schools and colleges	Bereaved children need understanding and support from their teachers and fellow students without having to ask for it. We will provide training to ensure this happens.
V	Voice in important decisions	We will work with families to encourage them to involve bereaved children in important decisions that have an impact on their lives such as planning the funeral and remembering anniversaries.
E	Enjoyment	We will support the bereaved child's right to enjoy their lives even though someone important has died.

M	Meet others	We will try where possible to enable bereaved children to benefit from the opportunity to meet other children who have had similar experiences.
E	Established routines	We will endeavour, whenever possible, to enable bereaved children to continue activities and interests so that parts of their lives can still feel 'normal'.
N	Not to blame	We will help bereaved children to understand that they are not responsible, and not to blame, for the death.
T	Tell the story	We will encourage bereaved children to tell an accurate and coherent story of what has happened. We know this is helpful to them particularly if these stories are heard by those important people in their lives.

3 Safeguarding,

3 Safeguarding, confidentiality and recording

We follow our school's safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure that the welfare of the child remains paramount throughout, and that all children are protected from harm.

It is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure. However, pupils will need to be made aware that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

To retain the trust of pupils and parents and carers, we will ensure that the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. Sensitive information will only be disclosed internally or externally with careful attention to the rights and needs of individuals and in line with general data protection regulation.

If a child is suffering from trauma, we will share this as appropriate with staff, but not necessarily the details of their experience. We will discuss with the bereaved child and their family which adults in the school community they would like made aware of the experiences impacting on the child.

We will use our usual school safeguarding systems to record when a child has experienced a close bereavement, is at risk of suicide or has made a suicide attempt.

4 Roles and responsibilities in dealing with bereavement

4.1 The role of the governing body is to:

- approve the bereavement policy and ensure its implementation
- ensure the policy is reviewed every two years or when national or local policy directs a change
- ensure that appropriate attention is given to how bereavement issues are addressed within the curriculum
- ensure that approaches to bereavement are respectful of religious and cultural values and beliefs
- ensure that staff are given appropriate opportunities for training, reflection and access to support if they need it.

4.2 The role of the head teacher and senior leadership team is to:

- access bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff, if appropriate
- lead a whole-school approach to the effective management of loss and bereavement including ensuring appropriate training and support provided for staff

- contact the local authority in the case of a sudden and unexpected death or suicide – key professionals would be expected to be involved, eg link educational psychologist and primary mental health worker, alongside relevant colleagues and managers
- liaise with other statutory agencies, e.g. where necessary in a child death review
- be the first point of contact for family/child/staff directly affected by a bereavement
- record bereavements affecting children
- designate liaison and support to other trained members of staff when appropriate
- monitor progress in supporting those impacted by a bereavement and liaise with external agencies
- keep the governing body appropriately informed
- deal with media enquiries with local authority support

4.3 The role of all staff in our school is to:

- know how to access support for themselves, for other staff and for the family, if advice or information is needed
- know how to report a concern if the bereavement or sudden and unexpected death has placed a child at significant risk of harm
- know how to support a child when they are distressed and how to refer to specialist support if needed
- have a basic understanding of a child's needs when facing loss and change
- provide individual support as and when needed and in consultation with the head teacher
- teach about loss and bereavement as part of the planned curriculum
- inform the head teacher at the earliest possibility if they hear about a death of someone in the school community

Our learning Headteacher and mental health first aiders have had more advanced training about bereavement. They can offer professional support to other members of staff.

4.4 The role of the local authority

The role of the Local Authority is to:

- offer specific support when there has been an incident affecting a section of the school community, and/or a critical incident, suicide or sudden death of an adult or child, initially meeting with the head teacher and key lead staff in the school to discuss the immediate plan of action, with timeline outlined where possible for follow up actions
- inform appropriate colleagues within the local authority on a need-to-know basis
- advise and support staff who are supporting bereaved children and young people
- ensure that any staff significantly affected by a death are made aware of the support that is available to them.

5 Procedures

5.1 Pre-bereavement

In some situations, it is known in advance that a death is going to occur. This is usually because of a long illness.

In cases where this is an adult within the school community, individual conversations will be held with the head teacher in terms of support, information exchange and practical considerations.

