



“Every Opportunity for Every Child”

Alpha Trust

Bereavement Policy



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This policy is based on the Bereavement Policy from 'Juniper' and was originally adapted by Alpha Trust Schools in June 2020



ALPHA TRUST BEREAVEMENT POLICY

Introduction

Bereavement and loss are an inevitable part of learning and growing. No matter how prepared we think we are, death is often traumatic and unexpected. Its unpredictability can severely unbalance a school whose normal working environment is one based on routine.

This policy is regarded as a framework, rather than something prescriptive. A death can affect the school community in different ways, depending on the role of the deceased person, how well they were known and circumstances surrounding the death. Every child and adult is different and will need help and support in many various ways. Therefore what is deemed appropriate will depend on every new and in itself unique situation.

Usually, support and understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of our school, along with that provided by their family and friends, may be all the bereavement support most children or staff require. However, we recognise that referral to more specialist support may be necessary where the impact of grief is more complex.

Aims and ethos

As we recognise that most children and adults can be effectively supported through bereavement and loss by those with whom they already have relationships, we want to equip school staff and others to respond effectively and confidently to a death in the school community. It is important too that we recognise that everyone experiences bereavement and grief differently and that there is no right or wrong way to do it. Therefore, it is our aim:

- to provide appropriate support to students and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after a bereavement
- to provide an environment that is sensitive and compassionate to the needs of those wishing to grieve, whatever their cultural or religious beliefs.
- to ensure there is effective communication between home and school and to provide parents with information on how to access other support (if it is required)
- to work with the local authority and other partners as appropriate
- to provide an education about death and the associated rituals and traditions of mourning which include opportunities for discussion that help lessen the stigma attached to death, reducing its status as a taboo subject.

The role of Trustees

- To approve the policy
- To ensure it is adopted and implemented considerately by Trust schools

The role of the Local Governing Body

- To adopt the approved policy and ensure its implementation and regular reviews
- To ensure there is a whole school approach to supporting emotional wellbeing

The role of the Executive Principal/ Principal/ Headteacher/ Head of School

- To have oversight of support required and provided, liaising with external agencies as appropriate
- To be the first point of contact for the family/child concerned

- To liaise with the LA Communications Team, and respond to media enquiries if required
- To keep the local governing body fully informed
- To ensure staff are appropriately trained around bereavement and undertake actions set out in this policy (such as how to share sad news with students), including a deputy for the role of the Executive Principal /Principal/ Headteacher, should the event mean they are unable to complete this role

The role of the Local Authority (LA)

- To advise and support school staff as required
- To signpost to referral pathways and other means of support
- To provide information, guidance and support for all schools (available on Essex Schools Infolink)

The role of staff

- To provide a safe and calm environment for all
- To act as a 'trusted adult' to support students and proactively enable them to have the time and space to talk
- To monitor the wellbeing of their students, identify concerns and escalate where additional support may be required
- To ensure any safeguarding concerns are shared with the Designated Safeguarding Lead

Guidelines

1. The school will respond in a planned and agreed manner, so that all staff know what is expected and can contribute their part in a way that is consistent with the ethos of the school.
2. The Executive Principal/Principal/Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team will co-ordinate the school's response and be vital in creating an appropriate atmosphere.
3. Wherever possible (and if deemed appropriate), the Executive Principal/ Principal/ Headteacher will attempt contact with the bereaved family before taking any other action. This is to ensure any communications to the wider school community (and the media) are factual, avoid rumour or confusion and are aligned with the family's wishes. Where it has not been possible to establish contact with the family, and news of the death is already in the public arena, the Executive Principal/ Principal /Headteacher will need to manage this and will do so, taking advice from the Local Authority. **The School will always act in accordance with the wishes of the family.**
4. The Executive Principal/ Principal/ Headteacher or their representative will inform all staff of any death and agree how information will be shared with students and the wider school community – staff will need to be informed before students and parents.
5. The Executive Principal/Principal/Headteacher will allocate a specific person or team (usually the pastoral team i.e. Year Leader or appropriate Pastoral Assistant and Form Tutor(s)) to support a bereaved student. This person would offer support and check on the progress of any student(s) involved. They will also keep in touch with the family so contact from the family's point of view is manageable but also does not come to an abrupt end after all the initial attention.

