

OLDHAM HULME GRAMMAR SCHOOL

BEREAVEMENT POLICY

This policy is applicable from EYFS through to year 13

Section 1 - School Background

Oldham Hulme Grammar School is fully committed to the emotional health and well-being of our children and young people and that of our staff. We are dedicated to the continual development of a healthy and thriving school community and strive to work towards this in all aspects of school life. We are committed to providing an ethos, environment and curriculum that can provide support during difficult times, including time of death or dying.

Section 2 - Rationale

Within our school community there will almost always 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. Child Bereavement UK cite that 1 in every 29 5-16 years olds have been bereaved of a parent or sibling, whilst many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person. The Children Act 1989 aimed to ensure the welfare of the child was paramount, working in partnership with parents to protect the child from harm. Whilst the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) outlines children's rights, including the right to have their emotional needs met.

All intentions of this policy endorse these aims as we endeavour to counter any adverse effects of bereavement and maintain pupils' emotional well-being.

Section 3 - Objectives

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. This policy will provide guidelines to be followed after a bereavement. The aim 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 this policy has been constructed to guide us on how to deal professionally, sensitively and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances.

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 consequences and extended contacts.
- It is extremely important to take on the views, wishes and feelings of our staff, pupils and their families.

Section 4 – Preparation & Building Resilience

The prevalence of pupils experiencing bereavement and the introduction of the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education Curriculum provides a clear rationale for ensuring that pupils are suitably prepared for managing difficult life circumstances.

At OHGS we support our pupils in developing useful resilience and coping skills. This is a universal curriculum/approach and does not replace individual or specialist support which may be required in the event of a bereavement.

It is also recognised that staff resilience and training is important, both for the staff themselves and also the pupils they teach. Staff within OHGS have access to the following in order to support them in this end:

- Support from trained counsellors and from SLT
- Access to INSET and specific training as required. Some staff have already attended training sessions on bereavement counselling.

OHGS have a commitment to working with outside agencies in order to ensure a high quality of training and preparation for potential bereavements/critical incidents.

Section 5 - The role of the Principal and Senior Staff

The Principal is often the first person to become aware of the death of a pupil / student or a member of staff within the school and will therefore hold several key responsibilities such as:

- liaising with outside agencies and keeping the Chair of Governors and governing body informed
- be the first point of contact for family / child concerned
- responding to media enquiries and acting as spokesperson for the school
- liaising with other members of SLT

Initial contact to the deceased family should be established by the Principal to gather factual information regarding the death, if not already received from agencies such as the Police. The family's wishes should be ascertained and respected regarding the sharing of Information.

A Deputy Principal, Head of Juniors, Head of Nursery & Infants [or designated member(s) of staff] will assume this role in the absence of the Principal. Furthermore, due to the demands of a leading and supporting role and the importance of the wellbeing of senior staff members, there may be times when this role will need to be handed over to others.

Section 6 - Responding to Bereavement: Death of a member of the school community

Key Steps:

Procedure

The Principal will determine the facts of the case and contact the family at the earliest possible opportunity to offer condolences. They will inform the Chair of Governors and coordinate communications.

- If not the Principal - In discussion with the family a family liaison worker will be appointed. This is likely to be a senior or pastoral member of staff in school. However, the person will be selected based on existing relationships with the family and the experience of the member of staff.
- The family liaison worker/Principal will work with the family to gather their preferences and wishes and to agree on the appropriate information to be shared.
- The Principal, family and key staff will make a decision about how best to share the news with the school community and pupils. The news will be shared in accordance with this decision.
- Where the death has happened in traumatic circumstances and there is likely to be a review, an appointed member of staff will represent the school at this review.
- If there is likely to be media involvement the Principal or their representative, will liaise and oversee this. Where necessary, a press statement should be prepared by the Principal.
- The Principal and designated staff will review the current support available for staff and parents and plan for any potential additional support. This may include seeking advice (e.g. Educational and Child Psychology Service or from school counsellors. Child Bereavement UK have a range of letter templates for informing others of a bereavement.).
- The Principal will then determine who in school will be responsible for providing support for staff and pupils and together, will draw up a support plan.
- Ongoing review will determine if support is needed and by whom. It is acknowledged that initial heightened emotions are to be expected and specific or specialist interventions may not always be required.

