

Oakwood Junior School Bereavement Policy



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Statement of intent

At Oakwood Junior School, we understand that bereavement is faced by members of our school community at different times, whether this is the death of a family member, a friend or a member of the school community.

We acknowledge that should our school community be informed of a death, our response should be a planned, tested and considered one. An unplanned response could make the situation worse for all concerned; we need to ensure we are able to react sensitively and professionally.

This policy provides a framework whereby this support is provided and outlines how the school will respond to these sensitive situations.

NB. In this policy, all mentions of 'the family' refer to the family of the deceased individual. The wishes of the family will always be considered when carrying out any of the actions outlined in this policy. If the family objects to any of the procedures, the school will work to ensure reasonable adjustments are made.

1. Background and Rationale

Oakwood Junior School is an inclusive school that strives to ensure that all children feel safe when with us. Our values focus on safety, positivity, aspirations, resilience, respect and kindness whilst working with the strengths of each individual child to ensure that they achieve to the best of their abilities.

Around 41,000 children are bereaved of a parent every year in the UK. That's nearly two children under 16 every hour. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person.

Experiencing a bereavement can make children more vulnerable. Bereavement, whether it is an expected death because of illness or a sudden and unexpected death or suicide, is something that can impact on members of our school community at any time.

Our school is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and pupils. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that prepares pupils for coping with bereavement.

This policy is for all staff, pupils, parents and carers, governors, visitors and partner agencies working within the school. It provides guidelines and procedures as to how our school can best prepare for, and respond to, bereavement in the school community.

We recognise that members of the school community will be affected by a range of losses including separation and divorce. Some aspects of this policy may also be helpful in these cases.

2. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Children Act 1989
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Equality Act 2010
- DfE (2018) 'Mental health and behaviour in schools'
- DfE (2024) 'Keeping children safe in education'
- Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (2018) 'Good Work Plan'
- The Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay Regulations 2020
- Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act 2018

This policy has been created with due regard to the following guidance:

- Winston's Wish (2019) 'A Guide to Supporting Grieving Children and Young People in Education'
- Winston's Wish (2019) 'A Strategy for Schools: Positive Responses to Death'
- Samaritans (2017) 'Help When We Needed it Most'
- Child Bereavement UK (2018) 'Schools' Information Pack'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Anti-bullying Policy
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure

3. Roles and responsibilities

The local governing body will be responsible for:

- Overseeing the implementation of this policy.
- Reviewing this policy with Senior Leaders on an annual basis to ensure its effectiveness.

The Headteacher will be responsible for:

- The overall implementation of this policy.
- Liaising with external agencies, as appropriate.
- Informing governors and staff when a death occurs and arranging for pupils to be informed, as appropriate and with approval from the family.
- Being the first point of contact for staff, pupils and parents directly involved in a death, or designating this role to another appropriate member of staff.
- Responding to any enquiries from the media or the wider school community, or appointing a member of staff to undertake these duties.
- Ensuring staff have the necessary training to support bereaved pupils and to deliver sensitive news.

Pastoral staff and Deputy Head will be responsible for:

- Sharing knowledge of any bereavement support training with other staff.
- Supporting the Headteacher in carrying out the procedures outlined in this policy.
- Supporting staff, pupils and parents following a death, as directed by the Headteacher.
- Supporting other staff members with communicating the news of a death.
- Making referrals pupils, staff and other members of the school community to receive support.

The Odyssey Trust Central Team media spokesperson will be responsible for:

- Liaising with the media as required.
- Monitoring media and social media activity regarding the death.
- Respecting the family's wishes in relation to what information can be provided to the media.

All staff members will be responsible for:

- Undertaking any bereavement support training arranged by the Headteacher or pastoral staff.
- Seeking support from pastoral staff as appropriate.
- Supporting their colleagues and pupils following a death, as appropriate.

4. The initial response

If the family or member of staff contacts the school to inform them of a death, the member of staff that answers the phone will transfer the call to the Headteacher or the most senior member of staff available.

If the school is made aware of the death through a source other than the family, the Headteacher will contact the family either by phone or through a home visit.

