



# LOUGHBOROUGH High School

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Policy Title: Bereavement Policy

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Point of Contact (Reviewer): Mr Stuart Thompson – Senior Deputy Head

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Every 22 minutes in the UK a child is bereaved of a parent, making up some 41,000 a 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. Experiencing a bereavement can make children more vulnerable. Bereavement, whether it is an expected death due to illness or a sudden, unexpected death or suicide, is something that can impact on members of our school community at any time.

Loughborough High School is committed to the emotional health and wellbeing of all of its staff and pupils. It is at the heart of all aspects of school life, providing an ethos, environment and curriculum that prepares pupils for coping with bereavement.

The trauma of bereavement can also have a profound effect on the whole school community. It is therefore important for us as a school to reflect upon an appropriate response to bereavement and to develop flexible contingency plans that reflect how the School could or should respond in a tragic situation.

## **2.0 AIMS**

- To provide a framework for all staff, giving guidance in how to respond sensitively and compassionately to a bereavement within the school community.
- To support pupils and/or members of staff before (where applicable), during and after bereavement.
- To enable effective communication and clarify a pathway of support between members of staff, pupils, the grieving family/carers and the whole school community.
- To identify key staff within the school who can offer support with bereavement
- To provide guidance for staff on grief counselling and how to manage bereavement situations
- To have clear expectations about the way the school will respond to a death and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.

## **3.0 RATIONALE**

Whilst one of the few certainties in life is death, no matter how prepared we think we are, the loss of a loved one is often traumatic and unexpected. Grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real. Differing religions and cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value within our school environment. The death of a child or a member of staff has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching and pastoral team of that child or member of staff and every effort must be taken to inform and support sensitively these far-reaching contacts.

## **4.0 POLICY LINKS**

This policy also links to the following school policies:

- Safeguarding policy
- Critical incident plan
- Educational visits policy
- Anti-bullying policy
- Equality policy
- Health and safety policy
- Leave of absence policy (staff)
- PSHCE Policy and schemes of work

## **SECTION 1: The death of a pupil or member of staff**

### **5.0 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### **The role of the Head and Senior Leadership Team is to:**

- Review the bereavement policy annually and ensure its implementation
- Lead a whole-school approach to the effective management of loss and bereavement
- Be the first point of contact for family/child/staff directly affected by a bereavement
- Record bereavements affecting children on CPOMS
- Monitor progress in supporting those impacted by a bereavement and liaise with external agencies
- Keep the school governors appropriately informed
- Deal with media enquiries

#### **The role of all staff in the school is to:**

- Inform the Head, Senior Deputy Head and Assistant Head (Pastoral) at the earliest possibility if they become aware of the death of someone within the school community.
- 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 pupil when they are distressed and how to refer to specialist support if needed
- Know how to access support for themselves, for other staff and for the family, if advice or information is 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, Senior Deputy Head, Assistant Head (Pastoral) and pastoral team.
- Teach about loss and bereavement as part of the planned PSHCE curriculum or in the role of the tutor (Teaching staff only)

#### **Procedures**

In the event of a pupil or member of staff dying, it is important that all people who are close to the deceased are informed in a sensitive and supportive manner rather than risk hearing the news through other means.

In both cases, discussions must take place with the family and their wishes taken into account as to what information they wish to share with the school community. A simple confirmation of death may be required until more details are available.

The school can help to prevent speculation and rumours as well as be a source of support for the family and community.

In the case of the death of a pupil or member of staff while at school or on a school trip, the Senior Leadership Team will follow the 'Critical Incident Plan' response procedures.

#### **Pre-bereavement**

In some situations, it is known in advance that a death is going to occur, often as a result of a long illness.

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

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

- Contact the family to confirm factual information and explore what support can be provided to them
- Identify a key point of contact within school for information exchange and to update when things develop who will keep lines of communication open to ensure that all information is received in a timely manner.
- Ensure that all relevant staff are clear about what information needs to be shared with the pupil.
- Offer to involve the school chaplain and other faith or community leaders when appropriate and with the agreement of the family,
- Signpost other external agencies and means of support (See appendix 1)

- Explore what support for the pupil 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.
- Consider whether and, if so, how to communicate with the wider school community, especially friends and members of the pupil's tutor group
- If appropriate, begin conversations with sensitivity around practical considerations in the events leading up to the death and following the death.