6. When necessary other students and parents or carers will be informed at the same time and as promptly as circumstances will allow. Students in school will be informed face to face in a supportive and age-appropriate way, parents or carers by letter on the same day. Absentees from school will be noted to ensure that they are also informed on their return by their form tutor. Staff who are absent will be informed by their line manager. Where face to face contact is not possible, consideration will be given as to how to communicate the information to students in a supportive and age-appropriate way. A letter to parents and carers could possibly include a guidance sheet for parents/ carers who support bereaved children.
7. It is necessary to be aware of the differing cultural and religious traditions of grieving and mourning. The school should ensure that they do not deny young people the opportunity to grieve and mourn within the traditions of their own culture and religious beliefs.
8. The Executive Principal/Principal/Headteacher will agree a statement for the media, where this is required, linking with the local authority as appropriate.
9. The Executive Principal/Principal/Headteacher and staff will monitor the wellbeing of all pupils identifying any concerns and escalating where additional support may be required.
10. The school will record any concerns about a child's wellbeing on their file to ensure any future school is aware that additional support may be required.

Managing the First Day

- Upon hearing news of a death, members of staff should contact the Executive Principal/Principal/Headteacher. If a student or member of staff has died, the Executive Principal/Principal/Headteacher should make contact with the parent/family. If a parent, relative or close friend of a student has died, the Executive Principal/Principal/Headteacher will decide who should approach the student and liaise with their family.
- A parent or relative coming into school to break the news, possibly with support from a member of staff, would normally be the best and usual approach. If no parents, relatives or carers are able to attend, the Executive Principal/Principal/Headteacher will need to decide who is best suited/qualified to deal with the situation. In school closure times, consideration will need to be made as to how best to communicate the news to students and parents.
- The Executive Principal/Principal/Headteacher, supported by the Senior Leadership Team and the student's Year Leader, should gather all details surrounding any death. It is vital to have all the facts. If the death/s have been particularly traumatic the media may be involved. It is essential that correct information is disseminated to all staff. Rumour and gossip can be very damaging and lead to both young and old developing the attitude that the death is not a topic to talk about. However, all staff involved must be careful not to break confidentiality.

Multiple Deaths/ A Death in School

- In the event of multiple deaths or a death in school, additional support and resources will probably be required. The Senior Leadership Team should meet to agree a planned course of action. The School Critical Incident Plan may need to be put into action and Essex LA Communications Team informed.

- It is likely that there will be considerable (if unwanted) media interest. The Executive Principal/Principal/Headteacher will decide what information should be released.

Information that might upset, confuse or exacerbate the situation should be withheld.

- It is important that *one* individual, pre-selected and briefed by the team, acts as spokesperson, relaying consistent information. Another consideration might be the setting up and running of an emergency school hotline.
- It may be necessary to retrieve the personal belongings of the deceased for their return to the next-of-kin. Information on the school's database, including references and addresses will probably need to be amended and updated. This also applies to notice boards etc. The school may decide to write to parents to allow them to explain to their children the meaning and implications of an event.