When the expected death is of a child or a member of a child's family we will:

- contact the family to confirm factual information and explore what support could be provided to them
- identify a key point of contact in school in terms of information exchange and to update when things change
- ensure that all relevant adults are clear about what information has and needs to be shared with the pupil
- keep lines of communication open to ensure that all information is received in a timely fashion
- explore the possibility of signposting to other organisations such as Winston's Wish or a local hospice
- look to involve faith or community leaders when appropriate and with the agreement of the family
- explore what support for the pupils affected might look like in practice
- arrange training for specific members of staff to ensure all involved are confident in their ability to support the pupil
- if appropriate, consider and reflect on how to communicate with the wider school community for example the pupil's class mates
- if appropriate, begin conversations around practical considerations in the events leading up to the death and following the death.

5.2 Following a bereavement

We will consider each individual situation carefully to ensure that the response from the school is sensitive, accurately reflects the gravity of the situation, and involves those affected as appropriate.

As an immediate response we will:

- contact the deceased's family with the aim to establish the facts and avoid rumours (head teacher) unless the school has been notified that a key worker has been allocated to do so in order to reduce the number of intrusions from multiple agencies
- consider any religious beliefs that may affect the timing of the funeral or impact on other aspects of the bereavement process
- find out, if possible, how the family would like the information to be managed by the school
- allocate member(s) of staff to be the key point(s) of support for the affected child/young person or children/young people and ensure there is support in place for the staff members if required
- send letters or cards of condolence to families or individuals directly affected
- will prepare a press statement, with support from the council's communications team if required and with due regard to the family affected (head teacher)
- inform staff of the death before pupils are informed, recognising that some pupils may have found out through other means. Where possible, staff will be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways to make sure all staff have the same version of the event. Where this has not been possible, staff will be supported to share the information.
- inform pupils who are most directly affected (such as a friendship group), preferably in small groups, by someone known to them and in keeping with the wishes of the family and expertise of the school.
- inform the wider school community in line with the wishes of the family. We would normally do this through assemblies and/or letters to parents.
- make small changes to the school timetable to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of the child or children affected by the situation; however, we will aim for minimal disruption to the timetable as this can offer a sense of security and familiarity.
- inform the wider school community in line with the wishes of the family.

For the funeral we will:

- find out the family's wishes and follow these in terms of the involvement of members of the school community (or not)
- identify which staff and pupils may want to attend if invited by the family and the practicalities of issues such as risk assessment, staff cover and transport. In some rare circumstances it may be appropriate to close the school
- organise tributes such as flowers or a collection in line with family wishes and the wishes of staff and pupils
- be sensitive to religious and cultural issues

After the funeral we will:

- consider whether it is appropriate to visit the child and family affected at home and plan a return to school
- ensure friendships are secure – peer support can be particularly important for a bereaved child or young person
- continue regular contact with the family and show we still care about them and their child over time
- monitor the emotional needs of staff and pupils and provide listening time and ongoing appropriate support
- consider practical issues and make thoughtful and sensitive updates to parental and other contact details when needed
- continue to assess the needs of children most affected, and record and plan for support accordingly

Longer term we will:

- Be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life – so we will record information and share with relevant people, particularly at transition point. This could include ensuring significant dates and events for the child are recorded and shared with appropriate staff for future reference
- Signpost families to bereavement support including that provided by Winston's Wish
- Ensure that learning about loss and bereavement is embedded into appropriate curriculum areas including PSHRSE education. When teaching about loss and bereavement we will give careful thought as to how to support those directly affected by loss and bereavement.

5.3 Following a sudden and unexpected death – suicide

Suicide is not just a really difficult event to deal with, it also presents the unique risk of potentially being the trigger for another suicide. As described in section 4.3 we will seek advice from the Local Authority Educational Psychology team. As a school community we will make a response to a sudden death within two school days.

It is necessary to maintain the structure and order of the school routine, while facilitating the expression of grief, and reducing the risk of imitative suicide.

In the case of suicide, we will refer to The Samaritans Step-by-Step Guide and Papyrus training and support.

Information provided to the school community in the immediate aftermath of a sudden and unexpected death will depend on the age of the pupils but should be based on and reinforce:

- facts (not rumours)

- an understanding that death is permanent
- an exploration of normal and wide-ranging reactions to sudden and unexpected death – expressions of anger and guilt are entirely normal
- an understanding that, with support, people can cope
- an understanding that fleeting thoughts of suicide are not unusual
- an awareness of suicidal warning signs and resources available to help
- an understanding of expectations around funerals

When discussing any suicide that has occurred, we will ensure that the information given is age appropriate and:

- is factually correct but does not include detail of the suicidal act itself does not romanticise, glorify or vilify the death
- does not include details of any suicide note
- does not include speculation over the motive for suicide
- takes care with the language used – for example using phrases such as 'died by suicide' or 'ended his/her life' rather than 'committed suicide' or 'successful suicide', and 'attempted to end his/her life' rather than 'unsuccessful suicide' or 'failed attempt at suicide'.

