



# HOWITT PRIMARY COMMUNITY SCHOOL

*Embark Multi Academy Trust*



## **Policy and Procedures** For **Loss and Bereavement**



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**March 2023**

At Howitt Primary Community School we understand that bereavement is faced by members of our school community at different times and that when the loss is of a member of our school community – such as a pupil, staff member or any parent/carer, it can be particularly difficult. Pupils and staff need to be supported when they experience family bereavements and other significant losses in the course of their lives.

The aim of this policy is to be supportive to both pupils and adults, and for staff to have greater confidence and be better equipped to cope when bereavement happens. Every death, and the circumstances in which it occurs, is different and has to be handled professionally, sensitively and compassionately in upsetting circumstances.

This school is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and pupils and, as consequence, the parents/carers of our pupils. We have an ethos and environment that support and prepare pupils for life's trials and difficulties such as coping with separation or loss of a loved one, either through death or other circumstances.

The policy is based on practice that has grown over time as the school has previously experienced bereavements.

We recognise that:

- grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real;
- differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment;
- the death of a pupil or parent has huge repercussions beyond the class teacher of that pupil and can affect the whole school and its community and every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far reaching contacts;
- the death of a member of staff gives a huge emotional shock to the whole school community;
- for the majority of pupils or young people whose life has been turned upside down, the routines of school life can give a sense of normality. One of our main concerns must be the immediate family of the deceased and as a school we always offer practical, emotional and ongoing support

### **The Death of a Pupil**

The school may be notified in a number of ways. Upon notification of the death of a pupil, parents/carers usually let the school know directly and the person answering the phone will put them through to the headteacher (Lynn Pilling) or the most senior member of staff on site who will then contact the headteacher as soon as possible.

Where death occurs in the holidays or at weekends the parents/carers will contact whoever they can as soon as possible. The headteacher will immediately inform the co-chairs of governors (Carolyn Wood and Jane Bowley) and CEO of Embark (Matt Crawford).

### **Sharing Information**

It is important to agree the next procedures with the parent/carer, before the school can take on the role of informing concerned parties within the school, or within the school community.

There can be no definitive list of people to contact and, therefore, it will be different for each child.

The school will ensure that all people who are close to the pupil are told in a sensitive and supportive manner rather than risk them hearing it second hand. The school will ensure it does not add to the sorrow by leaving people feeling marginalised.

The following people should be considered:

- Current school staff not in school that day
- Pupils not in school that day
- Previous school staff who worked closely with the pupil
- Social Work team, if applicable
- SSSEN team
- Medical team – the school nurse, for example
- Other professionals who work with the pupil, for example, Educational Psychologist
- In agreement with the pupil's parents/carers, if pupils have been informed, the school needs to send a note to parents/carers informing them of the loss, and they may need to support or comfort their own children. (See appendix C).

The process for telling the pupils will be decided by the headteacher following consultation with the senior leadership team (SLT) and teaching staff as appropriate. The class which included the pupil will be told first and other classes will be informed of the death after this. The information will be given clearly and honestly and an opportunity for questions will be given to the class. If there are siblings in the school, then the situation of telling the classes must be handled sensitively for classes with siblings in.

Pupils must be told that, while they may feel sad, they do not have to feel guilty if they go on to have fun and are laughing in their day ahead. They must not feel obliged to assume a burden of grief.

### **Support for Pupils.**

Systems will be in place to keep in contact with the family. Procedures, and concerns as well as successes can be discussed. Grieving pupils can display altered behaviours in different situations. Support for pupils and staff will be put in place immediately. The Educational Psychology team for Derbyshire County Council will be used for support for the school community if necessary.

There are websites designed for support (appendix A) and books that will help pupils and staff to come to terms with bereavement (appendix B).

### **The Death of a Parent or Close Relative**

We acknowledge that in the case of the death of a pupil's parent/carer or close relative, it is best that a family member break the news with the support of an appropriate member of staff. The wishes of the next of kin of the family will be followed. The news of the death will be given to all relevant staff as soon as possible. Procedures will be discussed with the family and their wishes taken into account before any information is given to the pupils. Pupils should however, be told as soon as possible to avoid rumour and uncertainty. This is best done in familiar groups by someone they know, probably their class teacher. Opportunity should be given for pupils to ask questions and respond to the news. The bereaved pupil may or may not wish to be present when the news is broken.

### **The Death of a Member of Staff**

We acknowledge that if such a death occurs it is doubly traumatic for the staff; supporting the pupils but also grieving on a personal level for a colleague.