Funerals/ Memorial Services/ Student Participation

- Before the bereaved student or member of staff returns to school there is likely to be a funeral. It is probable that students (and staff) will 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 or relatives, as well as the agreement of their own parents/carers. The Executive Principal/Principal/Headteacher, or Pastoral Leader should be in contact with the family/relatives to discuss funeral arrangements - they may welcome involvement of the school or they may prefer to keep it private.
- If the bereaved family wish students and staff to attend, the team should be available to offer support *before* and *after* the service. If they do not wish the school to attend, their wishes should be respected and the school should consider arranging an alternative. The school should identify who will attend (staff and students) and sort out cover for staff and transport. Consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances may be necessary
- Planning a memorial service, reading lessons, poems, or choosing hymns may assist in the grieving process.
- The form group most affected might like to write down their thoughts and feelings; these may be given to the bereaved family. It should be the role of the pastoral team to ensure that no inappropriate remarks or comments are made. After either service, staff and students should be encouraged to meet and express their thoughts and feelings. Refreshments would normally be provided. Such services are important in initiating the mourning process.
- The Executive Principal/Principal/Headteacher will make arrangements in school for a book of condolence if appropriate and/or an area where flowers may be placed. The Memorial Garden or area of the school grounds may serve as a venue for gatherings and quiet moments of reflection.

Death of a Member of Staff

- When such an event occurs it is usually extremely traumatic, especially for members of staff forced to deal with their own grief as well as comforting students. Planning how a school manages such an event is important. To avoid rumours it is advisable that the news is

broken as soon as possible. A gathering together of staff to allow them to grieve in private before announcing the news to the rest of the school is something that should be considered.

- Generally such news is broken in assembly, in a space where everyone maybe told simultaneously. Later in class students should be allowed the opportunity to express their grief individually with the support of Form Tutors. Some students may have already experienced death and their way of coping with such events is sometimes observed in emotional outbursts. Some may express feelings of anger, panic or relief. It is important to try to remember that this is a time when everyone is hurting. Where face to face contact is not possible, consideration will be given as to how to communicate the information to students in a supportive and age-appropriate way. If a directly affected student has a history of aggressive behaviour or anger, consideration should be given to allow that student authorised leave. A risk assessment may be required to mitigate risk upon reintegration to school.
- For a community as close knit as a school, a memorial service in keeping with the ethos and ethnic beliefs of the school is normally a good idea. The coming together of the whole school collectively for one purpose helps each individual come to terms with his/her own grief in a shared experience – i.e., helping to initiate the grieving process. Such services also offer the opportunity for those who may have been unable to attend the funeral to express themselves through drama, poems and letters.
- Counselling should be made available to staff as well as students. Line managers should monitor teachers who may be particularly affected by the death of a colleague or a student.

Supporting Students

- The death of a fellow student is probably the most demanding situation a young person might be forced to face whilst in school. Comprehending and coming to terms with such an event is going to be equally difficult and will require great emotional support from the school staff.
- If faced with a sudden death the Executive Principal/Principal/Headteacher should contact the deceased parents/carers/next of kin as soon as possible thus enabling compliance with any of their wishes. The immediate class friends and siblings of the deceased should be gathered and the news, if not already known, be broken before an announcement is made to the rest of the school, thus allowing private grief. It is important to identify students who may be particularly vulnerable (for example a close friend or someone who is experiencing severe illness in the family.) To avoid rumours an announcement should be made to the whole of the school as soon as practically possible.
- Additional support from fellow teaching colleagues may well be required as well as the assistance of the school counsellors or specialist bereavement counselling services. It is important to use appropriate support for each individual – some students may find it helpful to have counselling with someone they do not know personally.
- In event of a young person becoming terminally ill their wishes and those of their parents or carers should always be respected. Should the young person wish to attend school, pastoral staff may need to inform students of the young person's condition. Occasionally the student

may wish to talk to their fellow classmates about their predicament themselves. Honesty about death and dying is often the best line of approach.

- Students may wish to remember the person they have lost. The idea of a 'memory box', which the student fills with important items, is just one method suggested. Give them time and space but provide opportunities to talk about feelings (give space but do not avoid the issue!). Ensure ALL students can voice their feelings and fears, not only those directly connected. Others may also suffer from the news without showing obvious signs. Give students within the group roles to make them feel useful and included. Possibly spend a form time discussing the group's feelings, allow everyone to contribute or to retreat. Try to finish the discussion on a positive note (not all people who are ill die), consider a prayer or a 'quiet moment of reflection.'
- Identify a 'safe haven' in the school for students if they need some space and/ or help during the school day.

