

GAYTON PRIMARY SCHOOL



# Bereavement Policy

Next Review Due: May 2025

## **Policy Statement**

Gayton Primary School is fully committed to supporting all those affected by loss and death in a supportive and caring environment in which everyone can respond appropriately to individual circumstances.

We believe that we need to ensure that all students have access to a happy, challenging and safe learning environment. To achieve this we need to nurture a partnership with parents and students that is based upon openness, mutual respect and the highest expectations of all.

Our 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 passionate about providing an ethos, environment and curriculum that can provide support during difficult times, including a time of death or dying.

## **Rationale**

Every 22 minutes a parent of a child dies that's around 23,600 bereaved children each year. Almost one in every class. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend, teacher or other significant person in their life'. (Child Bereavement UK, 2017 statistics)

Teachers in a primary school are certain to encounter pupils who have been deeply affected by bereavement.

Close bereavements bring profound effects and changes to a child's life.

There is no fixed pattern to how a child will grieve.

It is almost inevitable therefore, that at some time any school will have to deal with a death that impacts the whole school community. Death is something that we do not like to think about, so when we are faced with it, we often find ourselves underprepared.

## **Aims and Objectives**

This policy outlines practical measures to be taken when people are in shock, or upset, especially with sudden or multiple deaths or traumatic circumstances to include:-

1. To identify key staff within the school and LA, resources and further support services to help the whole school community work together.
2. To provide a framework for all staff, teaching and non-teaching to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with difficult and upsetting circumstances.
3. To have clear expectations about the way school will respond to the death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.
4. To support pupils and/or staff before (where applicable) during, and after bereavement.
5. To meet the needs of all its children and staff and to be a place that both child and

family can rely on, and gain much needed support.

6. For children to have the opportunity to tell their story, express their feelings, share their memories and develop coping strategies through support by sensitive staff.

### **Guidelines for staff and governors:**

A death can affect the school community in different ways and depends on:

- The role that the deceased person had in school.
- How well known they were in the local community
- Circumstances surrounding the death, particularly suicide, or other violent or sudden deaths.

Rumour and gossip can be damaging and can lead to both young and old developing the attitude that the death is not a topic to talk about. Children and young people have a healthy curiosity and if they are not informed of the circumstances, or feel they are unable to ask questions, their normal grief process can be affected.

The following guidelines may help when informing staff and governors:

- Where possible, discussion should take place with the bereaved family and their wishes taken into account before any decisions are made in relation to how and what to tell the staff and wider school community.
- It is important to consider any cultural or religious implications and seek advice if necessary.
- Arrange a staff meeting as soon as practicable. Identify absent staff.
- If a death has occurred in a holiday period, make sure that all staff are informed. Use your usual methods of communication to break this news to staff.
- Tell the story of what happened leading up to the death.
- Give a factual explanation of how the death occurred.
- Be prepared for obvious upset and feelings of anger/guilt. People may connect the incident to their own personal experience of bereavement, so feelings about past bereavements may need to be discussed. This is perfectly natural.
- To enable absent staff to feel part of a caring team, arrangements should be made to inform them over the telephone if a personal visit is impractical. Consider the relationship between the absent colleague and deceased.
- For a death that may attract media coverage (e.g. if the member of staff was a well-known personality or died tragically), identify a nominated spokesperson (e.g. Headteacher, Chair of Governors) to provide a 'news statement' at an agreed time, as a way of dealing with media intrusion. Liaison with the individual's family is essential, prior to reporting information to the media, in order to respect their wishes and privacy.
- Establish good lines of communication with all relevant parties, this will always include family and staff, in other cases it may involve communication with emergency services, health, the Educational Psychology service, Social Care and other support

services.