Should we receive the news of the death of a member of staff; the headteacher or next senior member of staff will immediately inform the co-chairs of governors and CEO of Embark of the death.

The next steps will be to:

- a. Gather together the staff and inform them of the news.
- b. Allow time for corporate grieving amongst the staff.
- c. Allow the staff to share how they feel about what has happened.
- d. Discuss with the teachers how and when the information will be shared with their classes.
- e. Impress on the staff to avoid rumours, exaggerations and development of the event, the agreed facts should be stated simply and any questions to be answered with the facts.
- f. Remember that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotional feelings. Some will deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some may show feelings of anger. There may be tears and distress; everyone will react in their own way.
- g. Acknowledge that, under such circumstances, some staff may have difficulty coping with the loss themselves. Colleagues will need to be aware of those staff who seem particularly affected by the death.
- h. Emphasise that the news of the death is not for discussion on social media.

Parents/carers will be informed as soon as possible. (see appendix D)

### **Managing Anticipated Death and the Terminally Ill**

We acknowledge that the anticipated death of a member of our school community, whilst very difficult to manage, enables us to establish appropriate communication with the family to support those likely to be most affected before and after the death.

We acknowledge our responsibility to support adults, pupils and young people within our community who have to face the painful reality that a parent/carer or someone close to them is terminally ill. When supporting pupils who are experiencing anticipatory grief, we will:

- Confirm the facts concerning the pupil's sick relative or friend.
- Communicate the information as appropriate (in line with school procedures and the family's wishes).
- Never give false hope to the pupil.
- Discover what the pupil has been told of the illness.
- Allow the pupil to talk freely about the sick person in an appropriate setting.
- Enable the pupil to talk freely about how he/she is feeling.
- Be honest! If we do not know the answer to a question we will say so.
- Not inform the pupil about any progression concerning the illness unless the family have given permission and requested us to do so.

### **The First Few Days**

As far as is possible, it is best to have as little disruption as possible to the school timetable and school life should try to go on as normal, but with flexibility as necessary. If it is a teacher who has died, the class should be covered by another teacher from the school whom the children know well and feel comfortable talking to.

The staff and pupils will have time to talk and share memories of the person. The senior staff will take advice from the Educational Psychology team at Derbyshire County Council.

### **Responding to the Media**

Some deaths, particularly those in sudden or traumatic circumstances, attract media attention. All members of staff are advised not to respond to journalists and to refer all enquiries to the headteacher, who will make a considered response after seeking assistance from the Local Authority Press Office. (see the Critical Incident Plan)

## **On-Going Support**

### **For staff:**

Following bereavement, it is only to be expected that some members of staff will be emotionally affected and would benefit from the provision of some time for reflection. The following support may be helpful:

- A specific room could be allocated (e.g. the Meeting Room) for the duration of a lunchtime to enable staff to meet and share their thoughts over a coffee or tea. It should be emphasised that anything shared on such occasions should be held as confidential and not for public airing.
- Access to one-to-one time with a member of staff who they can share their emotions and feelings with or the mental health first aider (Clare Rhodes).
- The Educational Psychology team offer counselling support and staff will be reminded about this service.
- Availability of information about accessing bereavement support outside of school, e.g. CRUSE

### **For Pupil**

- Many pupils will be supported by the school staff. This could be class teachers, teaching assistants or the nurture mentor (Deborah McBean). Pupils can be referred to Safe speak counselling which takes place in school each week. Some activities such as making memory boxes or butterflies have helped to express grief.
- The PSHE co-ordinator will ensure that we have suitable books and other materials to help pupils discuss death and come to terms with loss.
- Social Stories may be one way to help pupils to understand loss.
- The Educational Psychology team can offer support to pupils who may need more help.

### **For The Family**

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support. Send a letter or card of condolence from the school.
- Give parents/carers and family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died.
- Send a representative to the funeral.
- Hold a collection /flowers to be sent as appropriate.
- Invite parents/family to any commemorative events held by the school, both at the time and in subsequent years. If memorial work has been completed, for example a book, then this should be returned to the parents/carers at an appropriate time, and pupils informed where it has gone.
- If the relatives wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed. A memorial area can be created, e.g. planting a tree or having a bench installed.
- Parents/carers will be told that they are welcome in the school and will be encouraged to come and visit. This can be helpful in their grieving.
- The first visit to the school is often difficult and will be arranged sensitively in accordance with the parents' wishes. It will then be for the parents/carers to decide if they wish to maintain ongoing links. Each family will be different, with differing needs. Therefore, the school will always be there to act as a source of support and information.