Supporting the Family

Parents and carers often feel that teachers are experts on their children. They may invariably therefore turn to the school for advice and information, especially on matters of bereavement. It is important to remember that the family, friends and the immediate community often best support those suffering from bereavement, as is the case with other stressful life events.

The following are some points that may be helpful to bear in mind when talking to parents and carers:

- A death in the family will disrupt the family for many months; in fact the family will never be the same again. Family members are grieving, relationships alter, and members may take on new roles. Sometimes there is a change of carer, house or school, all of which add to the disruption and distress experienced by the young person. To support the young person it is helpful to minimise, if possible, changes and disruptions in their normal daily routine and life in school.
- The bereaved family members may emotionally and physically withdraw from the young person, to protect themselves from more distress. Some adults will deny the bereaved person is grieving, as it will be distressing for them to acknowledge the young person's pain. This may cause distress and confusion, causing grief reactions of anger, withdrawal or psychosomatic behaviours such as, headaches, stomach ache or sickness.
- The bereaved young person may regress in behaviour, becoming clingy, difficult or withdrawn. Their schoolwork may suffer. These changes will be partly due to grief but also to the disruption and changes within the family, causing the young person to feel confused and unsafe. Even the simple withdrawal of attention from the young person can lead to problems; the young person may feel resentment, jealous or guilt towards the dead person. The expression of this verbally can cause the remaining family members distress and shock. Parents and carers need to know this is normal and will decrease as the young person and the family become more stable and settled.

Parents and carers need to be informed of the benefits that a young person gains in being involved in the ceremonies and rituals that follow the death. An explanation as to how mourning practices help young people to express their feelings and come to terms with and accept the reality of their loss can be very beneficial.

Teachers need to remember that parents and carers will often use them as role models, counsellors or extended family; looking to them for support for themselves as well as finding appropriate ways

of supporting and talking with their children. Teachers therefore may require their own support structures, so they too can turn to others for emotional support, advice and information if needed. Supporting bereaved families, whilst rewarding, can also be emotionally draining. External professional support may also need to be sought.

Self care for those working with the bereaved

It is easy to overlook the stresses and anxieties placed on those dealing with the bereaved. In many instances these can be quite exacting and yet because our sympathy and attention naturally rests with those grieving we can easily forget the emotional weight resting on the shoulders of those offering support. To assist, the following points are worth bearing in mind:

- Anticipate possible reactions which may be experienced with grief and loss. Each one of us is likely to react differently depending on our age, personality, cultural and religious background. If you are ever unsure about how you should react to others' grief, honesty is always the best line of approach.
- Try to accept that you may experience emotional reactions yourself. Such an event might trigger thoughts of your own past grief experiences. You may even find yourself doubting your own abilities. It is not unusual to experience existential thoughts and find yourself querying life's injustices, questioning perhaps your own beliefs.
- Panic attacks and worries about death – your own, or perhaps that of your family – may also become a preoccupation.
- Try to accept that giving such support can affect you in perhaps ways you had not considered. Normally these reactions will subside after a few days or weeks but if they persist do not be afraid to ask for professional support.
- Never take on too much. If you find that you are having difficulty in managing to cope, look to others to offer support – a partner, friend, or colleague.
- It is important to remember that you alone cannot carry other peoples' grief.

Education of students relating to death, grief and bereavement

It is important to educate students in dealing with death, grief and bereavement in order to prepare them to cope with it effectively when it occurs. As such, these areas are covered in considerable depth through the Religious Education curriculum, PSHCE and assemblies.

Within the RE Curriculum there are two objectives: firstly, to learn about religious and non-religious views, to learn from them and learn how to apply this thinking and situations to students' own lives. The PSHCE curriculum teaches students about emotional literacy and applies this through various challenging subjects such as suicide and accidental or sudden death. Assemblies are tailored to cover these themes sensitively and, in an age-appropriate manner.

