Bereavement Policy

Low Ash Primary School

Approved by:	The Governing Body	**Date: 18.11.25**
Last reviewed on:	**Nov 24**	
Next review due by:	Autumn Term 2026	

Version Control		
Version	Date	Amendments
1.0	19.11.25	

Rationale

Every 22 minutes in the UK a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 41,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved by the death of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, and, sadly, around 12,000 pupils die in the UK each year.
Within a school community there will almost always be some children 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 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 the school might be proactive, rather than reactive, when responding to these sensitive situations. Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some pupils, families or staff require, though referral to more specialist support should be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex.

Location and dissemination

This policy is available on the school website. A physical copy of the policy is available on request from the school office.

Definition

Bereavement is the condition of having been deprived of something or someone valued, especially through death or, for example divorce, separation, death of a pet, armed forces postings, elder sibling leaving the home. Death and dying is a natural part of life. All living things – plants, animals and people, are special parts of the natural world. Nature usually gives us long, healthy lives, but not always. Like all other living things though, people grow old and reach the end of their life.

Purpose of the policy

This policy is intended to reflect our positive ethos as an inclusive school and contributes to the caring community we wish to nurture. It is hoped it will contribute considerably to the emotional health and wellbeing of our school community. The main purpose of the policy is to ensure that all pupils, families and members of staff faced with bereavement, or supporting bereavement, are provided with support.

Low Ash Primary School believes in adopting a holistic approach to the support and care of its pupils. Bereavement is a normal and inevitable part of human existence. When bereavement occurs, it can affect a variety of people, not just the family concerned. It is inevitable that at some point we will have to deal with bereavement.

We recognise that work needs to be carried out to ensure that staff, pupils and families:

- Have a clear understanding of what bereavement means and to be aware of the different stages of bereavement.
- Have the opportunities to develop skills to cope and support with bereavement.
- Have access to appropriate information and support when needed.

- Appreciate that everyone will react differently to bereavement.
- Understand that the break-up of a family through separation or divorce is a traumatic bereavement for a child.
- Have in place a course of action agreed upon by staff and the governing body, which is understood by everyone who comes into contact with the pupils.
- There is no single recipe for supporting bereavement; provision and services will always need to be organised in the light of needs, priorities and resources.

Language and answering questions

Language

Within the curriculum, across the school and when talking to a bereaved pupil, it is important to think about the words used around death. The school will use honest words such as death and dying but also recognise that it can be important to use the same terminology that the child uses for death, particularly at home. Phrases such as 'gone to sleep' or 'passed away' or words such as 'lost' may feel kinder but are misleading and will lead to confusion and complication. If death has been referred to, for example, as 'falling asleep' it is logical for pupils to become fearful of sleeping or of going to bed, or if it is referred to as 'losing someone', this implies that something is lost and could be found again.

It can be hard to know what to say to either the family or the child but we believe it is important to say something, even if it is to admit you don't know what to say.

Questions

At school we expect questions, but staff will not feel pressured to provide immediate answers. Any questions relating to loss or death will be answered in a sensitive and age-appropriate yet honest and factual way. The school will only give out details that the bereaved pupil and their family have given the school permission to.
Some questions may be straightforward and obvious under the circumstances, such as 'How does smoking cause cancer?' whilst some may be more complex, e.g. 'Why do some people die so young without warning?' If there are questions that staff are unable to answer, they will look into providing it at a later point. There may be other questions where an answer is not possible and might have to be referred back to the family.

Key responsibilities around bereavement

Although the management of bereavement is a whole school issue, the Senior Leadership Team will liaise with the family and any other people who may be involved. The specific member of staff may vary from child to child but will be someone with sufficient skills and knowledge to support the family and advise remaining staff of any necessary information.

