

Bereavement Policy



**Greenmount
Primary School**

Updated September 2024

Next review July 2026

The term 'bereavement' refers to the process of grieving and mourning and is associated with a deep sense of loss and sadness. It is a natural process; however its effects can be overwhelming. This document outlines the basic principles and procedures that underpin the school's approach to supporting members of the school community effected by bereavement.

Bereavement affects everybody at some time, and as a close community, our school aims to provide the best support for those experiencing bereavement. We recognise that every bereavement is unique, and that any guidelines we have will need to take account of individual circumstances and the wishes of those most closely involved.

What can we do here at Greenmount?

Normality

For many children or young people whose life has been turned upside down the routines of school life can give a sense of normality. Everything else may have fallen apart but school and the people within it are still there, offering a sense of security and continuity

Relief from Grief

For children and young people, school can give relief from an emotionally charged atmosphere at home. They may feel overwhelmed by a grieving family. There may be a constant stream of visitors expressing their own grief. Children and young people can find this difficult to deal with.

An Outlet for Grief

When a parent or sibling has died, children and young people can try to spare their surviving parent by hiding their own grief and appearing to be OK. School is often seen as somewhere safe to express this grief.

A Listening Ear

Family members struggling to deal with their own grief can overlook children. For a child who wishes to, school staff can provide an opportunity to talk about what has happened with a familiar and trusted adult in relative peace and calm.

The Opportunity to be a Child

Even when deeply sad, children still need to be children. School offers the chance to play, laugh, sing and generally just be a child without feeling guilty.

Procedures

To best support staff and pupils during times of bereavement it will be necessary to ascertain sensitive and potentially distressing information regarding the nature of an illness or cause of death. We will always ensure that any meetings with families are conducted in a comfortable, private space, in an unhurried manner. If this information must be shared, we

will always be clear with parents beforehand about how we will respect confidentiality and share information sensitively, only where it is in the interests of the bereaved and the school community.

In the case of terminal illness, the school will liaise with the family to arrange for a member of staff to be the main point of contact throughout the illness. This member of staff will support the family regarding school procedures to support them during the illness and will help keep the pupil informed about events at school during any prolonged periods of absence. A member of staff will support the pupil during their time in school, and be available to the family before, during, and after the death. Staff members will also co-ordinate attendance at the funeral, and any memorials the family may wish the school to facilitate. Where possible this may be a staff member who has an existing relationship with the family. In turn, this staff member will be given close support by the Headteacher and will be supported in developing their professional practice in this regard.

At times of bereavement, it is important that rumour and speculation are avoided. We will take time to talk to the affected family or staff member about the circumstances surrounding the bereavement. Knowing the background will help us provide the best support for those affected by bereavement. We will discuss with the family the extent to which the circumstances should be shared with other staff members and pupils, to provide the best support for the grieving child.

To help pupils understand bereavement we will aim to inform groups of children of the death of a pupil or staff member in small groups, supported by staff with whom they are familiar. We will allow children to ask questions, and will endeavour to answer sensitively, factually and using unambiguous language to help all children understand what has happened. We will seek to involve the bereaved family in these decisions and will offer to draft a letter to parents explaining the situation.

In the event of the pupil being bereaved of a loved one or close friend we will discuss what the pupil has already been told to provide clarity and consistency for the pupils. Where there are religious considerations, we will also seek the views of family, and respect those beliefs. We will allocate a member of staff to whom the pupil relates well (and who is appropriately trained) to be a mentor in school and encourage the pupil to feel free to express themselves when and how they choose, by providing time-out space and a range of activities and channels through which the pupil may wish to express their feelings.

Subject to the wishes of the family, in the event where a pupil or staff member has died, the school may be closed, if necessary, in order to allow staff and pupils to attend the funeral.

Where a member of the school community has died, the school will provide additional space and time for those staff or pupils most likely to be particularly affected. Our trained mental health leaders will be particularly vigilant regarding the emotional wellbeing of pupils and members of our school community and will offer support and guidance as/when it is needed.

We will ensure long term support for the pupil by keeping a diary of significant days and ensuring that this information is communicated (with consent) to the pupil's next school. We will endeavour to include the child in commemorative days such as mother's/Father's Day, by sensitively providing time for reflection and remembrance where appropriate.

Where there is media interest no member of staff should engage with the media. All comment should be made through the Head Teacher (Lisa Dixon) or chair of governors (Robert Greaves) if the Head teacher is unavailable.

Supporting a bereaved child with Additional Support Needs

Children and young people with Additional Support Needs are sometimes assumed to need protection from death and dying more than most or not have the capacity to understand. It can be easy to underestimate their ability to cope with difficult situations. The challenge is finding creative ways to communicate when words are sometimes not appropriate. If using words, use the real ones, for example dead and dying, not euphemisms.

Curriculum

Children and young people explore the concept of loss, bereavement, and grief as part of the PSHE curriculum. In our school this is taught as part of the 'Relationships'. It is also addressed through cross curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles, as well as through art, literacy and Religious Education. Assemblies may also be used to address aspects of death e.g. Remembrance Day or commemorative occasions.

Any questions relating to loss or death will be answered in a sensitive and age-appropriate yet honest and factual way. Children 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.

Teaching and Learning

Our teaching will be based on an understanding of the principles stated above and that a variety of approaches should be used to meet the needs of our pupils and show sensitivity to their age and experience.

Teaching methods adopted in the classroom include:

- Giving clear, truthful and accurate information, not trying to soften the blow with ambiguous language which does not tell the truth.
- Practising the collaborative social skills necessary to help cope with the feelings of loss.
- Giving relevant and appropriate advice and support.

Transition

It is vitally important to ensure that if a child has experienced bereavement that this information is passed on to the relevant persons when they move on to a new class or school.

Support for Staff

Supporting bereaved pupils can be very stressful for staff who may be more vulnerable due to circumstances in their own lives. Appropriate support will be available to meet the needs of the person showing signs of mental ill health. This may be through talks with one of our Mental Health leaders, referrals to outside agencies or an area within school for reflection and thought.

Confidentiality

Although it is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure, pupils will be made aware that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. This will help in retaining the trust of pupils and parents/carers and will ensure that the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. Sensitive information is only disclosed internally or externally with careful attention to the rights and needs of individuals.

Referral Process

The Inclusion Lead will make a referral for external support after discussion with the family, child, and staff working with the child in school. We will liaise with external agencies to ensure that any additional support is at a time appropriate for the child, in a suitable space in school.

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. Some of these may affect matters of school organisation. (More details about this are to be found in 'Death and Dying in the World's Major Religions' – Steven J. Rosen. We try to present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. Children 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.

Reference documents used in the drafting of this policy

Winston's Wish Schools Information Pack.

Winston's Wish online support materials