Norwood Green Junior School

Bereavement Policy

Policy ratified by the GB: February 2024

Policy to be reviewed: February 2027

Norwood Green Junior School's values and aims are central to every aspect of school life. They represent the school's compassionate approach and are the core aspect of this policy.

Our School's Values (chosen by the pupils):

1) Honesty
2) Good Manners
3) Determination
4) Friendship
5) Respect
6) Responsibility

Our Schools Aims:

We aim that our pupils:

- have a sense of pride in what they do, and foster compassion and respect for all.
- think independently and creatively as well as develop their leadership skills.
- are able to communicate effectively and achieve a high level of literacy and numeracy skills.
- develop core skills through a rich curriculum which offers understanding and appreciation of the wider world.
- are safe and cared for, including their emotional, physical and social needs.
- develop the confidence and skills to make positive choices about their lives now and in the future.

Rationale

Every 22 minutes in the UK a child is bereaved of a parent, making up some 24,000 a 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. Looking after those who need help is at the core of both Norwood Green Junior School's values and aims.

Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children – or staff – require, though referral to more specialist support should be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex. Additional information and resources can be accessed at www.childbereavement.org.uk

Objectives

The core intentions of the policy are:

- To support pupils and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement

- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and community.
- To identify key staff within school and LA, and clarify the pathway of support.

The role of the governing body

- To approve policy and ensure its implementation, to be reviewed in three years.

The role of the head teacher

- To monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.
- To respond to media enquiries.
- To be first point of contact for family/child concerned.
- To keep the governing body fully informed.
- To contact advisory support staff. Consult on referral pathways and identification of complex grief.

Head teacher: Priya Sehgal

The role of senior staff.

To offer support to the member of staff directly affected or support the teacher of a child who has experienced bereavement. They may also work in a supportive role with the pupil directly.

The role of class teacher

- To support a child who has experienced bereavement

Procedures led by the Headteacher:

1. Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the Head teacher and their wishes respected in communicating with others. Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion, whilst being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations.

2. Staff should be informed before pupils and be prepared to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.

3. Pupils who are affected should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them.

4. A letter to all school families affected should be composed at the earliest opportunity and a decision made as to whom, and how, it should be distributed.

5. The school should be aware that the school timetable may need a degree of flexibility to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of children affected by the situation. However, minimal disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security and familiarity.

6. Staff affected by the death will be offered on-going support as appropriate.

7. 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.

8. Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Head Teacher

9. School should be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life so information should be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points.

The London Borough of Hounslow Educational Psychology Service should be able to support in discussing options and possible financing of individual counselling for pupils/staff.

See Appendices for guidance on support and examples of parent letters.

Procedures led by the Teacher:

The following procedures will alter on case by case bases at the discretion of the teacher. To support them with the situation they will meet with a member of the SLT.

1. Teachers of bereaved pupils will approach the situation with an understanding that they have a responsibility for the well-being of the child. This does not extend to a role of councillor or psychologist but does include additional emotional support.

2. In their supportive role, the teacher will inform the bereaved that they will make themselves available to listen and they will signpost them to other adults in the school who can be used in this role e.g. the bereaved 'special adult' and SLT.

3. When listening to the bereaved the teacher will adopt an empathetic and non-judgemental approach. They will where appropriate acknowledge the pupil's loss and give them *'permission to grieve' (a common requirement of bereaved)*.

4. The teacher will ensure that the learning environment/culture of the class is a kind safe space. They may need to talk to the class separately without the bereaved.

5. The teacher will provide extra space and flexibility whilst maintaining a sense of normality through maintaining the child's involvement in school routines, whenever possible.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Guidance: **Support offered to the person who has experienced bereavement**

Appendix 2 - Useful Links and contacts

Appendix 3 - Suggested templates for letter to parents

Appendix 4 - Sample letter on death of a staff member

APPENDIX 1

Often, our first thought is "HELP!" and we don't know what to say, fearing we will 'make it worse'. The very worst thing that could ever happen in that child's life has just happened – you can't make it worse! The fact that a teacher cares enough to say "I was really sorry to hear about your mum dying, it made me sad" or asking "how are you feeling today? I guess things are still hard" will make a world of difference to a pupil, and demonstrate a lot of care.

Dare to ask questions and listen to the answers. Be prepared to share your own feelings if necessary, or talk about how death makes you feel and allow your student to decide what happens next, and who they talk to.

Having to talk to a class about a death will feel more familiar if you have mentally rehearsed it before, and maybe researched on good language to use.

In the real world, despite the very best of intentions, you will probably find yourself needing to respond to the death without the time to look back on your shelves for reference material.

Remember:

School may be an escape for the bereaved person- a place where there are no parents and reminders. It may be 6 months/1 year after a sudden death that the young person reacts. This is normal and not an excuse or attention-seeking behaviour.

In much of today's media, we meet the misguided idea of 'stages of bereavement' and the idea that we have to 'pass through' them to 'acceptance.'