The following summarises the main areas of responsibility:

All pupils will:
- Be made to feel as comfortable as possible to talk to a member of staff, in confidence, regarding any support they require around bereavement. Conversations of this nature between staff and pupils will be held in confidence; however staff will make pupils aware of the confidentiality policy and may take concerns to a safeguarding officer if there is a safeguarding concern or they feel ill-equipped to deal with the issue at hand.

All staff will:

- Ensure that they are up to date with school policy and curriculum requirements regarding bereavement. Any areas that they feel are not covered or inadequately provided for should be reported back to the PSHE Leader.
- Attend and engage in professional development training around bereavement, where appropriate.

The Governors will:

- Develop this school policy and review it regularly.
- Support the policy and ensure it is implemented.

The Senior Leadership Team will:

- Ensure that all staff are up to date with policy changes, and familiar with school policy and guidance relating to bereavement.
- Be the first point of contact for the individual concerned and their family.
- Identify appropriate support within the school community for the individual/family concerned.
- Ensure that all staff are given regular and ongoing training on issues relating to bereavement and how to support and deliver lessons on such issues.
- Ensure that bereavement education is age appropriate and needs-led across all year groups; this means ensuring that the curriculum develops as our pupils do and meets their needs.
- Monitor progress and deal with external agencies.
- Coordinate media enquiries, where necessary.
- Ensure all staff members are aware of bereavements so they are able to offer support, where appropriate.

Staff Continuing Professional Development

It is important that all staff feel confident and skilled in delivering support for pupils and mutual support for each other, and in implementing this policy.

As a school we will:

- Provide bereavement awareness training for all staff, as well as for relevant governors.
- Ensure that members of staff are regularly consulted as to their training needs and training is provided, as appropriate, to keep up to date with developments.
- Ensure that the Senior Leadership Team receive additional training so that they are able to support the pupil, staff and families as necessary.

Support

Support for bereaved staff members

A skilled and familiar member of staff will be established as a key person to support the bereaved member of staff. They will:

- Consider requesting bereavement support from First Response, if needed. The number is 01274 221 181.
- Ensure the bereaved member of staff knows they need not come to work on the day of the death, and that work comes second.
- Ask how they would like to stay in contact.

- Ask how much information they want colleagues to know, and if they wish to be contacted by them.
- Stay in regular contact.
- Discuss with the staff member when it is appropriate to return to work, in accordance with Local Authority guidelines.
- Be conscious of diversity, and accommodate religious beliefs and customs where it is reasonable and practical.
- Consider adjustments that may be needed, such as a phased return to work or temporary change of duties.
- On return to work, hold regular reviews with the bereaved member of staff.
- Take bereavement into account should there be an impact on performance.
- Be aware of changes in personal circumstances, such as caring responsibilities.

All staff will:
- Be caring and compassionate.
- Be aware that special dates such as inquests, birthdays and the anniversary of a death may have an impact on the member of staff.
- Remember that the full impact of bereavement may not be felt until sometime after the death.

Support for bereaved pupils

Not all pupils and young people will need the support of specialist practitioners; they need familiar people who care. Schools can be the foundation for pupils being able to talk openly and in a safe place about bereavement and associated feelings in an ethos of listening and empathic support in the school.

As a school, staff will offer:
- Bereavement support through the use of First Response, if needed. The number is 01274 221 181.
- A routine, providing a sense of normality.
- Some space, away from an emotionally intense atmosphere.
- Neutral space and people to share their feelings without the worry of upsetting a loved one (e.g. a surviving parent).
- Time for the bereaved pupil to be themselves without feeling guilty (being with friends, time to play in a safe space outside of the home environment).
- Regular correspondence with home, providing reassurance about behaviours and general well-being, of how their child is managing their grief.
- Information to the parent/carer if there is any change in the pupil's behaviour, so the parent/carer has an opportunity to talk to them and to help them progress through their grief.
- Access to appropriate resources and other support agencies.
- Preparation time for pupils to discuss what to say and how to behave when the bereaved pupil returns to school.
- An individual link person to support the pupil(s).
- A suitable place in school for pupils who need some space if they are too upset to stay in the classroom and people to whom they can go for support.
- A pass for pupils to be able to leave class if necessary.
- To make missed work available so that the pupil does not fall behind.
- Extra time and support, if necessary and wherever possible, during exam periods.
- Peer support.