### **The first few days**

- If the school is open the Head will inform the Senior Leadership Team, Chaplain, Chair of the School Board, Director of Marketing and any admin staff required to support the next part of the process.
- If the information comes outside of working hours the person who receives the news will inform the Head who will then inform the Senior Leadership Team and any others who need to know initially bearing in mind the impact of hearing the news remotely.
- A nominated senior member of staff will contact the deceased's family with the aim of establishing the facts and avoid rumours, ideally using a protected phone line to ensure free flow of accurate information.
- 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 a member of staff to be the key point of contact for the affected pupil/s and ensure there is support and cover in place for that member of staff if required. Send letters or cards of condolence to the family and individuals directly affected.
- Prepare a press statement, in conjunction with the Director of Marketing and with due regard to the family affected.
- Inform members of staff before pupils are told, recognising that some pupils may have found out through other means, in particular staff members who had a particularly close relationship with the deceased. Where possible staff will be prepared to share information in age-appropriate ways to make sure that all staff have the same version of events. Ensure that staff not on site on that day (e.g. part time staff, colleagues from other schools within the Foundation) are also informed simultaneously.
- Inform pupils who are most directly affected (e.g. friendship group, tutor group), preferably in small groups, by someone known to them and in keeping with the wishes of the family. (See Appendix 1)
- Inform the wider school community in line with the wishes of the family. This may be done through an extraordinary assembly, to acknowledge what has happened, to reflect on and remember the life of the person who has died and to normalise and share grief.
- All should be given time to process the news and the opportunity to grieve in an appropriate private space. (See Appendix 2)
- After the news has been announced, it may be appropriate to have a short break in the timetable to allow the community to process the news and take some time out. However, we should aim for minimal disruption to the timetable as this can offer a sense of security and familiarity.
- A temporary tribute/book of condolence may be set up, in a safe accessible area where pupils can be supported. The family should be offered the opportunity to visit the school if they wish to, or photographs can be shared with them later. Staff and pupils will be given notice before removing this to prepare them beforehand.
- Arrange a staff meeting at the end of the first day to ensure that staff are coping with the situation and identify any unresolved problems or ongoing issues.
- Ensure that staff who live alone have contact numbers of colleagues or are directed to external agencies for further support if required.
- Do not remove a deceased pupil's belongings/work/name from classrooms, these should be discussed with pupils at a later stage.

### **The funeral**

- Find out the wishes of the family and follow these in terms of the involvement of members of the school community (or not)
- Identify which staff and pupils may wish to attend if invited by the family and the practicalities of such which may include risk assessment, staff cover, parental consent and transport. In some very rare circumstances, it may be appropriate to close or suspend the school.
- The Head or a deputy will always attend the funeral as a mark of respect and to represent the school.

- Organise tributes (such as flowers or a collection) in line with family wishes and the wishes of staff and pupils
- Remain sensitive to the religious and cultural beliefs of the family at all times.

### **Following a sudden and unexpected death: suicide of a pupil or member of staff**

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. We will closely monitor any pupils (and liaise with their parents if appropriate) who are thought to be 'at risk' as a depressed pupil is at even greater risk of suicide after a peer commits suicide.

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: 'Help when we needed it most': <https://media.samaritans.org/documents/samaritans-help-when-we-needed-it-most.pdf>

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 and 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 saying 'attempted to end his/her life' rather than 'unsuccessful suicide' or 'failed attempt at suicide'.

## **SECTION 2: Supporting a bereaved pupil**

### **Returning to school after a bereavement**

- After the funeral consider whether it is appropriate to visit the child and family affected at home and plan a return to school. If so, the meeting should outline:
  - Acknowledgement of the death
  - How the pupil would like to share the news
  - Which member of staff they would like as their contact within school
  - Agree a safe space for them to go to if they feel overwhelmed by grief at any point. Other strategies may include use of a time out card or a non-verbal sign or message. Agreement of how this will be communicated to staff.
  - Consider whether a phased return to school may be appropriate.
  - Plan the first day back with a key member of staff taking the lead. When the pupil returns it is important to acknowledge the loss.
- Ensure that friendships within school are secure as peer support can be particularly important for a bereaved child or young person
- Ensure that all staff are notified of the day of return and reminded to allow for possible changes in emotions, behaviours, concentration and work levels.
- Continue regular contact with the family, demonstrating continuing care for them and their daughter over time
- Consider practical issues and make sensitive updates to parental and other contact details when needed