- Provide details of someone who can be available to talk things through with a member of staff, parent or child if they are finding the situation particularly hard. This person could advise the family of support services available if required.
- Nominate staff to prepare a letter to parents and carers
- Provide staff with a script about what has happened so that consistent information is given to all of the pupils. Include where possible some answers to difficult questions that staff may be asked by the children, to prevent them needing to think of appropriate responses on the spot.
- Encourage everyone to consider how to meet their own support needs and take care of themselves, this may be from friends, family, support services and/or buddying up with other members of staff. Provide contact details for support in your local area.
- We recognise that speed and chaos may be a major factor on a day when a critical incident has happened- the speed and chaos meaning that constantly referring to plans and lists is not possible- **DON'T WORRY!** Be confident enough to go with your gut instinct. Remember that keeping people as informed as possible is always helpful, and don't bear all the responsibility yourself, share it around.

### **Guidelines for informing pupils**

People often think that children do not grieve, but even very young children will want to know what happened, how it happened, why it happened and perhaps most importantly of all, what happens next?

The following guidelines will help you to inform children of the death:

- Identify children who are most likely to be impacted by the news because they had a close relationship with the deceased or are already bereaved to be told together in a separate group. Where possible, inform children in the smallest groups, preferably class sized groups. This should be done by adults they know.
- It is always a shock when a death occurs in a school even if it may have been anticipated. Children expect to live forever, and so the news of a friend dying can feel very shocking. Experience has shown it is more beneficial if all pupils are informed.
- Provide staff with guidelines on how to inform children; be honest, it is ok to say if you don't have the answers but remember to revisit the question at a later date when you do have the answer.
- Be prepared for children to say or do the unexpected, experience has shown some responses or apparent lack of response may be upsetting for adults. No apparent response does not mean that a child does not care.
- Try to identify any key questions that you may need to prepare e.g. the facts about an illness, or dates which may be relevant to the death such as end of school year and

changing classes or schools.

- End up discussion on a positive note- not all people who are ill or have accidents dies- many get better. Consider a prayer or a reflection to remember the deceased and their family.
- Do pupils want to do an activity to express their thoughts and feelings?

*Grief will last a life time and can surface throughout with new questions and many reflections.*

*"A child can live through anything so long as he or she is told the truth and is allowed to share the natural feelings people have when they are suffering."*

Eda Le Shan, The Compassionate Friends Newsletter

### **In the days after the death**

- It is important to consider any cultural or religious implications and seek advice if necessary.
- Ensure nominated staff with responsibilities for supporting staff and children, are available to do so.
- It may be necessary temporarily to provide staff cover for their normal activities.
- Identify an allocated quiet place where children, young people and staff can go if necessary.
- It is preferable for there to be minimum disruption to the timetable but some flexibility may be required.
- Try to engender an awareness of when people need support and help, particularly those who work closely with the person who has died and administrative staff who are taking telephone calls or dealing with parents etc.
- Through the nominated staff member who has responsibilities for liaising with the individual's family, ascertain their wishes about the school's involvement in the funeral, if any.

In line with the families' wishes consider practical issues such as:

- Sending flowers to the home or to the funeral, making a collection etc.
- Who will attend the funeral?
- Organise cover for any staff who are attending the funeral.
- Informing the parents of those pupils who will be involved.
- Possible closure of the school.

## **SUPPORT**

### **Support for the Bereaved Pupil**

Not all children will need the support of specialist practitioners; they will need support from familiar people who care.

- Keep a routine, providing a sense of normality.
- Offer a safe place, away from an emotional intense atmosphere.
- Neutral space and people to share their feelings without the worry of upsetting a loved one (i.e. a surviving parent).
- Time to be themselves without feeling guilty (being with friends, time to play in a safe space outside the home environment)
- Regular correspondence with home, providing assurance about behaviours and general well-being, will ensure the child is managing their grief.
- Access to appropriate resources via Bereavement counselling, Healthy Schools or other support agencies.
- An individual link person to support the pupil/s when necessary.
- A suitable place in school for pupils who need some space if too upset to stay in the classroom and people to whom they can go for support.

### **Guidelines for supporting a bereaved pupil return to school:**

When the child or young person returns to the setting they want to get straight back into friends, work and routine. They will have been surrounded by grieving family members and often a chaotic household of visitors. School maybe a break from that.

