



## INTRODUCTION

The loss of someone close through death can be a traumatic and painful event. For many children and young people the death of a parent, sibling, friend or relative can be extremely difficult and they may find the emotions that they are experiencing to be frighteningly intense.

As children spend the vast majority of their time at school, teachers and staff members will be one of the primary sources of care and support in the event of a death. Bereaved children may see school as a safe haven away from the turmoil of emotions at home and will look to trusted staff members for help. Advice for staff on dealing with bereaved pupils is detailed in Appendix One and Appendix Two.

Pastoral staff are trained to help pupils deal with these emotions, but all staff have access to information and support should they need to offer help to any pupil or colleague. In addition, the school offers access to a school counsellor.

The purpose of this Bereavement Policy is to help everyone at our school at a time when there may be shock, upset and confusion, ensuring that there is as little disruption as possible, that effective communication takes place and that each member of our school community is supported to help them through a very difficult time.

Every 22 minutes in the UK a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 41,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, and, sadly, around 12,000 children die in the UK each year.

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. We would hope to not encounter such circumstances, but the statistical inevitability of such an occurrence implies the necessity of having a Bereavement Policy in place in order that we might be proactive, rather than reactive, when responding to these sensitive situations. As children spend the vast majority of their time at school, teachers and staff members will be one of the primary sources of care and support in the event of a death. Bereaved children may see school as a safe haven away from the turmoil of emotions at home and will look to trusted staff members for help. Pastoral staff are trained to help pupils deal with these emotions, but all staff have access to information and support should they need to offer help to any pupil or colleague. In addition, the school access to a school counsellor.

In the event of a death within the school community, staff will be informed before pupils and be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.

Pupils who are affected should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them. The school is be aware that the school timetable may need a degree of flexibility to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of children affected by any situation. However, minimal disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security and familiarity. Staff and pupils affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate. In the immediate aftermath, support may be offered by an external counsellor who will be available to talk about what to expect when dealing with grief.

Counselling is not advised at this stage – but talking about feelings and experiences is encouraged within the community. We would expect counselling to occur after a couple of months and this can be arranged with our own school counsellor.



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In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance may be clarified, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances. The school is aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life so information will be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points.

Please refer to Appendix 3 for specific checks to be carried out in the event of a bereavement.

## **1. The following guidelines can be used when a member of the school community (pupil or staff) dies.**

Prior to any information sharing, agreement should be reached first with the family of the deceased in terms of what will be shared.

In the event of a death involving a member of the school community whilst pupils are on residential trips, the following guidelines still apply but will need to be adapted dependent on the circumstances.

The trip leader should be the point of contact in terms of communication, and information should be shared appropriately but promptly to prevent speculation on social media. Parents of pupils on the residential trip should be informed of all steps taken.

### **Informing Staff**

Obtaining factual information should be made a priority.

Arrange a staff meeting, including support staff, as soon as practicable. The Rector, or in his absence,

the Senior Depute Rector, will convene the meeting. In the Primary School, this may be undertaken by the Head of the Primary School.

Give advice to staff on how to deal with any questions from pupils, parents or anyone outwith the school community.

For a death that might attract media coverage, identify a spokesperson, normally the Rector, who would liaise with the family, and inform staff.

Identify absent staff, including part-time staff, and arrange for the information to be passed to them.

This would be the responsibility of the Depute Rector in charge of Pastoral care.

With a traumatic death such as suicide or murder, consider requesting bereavement support services.

Consideration should be given regarding how best to support those staff members and students who have been particularly affected by the death.

### **Informing Pupils**

Identify those children who had a close relationship with the deceased so that they can be told together in a separate group – for example, the teacher's current classes, or with the relevant House staff.



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Experience has shown that it is more beneficial if all pupils are informed – this is best done in small groups, at the same time, to provide more support for the pupils and prevent rumour spreading.

Allow pupils time for discussion and support. Answer questions factually.

Provide pupils with a designated area to go to in the course of the day should they feel upset, in order to reflect and discuss feelings with others if need be. Consideration should be given to the facilitation of a 'condolences' book or similar. This area should be supervised by staff, and offer a degree of privacy for pupils. It may be that this area is required for longer periods of time – perhaps a day, or several days, until the initial shock has subsided. Suitable venues could include (depending on numbers) the Bistro for S6, the Assembly Hall (with curtains drawn), the G.P. room, the Georgeson

Room, the Fotheringay Auditorium, the meeting room. In the Primary School, this would be the classrooms of the pupils most affected.

Specific members of staff (normally from House staff) should be identified for pupils to go to for bereavement support, and this should be seen as long term support. In the event of a suicide, the following members of staff have specific training: Ms S. McArthur, Mrs J Leonard, Mrs H Liddell. In addition, the pastoral staff are all trained in mental health first aid.