- Support to staff to ensure they are alert to verbal and non-verbal communications and changes in behaviour.
- Information about what bereavement is and the possible reactions during different stages of grief.

NB all the above will be mindful of the family and pupil's culture and wishes.

Support for bereaved families

As a school, we will:

- Offer bereavement support through the use of First Response, if needed. The number is 01274 221 181.
- Be caring and compassionate.
- Consider any pupils who are affected.
- Be aware that special dates such as inquests, birthdays and the anniversary of a death may have an impact on the family.
- Remember that the full impact of a bereavement may not be felt until sometime after the death.
- Offer time and some space away from an emotionally intense atmosphere.
- Have regular correspondence with home, providing reassurance about behaviours and general well-being, of how their child is managing their grief.
- Share information and offer support if there is any change in their child's behaviour, so they can help them progress through their grief.
- Signpost and/or facilitate access to relevant information, support agencies and advice with regards to legal and financial issues.
- Offer preparation time for the family to discuss what to say and how to behave when their child returns to school.
- Offer an individual link person to support the family.

Further information, support and advice can be found at:
www.bereavementadvice.org

http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/How-You-Can-Help-Bereaved-Parents-NEW-2013.pdf

Bereavement Education

Pupils and young people explore the concept of loss, bereavement and grief as part of the PSHE curriculum. It is also addressed through cross curricular opportunities such as life cycles, risk and resilience education as well as through Art, English, History, Geography and Religious Education. Assemblies may also be used to address aspects of death e.g. Remembrance Day or commemorative occasions.

Pupils are given the opportunities to learn about and discuss cultural and religious issues around death as well as being encouraged to express their own responses and feelings. Our curriculum policies are available via our school website and/or on request at the school office.

Teaching and Learning

We will use the following teaching and learning styles:

- Individual and group discussions, role play and drama
- Supporting resources – photographs, mementoes, stories, poetry and music
- Giving clear, truthful and accurate information
- Opportunities to practise the collaborative social skills necessary to help cope with the feelings of loss

In lessons around bereavement, we will also:
- Give relevant and appropriate advice and support.
- Provide continuity and progression by visiting and revisiting issues as pupils develop and their needs and understanding change.
- Consider the attitudes and values of pupils and a range of other significant groups, cultures and religions in their locality.

Procedures when a death occurs

As a school, we will:
- Consider any cultural or religious implications and seek advice if necessary.
- The cause of death will not be disclosed until the family has been consulted (particularly in the case of a suicide).
- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support.
- Send a letter/card of condolence from the school.
- Give family or relevant person/s the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died.
- Act early and only use factual information in order to avoid rumours, gossip and confusion, whilst being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations.
- Give out information to appropriate people, depending on the wishes of the family.
- Be particularly sensitive if the death has not been shared with school directly.
- Inform all staff as soon as possible (including absent staff) and be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.
- Inform pupils who are affected by the death first, in small groups or as a class, by someone known to them e.g. class teacher.
- Prepare a letter to school families at the earliest opportunity and decide as to how and to whom it should be distributed.
- Be aware that the school timetable may need a degree of flexibility to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of pupils and staff affected by the situation. However, minimal disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security, familiarity and normality.
- Offer ongoing support, as appropriate, to the affected parties.
- In consultation with the bereaved family/relevant person/s, clarify arrangements for funeral attendance, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances.
- In discussion with family or relevant person/s, open a book of remembrance and / or hold a memorial service to allow staff and pupils to remember the person who has died.
- Give advice on the details that can be shared publicly, including via social media.
- Be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life so information will be recorded and shared, particularly at times of transition, with the family's permission.
- Arrange for the school staff to meet at the most convenient time to allow them to share their emotions and discuss ways to best support each other and the pupils.
- Provide special support, including appropriate cover, for staff who were particularly close to the deceased, where appropriate.

