

Maidensbridge Primary School



Bereavement & Loss Policy

| | |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| Written by | Sarah Mason |
| Date | December 2020 |
| Approved by Governors | 21.1.2021 |
| Review Due | September 2023 |

Version 1

Bereavement & Loss Policy

1. Introduction

Maidensbridge Primary School is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and children. We work towards this in all aspects of school life, seeking to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that supports members of the school community in coping with the loss of a loved one through separation or death.

Bereavement and loss affect everybody at some time and, as a close community, our school aims to provide the best support for its members during such times.

'Death neither obeys the school timetable nor appears on it... It enters the classroom without knocking.'

Winston's Wish

2. Aims

At Maidensbridge Primary School, we aim to:

- Have a co-ordinated plan to support all those affected by loss and death in a supportive and caring environment in which everyone can respond appropriately to individual circumstances.
- Offer understanding of the impact of loss and grief on children and young people's physical and emotional health.
- Gain insight into children's/ staff reactions to loss and grief and how our school responds to meet the needs of grieving children, parents, and staff.
- Provide pastoral support for children, parents, and staff.
- Share knowledge of and signpost families to external agencies who can support them in their grief.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

The Headteacher

The Headteacher has overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy. The Headteacher will be supported by the Deputy Headteacher and SENCo.

The Headteacher will:

- Implement the policy and reflect on its effectiveness.
- Co-ordinate the planned actions to manage school related incidents.
- Disseminate factual information to key staff.
- Decide who will be responsible for liaising with the family of the deceased.
- Decide who will be responsible for sharing the news with the school community and if necessary, respond to media requests for information in the case of a publicised death.

- Establish and co-ordinate links with external agencies.
- Lead reintegration meetings for children or staff returning to school following a bereavement.
- Arrange for monitoring and support for the staff delivering pastoral support or any individual staff members who are supporting bereaved children or staff.

SENCo

The SENCo will:

- Ensure that school has suitable books and resources to support the process of bereavement and loss.
- Liaise with external agencies and families to arrange bereavement/ counselling support.

Teaching Staff

The teaching staff will:

- Be familiar with and guided by the procedures outlined in this policy.
- Educate pupils to know about bereavement and loss using recommended age-appropriate resources.
- Support pupils in school who have experienced bereavement and loss.
- Liaise with the Headteacher/ and parents.
- Seek support for themselves if needed.

