



KING EDWARD VI HANDSWORTH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Bereavement and Loss Advice and Support Policy February 2022

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Related Documents/Policies

Reference	Title
	Safeguarding Policy
	Suicide-Safer School Policy
	Self-harm Policy

Jane Glendenning (DSL) is responsible for reviewing and updating this procedure.

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Aims and values

This policy will help staff to achieve the safeguarding vision of the School, which is that the Staff and Governors are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all its students. We believe that:

- Young people need to be safe and to feel safe in school;
- Young people need support which matches their individual need;
- All young people have the right to be supported to meet their emotional, and social needs as well as their educational needs – a happy, healthy, sociable young person will achieve better educationally;
- it is important to celebrate diversity and value fairness and equal treatment for everyone at the school regardless of their race, age, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation or disability, as per our [EDI Statement](#)

Statement of Principles

This policy relates to bereavement experienced by any member of our school community and applies to all at King Edward VI Handsworth School for Girls irrespective of their age. This policy also applies at times when a student or staff member is not in school. The procedures and support guidelines may be adapted as appropriate to meet our School's emotional health and well-being aims and the individual circumstances of each situation.

Roles and responsibilities

Governors

As part of their general responsibilities for the strategic direction of the school, Governors have a key role to play in the regular review of King Edward VI Handsworth School for Girls Bereavement Advice and Support Policy.

Headmistress

The Headmistress will ensure that staff and parents/carers are informed about this policy, and that the policy is implemented effectively. The Headmistress will also ensure that staff receive training, so that they are able to handle any difficult issues with sensitivity and confidence.

School staff

All school staff will use this document to enable them to effectively support students and colleagues affected by bereavement. They will follow the detailed [guidance](#) here and if necessary:

- [dealing with an accident or crisis at school/on a school trip](#);
- [The death of a pupil](#);
- [The death of a staff member](#);
- [dealing with traumatic bereavement through violence](#);
- [Ways of dealing with the impact of a traumatic bereavement](#): advice for all members of our school community
- [Who to contact: specific staff areas of responsibility within school](#) (including support for staff, pupils and parents/carers);
- [Resources for staff, students and parents](#)

Staff are also welcome to request further training through the [UK Trauma Council](#) or view videos on [traumatic bereavement](#) to aid their own personal understanding and to better prepare them to support young people.

Parents

Parents will notify the school of any bereavement which is likely to impact on their child and provide the Pastoral Team with necessary details in order for us to offer and provide relevant support in school. Parents will use the information in this document based on material available from the bereavement support charity, Cruse, to aid their understanding of the grieving process; the impact of bereavement on them and their child; and follow the [advice](#) recommended to support both adults and young people affected by the bereavement, including signposting [here](#).

Students

Students will have access to this document in order to aid their understanding of bereavement and the grieving process and who to go to for support. This includes [advice for young people from young people](#); [Resources for staff, students and parents](#) and [Ways of dealing with the impact of a traumatic bereavement](#)

An introduction to bereavement and loss

We know that these continue to be unprecedented times but the 'normal' scale of bereavement outside the pandemic is that:

- Every 22 minutes a parent of dependent children dies in the UK.
- Up to 70% of schools have a bereaved pupil on their roll at any given time – about 1 in 25 children have experienced the loss of a parent/sibling.
- 92% of young people will experience a significant bereavement before the age of 16 years.

Source: (Child Bereavement UK 2018)

The impact on people affected by a bereavement during the pandemic can be further explored in this article from the University of Bristol: [New research shows UK faces post-pandemic bereavement crisis and lasting legacy of grief](#)

Bereavement and loss are essential to the human experience. For most of us, bereavement will be the most distressing experience we will ever face. Grief is what we feel when somebody we are close to dies. Everyone

experiences grief differently and there is no 'normal' or 'right' way to grieve. For details of [the grieving process and changes in behaviour](#) follow the link.

At some point in their childhood or adolescence, most children will experience the death of a family member or friend. Oftentimes they will manage this grief with the support of their family and friends, however, the death of a parent or main carer remains the most traumatic and painful loss for a child. Following the loss of a parent, 19% of children continue to experience significant psychological problems, such as trauma or a prolonged grief reaction, one year later, according to research by William Worden (1993). Research from [Boingboing](#) has suggested that children reach acceptance sooner if they are well supported by families and the school community in the early stages of grief.

The developmental perspective

A child's stage of development partially determines their ability to grieve and understand the notion of death.

- Seven- to 11-year-old children begin to grasp the finality of death, but may have difficulty processing that it will or could happen to them.
- In early adolescence, young people begin to accept that they too will die.
- The significance of death is not fully realised until adulthood. Even as adults, we continue to struggle to accept our own mortality (Kalish & Reynolds, 1976).

Children and young people who have experienced significant loss or multiple bereavements may come to understand the inevitability of death far sooner than their peers.

Children's grief

For many children and young people, the death of a parent, caregiver, sibling or grandparent is an experience they are faced with early in life. Sometimes people think a child or young person who is bereaved at a young age will not be greatly affected, as they are too young to understand the full implications of death. This is untrue and unhelpful. Even babies are able to experience loss. A baby cannot cognitively process the implications of the bereavement but that does not mean that they do not feel the loss.