- Reassure all pupils that, should they want to talk about the death and discuss how they are they feeling, they will be able to do so.
- Liaise with families of pupils who have been particularly affected by news of the death, so that they are supported at home.
- Allow pupils to take time from their lessons / normal school day to talk about their reactions to the death and to share their memories and reflections of the person who has died.

Responding to a death in differing circumstances:

- suicide
- murder/manslaughter
- drugs/alcohol related death
- unexpected or sudden death
- death on a school trip
- military death

In responding to a death, such as those outlined above, bereavement support services, such as Bradford Bereavement will be contacted for additional support and advice.

Media response

The Head Teacher (Beth Medhurst) will take the lead with support from the Local Authority and prepare agreed statements.

Considerations

Returning to school

As a school we recognise that for the bereaved child or member of staff, returning to school will be traumatic. We will pave the way for their return. It is important that everyone in school is aware of what has happened. If everybody knows, and the bereaved person is aware of this, then it should make the situation more bearable. It is also important for everyone to be aware so they can appreciate and make allowances for uncharacteristic behaviour. It is also important to discuss with the child whether they want certain people with whom they come into contact outside of school to be informed, such as extended school club leaders.

As a school, we will:

- Allocate a staff member to coordinate the bereaved pupil's return to school to ensure that their needs have been discussed prior to their return to school.
- Hold a meeting with the bereaved pupil and their family in advance of their anticipated return so that the staff and other pupils are informed about how to react to the bereaved pupil in accordance with their wishes.
- Make sure that all school staff are made aware of the pupil's bereavement and ensure that any support plans are agreed and circulated to all school staff members who will be supporting the bereaved pupil.
- Inform agency or supply staff of the pupil's bereavement and ensure that they are aware of any special measures that have been put in place to support the child / young person, e.g. agreed time out periods from lessons, the relaxing of homework and/or learning task expectations.

Pupils' reactions to bereavement

Not everyone has these feelings and although they may be very strong and confusing, they are normal feelings which are associated with many bereaved people. Hopefully they will subside over time, and with reassurance from adults.

- Being anxious
- Open distress
- Refusal to cooperate
- Panic
- Having vivid memories
- Trouble sleeping
- Feeling sadness
- Feelings of anger against people and things
- Feelings of guilt
- Regressing to behaving like a younger child
- Changing personality
- School difficulties e.g. lack of concentration
- Psychosomatic illness
- Bed wetting
- School refusal
- Watch out for signs of bullying as bereaved pupils may be more susceptible to being bullied
- Any other signs of stress/change of mood – these may be expressed in unexpected ways e.g. nervous giggling, stoical bravery, untypical aggression, becoming the class clown, or even total denial. These signs may show at the time or some time after the death has occurred.

NB. Traumatic deaths, such as murder, manslaughter, suicide or substance misuse, often result in police investigations, a post mortem, trials and court attendance. The processes surrounding these types of death can be complex and lengthy and may cause the pupil to re-visit the circumstances and their grief time and time again, thus prolonging the grieving process.

Ongoing remembrance

As a school, we will:

- Invite family/relevant person/s to any commemorative events held by the school, both at the time and in subsequent years.
- If memorial work has been completed, for example a remembrance wall or book, then this should be returned to the family/relevant person/s at an appropriate time, and pupils informed where it has gone.
- Be aware of any activities or times throughout the school year that may spark an upsetting memory, for example a lesson where pupils make a 'Mother's Day' or 'Father's Day' card. However, we will not automatically exclude a bereaved child from such lessons. We will talk to the child and their carer to help them choose what they would like to do.

