



*Let your light shine!*

## **Bereavement Policy**

### **Rationale and Ethos**

At Frieth CEC School our aim is to shine a light on individual success and open the doors to our future global citizens by developing potential without limitations within a welcoming Christian and spiritual community. Our clear Christian values of respect, responsibility, resilience, honesty, kindness and creativity guide all that we do. These, along with our sense of belonging to our Christian community, leave us well placed, as a familiar and safe place, to support those in need in our school community. We are fully committed to supporting all those affected by loss and death in a supportive and caring environment in which everyone can respond appropriately to their individual circumstances.

### **Aims and Objectives of this policy**

- To ensure that there are designated members of the school staff who will provide support to pupils and/or other staff before (where applicable) during and after bereavement.
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and the community.
- To set out how to inform students/colleagues about a death and what to do when you are required to tell a student that someone close to them has died.
- To discern what support will be offered to staff/students if they have been bereaved.
- To provide a framework for all staff to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with the bereavement.
- To have clear expectations about the way school will respond to a death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all
- To ensure staff, pupils and families feel supported during and after bereavement
- To identify key support structures including at the Local Authority and local and national support agencies specialising in bereavement (eg: Cruse Bereavement Care and Child Bereavement UK), including contact details.
- To offer a framework for review and learning from situations

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

- The headteacher will take overall responsibility for the management of any bereavement with support from the governors and SLT, who might need to deputise.
- The headteacher will be the first point of contact for the family/child concerned. However, if other members of the staff team are better placed to liaise with the family, the headteacher will make this decision and provide the time and support for this to happen.
- It is the headteacher's responsibility to inform all relevant authorities (via telephone), governors (via email to chair and vice chair of governors) and staff (via text with follow up face to face meeting). Some staff members may be additionally vulnerable - they may have lost someone recently, or may have relatives who are currently ill - this will be taken into account when making initial contact and during the following days and weeks.
- All staff will take responsibility for supporting bereaved pupils as laid out in this policy.

- Parents are encouraged to make teachers aware of any events that might have profoundly affected their child (divorce, bereavement, moving, new babies etc.) and to keep staff aware of new situations and events.

### **Procedures to be followed in the event of a death within the school community**

- 1) Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the Headteacher and an offer of support made.
- 2) Establish the family's wishes for communicating with others and give out information to appropriate people as requested. Headteacher to establish factual information in order to avoid rumour and confusion, whilst being sensitive to family's grief.
- 3) If possible, staff should be informed before pupils and should be prepared to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.
- 4) Decisions need to be made about where pupils will be told, if this is necessary. Identify the most vulnerable pupils and what support they might need. Pupils who are affected should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them. Staff may need guidance on words to use and the approach to take.
- 5) A letter to all school families should be composed at the earliest opportunity, in line with family wishes, and a decision made as to how it should be distributed. If appropriate, the letter will contain guidelines for parents on supporting bereaved children. If it is a teacher who died, consideration should be given to who will cover the class.
- 6) Staff and pupils affected by the death will be offered on-going support as appropriate, with opportunities available for anyone wishing to talk. Let them talk about how they are feeling and about the person who has died – talking can be one of the most helpful things. It is usually best to have minimum disruption to the timetable, but some flexibility may be required.
- 7) Consider what the school approach will be if pupils or staff are too upset to attend lessons. Plan a quiet place where the staff or pupil can go if necessary, alone or with a companion.
- 8) Discuss with staff how to best support their colleagues most affected.
- 9) Being bereaved can be an extremely lonely time and this is most likely worse if the family are having to self-isolate. Isolation can make it harder to process and express grief. Practical concerns and considerations may also cause additional stress. Talking with friends and family can be one of the most helpful ways to cope after someone close to us dies. Although we may not be able to see people in person, it is important that we **keep in regular contact** by phone, text, or internet.
- 10) Send condolence letter, card or note to let them know you are thinking of them.
- 11) Decide whether to send flowers and/or make a collection as appropriate.
- 12) In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance may be clarified, with the consideration of a representative, or full or partial school closure, depending on circumstances and whether the family would welcome involvement of members of the school community, or if they wish to keep it private.
- 13) Give the parents and/or family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who died.
- 14) Where necessary, a press statement should be prepared by the headteacher, in consultation with the Local Authority.
- 15) If we know a family might struggle practically, we will offer to help by delivering supplies and gifts from other families and school members.
- 16) The school are aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life. It is vitally important to ensure that if a child has experienced bereavement that this information is recorded and passed on to the relevant people when they move on to a new class or school.