However, children do not have the emotional resources or cognitive capacity to stay with feelings of grief for a prolonged time (a common adult experience). The [Child Bereavement Network](#) likens this to 'puddle jumping', whereas in contrast adults 'may wade through rivers of grief or become stuck in the middle of seas of distress'.

After losing a loved one, children may swing from crying one minute to playing the next. This can be distressing for their parents or carers, who may also be grieving, to observe. This fluctuation in mood does not mean the child isn't sad or they have finished grieving. On the contrary, it can form an important defence mechanism against becoming overwhelmed by loss. It is also normal for children to feel depressed, guilty, anxious or angry with the person who has died, or another close person to them.

Children and young people need to be given the opportunity to grieve as any adult would. Trying to ignore or avert the child's grief is not protective and can be damaging. Children and young people regardless of their age need to be encouraged to talk about how they are feeling and supported to understand their emotions.

Some children may, however, struggle to express their feelings through words, so exploring sensitive children's books about death (such as Michael Rosen's *Sad Book*) or drawing pictures are important alternative ways of expressing feelings.

Teenagers' understanding of death

- A bereaved young person may appear to be grieving like an adult but they are not an adult and should be treated as a young person.

- The bereaved young person shouldn't be burdened with tasks that a responsible adult can undertake.
- Grieving young people may prefer to speak with their friends or people outside of the immediate family about the death. This should be encouraged.
- Due to the developmental and hormonal changes that a young person will be undergoing, the emotions related to the death of someone close may be very intense.
- The young person needs to be encouraged to express how they are feeling and the emotions they are encountering.
- The death of someone important, may make them feel different at the time when, developmentally, they want to be the same as everyone else.
- The reality of death conflicts with the teenage 'task' of being invincible.

Adults' experience and response to loss

- Low motivation;
- Difficulty problem solving;
- Fear of being alone;
- Use of substances to medicate;
- Vulnerable immune system;
- Denial;
- Difficulty finding consolation;
- Irritability and mood swings;
- Sleep difficulties;
- Change in eating habits.

Navigating change and loss

Whilst this document refers to the death of a person, the impact of the death of an animal or even the 'death' of a marriage for example, can result in the same grieving process. Remember that loss is not just about death.

We experience loss in all different parts of our lives:

- Relationship breakdowns;
- Prolonged absence;
- Loss of teacher;
- Disenfranchised grief;
- Moving - house and friends;
- Starting school, college, work;
- Serious illness or disability;
- Redundancy.

Anyone who suffers a bereavement during the pandemic crisis may also not have had the opportunity to say goodbye to their loved one; this will compound their feelings of loss. In the context of COVID-19 some teenagers will have lost opportunities such as end of key stage transitions, including celebrations/goodbyes; completing end of key stage exams; being able to access usual ways of maintaining good well-being e.g. playing outside, meeting friends or going to the gym; routines shaped by a school day and support from teachers; and the usual social interactions which come with being in school. Some of these lost opportunities will have had an impact on the habits of young people and they will need time to relearn them.

Other people's reactions

One of the hardest things to face when we are bereaved is the way other people react to us. They often do not know what to say or how to respond to our loss. Because they don't know what to say or are worried about saying the wrong thing, people can avoid those who have lost someone. This is hard for us because we

may well want to talk about the person who has died. It can become especially hard as time goes on and other people's memories of the person who has died fade.

Young people are also significantly affected by the grief processes of those around them. Parents, carers and involved friends should seek help for their own distress in order to both support and protect grieving children.

Coping and adapting

When someone close to us dies we have to cope and adjust to living in a world which is irreversibly changed. We may have to let go of some dreams built up and shared with the person who has died.

The length of time it will take a person to accept the death of someone close and move forward is varied and will be unique to the mourner. How we react will be influenced by many different things, including:

- age;
- personality;
- cultural background;
- religious beliefs;
- previous experiences of bereavement;
- personal circumstances.

No one can tell us how or when the intensity of grief will lessen; only we will know when this happens. It is not unusual for bereaved people to think they are finally moving towards acceptance only to experience the same strong emotions they experienced shortly after the death.

Life will never be the same again after a bereavement, but the grief and pain should lessen. There should come a time when we are able to adapt and adjust and cope with life without the person who has died. The pain of bereavement has been compared to that of losing a limb. We may adapt to life without the limb but we continue to feel its absence. When a person we are close to dies we can find meaning in life again, but without forgetting their meaning for us. Many people worry that they will forget the person who has died; how they looked, their voice, or the good times they had together. There are, however, many ways we can keep their memory alive (see [anniversaries and reminders when you are bereaved](#)).

Monitoring, evaluation and review

1. Governors, the Headmistress and the DSL will review this policy annually and assess its implementation and effectiveness. The policy will be promoted and implemented throughout the school.
2. Any information shared in relation to a bereavement is logged in the student CPOMS file.
3. Any information with regard to a pupil/staff death will be reported to the Governing Body by the Headmistress.
4. The DSL and Subject Leader for PSHCE will regularly review curriculum/assembly/form time content to ensure pupils are provided with appropriate information.