Transition

As a school, we will:

- Pass on the pupil's bereavement history, along with significant dates, with the family's permission, when the child moves on to another school or environment.
- Ensure that brief information is shared between teachers as the pupil moves up though the school years.
- Talk with staff at the pupil's new school or environment in order to give them a picture of how the bereaved pupil was prior to their bereavement. This will help new staff who do not know the bereaved pupil to become aware of behaviours that are out of character.

Self-care for those working with the bereaved

As a school, we will:

- Recognise that supporting bereaved pupils will be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions.
- Plan for informal mutual support, for example in the staffroom at the end of the school day, to give staff an opportunity to share feelings and reactions.
- Give people time to attend the funeral if appropriate.
- Provide training before events happen – general for all staff and specific to bereaved pupils and young people.
- Ensure an awareness of available resources and time to become familiar with what is available.

Inclusion and Equality

We recognise that there is a range of cultural and religious customs and procedures concerning death and that there may be different expectations of the bereaved child and family that need to be taken into account. We try to present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. Pupils will be made aware that there are a range of different responses to bereavement and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

Parents, carers and families

We will work with parents to support their child's learning about bereavement. We will notify parents and carers when we will be talking about death as part of the curriculum and will support them to be prepared to answer their child's subsequent questions or simply talk together about their child's learning.
Whenever there has been death that will affect many pupils we will notify parents and carers. We will make it clear in that letter how we will be supporting pupils and staff but also offer wider support to parents, carers and families, where appropriate.

Monitoring and evaluation

The effectiveness of the policy will be monitored and evaluated by the Senior Leadership Team and reported to the Governors on a yearly cycle.

This will include the following methods, where possible:

- Feedback from staff, pupils, parents, carers and families affected by bereavement.
- Feedback from staff involved in supporting a bereavement situation.

Resources

The resources we have in school include:

- PSHE Curriculum
- Age appropriate books for talking about death and dying
- Child Bereavement UK website and online materials

Useful Websites

The following Leeds-based website houses all sorts of information about emotional wellbeing and mental health issues that affect pupils and young people. It has sections for young people and also for parents and carers and professionals. It can be found at:

www.mindmate.org.uk

Other websites that contain useful information include:

www.winstonswish.org

www.childbereavementuk.org

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

www.samaritans.org

www.hopeagain.org.uk

www.youngminds.org.uk

www.achildofmine.org.uk

www.elliotsfootprint.org

www.griefencounter.org.uk

www.thecalmzone.net

www.cruse.org.uk

http://www.supportline.org.uk/problems/bereavement.php

Appendix 1

Suggested templates for letters

Sample letter on death of a pupil

NB: 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.

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the pupils of the death of [Name], a pupil in [Year].

[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 pupils have been told that their teachers will 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

[Name]

Head Teacher

Sample letter on death of a staff member

Dear Parent/Carer(s)

I am sorry to have to tell you that a much-loved member of our staff [Name] has died. [Name] has worked in the school for XXX years and his/her impact on the whole school community was huge. She/he made such a difference to the happiness, wellbeing and learning of so many pupils and adults and will be greatly missed.

The pupils were told today and may have been distressed at the news. No-one wants to see pupils sad, but we are very aware that factual information and emotional support are the best means of helping pupils deal with bereavement. I am sure there will be many parents/carers who are also saddened by the news.

Pupils respond in different ways so may dip in and out of sadness and ask 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.mindmate.org.uk or www.childbereavement.org.uk

We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Pupils 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/carers and trust that we, together, will be able to guide and support the pupils through what may be, for many, a very new experience in their lives.

Yours sincerely

[Name]

Head Teacher

Sample letter to bereaved parents

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear of [Name]'s death. There are no words to express the sadness of losing a child and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through.

Clearly, as a school community, we will miss him/her very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to his/her friends and classmates. S/he was a much loved member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help as you plan [Name]'s funeral service or other memorial opportunities, please let us know. In time, we will also ensure that anything of name that remains in school is returned to you, including photographs we may have on the school system.

Be assured that you are in our thoughts at this very sad time and do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of support in any way.

With sympathy,

[Name]

Head Teacher