



## **Christ Church CE Infant School BEREAVEMENT POLICY**

**Date reviewed: Summer 2018**

**Date of next review: Summer 2021**

**This school is committed to safeguarding, child protection, and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all members of the school and its community to demonstrably share this commitment.**

### **Aim of Policy**

This policy has been constructed to guide us on how to deal professionally, sensitively and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances. It seeks to reflect the values of Christ Church CE Infant School.

### **Rationale**

Every 22 minutes in the UK a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 41,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, and, sadly, around 12,000 children die in the UK each year.

Within our school community there will almost always be some recently bereaved children who are struggling with their own situation – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil. We would hope to not encounter such circumstances, but the statistical inevitability of such an occurrence implies the necessity of having a Bereavement Policy in place in order that we might be proactive, rather than reactive, when responding to these sensitive situations. Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children – or staff – require, though referral to more specialist support should be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex. Additional information and resources can be accessed at [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk).

Every death and the circumstances in which it occurs is different and a policy that covers every possible contingency would be excessively long. The school uses its discretion when taking into account requests of the family.

In order to be ready to act professionally, sensitively and compassionately, staff are encouraged to read material relating to bereavement and visit appropriate websites, e.g. Macmillan/Winston's Wish.

At Christ Church CE Infant School we seek to meet the needs of all our children/students/pupils and staff in all situations. When home circumstances are changed because of a death in the family, all around is 'different'. We need to be a place that both the child and family can rely on and gain some much needed support.

If the death occurs of one of our pupils or of a member of staff, we will work together, with outside agencies as appropriate, to support each other.

### **Procedures**

We always work in partnership with parents or carers. We will always listen. We will sensitively support and encourage parents, carers or family to tell us of any happenings in their child's life that may affect their child's emotional state but we recognise we will never be told everything.

Every death and the circumstances in which it occurs is different. Sometimes we will only get to know that someone important to one of our pupils has died because of the depressed emotional state / disturbed behaviour or other signs of distress we have seen and have needed to respond to in the child. Sometimes the child will confide in a member of staff or a fellow pupil. Sometimes a member or friend of the family will tell us. Sometimes it will be a friend of the child.

If there has been a bereavement or significant loss in a family we will seek their help and advice to help us avoid saying anything that could confuse or upset the child or add further to the distress of those family members most affected. The following procedures will act as a guide to the school at these times.

### **Preparation**

This policy to work to will greatly help when in shock or upset, especially with sudden or multiple deaths or traumatic circumstances.

Key people to call upon in the Local Authority is Kate Prince, Area Schools Officer, Natalie Cull Areas Schools Assistant, 01483 518106.

A sample letter to send to parents is ready (see appendices 1 & 2).

### **Roles and responsibilities**

The Head, (or most senior member of staff, or Governor) will:

Use the expertise within the school and share the responsibilities.

- Decide who will take overall charge and designate substitutes should they be absent.
- Decide who will be responsible for communicating with the families directly involved.
- Decide who will give the news to the rest of the school community.
- Decide, if the press are involved, who will liaise with them.
- Organise training / support for all involved, if required.

### **Breaking the news to staff, pupils and families**

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 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. Don't forget part time and peripatetic staff.
- Pupils should be told as soon as possible, in most cases. This is best done in familiar groups by someone they know. A large school assembly is not ideal. Staff may well need guidance on words to use and approach to take.
- A letter should go to families the same day if possible and bearing in mind the circumstances of the death. A pre-prepared sample letter is included in appendices 1 & 2 that can be altered according to circumstances - it is difficult to find the right words when emotional and in shock.

### **The first few days**

During the first few days after an incident, it is usually best to have minimum disruption to the timetable, but some flexibility may be required.

The school will consider what the school approach will be if pupils are too upset to attend lessons. If it is a teacher who has died, what will happen to his/her class?