### **The Funeral**

It is essential to listen to and respect the family's wishes. The family may well welcome involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to keep things private.

The headteacher and/or the deputy headteacher: Clare Rhodes will make arrangements for the school to be represented at the funeral, and identify which staff and pupils may want to attend, together with the practicalities of issues such as staff cover.

For some schools it is appropriate to close, for others it is not, consequently difficult decisions will sometimes have to be made concerning attendance.

Flowers may be sent and/or a collection made. The staff and pupils in the school will be consulted, if appropriate.

Cultural and religious implications need consideration.

If the parents/carers wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed. This can be helpful in their grieving.

### **The Curriculum**

Pupils 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 using the SEAL materials. It is also addressed through cross curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles, as well as through art, literacy and Religious Education. Assemblies may also be used to address aspects of death e.g. Remembrance Day or commemorative occasions.

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.

### **Teaching and Learning**

Our teaching will be based on an understanding of the principles stated above and that a variety of approaches should be used to meet the needs of our pupils and show sensitivity to their age and experience.

Teaching methods adopted in the classroom include:

- Giving clear, truthful and accurate information, not trying to soften the blow with ambiguous language which does not tell the truth.
- Practising the collaborative social skills necessary to help cope with the feelings of loss.
- Giving relevant and appropriate advice and support.

### **Confidentiality**

Although it is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure, pupils will be made aware that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. This will help in retaining the trust of pupils and parents/carers and will ensure that the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. Sensitive information is only disclosed internally or externally with careful attention to the rights and needs of individuals.

Any critical incident such as a death will be recorded in the critical incident plan file which is kept in the 'red box' in the main office.

In the event of a pandemic or other such emergency, this policy' procedures may not be able to be carried out face-to-face. In such an event, every effort will be made to give remote support, as appropriate.

This policy must be used in conjunction with the following policies and procedures:

- Safeguarding
- Critical Incident Plan
- SEND
- Confidentiality
- Use of Social Media
- PSHE

## Appendix A - List of Online Resources and Information

[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk) A useful website offering practical ideas for helping

those bereaved in the family and school community.

[www.childbereavement.uk](http://www.childbereavement.uk) A bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

[www.bbc.co.uk/health/emotional\\_health/bereavement/bereavement\\_childtalk.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/emotional_health/bereavement/bereavement_childtalk.shtml)

Information on the way bereavement affects children

<http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk> An organisation offering local bereavement support to both adults and children

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/index.htm> Federation of organisations



## Appendix B - Books on Bereavement

Muddles Puddles and Sunshine written by Diana Crosley

The book offers practical and sensitive support for bereaved children. Beautifully illustrated, it suggests a helpful series of activities and exercises accompanied by the friendly characters of Bee and Bear. This book offers a structure and an outlet for the many difficult feelings which inevitably follow when someone dies. It aims to help children make sense of their experience by reflecting on the different aspects of their grief, whilst finding a balance between remembering and having fun.

Badger's Parting Gifts written by Susan Varley (Collins Picture Lions, pub, 1992)

An old favourite, a charming illustrated book in which a very old and much loved badger dies. The forest animals gather and reminisce about the important part Badger played in their lives, and as time passes memories of Badger make them smile. These memories were different for each of them, including very recognisable things like a favourite recipe or showing someone how to knot a tie - Badger's "parting gifts"

## Appendix C

### Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a pupil

*Before sending a letter home to parents/carers about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the pupil's parents.*

*The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the Parents/carers and school.*

Dear Parents/Carers

Your child's class teacher 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.) To use discretion here with the information to be given.*

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 ..... 's life.)*

Yours sincerely

..... **Headteacher**

## Appendix D

### Template of a letter informing parents/carers of the death of a member of staff

Dear Parents/Carers

It is with great sadness that I wish to inform you that ..... *(their role in school)* has passed away. This was very sudden and has been a shock for the whole school community. Your child has been informed of this sad news this afternoon and maybe upset as they come home. Our thoughts are with ..... 's family at this time and in an effort to try to respond to his/her death in a positive way, we have spoken with the children of the happy times that we have had whilst ..... has been at our school.

Your child may want to ask questions about the death that need to be answered honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.

The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school but if there is anything else you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we will be more than happy to help you.

Yours sincerely

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Headteacher