



# Kings Meadow School

Believe and Achieve



## Supporting Bereavement During the Covid-19 Pandemic

### Aims and Ethos

Kings Meadow School is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff, pupils and all other stakeholders. We are dedicated to the continual development of a 'healthy school'. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that support and prepare pupils for coping with separation or loss of a loved one, either through death or divorce.

### Rationale

The global COVID-19 pandemic has created many challenges for all individuals, substantially changing our everyday lives. Unfortunately, an inevitable consequence of the coronavirus outbreak is that there will be many more individuals, families, schools and communities dealing with bereavements.

Typically, 1 in 29 pupils aged five to sixteen-years olds have been bereaved of a parent or sibling. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, relative, friend or other significant person. However, this will no doubt increase significantly during this challenging period.

Within a school community there will almost always be some pupils who are struggling with bereavement – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil. We believe that it is an issue to be addressed openly and guiding principles outlined and developed in an objective manner.

The death of a pupil or member of staff is considered a 'critical incident' and, as such, this guidance should be cross referenced with the Business Continuity Plan.

### Objectives

Within this policy, we provide a framework for all staff and volunteers to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with the 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.

Following a bereavement, Kings Meadow will:

- support pupils and/or members of staff before (where applicable), during and after bereavement.
- enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between members of staff, pupils, the family/carers and the community.
- identify key staff within school and the governing body/Local Authority.
- have clear expectations about the way school will respond to a death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.



# Kings Meadow School

Believe and Achieve



## Contents:

- Following a Bereavement
- The First Few Days
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Procedures
- The Funeral
- Support for Pupils
- Support for Staff
- Returning to School after a Bereavement
- Remembering
- Longer term Support
- Death, Grief and Bereavement in the Curriculum
- Useful Websites and Resources



# Kings Meadow School

Believe and Achieve



## 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.

## The First Few Days

Although school can provide stability and normality for staff and pupils, some flexibility may be necessary.

Bereaved young people may need time to grieve and manage overwhelming feelings, being able to leave a classroom and take time out in a safe space can be very welcome.

The idea of a tribute/book of condolence should be agreed with the bereaved and/or family of the bereaved and needs to be safe in a safe place, easily accessible and ideally where pupils can be supervised. Offer the family the opportunity to visit, if they wish to, or take photographs to share with them later.

Consult with staff and pupils before removing any temporary tribute, giving notice to prepare them beforehand.

## Roles and responsibilities

The designated person within the school who has overall responsibility for support and liaison in event of a death or traumatic loss is the Headteacher. In the event that this person is absent then another Senior Leader will take responsibility. Her responsibilities are:

- Policy development and review, involving pupils, staff, governors, parents/carers and relevant local agencies
- Implementing the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary school
- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff.

The nominated Governors with responsibility for bereavement are: David Bates and David Gee

Their responsibilities are to:

- contribute to generating and updating the policy

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# Kings Meadow School

Believe and Achieve



- support the Headteacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is managed
- support the Headteacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is integrated into the curriculum
- to review practice.

## Procedures

**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.

In the event of the death of a pupil, the school may be notified in a number of ways.

- If the death of a pupil occurs, parents/cares would usually let the school know directly and the person answering the phone will put them through to the most senior member of staff on site
- Where death occurs in the holidays or at weekends, the parents will contact whomever they can – they may have the phone number of a DSL or email address for a member of staff. In that instance, the member of staff who receives the information will immediately contact the headteacher or other senior leader as soon as possible and that person will then assume responsibility for the dissemination of the information.

**Sharing information:** It is important to agree, with the parent, before the school can take on the role of informing concerned parties within, or outside, the school community. Evidence shows that many parents are often happy to have this burden taken away from them, as they have many people unconnected with the school to contact. There can be no definitive list of people to contact and, therefore, 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'. The school needs to 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, including those professionals working 1:1 with that pupil
- Previous school staff who worked closely with the child
- Chair of Governors
- Social Work team if applicable
- SEN team
- School Nursing Team
- SEN Transport
- Other parents – if children have been informed, the school needs to send a note to parents informing them of the loss, and they may need to support or comfort their children.

The process for telling the other pupils will be decided by the Headteacher following consultation with the teaching staff. For example, with different aged pupils there will be different decisions made and the class teacher of the class with the loss will usually be the best person to tell the rest of the children in that class. It is important that staff avoid adding worry – for example, if the child died in hospital we do not want to give children a fear of hospitals. Although

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Believe and Achieve



the finality of death cannot be diminished, 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. 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.

## The Funeral

The Headteacher and/or the Assistant Headteacher 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 and transport. The headteacher will consult the family to find out whether members of staff and/or pupils are welcome to attend.

We will also consider:

- involving pupils in choosing flowers or organising a collection
- the practicalities of issues such as staff cover to allow all those wishing to attend the funeral to do so
- whether it is appropriate to close the school
- cultural and religious implications
- how to support pupils and staff members attending the funeral.

## Support for Pupils

There may be bereavements experienced by children and young people during the COVID-19 outbreak. Supporting bereaved pupils will be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions. Plan for some sort of mutual support, for example in the staffroom at the end of the school day, to give staff an opportunity to share feelings and reactions.