### **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 it private.

- School will identify which staff and pupils may want to attend and the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport. It may be appropriate to close, this decision should be made by the Head and Chair of Governors.
- Will flowers be sent and / or a collection made? Staff (and possibly pupils) will be involved in the decision.
- Cultural and religious implications need consideration (see fact sheet 'Different Cultures and Beliefs', Appendix 3).

### **Support for staff**

Supporting bereaved pupils will be very stressful for staff who may well be already struggling with their own reactions and emotions. Advice will be sought from the Local Authority and the Diocese about who may be able to offer help, both short and long term.

- Opportunities for mutual support, for example, in the staffroom at the end of the school day, will be given to share feelings and emotions.
- Give out copies of 'What helps grieving children and young people' (Appendix 4)

### **Support for pupils**

- It is important to identify pupils who may be particularly vulnerable or likely to experience PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). For example, anyone who witnessed the death.
- Outside professionals and agencies can support the school in the event of traumatic death to counsel pupils.
- The school will make sure that help offered from outside is appropriate before accepting.
- Pupils may find it difficult to be receptive to support or counselling from families of fellow pupils.
- School will identify 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 to for support.

### **Remembering**

This is difficult to plan in advance, but careful thought will be given to this. The dead person's family will be consulted. Schools often find that an assembly that takes the form of a celebration of life is appropriate.

## Appendix 1 - Suggested templates for letter to parents about the death of a pupil

- Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the child's parents.
- The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the parents and school

### Sample letters on death of a pupil:

Dear Parent/Carer

Your child's class teacher/form tutor/had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>.

<Name> died from an illness called cancer. As you may be aware, many children who have cancer get better but sadly <Name> had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday.

He/She was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try to answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we would be more than willing to help you.

We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating <Name.. 's> life.

Yours sincerely <Name> Head Teacher

Dear Parent/Carer

Today, your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the sudden and unexpected death of <child's name> in Year 2.

With the permission of <child's name> family, the children have had the circumstances of her death explained to them in a simple and honest way.

They have been told that on Saturday, she was knocked down by a car that was being driven too fast. An ambulance took her to hospital but her injuries were very serious and she died on Monday morning.

The children have been reassured that accidents like this do sometimes happen but they are very unusual.

The children have been told that some of them might be feeling sad, confused, curious, frightened or perhaps angry and that all of these responses are normal. Equally, they might not be affected and that is absolutely fine.

If they wish to talk to anyone about what happened to <child's name>, the children have been told that their teachers are willing to do this and will do their best to answer questions. If you feel that your child needs extra support, please do let us know. I have also enclosed some information for you on children and grief. Our thoughts are very much with <child's name>'s family at this difficult time, and the whole school community sends them our deepest sympathy and support.

Yours faithfully

## **Appendix 2 - Suggested templates for letter to parents about the death of a staff member:**

Dear parent/Carer

I am sorry to have to tell you that a much-loved member of our staff [name] has died. The children were told today and many will have been quite distressed at the news. No-one wants to see children sad, but we are very aware that factual information and emotional support are the best means of helping children deal with bereavement. I am sure there will be many parents who are also saddened by the news. Children respond in different ways so may dip in and out of sadness, and questions, whilst alternately playing or participating in their usual activities. This is normal and healthy. You may find your child has questions to ask which we will answer in school in a way appropriate to their level of understanding, but if you feel you would like more support and advice yourself, please do not hesitate to contact the school office. You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)

We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Children who wish to attend will be welcome to do so, though it will not be compulsory. It is likely that school will be closed on the morning or afternoon of the funeral as staff will, of course, wish to pay their respects to a very popular colleague. I am sorry to be the bearer of sad news, but I appreciate an occurrence like this impacts the whole school community. I am so grateful for the thriving partnership we have with parents and trust that we, together, will be able to guide and support the children through what may be, for many, a very new experience in their lives.