The Headteacher will gather factual information about what has happened and establish the family's wishes with regards to what information will be communicated to the school community and how.

If a death affects the entire school, e.g. the death of a pupil or member of staff, the Headteacher will inform the family that staff and pupils will be informed as soon as possible.

If the death affects an individual member of staff, e.g. the death of a relative, the Headteacher will ask the member of staff if they would like this to be communicated to any of their colleagues. If it is decided that the death will be communicated, the Headteacher will discuss with the staff member what information will be communicated and how they would like it to be delivered.

If a death affects an individual pupil, e.g. the death of a parent, the Headteacher will ask the family if they would like this to be communicated to the school community. If it is decided that the death will be communicated, the Headteacher will discuss with the family, and the pupil if possible, what information will be communicated and how the family would like it to be delivered.

If the death of a pupil's family member occurs while the pupil is at school, a member of the pupil's family will be asked to come to the school to inform the pupil of what has happened and to take them home. If this is not possible, arrangements will be made for a member of staff to take the pupil home.

The Headteacher will make contact with any other agencies as required, e.g. the police, social care.

The Headteacher will decide if any temporary variation needs to be made to the school timetable, e.g. rearranging or cancelling certain lessons.

In the event of the death of the Headteacher, the deputy head teacher will be responsible for the duties outlined above.

5. Informing staff and governors

Staff and governors will be informed of the death before pupils.

Absent staff and governors, including part-time and peripatetic staff, will be identified so they can be informed as soon as possible. If it is not possible for absent staff to be told in person, a phone call will be arranged.

Any information provided to staff and governors during the meeting will have prior approval from the family.

During the meeting, the Headteacher, with the support of pastoral staff and Deputy Head, will:

- Give a factual explanation of how the death occurred and events leading up to it.
- Allow time for staff and governors to discuss what has happened and how they feel.
- Communicate with the Local Authority media spokesperson who will be responsible for liaising with the media and advising school staff as required.
- Identify what internal and external support is available to staff and governors.
- Discuss the arrangements for informing pupils, including whether all pupils will be told and who will be responsible for informing them.

Staff members that will be responsible for informing pupils about the death will be provided with a script (created by the Headteacher) which sets out what pupils should be told and includes information on how to answer some difficult questions.

6. Informing pupils

The Headteacher will have a discussion with the family about whether all pupils need to be informed about the death.

The Headteacher will make the final decision regarding which pupils will be informed.

Where possible, pupils will be informed about the death in small groups by a member of staff that is familiar to them at the same time.

Pupils with specific needs that may influence their response to being informed about the death will be identified and told separately. These needs include the following:

- Pupils that had a long-term and/or close relationship with the individual who has died
- Pupils with a history of loss
- Pupils with SEND
- Pupils who have difficulty managing their emotions or behaviour

Staff responsible for informing pupils will use the script provided to them.

Pupils will be told about the death in an age-appropriate way.

Pupils will be given time to ask questions about what has happened and to talk about how they are feeling.

Any questions that are asked by pupils will be answered factually.

Pupils will be told where they can go to in school for support and will also be directed to any external support. External support will only be arranged in communication with parents.

Informing pupils in a large group

If it is not possible to inform pupils about a death in small groups, the Headteacher, in

communication with the family, will decide if it would be appropriate to inform pupils in a large group, e.g. during an assembly.

Where an individual pupil has been bereaved, they will be asked if they want to attend the assembly and, if they do not want to be involved, appropriate support will be arranged for the pupil during and after the assembly.

The Headteacher, with support from relevant staff, will deliver the information to pupils.

After pupils have been informed, they will be given time to express any thoughts or feelings about what they have been told.

7. Informing parents

The Headteacher will have a discussion with the family about whether any or all parents need to be informed about the death.

A letter will be composed for parents containing the basic, factual information about the death, information about how the school is supporting pupils, how they can support their children, and who to direct questions or concerns to.

8. Funerals

If appropriate, the Headteacher will discuss with the family whether any staff, governors or pupils are able to attend the funeral.