Have some action plans in place to help the children and young person return by:

- Identifying a member of the team who will be the main contact point for them and their family.
- Ensure regular contact, this may be daily or weekly depending on needs and wishes of the family. This helps you understand how they are coping, what support they may need now and in the future, to discuss concerns and worries and plan strategies to cope.
- If they stay at home, remember them. Have cards and messages sent to them from appropriate people (peer group and staff they have good relationships with). Activities such as these will give the other children the opportunity to discuss concerns or experiences with the family and help them to feel they are doing something positive to support them, you may want to collate them into a book. This death may remind others of their own experiences and so be prepared to support them. You may find out information about a child in your class that you didn't know before. Be ready to listen to them all.
- Before they return ensure all staff are aware of the bereavement and the possible

effect on them, their behaviour and their learning, so that appropriate care and support can be given throughout the setting. Remember bereaved children and young people have 'physical' illness, such as headaches, tummy aches and feeling sick, as well as mental sadness including lack of concentration, feeling tired, disorganised anger and frustration. These will have an impact on work load and learning. Monitor how things are going on their return and maintain communication with all staff involved.

- Maintain normal rules and expectations of behaviour. This is important for the children and young people within the setting and the child or young person who has been bereaved. The rules and expectations are all part of the 'normal' routine and will help to make them feel secure. Remember the impact of bereavement on the whole family when giving sanctions and the impact the sanctions many have on the whole family.
- Consider 'time out' strategies that suit the child and the setting. Time out cards, signals or signs can help them to exit the room quickly if they are feeling vulnerable or emotional. Make sure they have a safe place to exit to.
- Remember there is no set pattern or time limit to grief- It is a unique experience and the process is a lifelong one. At different ages and during new or transitional times they will have new questions requiring answers and questions requiring a revisit of what happened to develop a better understanding and acceptance.
- It is not unusual for bereaved pupils to take time off school during the early stages of their bereavement. For some, the need to be with their families will be strong and indeed they may suffer from separation anxiety when the times comes for a return to school. For others the familiarity, stability and routines of school life may prompt an early return. The time away from school will vary from pupil to pupil but when they do return, they may have a number of concerns- you will only know what these are and how they might be resolved if you ask. Some of the more common concerns might be:

**How will staff and peers react- who has been told, what do they know, what will be said, how much will I have to say to people?**

You can help by meeting with them to welcome them back, acknowledge the death and talk through their concerns. Saying something simple like 'I am sorry to hear that your dad died- sometimes it helps to talk about it and if so, who would you like to be there for you? Is usually much appreciated by them. If possible offer them choices about how things should be handled and what support would be helpful. Let staff and classmates know how they want to be received and supported.

#### **Monitoring/Supporting Pupils**

- Support may need to be offered to other vulnerable pupils.
- The anti-bullying message needs to be reiterated and monitored closely.
- Therapeutic books should be readily available to assist with counselling. These can be found in the Headteacher's office.

#### **Monitoring/Supporting Staff Members**

- Supporting bereaved pupils will be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions. See list of outside agencies, including professionals

from Children and Young People's Services that may offer help, both in the short and long term.

- Give staff time to attend the funeral if appropriate.
- Awareness of available resources and time to become familiar with what is available.

### **Support for Parents**

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support.
- Send a letter of condolence from the school.
- Depending on the wishes of the family, give out information to appropriate people.
- Give the parents and/or family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who died.
- Send a representative to the funeral.
- Hold a collection or send flowers, 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 remembrance book, this should be returned to the parents at an appropriate time and the pupils informed where it has gone.