Informing others

- A script will be agreed as to the key events that are to be shared.
- Where information is unknown or immediate family consultation is not possible, a simple statement will be initially agreed which confirms the death.
- Any incorrect rumours will be corrected and where information is missing this will be communicated clearly. Staff and pupils will be informed of additional information as it is made available. Any further information will also be planned as a script to ensure consistency of communication.
- Staff will be informed first; then pupils.
- A letter to all school families affected will be distributed at the earliest opportunity and wherever possible, the wording of this communication will be shared in advance with the bereaved family for their input.

First few days

- The belongings, associated space (e.g. locker) and items (e.g. nameplates, work on the walls) of the deceased individual will remain. Any change to that will be negotiated with school staff and the pupils at a later date.
- Social media will be monitored.
- Many pupils will have questions they will want to ask and some pupils will need to talk about the bereavement more than others.

- Students who wish to talk will be provided with the time and space to do so. Staff members will be consulted as to those most appropriate for providing this. However, all staff will be encouraged to be open and honest about their own emotions.
- The school's counsellors will be contacted and consultation will be offered based on need.
- The school will endeavour to maintain daily school life as normal. Stability and routine will be very important for the pupils at this time. Most children will respond well to this.
- A team providing pastoral care will be available to support children and a suitable place identified if pupils require some time away from the classroom. The school will ensure that these members of staff are taken off timetable duties and are available in private rooms for pupils where necessary.
- Some flexibility within the timetable may be required to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of children and staff affected by the situation; and this will be provided.
- There will be no expectation for siblings or affected family members to return to school in the aftermath. The family will be reassured of this and a return to school will be negotiated with the family on an agreed timescale.
- Where deemed appropriate – and agreed with the family – a book of condolence or similar temporary tribute may be arranged with an agreed date as to the removal of this.

Funeral

- The school will be sensitive to any arrangements which may have been already discussed for a person who died from a progressive illness or on end of life care.
- In consultation with the family, arrangements for the funeral attendance will be clarified, this will include:
 - Consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances;
 - Who should go from school;
 - Whether the school will send a wreath or similar tribute (e.g. donations to charity or a special fund instead).

Informing and supporting staff

- All staff will be informed before pupils and be prepared and able to then pass on information to pupils / students. This will include contact to current staff members who may not be in school that day.
- Staff who are directly affected will be contacted directly. They will be offered support and asked whether (where their role requires it) they feel able to share the news with pupils.
- Additionally, those staff who may be particularly vulnerable or known to be alone that night / weekend / holiday will be offered support.
- Support for staff will be negotiated with the staff member in line with their needs, e.g. exchange of phone details in order to provide a point of contact for a member of staff or signposting to bereavement resources.
- All staff will be informed of the support available to them. An informal mutual support forum will be established in line with school logistics, e.g. an opportunity to meet in the staffroom at the end of the school day.
- There will be a designated staff member for staff to contact where they feel they need support. They will be tasked with reviewing staff welfare at an agreed point.
- All staff will be provided with key information about grief and how it may impact both themselves and their pupils. Staff training requirements will be considered and met where required.

Informing and supporting pupils

- OHGS will place the emotional well-being of each child / young person centrally to their needs and support. We recognise that the initial support would be best placed with an adult who the young person already knows and has a positive relationship with.
- Pupils may be told in class/form groups or as a whole school depending on the needs of the school community and the situation. Where possible they will be informed by a member of staff who is familiar to them.
- Pupils who may be particularly vulnerable, such as friends of the deceased, tutor group of a staff member, those who may have witnessed the event or those with special educational needs will be identified and informed in a way most appropriate for them. This may be individually or as a peer group by a person known to them.
- A list of internal and external agencies who can support the pupils will be compiled and shared with parents and staff. Procedures for accessing this will be outlined clearly.
- It is expected that many pupils may experience heightened emotions initially and the school recognises that this is typical. However, pupil well-being will be monitored following the bereavement to identify any pupils who are experiencing longer term difficulties.