- 17) Invite parents/family to any commemorative events held by the school, both at the time and in subsequent years.
- 18) If memorial work has been completed, for example a remembrance book, this should be returned to the parents at an appropriate time and the pupils informed where it has gone.
- 19) Review the way in which bereavement is tackled in the curriculum.

### **Supporting a Return to School**

A bereaved child may have had an absence from school and may struggle to return. In these circumstances, we will support the return to school in the following ways:

- Consider a home visit or return discussion prior to the pupil returning to school.
- Talk to the family and child, if age appropriate, to see what they would like to happen when they return to school.
- Talk to the child's current peers attending school about how people are affected by grief and encourage them to share their own feelings. Ask about how they have coped with bereavement in their own lives and what has helped.
- Discuss how difficult it may be for the bereaved pupil to come back to school. Ask how they would like to be treated if they were returning to school after a death. Acknowledge that people will have different preferences as to how they are treated. Some people may want to discuss what has happened, while others may want to be left alone. In general, bereaved students say that they would like others to treat them as before rather than being 'over-nice' to them. However, it is a delicate balance as typically they also don't want people to behave as if nothing happened at all.
- When they return, acknowledge their loss "I'm sorry that (name of deceased) died. I know that you are sad. It is ok to cry".
- Allow them access to a 'quiet room' where they can go to be alone; agree a way for them to communicate this need (e.g. signal or exit card).

### **Supporting Bereaved Children in School**

There may be bereavements experienced by children who continue to attend school. Not all children will need the support of specialist practitioners; they will need support from familiar people who care. The following guidance may help staff seeking to support bereaved pupils:

- Keep a routine, providing a sense of normality.
- Offer a safe place, away from an emotional intense atmosphere, a neutral space and people to share their feelings without the worry of upsetting a loved one (i.e. a surviving parent).
- Use words that children understand and are age appropriate.
- Give the information a bit at a time, allowing them the opportunity for them to ask questions. Older children will want and be able to handle more information.
- Tell them that you are sorry such an event occurred and you want to understand and help them.
- Use pictures and storybooks. These are particularly helpful for younger children or children with special needs. Social Stories can be used for children with communication difficulties.
- Encourage children to ask questions and answer their questions honestly and simply.
- Accept that some things can't be 'made better'.
- Don't be afraid to show children how you are feeling.
- Tell them that the reactions they are having are normal.
- Pay extra attention and spend extra time with them, be more nurturing and comforting.
- Reassure them that they are safe.
- Do not take their anger or other feelings personally. Help them to understand the relationship between anger and trauma. Help them find safe ways to express their feelings, for example by drawing, talking or exercising.

- Do not be surprised by changes in behaviour or personality. They will return to their usual selves in time.
- If they are feeling guilt or shame, emphasise that they did not choose for this to happen and that they are not to blame. Even if they were angry with the person who died, or had been mean to them, this did not make it happen.
- Encourage time to be themselves without feeling guilty (being with friends, time to play in a safe space outside the home environment).
- Provide access to the ELSA for support, for example through 'Drawing and Talking' therapy.
- Signpost access to appropriate resources via Bereavement counselling, Educational Psychology Service or other support agencies.

### **Activities to support children experiencing bereavement**

- Looking at photos
- A memory display using photos and paper flowers
- A balloon release
- Stories about loss
- DVDs and videos
- Lighting a candle
- Saying a prayer or another appropriate religious/spiritual act
- Listening to the pupils and checking their understanding

Children with special educational needs may need extra help with their understanding and ways to express feelings. The educational psychology team can provide specific advice and guidance around this; contact [eps@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:eps@buckinghamshire.gov.uk) for support.

### **Supporting Staff**

Supporting bereaved pupils may be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions. In these circumstances, we will offer mutual support, by meeting in the staffroom at the end of each school day, to give staff an opportunity to share feelings and reactions.

### **Useful Websites**

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

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

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

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

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/>

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

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/coronavirus-supporting-pupils>

NCSCB Guidelines for responding to the death of a student or school staff <https://www.schoolcrisiscenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/ncscb-guidelines-responding-death-student-or-school-staff.pdf>

NEPS Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Critical-Incidents.html>

[https://www.bucksfamilyinfo.org/kb5/buckinghamshire/fsd/advice.page?id=NrEa25\\_VxtA](https://www.bucksfamilyinfo.org/kb5/buckinghamshire/fsd/advice.page?id=NrEa25_VxtA)

<https://schoolsweb.buckscc.gov.uk/covid-19-corona-virus-latest-advice/>

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