5.4 Following a sudden and unexpected death – homicide

The Childhood Bereavement Network and Winston's Wish estimate that around one child every day is bereaved of a parent or sibling through murder or manslaughter in Great Britain.
Children may experience profound and lasting shock, enormous anger at what has happened, rage at the person who caused their relative to die, deep fear at the perceived insecurity of the world around them. Sadly, in many cases, the person who caused the death is also known to the child, resulting in great confusion and a double loss, for example, if one parent kills the other and is then imprisoned. In some families, the child may have to move to a new house, school, area – away from familiar and comforting places and routines.

Winston's Wish recommend taking an honest and consistent age-appropriate approach to talking with children about what has happened. It is not possible to shield them from what has happened completely. Winston's Wish can provide support to families bereaved in this way and further information can be found on its website.

6 Equality and inclusion, values and beliefs

We recognise that there is a range of cultural and religious beliefs, customs and procedures concerning death. It follows that bereaved children and families may have differing expectations.
Some of these may affect matters of school organisation. We will source training and guidance to develop our understanding of the range of beliefs to best support pupils.
We will present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. We will make pupils aware of differing responses to bereavement, and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

7 Young asylum seekers and refugees

Many young asylum seekers and refugees have experienced the death of family members or friends, often in traumatic circumstances. This, and further traumatic experiences and losses, can have a devastating effect on their emotional and physical health, behaviour, learning and relationships.
Sudden traumatic death complicates the process of grief and mourning, as usual ways of coping may be overwhelmed. We will consult specialist mental health services where appropriate.

8 Supporting staff

8.1 Support for bereaved staff

We are aware that staff also experience bereavement. When this happens, we will ensure they are provided with support to take care of themselves, and to know where they can go for additional help should they need it.

This could include: their GP, Cruse Bereavement Care or staff counselling, information and advice which is available through the Local Authority Health and Wellbeing service and through the Education Support telephone support line available to all staff working in schools.

We will work within our leave of absence policy and if necessary, with the council occupational health team to ensure staff are provided with appropriate leave and support at a time of bereavement.

Teachers who are dealing with their own bereavement are encouraged to speak with their line manager about any areas of the curriculum which they feel uncomfortable to teach or want support to teach.

8.2 Staff training

We will ensure that regular training is provided to staff to support staff in meeting their roles and responsibilities as identified in this policy through the Local Authority Educational Psychology service. Winston's Wish also offers training courses and a free online training course for school staff.

9 Curriculum

Children and young people explore the concept of loss, bereavement, and grief as part of the statutory elements of our PSHRSE curriculum. It is also addressed through cross-curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles, as well as through English and Religious Education.
We also use assemblies to address aspects of death – such as Remembrance Day, Holocaust Memorial Day or commemorative occasions. We also observe national minutes of silence in class assemblies and explain the purpose of this in an age appropriate way.

When appropriate, we respond to a tragedy or serious incident by discussing this in class having discussed as a staff team the language we will use to respond to the incident.
Teachers are provided with training on how to deliver this sensitive area of the curriculum within a safe, learning environment. We also point parents and carers towards appropriate advice via the school website, on how to talk to their children about these events when necessary.
We will answer any questions relating to loss or death in a sensitive, age-appropriate, honest and factual way. Children and young people will not be expected to disclose any personal experiences but will be signposted to support if they want it.
We give children opportunities to learn about and discuss cultural and religious issues around death and encourage them to express their own responses and feelings.

10 Additional support and links

As part of PSHSRE and our safeguarding work, we will also signpost to appropriate sources of support for pupils and adults in the school community.

Winston's Wish: www.winstonswish.org – support information and guidance for bereaved children, young people and for those caring for bereaved families.

Cruse Bereavement Care: www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk – support for anyone who has been bereaved.

Childhood Bereavement Network: https://www.cruse.org.uk/ – find childhood bereavement support in your local area.

Hope Again: http://hopeagain.org.uk/ – a website for young people who have been bereaved.

Papyrus: https://papyrus-uk.org/ – support and advice for young people struggling with thoughts of suicide, and anyone worried about a young person.

Samaritans: http://www.samaritans.org/your-community/supporting-schools – a range of guidance and support for schools.