Yours faithfully

### **Appendix 3 - Fact sheet 'Different Cultures and Beliefs'**

Most important in working with children in these circumstances is to understand and respect the views and wishes of their family, as well as to involve family members in the process. It is also important for school personnel and others to understand various cultural and religious perspectives on death so that interventions are appropriate to the cultural context of the children and families being served. Keep in mind that many of the people dealing with death are also dealing with trauma, and that culture impacts trauma reactions as well. Although not comprehensive, the following information provides describes some of the funeral/mourning practices present within our region.

#### **Impact of Culture on Trauma**

Cultural perspectives can shape people's reaction to a traumatic experience. Specifically, culture:

- a. Influences what type of threat is perceived as traumatic
- b. Influences how individuals and communities interpret the meaning of a traumatic event and how they express their reactions to the event
- c. Forms a context through which traumatized individuals or communities view and judge their own response
- d. May help define healthy pathways to new lives after trauma

#### **Religious Observances of Death**

The role of religion is important for most victims/survivors because their answers to religious questions form their view of life, death and meaning. Many people do not know their position on religion until disaster strikes, and then their religious faith and beliefs are formed. Some religions give individuals more power over life than others. Some religions give collections of individuals power over life. Some religions give spirits more power over life than the living. Some give free will. Some give fatalism. All have defined ways of dealing with death. Some religious differences include:

##### **1. Jewish observances**

- a. All customs are designed to treat the body with respect; therefore, autopsies and embalming are generally prohibited. Viewing the corpse is also considered disrespectful.
- b. The emotional needs of the survivors are very important.
- c. There is variance among Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Jewish practices.
- d. No funeral is allowed on Saturday (the Sabbath) or on major religious holidays.
- e. Music and flowers are *not* encouraged.
- f. Eulogies are given by rabbis, family and friends. When the deceased person is held in high regard, there are usually several eulogies.
- g. Family members and others accompany the casket to the grave and are encouraged to place a shovel of earth on the casket, as a sign of the finality of death.
- h. The period of mourning lasts for one year. The mourner's "Kaddish" or declaration of faith is said at the gravesite: "Blessed, praised, glorified and exalted; extolled, honored, magnified and lauded be the name of the Holy One. May abundant peace from the heavens descend upon us, and may life be renewed for us and all Israel, and let us say Amen."
- i. "Sitting shiva" refers to the seven-day mourning period immediately following burial. The family cooks no food and a candle or lamp is kept burning in the memory of the deceased. The Kaddish is said every day during this time.
- j. Some people observe a period of three days following the burial during which visitors are not received and the time is devoted to lamentation.
- k. After the first seven days, survivors are encouraged to rejoin society but still maintain mourning by reciting the Kaddish twice daily for thirty days.
- l. Many mourners may wear a black pin with a torn ribbon, or a torn garment during the funeral and for the next week as a symbol of grief.
- m. Newborn babies may be named after the deceased. (This is important to remember since many cultures believe it improper to name people after the dead and, in fact, adults may change their names to avoid being named after someone who was died.)
- n. The first anniversary is marked by the unveiling of a tombstone at a special ceremony.

##### **2. Roman Catholic observances**

1. Since the Second Vatican Council, the terms "last rites" and "extreme unction" are no longer used by the Catholic Church.

2. The Sacraments of the Sick are prayers that are said as the person is dying, and involve confession and communion. If a person dies before the sacraments are given, the priest will anoint the deceased conditionally within three hours of the time of death.
3. There is often a wake and, if so, the priest will conduct the service or say the rosary.
4. There are distinct phases to "The Mass of Christian Burial."
  1. Prayers at the funeral home
  2. Welcoming the body to the church
  3. Covering the casket with a white cloth
  4. Sprinkling the casket with holy water
  5. The Eucharist is celebrated
  6. Prayers are said after the Mass
  7. Casket is escorted to back of church
  8. At the cemetery, the grave is blessed.
5. Consecration is a reaffirmation that the person will rise again. Prayers address not only the dead but the survivors - their faith in eternal life is encouraged.
6. The one-month anniversary of the death is often celebrated by a Mass, as are those of other anniversaries.

