



Policy:	Bereavement Policy and Procedures
Policy Date:	SPRING 2022
Review Cycle:	3 YEARS
Reviewer:	RESOURCES
Approved:	SPRING 2022
Next Review:	SPRING 2025

### **Bereavement policy and procedures: Responding to a death within the school community**

At Chawton CE Primary School we acknowledge that death, while being the inevitable end of life, is often unexpected and traumatic. Its' unpredictability can cause severe distress and can shock and disturb the whole 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.

We acknowledge that the communication of any death within our community must be planned and handled with great sensitivity. While recognising the need to act speedily, we will ensure that the immediate family of the deceased have been consulted prior to any wider communication through the school website, text, telephone, email, or social media sites.

We will establish a "School Bereavement Team" to be chaired if and when necessary by a 'Bereavement Team Leader' who will be the most senior appropriate member of staff in school. Members of the team will be the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, Teacher, and a member of the Office Staff. They may call upon the school ELSA and members of the clergy and diocese for support and guidance.

We acknowledge our responsibility to all those who grieve as a result of a life changing significant loss in their lives. We will provide opportunities for pupils to share their feelings in the school environment supported by trained staff – including the ELSA, the clergy team and when appropriate, through the use of age related structured programmes provided by Rainbows Bereavement Support GB. <https://rainbowsgb.org/> Appropriate support will also be offered to staff; the Employee Support Line will be available to all staff.

The Bereavement Team will ensure all staff and governors are aware of our policy and procedures.

This policy and the accompanying procedures will be reviewed annually or in the event of a death within the school community.

*'Let all that you do, be done in love.'* 1 Corinthians 16:14

*'Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.'* Joshua 1: 5-9

*'If we walk in the light as He himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another...'* 1 John 1-7

## **SAMPLE PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED IN THE EVENT OF A DEATH WITHIN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY:**

We will ensure that school office staff are prepared to receive the news of a death within the community and respond in an appropriate manner.

Should we receive the news of a death, in **ALL** cases the person receiving the news will:

- Confirm the information, check it, record it and check it again. (*It is essential to have the facts confirmed*)
- Share the news as soon as possible with the Headteacher/Assistant Headteacher and a member of the Bereavement Team.

The Headteacher/Assistant Headteacher and the members of the Bereavement Team will:

- Consider the action required, follow the agreed procedures, take notice of the guidance and examples and be aware of the impact of shock on each other and on the wider community.

## **THE SUDDEN DEATH OF A PARENT OR CLOSE RELATIVE**

We acknowledge that in the case of the death of a pupil's parent or close relative, it is best that a family member 'break' the news with the support of an appropriate member of staff. If this is not possible, the Bereavement Team Leader will ensure someone suitable to break the news to the pupil or member of staff concerned.

The news of the death will be given to all relevant staff as soon as possible.

## **THE DEATH OF A PUPIL**

Should we receive the news of a pupil's death, we will call appropriate colleagues together *having consulted with the family of the pupil to ascertain their wishes.*

We will:

- Encourage staff to voice their concerns they have about telling the rest of the pupils/students.
- Consider the most appropriate way of communicating the news within school; be that a full school assembly, year groups, or a class/form group?
- Give pupils opportunities to express their feelings at the time they are informed and over the following days and weeks. This may include specific time with the ELSA.
- Avoid rumours, exaggerations and embellishment of the event, by agreeing the facts which will be stated openly and honestly without assumptions or judgements.
- Remember that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotions and feelings. Some may deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some may show feelings of anger. There may well be tears and distress. Planned support will be available and this will include support from our clergy team and from the diocese.
- Inform parents the same day in the most appropriate way via text, website, email, phone or newsletter depending on the circumstances
- Ensure time for corporate grieving amongst the staff and enable them to share how they feel about what has happened.

## **THE DEATH OF MORE THAN ONE PUPIL**

Should we receive such news, members of the *Bereavement Team* will be called together to be briefed with the salient facts and to decide what steps are to be taken. Information may already have been 'sent' from the incident.

We will consider:

- Who will contact parents, if necessary?
- Who will meet with parents who arrive at school? Where?
- Who will inform the staff? When? Where?
- Who will inform the pupils/students? When? Where?

It is imperative that rumours and interpretations of the truth be avoided. In a case of multiple deaths, there is bound to be some media interest. Members of the Bereavement Team responsible for dealing with the media will prepare all necessary statements. Such statements should deal only with facts in as sympathetic a way as possible. We will agree a format of response to telephone inquiries, including approaches from the media.

### **THE DEATH OF A MEMBER OF STAFF**

We acknowledge that if such a death occurs it is doubly traumatic for the staff; supporting the pupils but also grieving on a personal level for a colleague.

Should we receive the news of the death of a member of staff; the Headteacher/Assistant Headteacher will call together colleagues from the Bereavement Team.

We will use the guidance notes below:

- Gather together the staff and inform them of the news.
- Allow time for corporate grieving amongst the staff.
- Allow the staff to share how they feel about what has happened.
- Inform the teachers that they may need to address what has happened in their classes.
- Impress on the staff what facts are to be announced to the pupils/students. To avoid rumours, exaggerations and development of the event, the agreed facts should be stated simply.
- Communicate to the staff how the announcement will be made. Should it be a full school assembly, year groups, or a class/form group?
- It must be remembered that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotional feelings. Some will deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some may show feelings of anger. There may be tears and distress; everyone will react in their own way. Support from the ELSA will be offered.
- Under such circumstances some staff may have difficulty coping with the loss themselves. Colleagues will need to be aware of those staff who seem particularly affected by the death.