### **Longer term support**

- We are aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life. Record this information via CPOMS and share with the successive teachers and tutors of the pupil, including ensuring that significant dates and events for the pupil are flagged as they travel up the school
- Staff should be sensitive of significant days in the calendar e.g. Mothering Sunday/Fathers' day as these can spark a revival of the feelings of bereavement.
- Ensure that families are directed to bereavement support from external agencies.
- It may be appropriate and/or desired by the family to have a more lasting memorial in school. Pupils may also wish to be involved with any plans. There will need to be an awareness of the sensitivities of any future requirement for removal, relocation or replacement of any such memorial.
- Continue learning about loss and bereavement as part of our PSHCE education, ever mindful of how to support and flag in advance the topic to those who have been directly affected.

### **Death, grief and bereavement in the curriculum**

Pupils within LHS explore the concept of loss, bereavement and grief as part of the statutory elements of our PSHCE curriculum. It is also addressed through cross-curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles within science, as well as through art, English literature and religious education.

We answer any questions relating to loss or death in a sensitive, age-appropriate, honest and factual way. Pupils are not expected to disclose any personal experiences but will be signposted to support if they want it. We give pupils opportunities to learn about and discuss cultural and religious issues around death and encourage them to express their own responses and feelings.

We also use assemblies to address aspects of death for example Remembrance Day, Holocaust Memorial Day or commemorative occasions. We also observe national minutes of silence as a whole community, explaining the purpose of these.

When appropriate, we respond to a tragedy or serious incident by discussing this within classes, tutor groups or year groups having discussed as a staff body the language we will use to respond to the incident.

We also point parents/carers towards appropriate advice on how to talk to their children about these events when necessary.

**Equality and inclusion, values and beliefs**

We recognise that there is a range of cultural and religious beliefs, customs and procedures concerning death within our school community at LHS. It follows therefore that bereaved children and families may have differing expectations, some of which may affect matters of school organisation. We aim at all times to present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. We also make pupils aware of differing responses to bereavement, and that, as a community, we value and respect each one of these.

### **SECTION 3: Supporting staff**

People are often at a loss as to what to say or do to help a pupil who has been bereaved by the death of someone important to them. Every situation is different and pupils will be affected to a greater or lesser degree dependent on the circumstances of the death and the nature of the relationship they had with the person who has died. Sometimes school staff can provide an opportunity to talk about what has happened with a familiar trusted adult in relative peace and calm outside of the family home. When a parent or sibling has died, pupils can try to spare their surviving parent by hiding their own grief and appearing to be ok. School can therefore often be seen as somewhere safe to express their grief. The following e-learning module may prove useful: <https://www.minded.org.uk/Component/Details/448769>

The following guidance may also be helpful:

- Do not avoid the subject. It is better to explain what has happened sensitively to avoid rumours.
- Try not to judge: Grief is a very personal experience and every pupil will grieve differently, even those from the same family. Teenagers in particular resent assumptions being made as to how they should be feeling and what they should be doing.
- Ensure that facts given are clear and as agreed with the family.
- Acknowledge what has happened, don't be afraid to use the word 'death' in correspondence, 'I was very sorry to hear of the death of your.....'. A card to a bereaved pupil from the tutor group or class is often really appreciated, helps to maintain contact with school and, in the case of a death of a pupil, can also aid the grieving process of friends within school.
- Responses to the news will vary: a lack of immediate reaction does not mean that pupils do not care. Initially the full reality of the news may not have sunk in. Pupils can feel that they have to be seen to be coping as a sign of maturity. They must be allowed to express emotion and feelings and staff as well should not be afraid to share their own feelings of sadness.
- Above all, pupils need honesty. It is better to answer questions truthfully, ensuring accuracy of fact and in conjunction with the agreed lines from the family.
- Be prepared to listen. LHS is a busy place but an offer to spend a bit of quiet time with a pupil who wishes to talk is essential at this time. Some may wish to say nothing. If you are discussing something in class that will refer to the deceased do not be afraid to do so. Avoiding references to the deceased might be perceived as a denial that they ever existed.