4. Following a Bereavement

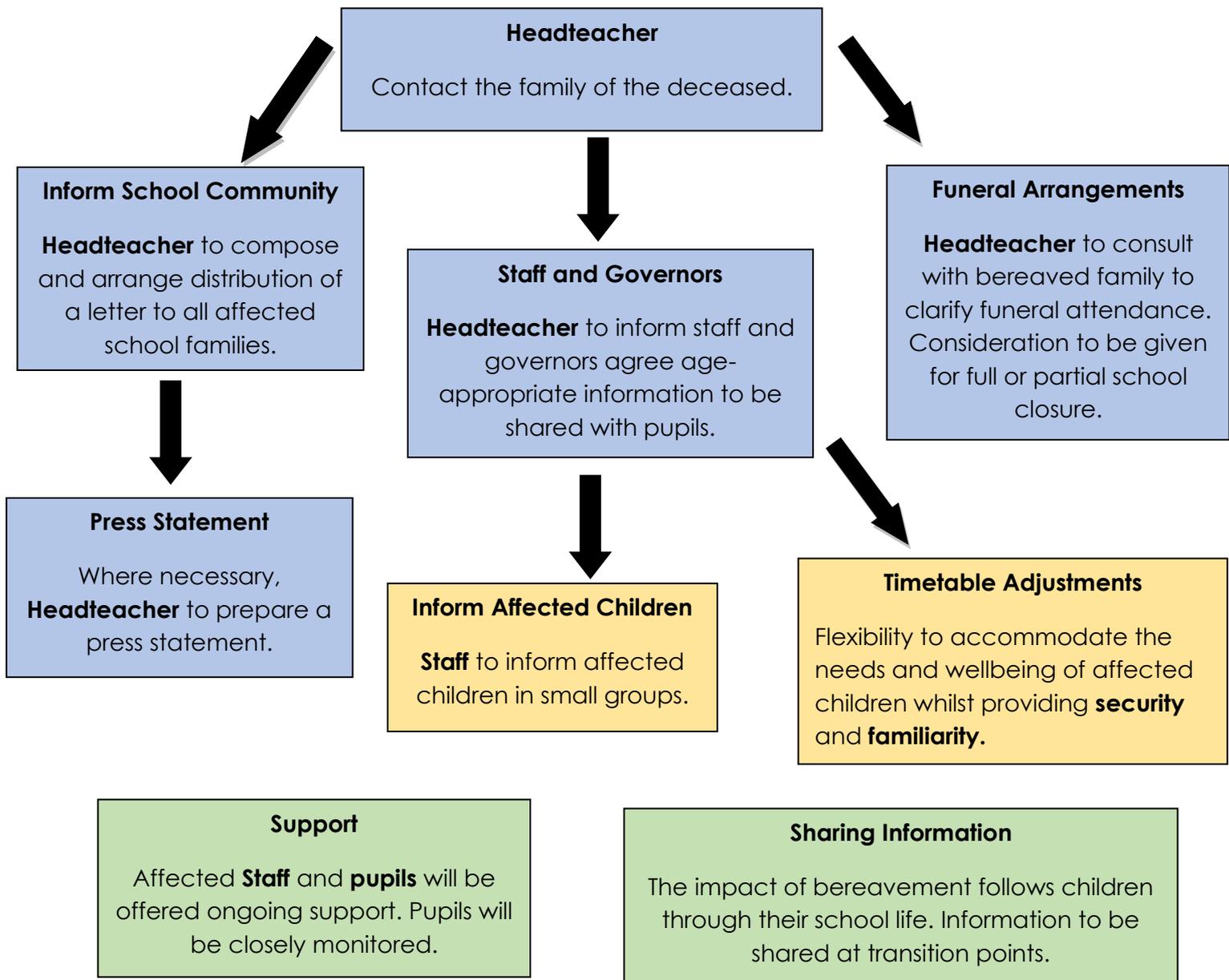
One of main concerns is for the immediate family of the deceased and, as a school community we are committed to supporting the family as they may need practical, emotional, and ongoing support.

At Maidensbridge, we believe that children and adults alike have the right to:

- Be given space and time to grieve.
- Be given support from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate and if possible, based on their personal choice.
- Encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement.
- Have different perspectives/ viewpoints of death which are influenced by religious/ cultural beliefs. All viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment.

5. Procedures- Learning of the death of a pupil

The following flowchart provides a framework for informing staff, the Governing Body, pupils and the school community following the death of a pupil.



After learning of the death of a pupil our school will:

- Speak to the family, if possible, to offer condolences and support before ascertaining what they would like to happen.
- Provide the family with a **named school contact**.
- Obtain factual information to avoid unnecessary speculation.
- Inform staff and governors as soon as possible.
- Decide when and where affected children will be told if this is necessary.

- Inform the children, in familiar groups, by someone they know.
- Identify the most vulnerable children and give them the support they might need.
- Send a letter to families.
- Provide families with guidance on supporting bereaved children.

Sharing the news of a death will be undertaken in a sensitive manner. Depending on the situation, members of staff may be notified individually upon arrival at school or in a staff meeting. Any member of staff not present will be told the news individually either via telephone or when they arrive to start work. Should the death occur during a school holiday, the Headteacher will notify the Senior Leadership Team without delay and instruct each member to contact specific members of staff, reporting back to the Headteacher when completed.

The Funeral

In the event of the death of a person belonging to the wider school community, it is usual practice that the Headteacher will attend and, on occasion, other members of staff who knew the person well.

