REED FIRST SCHOOL

Learning Together, Learning for Life

Bereavement Policy

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RATIONALE

We understand that bereavement is an experience which will be faced by all members of our school community at some point. It will be a more difficult experience when the loss is of a member of that school community – a child or staff member.
We believe that it is an issue to be addressed openly and guiding principles need to be outlined and developed in an objective manner. This policy will deal with bereavement following the death of a school pupil or staff member and will also address the procedures which will be followed should a child become terminally ill or die whilst at school.

FOLLOWING A BEREAVEMENT:

We believe that children and adults alike have the right to:
• Be given space and time to grieve
• Be given support from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate – if possible, of their own choice.
• Encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement.

We recognise:
• That grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real.
• That 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.
• That the death of a child has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/care team of that child and every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far reaching contacts.

THE MANAGEMENT OF BEREAVEMENT IN SCHOOL

The purpose of this policy is to give all staff a confidence in recognising and adopting a particular procedure. It should be noted that a universally accepted procedure outline will, in itself, not enable everyone to feel comfortable in dealing with the practicalities of death and bereavement.
One of our main concerns must inevitably be the immediate family of the deceased and as a school we state our commitment to any such family as may need practical, emotional and ongoing support.

Upon notification of the death of a pupil:

The school may be notified in an infinite number of ways. Past experience in schools has shown that if death occurs during school hours parents usually let the school know directly and the person answering the phone will put them through to the Headteacher. Where death occurs in the holidays or at weekends the parents will contact whoever they can – they may leave a message with the school office, for example.
In that instance the member of staff who picks up the message will immediately contact the Headteacher who will then assume responsibility for the dissemination of the information.

Dissemination

It is important to agree, if possible, with the parent that the school will take on the role of informing concerned parties. In all likelihood, parents are happy to have this burden taken away from them as they have many people unconnected with the school to contact but permission to do this will be sought.

There can be no exact list of people to contact. It will be different for each child. The school should ensure that all people who are close to the child are told in a sensitive and supportive manner rather than risk them hearing it 'on the grapevine'. Bereavement is very difficult and the school needs to ensure it does not add to the sorrow by leaving people feeling marginalised.

If school is in session the headteacher will inform admin staff as they may need to help in the next part of the process. She will then immediately inform the child's class staff. Where possible cover will move into the class to allow the staff to come out and be told together.

These staff then need to be given as much time as they need to process the news and start to grieve. Some may need to be allowed to go home (if this is necessary it would be with full pay). A space will be dedicated to these people and to anyone else in the school who had a close relationship with the child.

The office staff will arrange cover for the class and the head will begin the process of informing other classes – those with staff closest to the child first. This is never easy in a busy school. It is easy to see where these two functions will overlap as staff may need to be taken from one class to manage the 'bereaved class'.

The next step will be informing people not at school. Again there can be no definitive list but these should include:

- Current school staff not in school that day – including therapy staff
- Previous school staff who worked closely with the child
- Social Work team
- SEN team
- Medical team – the school nurse will communicate to them
- Chair of governors
- Other professionals who work with the child – Ed Psych
- Parents – if children have been informed it is appropriate to put out a note to parents informing them of the loss they may need to support or comfort their children. Some parents may need to be telephoned if their relationship is closer but may not have been informed by the family

Telling the other pupils will be a decision for the head and the class teachers. With different aged pupils there will be different decisions made. The class teacher of the class with the loss may be the best person to tell the rest of the children in that class. Where it is felt that the children will understand the head will visit the classes, usually with a photo of the child, and let the pupils know what has happened. The finality of death cannot be diminished, however if there are mitigating circumstances that may help, such as that the child was in pain and now is free of pain, this can be used to help alleviate sorrow. The head must try to avoid adding worry – if the child died in hospital we do not want to give children a fear of hospitals for example. Children must be told that while they may feel sad they do not have to feel guilty if they go on to have fun and pleasure in their day ahead. They must not feel obliged to assume a burden of grief. Children must be allowed to ask questions at this time or at any point in the following days or weeks. Staff must answer honestly and to the best of their knowledge. This is not a time to propound one's own religious beliefs. It is it beneficial in helping the children understand that the child has moved on to a new and happy place.

Memory Table
Once sure that all relevant people have been informed the head will set up a memory table in the front entrance. This will have a photo of the child, and may also have a candle, flowers, a helium balloon – whatever is relevant and appropriate for that child, depending on age gender etc.
There will be a memory book for *anyone* to come and write their favourite memories of the child. The book is open to anyone – staff, students, parents etc. Parents who do not live near are given the opportunity to send a message to be pasted in the book. People who have written in these books appreciate this chance to 'say goodbye'. Parents who have received the books have been delighted by it and have spoken of how it has helped over time to read the comments. Photographs will also be added.
Traditionally the book is passed on at the funeral and this is the natural time for the table to be taken down.
It should be ensured, as far as possible, that seeing this table on entry to the school, is not the first way people close to the child are informed of the death.