Training of staff relating to death, grief and bereavement

Child Bereavement UK research shows that the majority of staff nationally do not feel trained and therefore comfortable in dealing with these matters with students. Bereavement training in Trust schools is at the discretion of each school within their particular context. The training should aim to build the confidence of both teaching and non-teaching staff in helping students deal with bereavement and grief as well as in noticing and reporting possible issues surrounding bereavement.

Related Policies and Procedures

This policy should be read alongside other policies of the school, particularly:



AT 2 Alpha Trust Safeguarding Policy
AT P2 Alpha Trust Leave of Absence Policy
Individual schools:

- PSHCE & Relationships and Sex Education Policy Statements
- School Critical Incident Plan

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed at least every three years and/or following a specific occurrence of bereavement.

Appendix 1

Supporting a student through bereavement

The Grief Cycle

People who are grieving do not necessarily go through the stages in the same order or experience all of them.



Appendix 2

Supporting adults; The Little Book of Bereavement for Schools. Ian Gilbert (with William, Olivia and Phoebe Gilbert). 2010. (Independent Thinking Series), Crown House Publishing.

A summary:

The most important response to a bereaved child is attending to what they say or they indicate (through their behaviour) as to how they are living with that death and what helps them.

- 1. As soon as the death is known to the school have a senior member of staff talk to the immediate classmates about what has happened and offer support for those who may be affected.**
 - Ignorance is a vacuum that gossip quickly fills.
- 2. Send a condolence card and encourage classmates to do the same.**
 - Saying 'I didn't know what to do' and doing nothing is a form of moral cowardice. No-one else knows what to do either.
- 3. When the child comes back to school talk to them (but don't patronise them). Ask them how they would like their teachers to act.**
 - Possible strategy could be to deflect your sympathy towards another family member.
 - Be aware that grief is like standing on a beach and being hit by waves. You don't know when they are going to hit but you know they will and there is nothing you can do to stop it.
 - Make sure all teaching and non-teaching staff are keeping a discreet and caring watch over the child.
- 4. Teach other children to know what to say and how to handle things.**
 - Culturally we treat death with circumspection; we know it's there but no-one wants to talk about it.
 - The more you can talk about dying with the children, before a real-life death takes place in your school the better (in Gilbert's view).
 - Don't let them think if the grieving child is laughing then they have forgotten. Or if they are crying they should be given a tissue to make them stop.
- 5. School can be a place to escape from what is going on at home.**
 - But one size won't fit all.
 - Ask the child and liaise with the parent about the preferred strategy of the child.
- 6. Grieving is mentally and physically exhausting.**
 - At home talking about what has happened and how everyone is feeling is no respecter of bedtimes.
- 7. Be tolerant of homework and other work commitments.**
 - Be firm but caring as you try to ensure they don't get too far behind.
- 8. Talk to the spouse if they come to the school.**
 - Be mindful of the enormous effort the parent is making and the strain they are under.
 - However hard it is for you it is so much harder for them.
- 9. Keep on talking to the child and letting them know you still remember, even in small ways.**

- Adults grieve in rivers where they are fully immersed in their grief for an extended period of time following a death. Little children grieve in puddles.
- The bereaved person never forgets about the person they are missing and the fact that you mention them by name means that person is still, in some way, alive.

10. Remember the anniversaries.

- Make a note of date/s.
- Filling in a 'holiday form'.
- Transitions to other schools.

11. Be aware of areas you may cover in the curriculum that may bring back memories.

- Mother's Day, Father's Day, life after death in RE, areas that touch on illness.
- Give the child a warning. Give them the choice.

12. Be mindful of other children who have lost a loved one as it will bring back many memories.

- 24,000 children a year have to come to terms with losing a parent; 3,000 young people a year die from accidents or illness; 6,000 families a year affected by suicide. Sooner or later, probably sooner, the issue will arise in a school.
- Consider having a quiet, discreet word with the child who has previously lost a loved one, to see how they're doing too.