### **3. Protestant observances**

There are a wide range of Protestant observances, including:

1. Often there is a family gathering at the family home or funeral home.
2. Caskets, open or closed, are part of passage. Memorial items may be placed in the casket.
3. Cremation is an accepted option for some.
4. Black dress is a part of mourning.
5. Funeral services include music and testimonials. Music may include traditional hymns and/or songs of praise celebrating the Christian experience and the hope of everlasting life.
6. Gravesite visits may be made.
7. Memorial services are common, and sometimes replace funerals and other immediate observances of death.
8. Flowers and donations are preferred ways to express condolences.
9. Church members and friends will usually assist in providing the food needs of the family. The period of time will vary according to the needs of the family.
10. There is no formal structure to observe the death, month after month or year after year.

### **4. Islamic Traditions**

Traditions differ in every country and the Turkish interpretation of Islam is in some ways different than those in other Arabic countries. These comments are basically relevant for Turkish culture: Reviewed September 2014

1. Death is considered an act of God is not questioned. Faithful followers believe that all the events in the life-course of an individual, including the time and type of death, are pre-written by God.
2. People in grief are encouraged to show their feelings openly. They are encouraged to cry loudly as it is believed that crying cleans the soul. Any expression of rebellion against God's decision to take a person away from her/his dear ones is considered a sin.
3. Friends visit the house of the deceased and talk with the family members, encouraging them to describe how the death occurred, what they were doing at the time of death, etc.
4. For seven days, the family members are never left alone. Friends and neighbors bring food, as no cooking is supposed to be done in a funeral home during those seven days.
5. Traditionally, no television, radio or any musical devices would be allowed for 40 days but this practice has waned in recent years.
6. There is a religious prayer at the 40th and another at the 52nd day after the death.
7. Muslims are very sensitive to where their beloved ones are buried. They definitely want them buried in a cemetery for Muslims. They also want the funeral prayers to be led by a Muslim, not by a rabbi or a Christian priest.
8. A special ceremony and prayers accompany the funeral. The body is buried without the coffin and wrapped in white clothes, as it is believed that the body should touch the earth.
9. The body must be washed/bathed with certain rituals before the funeral ceremony begins. This usually takes place at either a special section of the mosque or in the morgue of the hospital. It is very upsetting when a body is buried without being washed.
10. When meeting with someone who has lost a relative, conversations start by saying: "May you be alive and May God's blessings be on him/her - the deceased."

## **Appendix 4 – Fact sheet ‘What helps grieving children and young people’.**

### **What helps grieving children and young people**

One of the most frequent questions that is asked of our Support and Information Team from adults caring for grieving children and young people is ‘How can I help and what can I do?’

Every child is unique and will cope with the death of someone important in their own way. There is no magic formula but we hope that this information sheet will help you to better understand what it is that grieving children need. It has been written with input from the children and young people that we work with and so is based on real children and their real experiences.

### **How can I help and what can I do?**

Grieving is exhausting for everybody, child or adult, but is eased if everyone can do it together and muddle through as best they all can. You can do a huge amount by carrying on as much as you can with the usual routines of home, school, time with friends, etc. whilst supporting one another when the grief feels all consuming.

In the early days after a death, what children of any age need is extra care and concern from the adults around them. Sudden death means there will be no opportunity to say goodbye and children can feel very angry with their parent or sibling who has died and left them. They may have regrets about something they said or wish they had said. They need to know from parents and carers that they are still loved, that they will continue to be looked after despite what has happened, and that they will be involved in any decisions that affect them.

What else is needed in the following days and weeks will be dependent on how the child responds, their individual personality, and the circumstances of the death. It is very normal to feel rather out of your depth and not sure what is best to do. It might help to remember that grief is a normal response to a death and no one knows your child better than you. Provided with love from their family, and support from friends and school, most children do not need professional help but if you are in doubt about this, please do seek guidance from the Child Bereavement UK Support and Information Line 01494 568900.