THE FUNERAL
The head will make sure that all staff are asked if they wish to attend the funeral. It may be that the school could not run safely if everyone were granted their wish and in that case difficult decisions will be made according to how close people are to the child and family.
The head, will always attend as a mark of respect.
If the parents wish to hold the funeral wake at the school (after school hours) this will be agreed as it is beneficial for the parent needing to maintain contact with the school.
The memory book will be taken to the funeral and passed on to the parents.

REFLECTION
Following a bereavement in school, it is only to be expected that many members of staff will be emotionally affected and would benefit from the provision of a calm environment in which to meet with other colleagues and spend some time in reflection. It should be emphasised that anything shared on such occasions should be held as confidential and not for public airing.

Memory Assemblies and Memory Roll
It may be appropriate to hold a memory assembly for the child. This can happen when staff feel strong enough to participate. Staff need to be able to show pupils that it is perfectly normal to feel upset at the loss of a friend, and tears cannot be helped, but they must try not to break down in front of the children.

The school will maintain a list of those pupils who have passed away whilst still at school. This list of pupils can form the basis for an assembly of remembrance at which we can talk about and remember our friends and keep their memories alive.

IF A CHILD DIES IN SCHOOL
If staff have concerns they will contact the school trained first aider who will call an ambulance. This decision can be taken by the first aider. If she requires a second opinion she will talk to the head or most senior team member on site.
The Head Teacher or other staff as appropriate to that situation will then telephone the parents and agree that they will meet the ambulance at the hospital or come to school.
If the child stops breathing the trained first aider will administer CPR and apply use of the school defibrillator.

Once the ambulance has arrived at school, the child is given over to their care and it is the ambulance team's decision as to where the child is taken or which form of treatment is administered.
Any change in circumstance following the first call to parents should be reported to them, although staff must not impart shocking or worrying news to a parent travelling in a car alone.
Even if it is obvious that a death has occurred in school, the procedures outlined above must still be followed as we are unable to confirm a death – that is the responsibility of a doctor.
Once the child is placed in the ambulance a member of staff will be appointed to travel to the hospital either in the ambulance or in their own transport. The purpose of this is to be a familiar face to the child's family on their arrival at the hospital.
This person will remain in regular contact with Headteacher.
The school, will notify the LA if there is a death in school.
The above procedures and protocols will then apply as for a death out of school.

IF A CHILD DIES ON A SCHOOL TRIP.
If a crisis situation occurs whilst a child is out on a trip, then the adult with the child or the trip leader should telephone for an ambulance first and then contact the school to inform the Headteacher. The school will take the responsibility of contacting the parents.
Again, once the ambulance team reaches the child, the child becomes the responsibility of the ambulance team and they will direct any subsequent actions.
The off sites visits protocols give guidance for such situations and should be followed.
The LA must be informed and the headteacher will do this.
The above procedures and protocols will then apply as for a death out of school.

ON GOING SUPPORT
For staff:
Staff will be reminded about wellbeing services. The Educational Psychology team offer support and support from Unions.

For Pupils:
Most pupils can be supported by the school staff, each child may have a favoured member of staff to approach. The school nurse can help some pupils understand. The Educational Psychology team can offer support to pupils who may need more help.
Social Stories may be one way to help pupils to understand loss and the Autism team have some generic stories and will help staff produce specific stories as needed.
The Headteacher and SENCo will ensure that we have suitable books and other materials to help children discuss death and come to terms with loss.

For the family:
Parents will be told that they are welcome in the school and will be encouraged to come and visit. The first visit to the school is often difficult and will be arranged sensitively in accordance with the parents' wishes.
If parents have other children on roll at the school, adjustments to home learning expectations needs to be made for the remaining children and the focus of monitoring needs to be on their wellbeing.
It will then be for the parents to decide if they wish to maintain on going links (if the child who has passed is their only child who attended the school), each family will be different, however the school will always be there to act as a source of support and information.
A referral to ASPECTs can be made to support the whole family if deemed appropriate.

THE DEATH OF A PUPIL'S FAMILY MEMBER:
Once the parents or carers have notified the school, a letter will be sent (see appendix) to the family offering practical and helping and signposting parents to support organisations. Within a week of the letter being sent, the Headteacher will phone the family to complete a welfare check and see if further assistance is necessary.

THE DEATH OF A MEMBER OF STAFF:
All the same principles and procedures apply as they do for the death of a pupil.
In addition to the above the school will notify the LA as employer.

THE DEATH OF A MEMBER OF STAFF'S FAMILY:
Once the member of staff has notified the headteacher, appropriate compassionate leave can be arranged depending on the individual circumstances and at the discretion of the headteacher.