It is our idea to replace the idea of 'stages' with a picture of a spiral. The 'Upward Spiral of Grief' allows people to accept their feelings, to accept that these feelings may come back and that grieving is long term work. For example, if 6 months after a loss, you still feel really tearful and sad one day, you may worry that there is something wrong with you. However, you will be in a different place to that black hole in the beginning. Your feelings will be the same, but with less intensity. You will have moved around the spiral. You have moved on and made some adjustments.

By using this spiral we can alleviate the pressure of having to move on through the stages of bereavement. It may become less frightening to revisit these feelings time and time again. It does not mean that you have gone back to the black hole in the beginning.

The idea of acceptance can also be misleading. We prefer to replace it with the word 'adjustment.' If we bereaved are really honest, we rarely accept the loss. We learn to live with it; we change our life accordingly. But, accept? Hardly.

There is little doubt that we do share similar feelings following a bereavement, such as shock, despair, pining, denial, anger, fear, guilt, anxiety, relief, sadness. It is comforting to know that these feelings are 'normal.' However, over the course of time the idea of stages has become misunderstood. Some people feel under enormous pressure to 'pass through' these stages in order to 'move on' and accept their loss. We argue that it is more realistic to think of grieving in an upward spiral.

- Ensure missed work is available and pupil does not fall behind.
- Provide a safe space and person if pupil needs time out- and monitor.
- Consider the possibilities of peer support.
- Be alert to verbal and non-verbal communications and changes in behaviour.
- Consider ways to commemorate the dead person, if the pupil wishes.
- Support the staff supporting the young person.
- Remember that grieving will not be over in a day, week or month.

The bereavement history should travel with the young person, noting significant dates.

APPENDIX 2 - Useful Links and contacts

www.griefencounter.org.uk their website includes kids' zone and printable resources such as bereavement workbook for children www.griefencounter.org.uk/professionals/school-teachers

www.childbereavement.org.uk Contains a helpline, lots of advice and resources. General enquiries: 01494 568900

www.rd4u.org.uk A website run by Cruse Bereavement Care specifically for bereaved children and young people. (Leaflet available and to be given to family)

www.winstonswish.org.uk has helpline and e-mail service and dedicated area of the website for children. Winston's Wish Helpline – 08452 03 04 05 – our national helpline offering guidance, information and support to anyone caring for a bereaved child, including professionals and family members

Mulberry Centre (Leaflet available and to be given to family)

The Mulberry Centre provides bereavement support to Hounslow residents ordinarily 12 years above/adults but may be able to support younger children depending on the availability of appropriate counsellors (voluntary basis). This support would probably be based at the centre rather than providing someone at school but may be useful for parents and child to know about. A referral is not required so they are free to drop in or ring to discuss possible support.

GP

GPs may be able to refer any family members for bereavement counselling via Anchor counselling service. The family should get in touch should they need support.

Childhood Bereavement Network

The Childhood Bereavement Network (CBN) is a national, multi-professional federation of organisations and individuals working with bereaved children and young people.

Cruse Bereavement Care

Cruse Bereavement Care exists to promote the well-being of bereaved people and to enable anyone bereaved by death to understand their grief and cope with their loss.

Helpline: 0844 477 9400

Life Signs

The user-led voluntary organisation which raises awareness about self-injury and help people who rely on self-injury by providing a safe, friendly message board, ideas for distraction techniques and by inspiring / empowering them to find alternative, healthier coping mechanisms.

National Children's Bureau

NCB is a charitable organisation that is dedicated to advancing the health and well-being of all children and young people across every aspect of their lives and providing them with a powerful and authoritative voice.

Papyrus (prevention of young suicide)

PAPYRUS is a voluntary UK organisation committed to the prevention of young suicide and the promotion of mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Hope Line UK: 0800 068 41 41 (for practical advice on suicide prevention)

Young Minds

YoungMinds is the national charity committed to improving the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people.

Parents Helpline: 0808 802 5544

Newsround

Watch the CBBC Newsround special on childhood bereavement.

APPENDIX 3 - Suggested templates 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 school

Sample letter on death of a pupil:

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher/form tutor/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 and family 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 as a means of celebrating <Name..'s> life.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Sehgal
Head Teacher

APPENDIX 4 - **Sample letter on death of a staff member:**

Dear parents

I am sorry to have to tell you that a much-loved member of our staff [name] has died. The children were told today and many will have been quite distressed at the news. No-one wants to see 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 there will be many parents who are also saddened by the news. Children respond in different ways so may dip in and out of sadness, and questions, whilst alternately playing or participating in their usual activities. This is normal and healthy.

You may find 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

We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Children who wish to attend will be welcome to do so, though it will not be compulsory. It is likely that school will be closed on the morning or afternoon of the funeral as staff will, of course, wish to pay their respects to a very popular colleague.

I am sorry to be the bearer of sad news, but I appreciate an occurrence like this impacts the whole school community. I am so 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

Mrs Sehgal
Head Teacher