

Moorcroft School

Bereavement Policy

June 2023

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Objectives

The core intentions of the policy are:

- To support students 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 wider agencies and clarify the pathway of support.

The Role of the Head

- To be a point of contact for family/student concerned.
- To discuss and prepare potential media communications with the Eden Academy Trust Marcomms Team.
- To keep the Trust Executive Leaders, Trustees and LAB fully informed.
- To monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.

Procedures

Contact should be established by the Head or a member of staff designated by the Head with the deceased's family and their wishes respected in communicating with others.

Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion, whilst being sensitive to a grieving family's requirements. Information should be given as quickly and effectively as possible to the whole school staff.

We should respect family wishes regarding their cultures and beliefs.

A clear process of communication should be followed, giving consideration to the multi-agency involvement families may have (see appendix A).

Staff should be informed before students and be prepared to share information in ways appropriate to the students' understanding, as agreed for each individual circumstance.

Training may be provided by Child Bereavement UK.

Students who are affected should be informed, preferably in small groups (or individually when necessary), by someone known to them (see appendix B).

In most cases 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.

Details of Child Bereavement UK contact numbers should be included to support families who may require further help and information.

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

Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate. The number of the Employee Assistance Programme should be passed to staff.

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.

Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Marcomms Team.

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

Empathetic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some students or staff require. However more specialist support may be a consideration. Additional information and resources can be accessed at www.bereavement.org.uk.

Appropriate memorialisation activities should be discussed with families and students, bearing in mind that any future deaths will require the same response. This should be in consultation with parents.

Suggested template for letter to parents

Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a student, 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

(A different letter would be produced each time to take into account the individuals circumstances involved):

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> 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 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 willing to help you. Alternatively you may find useful information and resources online at www.childbereavement.org.uk.

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

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 alternatively 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 school in a way appropriate to their level of understanding, 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

I am sorry to be the bearer of sad news, but I appreciate an occurrence like this impacts the whole school community. Together we will be able to guide and support the children through this difficult time.

Yours sincerely

<Name>

Head

Appendix A

COMMUNICATION PROCESS



Appendix B

TALKING ABOUT DEATH WITH CHILDREN WHO HAVE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

When talking about death and bereavement to children with learning difficulties it might be helpful to consider:-

- WHO should be key worker working with the child and family – inform parents who this person will be and keep in contact.
- Whether the Arts Therapy Team can provide support
- WHERE is the child most receptive to new ideas? – class room, sensory room. Alone or with class peers.
- WHAT should be talked about? (as agreed with parents). Ensure that you use the same language and ideas as the family to avoid confusing the child.
- HOW is the new information normally given? – signs, verbally, pictures. Use the same format to talk about illness and death.
- HOW is new information normally backed up? – you will probably need to repeat information a number of times over a long period.
- PROCEED at a level, speed and language appropriate to the child.
- BUILD on information give – small bites of the whole, given gradually will be easier to absorb.
- REPEAT information as often as needed.
- WATCH for reactions to show the child understands – modify and repeat as needed.
- FOLLOW child's lead – if indicating a need to talk or have feeling acknowledged, encourage as appropriate.
- WATCH for changes in behaviour to indicate the child is struggling more than they can say and offer support and needed.
- LIAISE with family and other agencies involved with the child to ensure accuracy and continuity of information.

All children benefit from being given, simple, honest 'bitesize' pieces of information about difficult issues – often repeated many times over. For some children with special needs, it might be more appropriate for symbols to be used to convey ideas rather than language.

(SeeSaw, Oxford)

Appendix C

MEMORIALISATION IDEAS

- Be aware of significant dates – Christmas, Mothers' Day, etc. – but also anniversaries, birthdays.
- Memory boxes can be made to contain mementoes and items of significance.
- Family trees and Life Story work – memory mobiles; salt jars; decorating photo frames; creating a collage; 'comfort cushions' made from a favourite item of clothing.... Many ideas to express feelings and assist understanding.
- Releasing balloons; celebrating special days; lighting candles; visiting a memorial site.
- Collate group responses to a loss to help in understanding of shared grief.
- Plant flowers; create a memory garden.

NB. In an environment where further deaths may be experienced (schools with children with life-limiting conditions) it would be wise to consider a realistic approach to memorialisation, eg. Names on stones to be added to a water feature – rather than naming rooms after a specific person.

Signed on behalf of the Eden Academy Trust:

A Sanders

Andrew Sanders
(Regional Director)

Date. 5/5/23