List of online resources and information
http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk – *A hub for professionals supporting children*
www.winstonswish.org.uk – *a useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community.*
http://chums.uk.com/– *a mental health and emotional wellbeing service for children*
www.childbereavement.org.uk-*a bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss*
https://www.thegoodgrieftrust.org/– *bereavement support for children and parents*
http://www.rebeccasutherland.co.uk/filter/British-Heart-Foundation/The-Small-Creature-Animation British Heart Foundation site to help children come to term with loss using carton creatures. An animated film that has a printed pack to go with it.

Books on Bereavement
GRANPA John Burningham (Puffin, 1998, ISBN 0099-43408-3) Designed to stimulate discussion rather than to tell a story, the book has a series of scenes of a little girl and her grandad, with comments from each or both of them. At the end, she is shown staring at his empty chair, without comments. The book allows the adult to direct discussion about not only the good things that the child remembers, but also the not so happy memories.

GRANDAD, I'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER YOU De Bode and Broere (Evans / Helping Hands, 1997, ISBN 0237-51755-8) A picture book about loss and memories, and potentially a good stimulus to talk about a bereavement.

WHEN DINOSAURS DIE L & M Brown (Little, Brown, 1996, hb, ISBN 0-316-10197-7) Charming busy anthropomorphic pictures of dinosaurs illustrate topics and questions and a range of answers about death: Saying Goodbye; Customs and beliefs about death; Why do people die? What does "dead" mean?. It is also quite acute psychologically, acknowledging that disbelief, anger, fear, and sadness are common feelings when someone dies. Expensive, but attractive and appealing to children.

REMEMBERING GRANDAD Sheila and Kate Isherwood (Oxford, ISBN 0-19-272368-5) A girl's grandfather has died and looking back over the happy times they enjoyed together helps her to cope with the loss. Very specific episodes and illustrations give it a life-like feel. Sensible and sound if a little stereotyped in its pictures of family life, it could help children to think about how to remember someone.

LIPLAP'S WISH Jonathan London and Sylvia Long (Chronicle Books, 1994, ISBN 0-8118-0505-0) Liplap the rabbit's grandma has died, and his mother tells him of the rabbit legend that "long ago, when the first rabbits died, they became stars in the sky. And to this day, they come out at night and watch over us. And they remind us that our loved ones shine forever in our hearts... When Liplap asks if a star might be his grandma, his mother replies, "I think you could wish it were." Could be considered "twee" and lacking honest engagement with the subject,

FRED Posy Simmons (Jonathan Cape, 1987, ISBN 0-2240-2448-5) When Fred the cat dies his owners, Nick and Sophie, attend his funeral and learn about his secret life as a famous singer. The story raises the idea of celebrating a life in a good-humoured and touching way, with entertaining pictures and not much text.

LIFETIMES Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen (Belitha Press, 1997, ISBN 1-85561-760-9) full title: *Beginnings and endings with lifetimes in between* – a beautiful way to explain life and death to children. This book places human life and death firmly in the natural world, and the tone is quietly reflective: "All around us everywhere, beginnings and endings are going on all the time.It may be sad, but it is the way of all things. For plants. For people. For birds". Whilst not exactly comforting, it tells the truth, puts death in perspective, Don't let the rather murky cover put children off - it belies the attractive illustrations within of plants and creatures, alive and dead.

BADGER'S PARTING GIFTS Susan Varley (Collins Picture Lions, pb, 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.

WE LOVE THEM Martin Waddell (Walker Books,1990, ISBN 0-7445-7256-8) Death is seen very much as part of life in this nicely illustrated story of life in the country, which conveys the idea that life goes on and that old creatures give way to young ones. But it is a bit too matter of fact about loss - barely is the old dog dead than the children have found a new one, is there an implicit message that dead pets (and people?) are easily replaced.

GRANDMA'S BILL Martin Waddell (Macdonald Young Books, pb, ISBN 0- 7500-0307-3) Bill's grandma is a widow, and he learns about her "other Bill" by looking through her photo album with her. A bit too stereoptypically suburban and middle class for general appeal perhaps. Some like its ordinariness, gentleness and factual accuracy, and couldn't fault what it had to say about death and living on in memories and in the family.

I'LL ALWAYS LOVE YOU H Wilhelm (Hodder & Stoughton, 1985) A touching story of the love between a little boy and his dog, who have grown up together. When the dog dies, the boy says that, although he is very sad, it helps that he used to tell the dog "I'll always love you" every night. An opportunity to discuss the importance of telling how you feel. Aimed at 4 to 7 year olds and delightfully illustrated.

I FEEL SAD (Wayland, ISBN 0-7052-1406-6) Not specifically about death, but about different ways of expressing sadness. Could be a useful opening for a conversation about a bereavement, or about coping with feelings.

A BIRTHDAY PRESENT FOR DANIEL Juliet Rothman (Prometheus Books, ISBN 1-57392-054-1) This story of a little girl whose brother has died is intended for children aged 8-12. "A difficult subject handled very well and movingly",