The following guidance may help staff seeking to support bereaved pupils:

- 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 has occurred and you want to understand and help them
- Use pictures, storybooks and social stories to help explain what has happened
- 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

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# Kings Meadow School

Believe and Achieve



- 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. They did not make this happen
- As well as advising the child about appropriate use of social media, monitor their use, particularly during this vulnerable time
- Be aware that holidays, Christmas, birthdays and the anniversary of the event that has caused distressed can mark points of particular emotional vulnerability
- Consider support for the peer group of the bereaved pupil
- Consider involving staff from the Children and Young People's Service, e.g. the Link Educational Psychologist
- You might have to explain your limits of confidentiality (ie, confidentiality can be maintained except where you believe that the pupil is at risk or there are issues relating to a possible criminal act).

## Signs that the Child may be in Crisis

A crisis may cause different reactions in different children in different ways. Some of the more common reactions include:

### Physical:

- Wetting / soiling 'accidents'
- Disturbed sleep, bad dreams, fatigue
- Lack of energy, listlessness
- Headaches, tummy aches, muscle aches
- Change in appetite/weight
- Lowered resistance to illness
- Alcohol/drug abuse

### Cognitive:

- Difficulties in concentrating, forgetfulness, increased distractibility
- Loss of previously acquired skills
- Deterioration in standards of work
- Being more accident prone
- Reduced interest in usual activities and interests
- Appearing preoccupied

### Emotional/Behavioural:

- Numbness
- Feeling of irritability, anger, aggressive behaviour
- Nervousness, jumpiness, panic feelings
- Raised levels of anxiety, fear of dark/confined spaces

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# Kings Meadow School

Believe and Achieve



- Feeling overwhelmed or confused
- Feeling insecure/clinging behaviour
- Regression to behaviour of a younger child
- Repetitive 'acting out' through play/drawing, etc.
- Crying spells
- Mood swings
- Apathy, hopelessness, depression
- Guilt
- Withdrawal from relationships
- Suicidal thoughts

Staff at Kings Meadow will be alert to delayed reactions which may occur some time after the actual incident.

## 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 is trained in bereavement support and/or Mental Health First Aid
- 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, eg: CRUSE

## Returning to School after a Bereavement

To support the reintegration of a bereaved child into school, Kings Meadow staff will:

- 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



# Kings Meadow School

Believe and Achieve



being 'over-nice' to them. However, it is a delicate balance as typically they also do not want people to behave as if nothing has 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).

## Remembering

It may be appropriate to hold a memory assembly for the child. Staff need to be able to show pupils that it is perfectly normal to feel upset at the loss of a friend and that helpful rituals, prayers, and remembering can be shared in a manageable way together. Other examples include:

- 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

## Longer term support

The pupil will continue to grieve for the rest of their life and may require ongoing support. Significant dates or anniversaries, Mother's/Father's Day, etc. may be particularly difficult. Regular contact with the family/carers and reviews with the pupil will help to build up an overall picture of how the pupil is coping.

The grief may impact upon the pupil's academic 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. There may be changes in their behaviour and their social, emotional and mental health needs. These changes may be reflected through the application of additional strategies (as detailed above) and staff will consider reflecting these changes in the pupil's Support and Intervention Plan.

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. Consider particularly vulnerable pupils as they may need additional support, particularly on transition.



# Kings Meadow School

Believe and Achieve



## Death, grief and bereavement in the curriculum

Teaching the topic of death, grief and bereavement will help pupils to understand feelings of grief and prepare them for the future. Informing parents and carers in advance will help to gather information about previous bereavements so that vulnerable pupils can be prepared for the lesson. Recently bereaved pupils may find it helpful if they are given the option to work elsewhere or step outside, if they think it would be too painful to attend.

See Elephant's Tea Party resource on Child Bereavement UK's website

## Useful Websites and Resources

### *Bereavement Support for Children*

- Winston's Wish – <https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus/>
- Childhood Bereavement UK – <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/coronavirus-supporting-children>
- Cruse Bereavement Care – <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief>
- Grief Encounter – <https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/child-bereavement-support/>

### *Bereavement Information for Schools*

- Child Bereavement UK: Supporting Pupils – <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/coronavirus-supporting-pupils>
- Elephant's Tea Party Resources: <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/elephants-tea-party-downloads>

## Other Useful Contacts

- [Cruse Bereavement Care Northamptonshire](#) offer support and advice after the death of someone you love
- [The Dove Service](#) offers counselling and support to all those affected by bereavement, life-changing illness and significant loss
- [Text your school nurse](#) - for friendly, helpful and confidential advice, text your school nurse on 07507 329 600
- [Child Bereavement UK](#) offer advice and support if someone important to you has died, or is seriously ill
- [Talk Out Loud](#) is a website set up by young people that provides mental health support
- [Youth Works Northamptonshire](#) in Kettering and Corby offer one to one counselling focusing on self-knowledge and coping skills to enable young people to support themselves
- [The Lowdown](#) offer bereavement advice and support for young people across Northamptonshire