With the family's approval, the Headteacher will arrange for the school to be represented at the funeral and identify which staff and pupils may want to attend.

The Headteacher and chair of governors will decide if it is necessary for the school to be fully or partially closed.

Necessary cover arrangements will be made for staff attending the funeral.

9. The media and social media

Any communication with the media or social media activity will be agreed with the family.

Only the Local Authority media spokesperson will deal with media enquiries and communications. Staff, governors and pupils will not respond to any media enquiries themselves or make any public statements about the death.

Staff, governors and pupils will not post any information about the death on social media. The media spokesperson will investigate any post made regarding the death and will refer any concerns to the Headteacher.

Information about the death is circulated on social media prior to the school making an official statement, the Headteacher and Local Authority media spokesperson will release a statement, with the agreement of the family, to prevent rumours from spreading.

Comments and other activity on school-posted social media statements will be monitored and moderated by the Local Authority media spokesperson.

If staff, governors or pupils find any false, negative or malicious information being posted about the death on social media, they will report this to the Headteacher.

If a member of staff is found to have been posting content on social media or providing information to the media that is false, negative or malicious, action will be taken in line with the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

If a pupil is found to have been posting content on social media or providing information to the media that is false, negative or malicious, action will be taken in line with Oakwood Junior School's Behaviour Policy.

10. Support for the family

The Headteacher will be the main point of contact between the school and the family, or will appoint another member of staff to this role where necessary.

The Headteacher will invite the family into the school to discuss how the school can best support them.

The family's wishes and feelings will always be considered and respected when making decisions and conducting activities relating to the death.

Any support that is put in place will be decided on a case-by-case basis, depending on the family's needs and wishes. Support could include the following:

- Sending a letter of condolence
- Giving the family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died
- Inviting the family to commemorative events held by the school

11. Support for staff

Staff directly affected by the death, e.g. if they are a relative or close friend of the individual that has died, will be identified and the appropriate support will be put in place.

The level of support will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the Headteacher, and may include the following:

- Ensuring the staff member is not left on their own
- Arranging for lessons or other duties to be covered
- Organising bereavement leave

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Odyssey Collaborative Trust Staff Authorised Leave & Absence policy.

A designated room will be made available to staff where they can go during break and lunchtimes to meet with other staff and share their thoughts and feelings.

Staff will be vigilant to the signs that indicate their colleagues have been affected by bereavement and will offer them support or make a referral to the Headteacher.

12. Support for pupils

Pupils that have experienced a significant bereavement, e.g. of a family member

A member of staff that is familiar with the pupil will be appointed to act as their main point of contact – the pupil will be made aware of who the staff member is.

The Headteacher will contact the pupil's family to discuss whether the pupil will be attending school.

Any support put in place for a pupil will be based on their needs and wishes.

When deciding what support will be put in place for a pupil, the impact the death will have on the pupil will always be considered in the context of pre-existing factors. The following contextual factors will be considered:

- The circumstances surrounding the death, e.g. was it under traumatic circumstances, was the death expected, or did multiple people die?
- The relationship between the pupil and the person who has died.
- The ability of the pupil's family to support them following the death, e.g. if a pupil's parent has died, how able is the surviving parent to support the pupil?
- Family factors such as size, financial state, structure, culture, style of coping, communication and stressors that affect the child.
- The support the pupil has from their peers and other organisations and people.
- Characteristics of the pupil, including their age and any SEND they have.

The pupil will be a part of discussions regarding who should be informed about the death and how, where appropriate.

If a pupil chooses to attend school immediately after a bereavement, they will be allowed a flexible timetable and staff members will be made aware that the pupil may not be able to work to their usual capacity. The designated staff member will keep in communication with the pupil's family to inform them about how the pupil is doing.

If the pupil is absent from school following the bereavement, they will be made aware of who has been informed about what has happened and what they were told.

The designated staff member will make regular contact with the pupil during their absence.

The Headteacher, designated staff member, pupil and the pupil's family will make arrangements for the pupil's return to school, e.g. a phased return.