### **How truthful should I be?**

Adults naturally want to protect, but children have a much greater capacity to deal with the harsh realities of life than we realise, as long as they are told in an appropriate way. Even a very sad truth will be better than uncertainty and confusion. What a child does not know they will make up and their fantasies can be very distressing to them and difficult to deal with.

One child said *“It helps to know why everyone in the family is sad and worried because when you don’t know what is happening you can’t help thinking it’s your fault.”*

Children and young people need information given in words appropriate for their age and understanding. Without information, they cannot start to make some sense of what has happened. Children pick up on atmosphere and will be aware that there is something that everyone else knows about but not them. This can create feelings of exclusion and isolation from the rest of the family.

When there are no secrets, a family has the chance to get closer together; the children can trust in the adults around them and are more likely to express their feelings more freely, talk about any fears, and be able to receive reassurance and comfort.

### **The word “dead” feels very harsh, should I use it?**

Phrases such as *“gone to sleep”* or *“passed away”* or words such as *“lost”* may feel kinder but are misleading and will lead to confusion and complication. We encourage children to find things that they have lost and if they associate going to sleep with dying, this commonly results in anxieties at bedtime.

Saying the person *“went away”* may cause the child to feel abandoned or think he or she did something wrong and is no longer loved. Our information sheet *Explaining To Young Children That Someone Has Died* will give you words to use to explain the concept of death to your child.

### **They keep asking me questions, how should I answer them?**

Questions need to be answered honestly, and in simple language suitable for the child’s age. This may seem harsh but bereaved children tell us that they need adults to speak to them in a way that is clear and unambiguous. It is helpful to reassure a child that it is OK to ask questions and to talk about what has happened.

Children are very literal and may have a different understanding of the words such as “heart attack” to that of an adult. It is easy to assume that they know what we are talking about. Check their understanding by asking them what they think a heart attack is.

Young children may need repeated explanations and answers. This can be very wearing and hard to deal with but it is a child’s way of fitting together all the pieces of the jigsaw. Questions from a child are sometimes not about more information but more a way to check out that what has happened is true and not just a bad dream.

### **Will they need any time off school and if so, how much?**

When their world has fallen apart, the familiar routine of school feels safe and secure, and is a helpful reminder for a child that not everything has changed. As was said earlier, what bereaved children and young people want is a sense of normality. School can provide this. School also offers a chance to have some time off from grieving.

Most of the children that we see at Child Bereavement UK want to get back to school after one, or at the most a few days. Some children do need a few days more at home but the longer they are away, the harder it is to return. Returning to school after the death of someone important does need to be handled sensitively and the child asked how they would like this managed. It is always a good idea to let school know what has happened and to keep in touch with staff. You may find our Schools Information Pack and section for schools on our website helpful.

[www.childbereavementuk.org/For/Shop/ForProfessionals/SchoolsInformation](http://www.childbereavementuk.org/For/Shop/ForProfessionals/SchoolsInformation)

### **How can I help my child to express their feelings?**

Children of all ages do not like to feel under pressure to express powerful emotions, it can feel too painful or just not the right time. Talking is only one way of doing this and for many young people, it is not what they find easy to do. There are alternatives. A shared activity such as walking the dog or playing a game takes off the pressure and therefore can be a time when a child will start to share thoughts and feelings.

Developing a memory box together is another idea to encourage communication. Working through an activity or workbook together is another good way to gently open the door on the subject. Suggestions of workbooks to use are given at the end of this information sheet.

### **I feel very sorry for my son but he is behaving badly, should I discipline him?**

Children can feel very out of control, and scared, when experiencing the death of someone important and respond with challenging behaviour. Your usual daily structures and routines will feel comforting for a child of any age but especially young children. Try to change these as little as possible although it may feel very difficult to do when you are exhausted emotionally and physically. Try to continue with normal standards of behaviour but “normality with compassion” is a good yardstick to use. Anger forms a large part of the grieving process and children of all ages will express it in various ways.