#### **The death of a member (or former member) of the school community**

In the case of the death of a member (or former member) of staff, special support including appropriate cover may be needed for staff who worked in the same department or who were particularly close to the deceased. We work within our leave of absence policy to ensure that staff are provided with appropriate leave and support at a time of bereavement.

Staff who are dealing with a bereavement of their own are encouraged to speak with their line manager about any areas of the curriculum which they feel uncomfortable to teach or would like additional support to teach.

## Contact Details of Support Agencies specialising in Bereavement

### Child Bereavement UK

Website: <http://www.childbereavement.org.uk/>  
Email: [support@childbereavement.org](mailto:support@childbereavement.org)  
Helpline: 0800 028 8840 (9am-5pm, Monday-Friday)  
Live Chat: via website (9am-5pm, Monday-Friday)

### Cruse Bereavement Care (For 18+)

Website: <http://www.cruse.org.uk>  
Helpline: 0808 808 1677  
(9:30am-5pm, Monday-Friday; Open later Tues-Thurs; Weekends 10am – 2pm)  
CruseChat: Via the website (9am-9pm)

### Child Death Helpline (For bereaved parents)

Website: <http://www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk>  
Email: [support@childbereavement.org](mailto:support@childbereavement.org)  
Helpline: 0800 282 986 & 0808 800 6019

### Grief encounter

Website: <https://www.griefencounter.org.uk>  
Email: [griefftalk@griefencounter.org.uk](mailto:griefftalk@griefencounter.org.uk)  
Helpline: 0808 802 0111  
Live Chat: via website

### Hope Again

Website: <https://www.hopeagain.org.uk>  
Email: [helpline@cruse.org.uk](mailto:helpline@cruse.org.uk)  
Helpline: 0808 808 1677 (9:30am-5pm, Monday-Friday)

### Survivors of bereavement by Suicide

Website: <http://uk-sobs.org>  
Helpline: 0300 111 5065 (9am-9pm, Monday-Sunday)

### The Good Grief Trust

Website: <https://www.thegoodgrieftrust.org>  
Email: [hello@thegoodgrieftrust.org](mailto:hello@thegoodgrieftrust.org)

### Winston's Wish

Website: <http://www.winstonswish.org.uk/>  
Email: [ask@winstonswish.org](mailto:ask@winstonswish.org)  
Helpline: 08088 020 021

Counselling Directory: <http://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/bereavement.html>

## **Appendix 1: Guidelines for breaking the news of a death to pupils**

- Once staff have been told of the death, inform pupils as soon as possible
- Where possible, pupils should be informed in small groups e.g. tutor groups or class groups and ensure that pastoral support is available (e.g. Chaplain, Tutor, HoY etc.)
- Identify those pupils who had a close relationship with the deceased so they can be told separately.
- Begin by acknowledging that you have some sad news to give
- Be honest. Give the news stating simple facts, using the words dead/died, not euphemisms.
- If known and with the permission of the family, explain briefly where and when the death occurred.
- If facts are not known, say so, and that you will endeavour to find out. If rumours are rife, say which are not correct, if known. Where appropriate, remind pupils of their responsibilities and the impact of posts in the public domain
- Allow pupils to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually as agreed with the family.
- Allow pupils to verbalise their feelings
- Allow pupils to discuss the situation and share their experience of death
- Be honest about your own feelings and talk about your relationship without eulogising the deceased.
- Those pupils closest to the deceased should be given the opportunity to share their feelings and experiences within the smaller group or in a one-to-one situation.
- Ensure that all pupils understand that the death is not their fault.
- Reassure pupils that not all people who are ill or have had an accident will die and that many do get better.
- Acknowledge that not all people will be feeling sad and that is ok too.
- Put an appropriate time limit on the discussions
- Conclude the discussions with a prayer, special poem, piece of music and/or moment of silence to remember the person who has died and their family.
- Allow a short break in the timetable as required.
- If appropriate give pupils something practical to do such as making cards, contributing to a book of condolence, writing or drawing messages, creating a piece of artwork etc.
- Be available for any pupil who needs additional help or support.

## **Appendix 2: Letter to parents/carers of the deceased template**

Dear

Further to our conversation earlier, we are so very sorry to hear the sad news of <Name's> death. There are no words to express our sadness and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through.

As a school community, we will miss <Name> very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to her friends, classmates and teachers. <Name> was a <valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly> member of our school community and.....