### **Guidelines for providing on-going support for a bereaved pupil**

- If the children thinks it would be helpful and friends agree, establish a peer support network- ensuring that those helping are given appropriate support themselves or seek help from an additional agency, if required.
- Make a note of significant dates which might affect the pupil e.g. date of death, birthdays, Christmas, anniversaries. Make sure other members of staff are aware of these and the possible impact these may have. Don't be afraid to acknowledge these potentially difficult times with them e.g. "I know Christmas is coming up and it might feel a very different and difficult time for you all this year without your dad- so don't forget, if it helps to talk you can always come and see me."
- Consider possible reactions to class/assembly topics. Discuss how these difficulties might best be managed with them e.g. if making Mother's day cards do ask them if they wish to be included in the activity too, very often the answer is 'yes' as they still have a parent, they just can no longer see them, but still want to remember them.
- Look out for signs of isolation, bullying or difficulties in the playground- bereaved young children are often seen as vulnerable and may become a target.
- Consider using books/activities to help explore feelings and ideas about death as part of the school curriculum.
- Be alert to changes in behaviour- these may be an indication that they are more affected by the bereavement than they are able or willing to say. Reactions may present themselves months or years after the event, and it may be difficult for staff and others to relate behaviour(s) to the bereavement.
- Follow up absences- absence could indicate bereavement associated problems at home or school.
- At transition time make sure the new class teacher and/or school are aware of the bereavement and support in situ.



- At the end of the day, be yourself, listen and care.

### **Guidelines for supporting a pupil with special educational needs.**

All children benefit from being given simple, honest 'bite-size' pieces of information about difficult issues- often repeated many times over. For further support visit

[www.autism.org.uk/about/family-life/bereavement.aspx](http://www.autism.org.uk/about/family-life/bereavement.aspx).

When talking about death and bereavement with a child with learning difficulties it might be helpful to consider:

- **WHO** should be key worker working with the child and family - inform parents who this person will be and keep in contact, this should be someone they ALREADY have a good relationship with.
- **WHERE** is the student most receptive to new ideas? – quiet room, pool, outside. Use this space for talking with them.
- **WHAT** should be talked about? (as agreed with parents). Ensure that you use the same language and ideas as the family to avoid confusion.
- **HOW** is new information normally given? - signs, verbally, pictures. Use their normal communication methods to talk about illness and death.
- **HOW** is new information normally backed up? – you will probably need to repeat information a number of times over a long period. Do you need to make a social story? ([www.speakingspace.co.uk](http://www.speakingspace.co.uk) will assist with this)
- **PROCEED** at a level, speed and language appropriate to them.
- **BUILD** on information given – small bites of the whole, given gradually will be easier to absorb.
- **REPEAT** information as often as needed.
- **WATCH** for reactions to show the child understands – modify and repeat as needed.
- **FOLLOW** the student's lead – if indicating a need to talk or have feelings acknowledged, encourage as appropriate.
- **WATCH** for changes in behaviour to indicate the child is struggling more than they can say and offer support as needed.
- **MAINTAIN** normal daily routine as much as possible.
- **LIAISE** with other agencies involved with the student to ensure accuracy and continuity of information.

### **Transition**

It is vitally important to ensure that if a child has experienced bereavement that this information is passed on to the relevant persons when they move on to a new class or school.

## Appendix 1- Guidelines on how to inform children

Remember it is ok to show your emotions in moderation. It is important that we model to children and young people healthy response to sad news and a natural response to hearing about a death is to shed a tear.

- Be honest and factual.
- Use clear language – use the person’s name, do not use euphemisms like ‘passed away’ or ‘lost’ use the words dead, died and death to avoid confusion.
- Allow the children/young people to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms they will understand.
- Allow the children/young people to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.
- Allow the children/young people to verbalise their feelings.
- Allow the children/young people to discuss the situation and share their experiences of death (even if that is the death of a pet).
- Ensure the children/young people understand that the death is nothing to do with anything they have said or done. It is in no way their fault.
- Reassure them that not all people who are ill or have had an accident will die and that many people get better.
- Acknowledge some days will be harder than others
- Do not expect to go straight into maths, allow for a time of restoration preferably with a physical outlet.
- Put an appropriate time limit on the discussion. It is preferable to resume normal school activities as soon as possible thus ensuring minimal disruption within the school day which also offers a sense of security and familiarity.

### **Suggested scripts to use when someone dies:**

“I’ve got some really sad news to tell you today that might upset you. I know most of you will have heard of cancer and know that sometimes people with cancer get better but other times people die from it. \_\_\_\_\_, the Geography teacher and Year 11 tutor, has been ill with cancer for a long time. I have to tell you that \_\_\_\_\_ died yesterday in hospital.