Our school will:

- Consider the religious and cultural implications if appropriate.
- Consult the family about their wishes and if/ how they would like the school to be involved.
- Identify which staff and children may want to attend and the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport.
- Send cards/ flowers if acceptable.
- Enable the person(s) who has the closest relationship with the child to attend the funeral; this would usually be the current class teacher but, this may be a staff member who had worked closely with the child in a previous class.

Support for Bereaved Children

Not all children and young people will need the support of specialist practitioners; they most often need familiar people who care. Children will react to bereavement/ loss in a variety of ways; no two reactions are the same. Personality, family support and life experiences will impact on children's responses.

Adults often wish to shield children from and distress. Experience and research have shown, however, that children are best supported by having the incident acknowledged in an appropriate way, rather than having it ignored.

It is important to be available and receptive to pupils, to listen to them, to empathise with them and normalise their emotions, thus enabling the development of healthy coping strategies.

It is normal for adults to be upset and it can be appropriate for children and young people to be aware of this because it can help them to understand their own emotions. Staff working directly with children can show that they are upset, but not out of control. It is important to maintain a safe, secure, and predictable environment for the pupils in their care. Staff should remember that they are modelling a response for children and young people and helping them to develop coping skills.

The positive effect that concern and support from a caring, familiar adult can have on a child should never be underestimated.

The Educational Psychology or Counselling Service will be contacted to provide support as necessary.

Parents will also be directed towards Winston's Wish, Cruze Bereavement and the Edwards Trust.

Primary Effects

The first reactions to bereavement or loss may be:

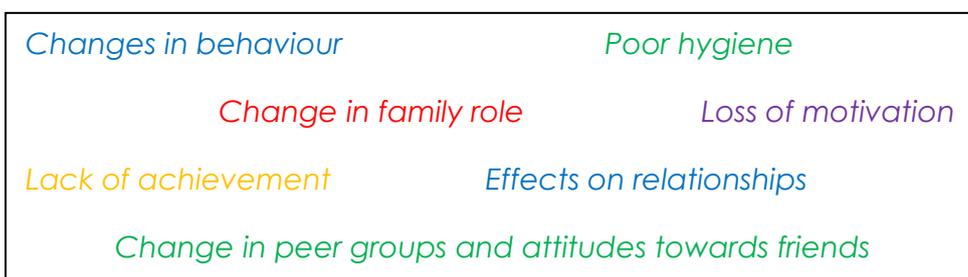


Grieving tasks include the following:

- **Shock, Disbelief and Numbness-** Life has lost its meaning. Shock can take the form of physical pain or numbness, but more often consists of complete apathy and withdrawal or abnormal calm, in some cases, coupled with anger.
- **Denial-** This generally occurs within the first 14 days and can last minutes, hours or weeks. No loss is acknowledged.
- **Growing Awareness-** Waves of savage feelings, over which there is temporarily no control; tears, anger, guilt, sadness, loneliness and depression.

Secondary Effects

Associated with the above primary effects are secondary effects which staff should be aware of:



Staff are aware that grief may be delayed or may re-emerge years later. Feelings and needs of bereaved children may vary. Some children see school as a haven of peace and normality in contrast to the trauma at home. Conversely, other children may find school the place to express their feelings.

Staff should be alert to:



Useful responses from staff:

- Acknowledge the event to children, in an appropriate time, place and manner, letting them know that you are available to help and support them.
- Be willing to listen and giving them time.
- Be willing to answer questions.
- Be genuine and professional.
- Be non-judgemental.
- Give information to them including the 'normalisation' of their reactions.
- Encourage children to talk, share their feelings and seek help as appropriate.
- Maintain a routine in school (flexible, caring and containing).
- Offer sensitivity, care, and empathy.