If we can do anything to help over the coming days and weeks and also as you plan <Name's> funeral, please let us know. We will continue to keep in touch and will support you in any way we can.

With deepest sympathy

### **Appendix 3: Letter to parents and carers in the school community on the death of a pupil template**

Dear parents/carers

Today, I/your daughter's form tutor/head of year had the very sad task of informing the pupils of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>. <Name> died suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness yesterday/last week/over the weekend/during half term.

She was a <valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly> member of the form/school community and will be missed by everyone who knew her.

When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some pupils may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

We have tried to answer their questions in school, in conjunction with the wishes of the family, using age-appropriate and honest language. We have also set up a book of condolence today and a quiet space within school where pupils can remember <Name> and help them begin the grieving process.

If you would like further information and support about how to speak to your daughter about this sad news you may find the resources on the Child Bereavement UK website helpful: <https://www.childbereavementuk.org>

Our thoughts are with <Name's> family and friends at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our community within school will celebrate/remember <Name's> life.

### **Appendix 4: Letter to parents and carers in the school community on the death of a member of staff template**

Dear parents/carers

I am sorry to inform you that a <well-respected/long-standing/well-loved/popular/well-known> member of our staff, <Name>, died <suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness>.

The community here at LHS were told today by their <class teacher/tutor/head of year/in assembly> and many will be reacting to this sad news.

When someone dies, we may all experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some pupils may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

We have tried to answer their questions in school, in conjunction with the wishes of the family, using age-appropriate and honest language. We have also set up a book of condolence today and a quiet space within school where pupils can remember <Name> and help them begin the grieving process.

If you would like further information and support about how to speak to your daughter about this sad news you may find the resources on the Child Bereavement UK website helpful: <https://www.childbereavementuk.org>

Our thoughts are with <Name's> family at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our community within school will celebrate/remember <Name's> life.

## **Appendix 5: Books dealing with death and loss**

### ***Heaven's Child***

***Caroline Flohr***

This book covers sudden loss; death of a child; relationships within a family; funerals and traditions; doubts, faith and hope; marriages, divorces, and parenting; forgiveness and healing; the power of memories and intuition; inner strength, and the resilience of the human spirit. *Heaven's Child* shows us that the grieving process is personal, that it's not just about death but also about any loss in our life; that grieving is not about endings...but about new beginnings.

### ***Still Here with Me: Teenagers and Children on Losing a Parent.***

***Suzanne Sjoqvist***

This book is a moving and thoughtful anthology of the experiences of thirty children and teenagers who have lost a parent. In their own words, children and young people of a variety of ages talk openly and honestly about losing their mother or father.

### ***Straight Talk About Death for Teenagers***

***Earl A. Grollman***

If you are a teenager whose friend or relative has died, this book was written for you. Earl A. Grollman, the award-winning author of *Living When a Loved One Has Died*, explains what to expect when you lose someone you love.

### ***Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing after Loss***

***Pat Schwiebert***

In this modern-day fable, a woman who has suffered a terrible loss cooks up a special batch of "tear soup," blending the unique ingredients of her life into the grief process. Along the way she dispenses a recipe of sound advice for people who are in mourning.

### ***The grieving Teen: A Guide for Teenagers and their friends***

***Helen Fitzgerald***

In this unique and compassionate guide, renowned grief counselor Helen Fitzgerald turns her attention to the special needs of adolescents struggling with loss and gives teens the tools they need to work through their pain and grief.

### ***What on earth do you do when someone dies? Trevor Romaine & Elizabeth Verdick***

This book suggests ways of coping with grief and offers answers to questions such as "Why do people have to die?" and "How can I say Goodbye?"

### ***When a Friend Dies: A Book for Teens***

***Marilyn E. Gootman Ed.D.***

The death of a friend is a wrenching event for anyone at any age. Teenagers especially need help coping with this painful loss. This sensitive book answers questions grieving teens often have, like "How should I be acting?" "Is it wrong to go to parties and have fun?" and "What if I can't handle my grief on my own?"

## **Also for staff:**

### ***Grief Works: Stories of Life, Death and Surviving***

***Julia Samuel***

This is a compassionate guide that informs and engages anyone who is grieving and provides clear advice for those seeking to comfort the bereaved.