



# Bereavement Policy

DOVELANDS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Updated  
Approved by Behaviour and Safety Committee  
Review Date

March 2023  
March 2023  
March 2026

## 1. Rationale:

Within our school community there may 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 having a Bereavement Policy in place means that we can 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) [useful organisations 2020.pdf](#)

## 2. School statement:

In our school we aim to promote positive mental health for every member of our staff and our children. We pursue this aim using both universal, whole school approaches and specialised, targeted approaches aimed at vulnerable pupils.

## 3. School Background:

Dovelands Primary School is openly inclusive, welcoming all children from the whole community to a caring and happy environment where they can achieve to the very best of their abilities. At Dovelands we believe that all children are unique and we encourage them to develop their strengths and creativity as individuals. We aim to provide education of the highest quality in an environment where every child's needs are recognised and each has an equal opportunity to realise their potential.

## 4. Curriculum

Children at Dovelands 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 in the Jigsaw scheme of work.) It is also addressed through cross curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles, as well as through art, literacy and Religious Education. Bereavement and grief issues may also be raised and discussed through topic work e.g. World Wars and Holocaust. Assemblies may also be used to address aspects of death e.g. Remembrance Day or commemorative occasions.

Staff are responsible for considering the needs of the children in their class and raising awareness with parents where necessary when planning lessons which may explore the concept of loss, bereavement and grief. 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.

## 5. Objectives:

The core intentions of the policy are:

- To support pupils and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and community.
- To identify key staff within school and LA, and clarify the pathway of support.
- The Children Act 1989 aimed to ensure that the welfare of the child was paramount, working in partnership with parents to protect the child from harm ([http://www.careandthelaw.org.uk/eng/b\\_section2](http://www.careandthelaw.org.uk/eng/b_section2)).

All intentions of this policy endorse that aim as we endeavour to counter any adverse effects of bereavement and maintain pupils' emotional well-being. This policy should be considered alongside other relevant policies including:

- Attendance Policy
- Health & Welfare Statement
- SEND Policy
- Mental Health and Wellbeing policy

All staff are signposted to the '10 needs of bereaved children' document from the Laura Centre in order to support the children appropriately [10 needs of children.pdf](#)

## 6. The role of the governing body

- To approve policy and ensure its implementation, to be reviewed in three years.
- To contribute to generating and updating the policy.
- To support the Head Teacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is managed.
- To support the Head Teacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is tackled in the curriculum

## 7. The role of the head teacher

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.

- To monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.
- To respond to media enquiries.
- To be the first point of contact for family/child concerned.
- To keep the governing body fully informed.

- 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

The Headteacher has overall responsibility for support and liaison in event of a death or traumatic loss. Another key person (a senior member of staff such as the SENCO or Phase Leader) may be named for a particular case and that person will take responsibility for:

- Implementing the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities.
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies.
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary schools.
- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff
- Accessing specialist support from the appropriate agency

## 8. Procedures for initial communication of a death

1. Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the Head teacher and their wishes respected in communicating with others. Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion, whilst being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations. This applies to staff, pupils, parents and the wider community.
2. Staff should be informed before pupils and be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways which is factual and not ambiguous to the child. Staff should avoid using language that gives the children false hope e.g. your dad is in the sky / in the hospital / sleeping, as this may lead them to believe that that dad may come back. This will be agreed for each individual circumstance.
3. Pupils who are affected should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them.
4. If appropriate a decision will be made about whether a letter to some or all school families affected should be composed at the earliest opportunity and a decision made as to whom, and how, it should be distributed.
5. The school should be aware that the school timetable may need a degree of flexibility to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of children affected by the situation. However, minimal disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security and familiarity.
6. Staff, pupils & parents affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate, as directed by the Human Resources Department or Individual union bodies, or the bereavement agencies listed under useful websites.
7. In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance may be clarified, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances.
8. School & staff should be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life so information should be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points. (new class teacher, supply staff etc.)

## 9. Ongoing support for children & families

1. School should be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life. Reactions to bereavement will change as the child moves through developmental stages, so measures put in place to support the child may need to change.
2. Arrangements and requirements for pupils affected by bereavement should be considered in consultation with the bereaved family and reviewed as necessary being mindful of the ongoing and changeable nature of the impact.
3. Regular communication with the appropriate member of staff (either face to face in private or via telephone or email) should be offered to ensure issues at home or in the classroom are shared. This will also enable discussion of curriculum planning and potential areas for concerns such as significant dates for the child (anniversaries, birthdays, mothers/fathers days, religious celebrations) or potentially upsetting topics.
4. Consider practical ideas to help a bereaved child as necessary including allowing a child to leave class briefly, pocket comforter to hold, diary to aid communication of feelings (through writing or drawing), happy/sad face cards to tell a teacher discreetly how the child is feeling. Additional information and resources can be accessed at [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk). When working with children who have experienced a bereavement, it is important that staff are aware of the 'five guiding principles to intervention' (*Hobfoll et al (2007)*) to ensure that they are appropriately supporting the child / children. These are:
  1. A sense of safety
  2. A calming environment
  3. Connection
  4. Self and community efficacy
  5. Hope
5. Absence management should follow similar lines to that for SEND and medical issues. Dovelands own 'Supporting children in school with medical needs' policy states that 'it is not generally acceptable practice to...penalise children for their attendance record if their absences are related to their medical condition e.g. hospital appointments. Absence management will be very individualised and dependent on each case as will the timescales. Each family will be supported in a time appropriate and individualised way to ultimately ensure good levels of attendance so that routines and education are affected as little as possible (the timescales for this can't be defined as they will depend on each case).
6. School should ensure that appropriate measures are put in place to ensure a smooth transition to secondary school / new school & in discussion with parents ensure that all relevant information is shared where necessary.
7. Bullying – staff should be vigilant in keeping an eye on a bereaved child as there is evidence that a bereaved child may be bullied because of their loss.

## 10. Ongoing support for staff:

School should be aware of the impact that bereavement has on a member of staff and measures should be put in place to support the member of staff accordingly. This will be on a case by case incident. It is important to note that grief affects everyone differently and that grief isn't linear. Staff will be referred to Vivup (a free

counselling service) and they should also be made aware of the variety of other services that are available to support them during this process. [useful organisations 2020.pdf](#)

#### 11. Anticipated loss:

Anticipated loss can be an exhausting rollercoaster of emotions. Children, staff, parents and the community embark on the grieving process before the death and they may hope for recovery right up to the end. They will need:

1. acknowledgement of their worries
2. acknowledgement of their fears and uncertainties
3. open communication
4. accurate/ honest information
5. inclusion and choice
6. encouragement/empowerment

Some questions that they may ask are:

1. What have doctors said?
2. What will happen next?
3. Will the ill family member get better?
4. Who is going to take care of them? (during treatment and after death if relevant)
5. Is it their fault?
6. Will anyone else die?
7. Who will look after me?
8. Is the illness contagious?
9. Is it ok to have fun and do normal things?

#### APPENDIX

Useful Websites and resources:

[useful apps 2020.pdf](#)

[useful organisations 2020.pdf](#)

p.25 of Child Bereavement UK Schools Information Pack

<https://childbereavementuk.org/wpcontent/uploads/2018/09/Schools-Information-Pack-Web-Complete-Download.pdf>

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

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

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

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

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

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

[www.rip.rap.org.uk](http://www.rip.rap.org.uk)

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

### Suggested templates for letter to parents

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 letter on death of a pupil:

Dear Parents

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 happy 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

#### Sample letter on death of a staff member:

Dear parents,

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 an age-appropriate way in school, 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.....