### **BREAKING SAD NEWS**

Should we need to break sad news to children or young people we will first refer to the *“Guidelines for Breaking Sad News of a Death to a class or assembly” Appendix 1*. This will be in conjunction with the clergy and the diocese.

### **MEMORIALS and FUNERAL SERVICES**

Should we need to consider our involvement with any funeral services or memorial services or memorials, we will first refer to the clergy team and the diocese for support and guidance.

### **RETURN TO SCHOOL**

We acknowledge our responsibility to ‘keep a special watch’ on pupils who have been bereaved, especially on their return to school and for at least a two-year period and at times of transition. We further

acknowledge our responsibility to prepare staff and pupils appropriately before a bereaved member of our community returns. Members of our Bereavement Team will advise an appropriate response, depending on the individual's circumstances.

### **MANAGING ANTICIPATED DEATH AND THE TERMINALLY ILL**

We acknowledge that the anticipated death of a member of our community, whilst very difficult to manage, enables us to establish appropriate communication with the family to support those likely to be most affected before and after the death.

We acknowledge our responsibility to support adults, children and young people within our community who have to face the painful reality that a parent or someone close to them is terminally ill.

When supporting children and young people who are experiencing anticipatory grief, we will:

- Confirm the facts concerning the pupil's sick relative or friend.
- Communicate the information as appropriate (in line with school procedures and the family's wishes).
- Never give false hope to the child or young person.
- Discover what the pupil has been told of the illness.
- Allow the pupil to talk freely about the sick person in an appropriate setting.
- Enable the pupil to talk freely about how he/she is feeling. This may be through ELSA sessions or in some such other way as appropriate for the child and the situation.
- Be honest! If we do not know the answer to a question we will say so.
- Not inform the pupil about any progression concerning the illness unless the family have given permission and requested us to do so.

### **THE PLACE OF DEATH AND BEREAVEMENT WITHIN THE CURRICULUM**

We acknowledge the importance of remembering anniversaries of death. Each year we will hold a special worship/act of remembrance as appropriate, to celebrate the life of those members of our community who have died. We will ensure we have approval from the family of the deceased to record the deceased name and create a school memorial book / memorial garden / memory tree in their memory. We also acknowledge our responsibility to explore issues surrounding death and bereavement within the curriculum. This will take place within the personal development curriculum when appropriate.

### **LONG TERM SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO GRIEVE**

We will offer pupils access to a range of age-related peer support programmes available through our trained staff and ELSA, provided by Rainbows Bereavement Support GB. <https://rainbowsgb.org/>

### **SUPPORT FOR STAFF WHO SUPPORT BEREAVED PUPILS AND COLLEAGUES**

We will ensure that all staff are familiar with this policy and these procedures for responding to bereavement and will offer training as part of our staff induction programme. Whenever necessary, we will request additional support from colleagues or from external support agencies.

## **Guidelines for Breaking Sad News of a Death to a class or in a school Act of Worship**

A special assembly or remembrance service after a death in a school community is a helpful thing to do. It can put back a sense of normality into what may have been a very unsettled time. Below are some ideas to help you organize something appropriate.

### **Why Hold a Special Assembly?**

- To bring the school together to acknowledge what has happened.
- To reflect on, and remember, the life of the person who has died.
- To normalise and share grief.
- To give the message that it is OK to be sad but equally OK to not be affected.
- To inform learners and staff of any support that is available.

### **Who Should Attend?**

- Anyone who wishes to be there, staff (teaching and non-teaching), learners and any family members who feel able to do so.
- A member of the clergy team and/or the diocese.
- Many families find comfort in other people organising something special and appreciate being there.
- Others may not wish to participate but should be given the opportunity to do so.

### **Who Should Be Involved?**

- Anyone who wants to:
- The clergy team can support in the organisation and creation of this special act of worship.
- Learners have produced some very moving assemblies about friends who have died.
- It helps them to feel involved and gives a sense of doing something positive.
- Very young children will need greater amounts of adult input but can still participate in a way appropriate for their age and understanding.

### **How to structure a Special Act of Worship**

Have a clear beginning, middle and an end.

The beginning should:

- Begin by explaining the purpose and length of the assembly, a chance to gather together.
- Follow with a brief, factual reminder of the circumstances surrounding the death and when it happened.

The middle section could include:

- Lighting a special remembrance candle.
- Favourite songs or poems of the person who has died.
- Learners or staff taking it in turns to recount stories or memories.
- Photographs of the person or child who has died to give a visual reminder, but remember, a large image can be too much for a grieving family.

- Placing objects associated with the dead person into a special memory box. This can then be given to the family.
- Talking about a memory tree or collage previously made from a collection of drawings that learners have created and stuck onto a large sheet of paper. This can be added to during the assembly; a special focus could be on the school values of 'Love, Courage and Fellowship.'

The end could include:

- A reminder to celebrate their life.
- A prayer – led by a member of the clergy – to support in the idea of fellowship at this difficult time.
- An appropriate 'sending' to ask members of the school community to reflect, remember and celebrate.