If a death occurs soon before or during a time where the pupil will take an exam, the Headteacher will report the circumstances and will decide if special considerations apply.

If a pupil misses an exam due to the death of a close family member or friend, the Headteacher will report this and make a decision as to whether special considerations can be applied.

Any safeguarding concerns regarding a bereaved pupil will be dealt with in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

Support for all pupils

All pupils, even those not directly affected by the death, will need to be supported following a death, particularly if the death affects the whole school community, e.g. the death of a staff member.

Pupils will be given the opportunity to be referred for counselling through Safe-Speak (Relate).

Staff will talk to pupils about what has happened using age-appropriate language.

Following a death in the school community, pupils will be invited to take part in remembrance activities, e.g. remembrance assemblies.

Staff will identify any pupils that may need more direct support and make a referral to the Headteacher who will assess what support might be required.

13. Behaviour and SEMH issues

Staff will remain vigilant to the following behaviours that a pupil may display immediately after the death of someone close to them:

- Inability to concentrate
- Lack of motivation
- Tiredness and irritability
- Heightened sensitivity to comments and remarks
- Inability to take others' feelings into account
- Anger, frustration or aggression
- A general change in behaviour, e.g. becoming unnaturally quiet or withdrawn
- Anxiety
- Being easily upset by events that would normally be trivial to them
- Physical complaints, such as headaches, stomach aches and a general tendency to be prone to minor illness

The pupil's designated staff member will keep in contact with the pupil's family and share information about how the pupil is behaving at school and home.

Any challenging behaviour displayed by bereaved pupils will be addressed using the individual graduated response outlined in the Positive Behaviour Policy.

A record will be made of anniversaries and days with regards to the death which may act as a trigger for challenging behaviour.

Any incidents of bullying, where a bereaved pupil is the victim or perpetrator, will be addressed in line with the Anti-bullying Policy, taking into account the pupil's needs and circumstances.

All staff members will remain vigilant to signs that a bereaved pupil is facing difficulties in relation to their psychological, physical and social development and will refer the pupil to pastoral staff who will put appropriate support in place.

14. Specific circumstances

The procedures outlined in this policy will be followed for all deaths affecting the school community and individual pupils; however, specific measures will be implemented for certain circumstances.

Pre-bereavement – when a family member is not expected to live

If a family member has an illness where they are not expected to live, their family will make the school aware of the situation and the school will ensure the appropriate support is in place.

Pupils with a life-threatening illness

Pupils with life-threatening illnesses will be encouraged to take part in school routines as much as possible, and the school will continue to expect the usual standards of behaviour as appropriate.

The Headteacher, the pupil and their family, and other relevant staff members will decide how to share the news that a pupil is terminally ill with the school community.

Other pupils will be informed about how they can best support the pupil in the most appropriate way.

If the pupil is receiving treatment from a local hospice or hospital, the key professional responsible for the pupil will be identified and the Headteacher will contact this person for advice and support as necessary.

Suicide

The school will respond to a suspected suicide within 48 hours.

The Headteacher, or other appointed member of staff, will contact the police or the family as soon as possible to confirm the death and whether it is being treated as a suicide.

If the family does not wish the cause of death to be disclosed to the school community, the school will state that the nature and cause of death are still being determined and that additional information will be forthcoming.

If the death is subject to an ongoing investigation, the Headteacher will check with the police before speaking about the death with pupils who may need to be interviewed by the police.

Staff will be told about the death first, in line with [section 4](#) of this policy.

The script that staff will use to inform pupils of the death will be factual while avoiding excessive detail about the suicidal act itself.

Immediate emotional support will be arranged for any pupils and staff who require it.

A designated room will be set up where pupils and staff can go to if they are struggling with the news.

Liaison with the media will be handled in line with [section 8](#) of this policy.

Any information distributed to the school community and media regarding the death will:

Be factually correct but not include detail of the cause of death or method used.

- Not romanticise, glorify or vilify the death.

- Not include details of any suicide note.
- Not include speculation over the motivation for suicide.