‘Sometimes people have accidents in work, at home, or school or on the road. People may be hurt or injured in the accident and they may have to go to hospital for treatment. Sadly, there are some accidents that cause people to die. I have some really sad news to tell you that might upset you. Yesterday, \_\_\_\_\_, who is in Year 4, was in an accident and he was so badly injured that he died.

## Appendix 2 – Template letter to parents

Suggested template for letter to parents

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

*The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the parents and the school.*

*Sample letter on death of a pupil:-*

Dear Parent

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.

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 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 to celebrate <Name's> life.

Yours sincerely,

### **Appendix 3 – Template letter to bereaved parents**

*Sample letter to bereaved parents:-*

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear of <Name>'s death. There are no words to express the sadness of losing a child and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through.

The school community at Audley will miss him/her very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to his/her friends and classmates. He/She was a very much part of the school family community and will be greatly missed.

If there is anything that we can do to help with <Name's funeral service or any other memorial ceremonies, please do let us know.

Please be assured that you are in our thoughts at this very sad time and please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of support in any way.

With sympathy,

Yours sincerely,

## Appendix 4– Template letter to parents

*Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a member of staff, permission must be gained from the deceased's family.*

*Sample letter on death of a staff member:-*

Dear Parent

I am very sorry to have to inform you that a much-loved member of staff <name> has sadly died. The children were told today and many have been quite distressed to hear the news. No-one wants to see the children sad, but we are very aware that factual information and emotional support are the best means of helping children deal with bereavement. I am sure that there will be many parents who are also saddened by the news.

Children respond in different ways to bereavement, and may dip in and out of sadness, denial and anger and may wish to ask questions, this is normal and healthy.

You may find that your child has questions to ask which we will answer in an age-appropriate way in school, but if you feel you would like more support and advice yourself, please do not hesitate to contact the school office. You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk).

We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Children who wish to attend will be welcome to do so. It is likely that the school will be closed on the morning or afternoon of the funeral as staff will, naturally, wish to pay their respects to a very popular colleague.

I am sorry to be the bearer of this sad news, and I appreciate an occurrence like this impacts on the whole school community. I am so very grateful for the thriving partnership we have with parents and trust that we, together, will be able to guide and support the children through what may be, for many, a very new experience in their lives.

Yours sincerely,

## **Appendix 5 - External Support Agencies.**

[www.simonsays.org.uk](http://www.simonsays.org.uk) - Child/Adolescent Bereavement Support.

[www.autism.org.uk/about/family-life/bereavement.aspx](http://www.autism.org.uk/about/family-life/bereavement.aspx) – Advice when supporting someone with autism cope with a death.

[www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk) – Supports families and professionals when a child is bereaved or facing bereavement.

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

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk) - Free national telephone helpline for children and young people.

[www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk) - All aspects of bereavement.

[www.griefencounter.org.uk](http://www.griefencounter.org.uk) - Helps bereaved children & young people rebuild their lives.

[www.hopeagain.org.uk](http://www.hopeagain.org.uk) - Specifically for young people aged 12-18. [supportline.org.uk](http://supportline.org.uk) - Confidential emotional support for children, young people & adults.

[www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org) - Provides resources & support for those dealing with suicide, depression or distress – particularly teenagers & young adults.

[www.seesaw.org.uk](http://www.seesaw.org.uk) - Grief support service for children and young people.

[www.sands.org.uk](http://www.sands.org.uk) - Providing support for parents & families whose baby is stillborn or dies soon after birth.

[www.teenissues.co.uk](http://www.teenissues.co.uk) – Discussing the issues teenagers face.

[www.theredlipstickfoundation.org](http://www.theredlipstickfoundation.org) – Support for families bereaved by suicide.

[www.uk-sobs.org.uk](http://www.uk-sobs.org.uk) - Those who are left behind after a suicide can be helped by talking to others who have experienced a similar loss.

[www.Widowedandyoung.org.uk](http://www.Widowedandyoung.org.uk) – peer-peer network for those widowed before their 51<sup>st</sup> birthday

[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk) - Help for grieving children and their families.