*“It was just total anger, you couldn’t explain it. It was to nobody and about nothing, it was just anger and it was building up inside me.”* Tanya age 10 whose brother Teddy died from a sudden illness.

Giving the message that it is understandable for them to be angry is what they need to hear. However, they also need to know that it is not acceptable to hurt themselves or anyone else. Safe ways to release anger that we use with our bereavement groups include bashing cushions, vigorous physical exercise, a very messy painting session involving hands, going outside to shout very loudly and throwing wet sponges against a brick wall. Any of them can help.

### **For how long will they grieve?**

Children and young people will continue to grieve for life. With support from adults around them, they will learn to adjust to life as it has become rather than how it used to be, but the loss will always be with them. *“I didn’t feel anything for the first 3 months. For the next 6 to 8 months I couldn’t really handle myself or my feelings. Then after that it took me a long time and a lot of tears but I managed to calm down. Ever since then it’s like a long road up a hill.”* Sarah age 17.

Children and teenagers may need to look again at the details surrounding the death of an important person in their lives as they grow older. Feelings they had when young will be different several years further on as their understanding matures and the meaning of the death changes as they move through life. This is not unresolved grief but the experience of different feelings later in life, often connected to major life events such as moving up to senior school or other change.

### **Is it Ok for my children to see me upset?**

Your children need you to be a model, not a hero. Share your feelings with your child; children learn to grieve from the adults around them. If parents are open and expressive their children are likely to be so too. On the other hand, they will learn to close down and bottle up emotions if adults are distant and attempting to keep their feelings under control.

You have your own grief to deal with which at times will understandably be overwhelming. It is difficult for children to share emotions with an adult who is continuously overcome by grief or depression. If you can, share the load and get support from friends and other family members by asking them to have the children for a few hours. This will give you space to express any raw grief without having to maintain some control for the children, resulting in your feeling stronger for when they are around.

### **Sometimes what helps a child is talking to someone who is not as emotionally involved.**

This could be a family friend, or other adult, who is prepared to give some time and listen properly.

Teachers can play an important role here, particularly in a Primary School, as they see a child on a daily basis and can keep a look out for signs of distress or changes in behaviour.

Do keep in contact with your child's school and ask them to ensure, without going into detail, that all staff are aware of what has happened. There is a special section on the Child Bereavement UK website for schools offering guidance and support. Children are very protective of adults they care about and may chose to talk to someone else in order to avoid causing further distress. The teenagers who we see at the Child Bereavment Charity tell us that they find sharing experiences with people their own age, using the internet, is helpful. Bereavement Websites that are safe are suggested at the end of this sheet.

Family pets may take on a new significance. One young boy told us that his dog was a source of comfort because it felt warm and soft to cuddle. It let him talk as much as he wanted to without interruption, didn't judge him, and gave him unconditional love and affection.

### **Will it help them to see a bereavement counsellor?**

Particularly in the early days after a death, counselling is not usually what children of any age want or need unless the death has been in very traumatic circumstances. The bereaved children that we work with at Child Bereavement UK tell us what they need initially is to be with adults who they already know and trust, rather than a stranger with whom they have to spend time building up a relationship. However, in time, needs will change and some children find speaking to a counsellor helpful, but others will not.

Anthony said "*Counsellors are helpful I feel because they won't necessarily ask you questions – they just say tell me how you are feeling*". But Emily age 17 told us "*There is no way that I was going to go to the school counsellor.*" *Seeing a counsellor will not help a child who is not yet ready for this type of support.*

### **Looking after yourself is essential**

*The first step to supporting a grieving child or young person is to get support for yourself. It is not a sign of weakness or not being able to cope if you seek help from others. Don't expect too much of yourself - managing life and your own at the same time as trying to support a child or young person, is exhausting.*

### **Useful websites**

[www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)

[www.rd4u.org.uk](http://www.rd4u.org.uk)

[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)