Research indicates that pupils that have been directly affected by suicide are at an increased risk of taking their own life. Staff will report any concerns about pupils to the Headteacher and the appropriate support will be put in place or a referral to specialist services will be made.

Any memorial activities conducted by the school will be held within two weeks of the death; following this, any memorial material will be given to the family.

Permanent memorials will not be held at the school; however, the school may set up a memorial on the website that will be moderated by a designated member of staff and removed after an agreed time.

Pupils and staff will be warned about the risks of un-moderated online memorials (e.g. those on social media), such as their comments becoming public without their permission and online memorials attracting negative comments.

Consider the language		
ISSUE	PROBLEMATIC	PREFERRED
Presenting suicide as a desired outcome	X – ‘successful suicide’ X – ‘unsuccessful suicide’	Died by suicide Took their own life
Associating suicide with crime or sin	X – ‘committed suicide’ X – ‘commit suicide’	Took their own life Died by suicide
Sensationalising suicide	X – ‘suicide epidemic’	Increasing rates Higher rates
Language glamourizing a suicide attempt	X – ‘failed suicide’ X – ‘suicide bid’	Suicide attempt Non-fatal attempt
Gratuitous use of the term ‘suicide’	X – ‘political suicide’ X – ‘suicide mission’	Refrain from using the term suicide out of context

Cultural and religious behaviours

The school will keep in mind the cultural attitudes and behaviours relating to a death and will make sure these needs are taken into consideration when putting support in place for those affected, including the length of bereavement leave for members of staff.

Forces’ families

The needs and feelings of bereaved forces’ pupils will always be considered prior to any school activities relating to the armed forces, e.g. commemorating Armed Forces Day, and additional support will be put in place for pupils as required.

Appropriate support will be implemented for bereaved forces’ pupils, particularly during times of change.

Bereaved forces’ pupils will be protected from any unwanted media attention and there will be a designated area in school that the pupil can go to if they are feeling overwhelmed.

A death involving murder or manslaughter

The Headteacher will contact the police or the family to establish the facts about what has happened.

A designated staff member will be available to talk to the pupil to help them to answer any questions they may get from their peers about what has happened.

Media personnel will not be permitted onto the school site at anytime.

15. Remembrance activities

Following a death in the school community, the school may conduct some remembrance activities, e.g. a remembrance assembly.

The family will always be consulted prior to any remembrance activities being planned and will be invited to take part in the activities.

All members of the school community, including staff, governors, pupils and parents, will be invited to take part in remembrance activities.

All remembrance activities will be planned so that they are respectful of the culture and religious beliefs of the family.

16. Managing transitions

Information about pupils that have been bereaved will be recorded. This information will be shared with relevant parties at key transition points, including the following:

- If the pupil moves school
- When the pupil moves to secondary school
- If the pupil moves class
- When the pupil will be taught by a new teacher

17. Teaching about bereavement and grief

Different aspects of the curriculum will be used to discuss relationships, feelings and emotions, and to think about how to manage these in relation to family events and death.

Before delivering any lessons that cover topics of death and bereavement, the teacher will consider how the lesson may affect the bereaved pupils they are teaching.

Bereaved pupils and their families will be consulted over whether it is appropriate for them to attend lessons about death or bereavement, and alternative arrangements or additional support will be put in place as required.

Where appropriate, the teacher will discuss what the lesson is going to cover with the pupil and will work with the pupil to design activities that the pupil feels they are able to get involved with.

Any lessons covering topics of death or bereavement will take account of religious and cultural beliefs. Specific lessons on bereavement are available for all staff from the PSHE Lead. A range of books for staff and children is available in the PSHE library, in the Hygge Room.

18. Staff Training

Whole-school training sessions to share knowledge on how to deal with bereavement will be built in to the professional development timeline.

The Headteacher will check if the staff that work for third party providers that deliver extra-curricular activities for pupils have received bereavement training and will recommend them to do so if this training has not been undertaken.

20. Monitoring and review

This policy will be reviewed on a 3-yearly basis by the Headteacher.

Any changes to this policy will be communicated to all staff members.