Remembering

- The family and pupils / students should be asked for their views on how best to mark the death in an appropriate way which is relevant to the deceased and be considerate of the nature of the death.

Section 7 Responding to Bereavement

Returning to school after a bereavement

- A designated member of staff will meet with the pupil and their family/carers to discuss their return to school or upon their return to school following a bereavement. The purpose of this meeting will be to:
 - Acknowledge the death.
 - Find out how the bereaved pupil would like to share their news.
 - Organise a safe space for the bereaved pupil to go if they feel overwhelmed by their grief and need a ‘time-out’ (with an agreed system for doing this, e.g. a ‘time- out’ card) which all staff will be made aware of.
 - Set guidelines for communication – with the pupil, between members of staff and between home and school.
 - Consider providing support for peers when they have a bereaved friend.
- Most grieving pupils do not need a ‘bereavement expert’, they need the support of familiar and trusted adults. OHGS, with its familiar environment and routines, can provide a place of comfort for a bereaved young person.

Longer term support

- The bereaved pupil will continue to grieve for the rest of their life and may require ongoing support. We will consider implementation of the following, as appropriate:
 - A member of the school community to record significant dates for the bereaved young person and communicate them with staff.
 - Regular contact with the family/carers and reviews with the pupil to help build up an overall picture of how the pupil is coping after the bereavement.
 - A member of staff to be responsible for passing on details of the bereavement at transition points.
 - Identifying whether the bereaved pupil is a vulnerable pupil, as they may need additional support, particularly on transition.
 - Bereaved young people can find change difficult, so preparing them in advance (where possible) may help them to voice their worries and ease the process.
- Grief may impact the pupil’s progress. Some pupils work really hard and may put themselves under extra pressure to succeed, while others may find it difficult to focus in class and on their work. A member of the pastoral team will be named to be responsible for monitoring this and action where necessary.
- Grief may impact the pupil’s behaviour. A member of school staff will be named to be responsible for monitoring this and action where necessary.
- We will maintain continued liaison with family to understand the wider impact of the bereavement as pupils may also be managing/experiencing the grief of other family members.
- Outside agencies will be contacted for further advice and support as required in agreement with the family.

Section 8 - Supporting young people with additional learning needs *Children and young people with special educational needs (SEND)*

Staff must have regard to:

- the views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person, and the child’s parents / guardians,
- the importance of the child or young person, and the child’s parents / guardians, participating as fully as possible in decisions, and being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions,
- the need to support the child or young person, and the child’s parents / guardians, in order to facilitate the development of the child or young person and to help them achieve that best possible educational and other outcomes, preparing them effectively for adulthood.

Children with learning difficulties are no different to all other children and young people, in having their grief recognised, hearing the truth and being given opportunities to express their feelings and emotions, but may need extra help with their understanding and ways to express feelings. Support for each child / young person should be dependent on their needs and suitable resources utilised for communication to be honest and understood.

Section 9 Social Media

If news of an incident or death is shared on social media sites, OHGS will act quickly to establish the facts and communicate effectively to the school community as previously described to avoid rumour and speculation as well as alleviating complexities and unnecessary trauma to the bereaved family.

It is our policy that no information regarding the death will be shared using social media by staff or pupils, until all the facts have been established and all family members, friends and colleagues have been informed. Respect and empathy are key to ensuring the bereaved do not face unnecessary trauma and OHGS will make every effort to handle the event and communication of this in a sensitive and efficient manner.

Bereavement Policy Reviewed: January 2022

Next Review Due: January 2024