Difficulty may arise in the Secondary School when pupils make direct contact with a parent via mobile phone; this can result in parental distress and concern. Pupils should be advised that if they wish to make contact with home, they should do so under supervision of staff. At the Primary School, any contact via mobile phone should be actively and strongly discouraged.

All staff should be given advice on what to say to parents should they encounter questions in the immediate aftermath of a death.

Students may wish to access Cruse Bereavement Care's specialist website, RD4U designed to support bereaved children and young people. If possible, it may be an idea to encourage form groups or groups of students who have been most affected by the death to log on to RD4U if they feel they would benefit from this.

Pupils should be given clear advice regarding online behaviour and the use of social media. They should not enter into discussion about the issue via electronic means.

## Informing Parents

Send a letter to all parents informing them of the event and the details given to their children in school.

Identify particular staff to whom any enquiries should be directed.

All staff should be given advice on what to say to parents in the event of any unforeseen contact.

The immediate aftermath of sad news can be difficult to predict. Whilst we recognise the need to give staff/pupils time and space to absorb distressing information, the aim is to continue to operate the school as normal, but enable individuals to seek support should they need it. Bereaved children should, whenever possible, be able to continue activities and interests so that parts of their lives can still feel 'normal'.





It is essential to sound out the family's wishes with regards to any funeral arrangements. Cultural and religious implications may also need consideration.

## **2. The following guidelines can be used when a parent/sibling dies.**

If the school has been informed of the death by a third party, there should be communication with the parent or guardian of the pupil, to offer condolences and support.

All staff must also be informed as soon as possible so that difficult situations can be avoided.

Clarification should be sought from the pupil/parent/guardian as to what information is to be given to peers.

With older pupils, rumour is more likely to spread via electronic means, therefore staff should recognise that pupils may already be aware of a death. It is also likely that in a school community such as ours, the peers may know the deceased parent/sibling very well.

Before the child returns to school it would help if the pupil and parent could meet with a member of staff (for example, SMT responsible for Pastoral Care, House staff, Matron or Class Teacher) to discuss if and how they would like their class to be informed of their loss, if this has not already happened.

If peers are aware of the death, it may be appropriate to organise cards or messages of support from the class/group, which should be organised/supervised by staff.

The death of a parent or sibling is often a shocking thing and the cause of death may be of great significance. An accident or sudden death can be far more traumatic for the child and where suicide has been the cause of death a whole host of issues are raised. It is impossible to know quite how a pupil of ours may react and we must be prepared to accept a variety of responses as normal.

In the event of a pupil suffering a close family bereavement, the details should be logged in the 'Confidential Notes' section of PASS and information passed on to the relevant staff at transition time.

The class teachers and House staff are responsible for monitoring the social, emotional and academic progress of the pupil, in the short and long term, intervening if and when necessary.

## **3. Support for staff and pupils**

It is important to recognise that no single approach is likely to meet the needs of all those affected by death. A list of contacts and support materials is detailed in Appendix Two. For staff, individual support, peer group discussion or external support are all available. For pupils, the Pastoral staff would be central to the individual support of pupils. In addition, we may refer pupils to the school's counselling service. The school also has access to external counsellors who are available to provide psychological first aid for staff.

During bereavement, children and young people can experience a great number of emotions, including sadness, anger, anxiety, guilt, fear, denial, disbelief and confusion. We need to be ready to acknowledge that our pupils will be experiencing these emotions without realizing they are related to their grief. Staff should be mindful of this when dealing with what appears to be poor behaviour.



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Although the grieving process at this age is much like adults, teenagers are still developing emotionally, and need support. By now young people are much more aware of the finality of death, and the impact that the death has had on them. The death of someone important may make them feel different, at the very time that they want to be the same as everyone else. They are aware of the longer term impact of their loss, when future milestones will not be shared with the person who has died. Relationships with others are becoming increasingly important, and any loss can lead to feelings of anger or severe distress.

Key points at this age:

- Pupils will have an adult understanding of the concept of death, but do not have the experiences, coping skills, or behaviour of an adult.
- Pupils may 'act out' in anger or show impulsive or reckless behaviours, such as substance misuse or fighting in school.
- Pupils may experience a wide range of emotions, but not know how to handle them or feel comfortable expressing them.
- The reality of death contradicts a teenager's view of himself or herself as invincible, and teenagers may question their faith or their understanding of the world.
- Developmental issues of independence and separation from parents can interfere with the ability to receive support from adult family members.
- Coping strategies may create tension with family members, as adolescents may cope by spending more time with friends or by withdrawing from the family to be alone.

Parents may need support in understanding how death (and particularly the death of a young person) might impact their child.

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The Governors of Hutchesons' Educational Trust, Registered Charity Number SC002922, is the governing body of Hutchesons' Grammar School.

## **APPENDICES**

- Appendix 1 Advice to staff
- Appendix 2 Support in a multi-faith context
- Appendix 3 Checklist