13. Learn about helping children to cope with bereavement from the various agencies out there.

- Local hospices, church groups, Yoyo project.
- Larger organisations: Winston's Wish, Cruse, Child Bereavement UK.

14. Time heals in bereavement as much as it does following an amputation.

- But healing implies getting better, going back to how it was, being as good as before.
- In bereavement, life gets better, not because of the absence of the pain, but because you learn to live your life despite it.
- Grieving can be like a 'pebble in your pocket' (always there, uncomfortable at times, sticks into you when you least expect it, but at times you can get it out and hold it and deal with it, then put it back in your pocket till next time, and get on with your life).
- If you're worried about not talking to someone about their loss for fear of upsetting them, don't worry. They're upset anyway, just hiding it. And talking to them can help.

15. You can make a terrible situation a bit less stressful for a grieving family.

- Nothing can take away the pain of the loss the children are dealing with. But actions from school staff– small ones, whole-school ones, genuine ones, professional ones, personal ones – can make an awful scenario just a little bit easier to deal with.

Appendix 3

Further reading for adults

Helping Children Cope with Grief Rosemary Wells

Very helpful and easy to read. Practical advice and suggestions, real life examples of children's reactions to bereavement. Particularly suitable for adults working with children.

Grief in Children – a handbook for adults Atle Dyregov

Useful and readable. Explains how children understand and react to death. Contains specific information about how to handle death in school and school's response to the needs of bereaved children.

Death and Loss – compassionate approaches in the classroom Oliver Leaman

For teachers involved in the pastoral care of pupils. Includes ideas about curriculum content within PHSE.

Giving Sorrow Words (Video and Book) Killick & Lindeman

Useful training package designed for school staff to help them deal with the effects of bereavement. Offers practical advice and demonstrates effective techniques for working with children and young people

Loss Change and Grief – An Educational Perspective Erica Brown

Useful book exploring the experiences of bereavement within an educational setting including suggestions about supporting children with learning difficulties.

I Miss You – a first look at death Pat Thomas

Simple factual and sensitive exploration of death which includes interactive questions

The Sad Book - Michael Rosen

Book about Michael Rosen's sadness at losing his son – reaches out to adults and children alike.

Appendix 4:

Reading for Teenagers:

Vicky Angel - Jacqueline Wilson

Even after she dies Vicky makes her presence felt through her close friend Jade.

The Charlie Barber Treatment - Carole Lloyd

When Simon's mum dies he begins to find life difficult. Through his friendship with Charlie he rebuilds his life and relationships.

When a friend dies - Marilyn E. Gootman

Practical suggestions about what can help and full of quotes from bereaved adolescents

When Parents Die - Rebecca Abrams

Written for older teenagers/adults. Looks at issues surrounding bereavement. Autobiographical.

Straight talk about death for teenagers - Earl A. Grollman

Easy to read, concise and informative about what feelings and issues might arise for adolescents.

Appendix 5

Sources of Advice & Support:

The following organisations may be contacted/websites visited to offer support and advice (not an exclusive list):

Essex Schools Info Link: <https://schools.essex.gov.uk/Pages/Search-Results.aspx?k=bereavement>

Child Bereavement Charity <http://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

www.seesaw.org.uk SeeSaw Bereavement Pack (available on Essex info link as above)

www.winstonswish.org.uk/supporting-a-bereaved-child

www.youngminds.org.uk

www.teachers.tv – School Matters – Coping with bereavement – video about two schools managing a death

www.childbereavement.org.uk – information for schools, general information about grief and bereavement

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/home.aspx>

<https://help2makesense.org/>

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/young-people/>

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

Farleigh Hospice in Chelmsford (North Court Road, Chelmsford, CM1 7HF, telephone: 01245 457300)
<https://www.farleighhospice.org/advice-support>

St Helena Hospice in Colchester, Myland Hall, Barncroft Close, Colchester, CO4 9JU, telephone: 01206 845566) <https://www.sthena.org.uk/how-we-can-help-you/for-children>

Samaritans: 115 123 (National)
01206 561234 (Local)