Our school will offer:

- A routine, which can have a stabilising effect.
- Some space, away from an emotionally tense atmosphere.
- Neutral space and people to share their feelings without the worry of upsetting a loved one.
- Time for the child to be themselves without feeling guilty.
- Regular correspondence with home, providing reassurance about behaviour and general well-being, ensuring the child is managing their grief.
- Access to appropriate resources via their class teacher.

- Preparation time for children and young people to discuss what to say and how to behave when the bereaved child or young person returns to school.
- Time for staff to be aware of changes in behaviour that may be related to the death.
- An individual link person to support the children when necessary.
- A suitable place in school for children who need some space if they are too upset to stay in the classroom and people to whom they can go to for support.

Support for Staff

Being alongside anyone experiencing a loss can be emotionally draining and supporting a bereaved child particularly so. At certain point in time, some members of staff may be more vulnerable due to circumstances in their own lives. It is important that the school considers how such members of staff can be supported and whether there is capacity to utilise other staff members to help share the load.

Our school will:

- Support bereaved staff and acknowledge they may be struggling with their own reactions and emotions while supporting pupils.
- Plan for informal, mutual support to give staff an opportunity to share their feelings and reactions.
- Give people time to attend the funeral, if appropriate.
- Offer general training for staff.
- Be aware of all supporting information and resources available.

Support for Parents

Our school will:

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support (*Appendix*).
- Send a letter/ card of condolence.
- Give out information to appropriate people depending on the wishes of the family.
- Send a representative to the funeral if appropriate.
- Hold a collection/ flowers to be sent as appropriate.
- Invite parents/ carers to any commemorative events held by the school.

Acknowledgements

Our school will give the following opportunities to commemorate loss for parents/ carers, staff and children:

- Hold a celebration assembly or other commemorative activity as per the wishes of the family.
- Offer support to individuals who wish to talk about their experiences.
- Offer support to children who need to explore and learn to understand their emotions.
- Give children opportunities to talk within a group about their experiences.

6. Procedures- Learning of the death of a member of staff

Our school will:

- Provide information to governors, staff, children and parents (*Appendix*).
- Provide information to absent staff.
- Make a news statement if necessary.
- Arrange for condolences from staff and children.
- Arrange support for individual/ group members of staff.
- Directed by the Headteacher, make arrangements, as appropriate, for:
 - Expression of feelings
 - Personal belongings
 - Card/ wreath
 - Death notice in local paper,
 - Services
 - Funeral
 - Commemoration.

7. Procedures- Learning of the death of a parent

Our school will:

- Convey information as agreed with the family to staff and children.
- Arrange for expression of condolences which may include:
 - A personal visit
 - A sympathy card
 - Attending the funeral.

8. Procedures- Supporting a child returning to school

Most grieving children do not need a 'bereavement expert', they need the support of a familiar and trusted adult. School with its familiar environment and routines, can be a place of comfort for a bereaved young person.

It can be helpful to meet with the children and their family/ carers to establish what has happened and to discuss their return to school. The purpose of the meeting should be to:

- Acknowledge the death.
- Find out how the child would share the news.
- Organise a safe space for the bereaved child to go if they feel overwhelmed by their grief and need 'time out'.
- Consider, in liaison with the child's family, whether to provide 'time out' activities- journals, arts and crafts, books, screen time and memory boxes.
- Set guidelines for communication- with the child, between members of staff and between home and school.
- Consider providing support for children who have a bereaved friend.

The child will continue to grieve for the rest of their life and may require ongoing support. Significant dates or anniversaries, Mother's/ Father's Day may be particularly difficult and alternative arrangements can be considered in liaison with the child's family/ carers. Regular contact with the family/ carers and reviews with the child will help to build an overall picture of how a child is coping.

The grief may impact a child's progress. Some children work really hard and put themselves under extra pressure to succeed, while others may find it difficult to focus in class and on their work. There may be changes in their behaviour. It is important to recognise this and consider how this will be managed.

Bereaved young people can find change difficult, so preparing them in advance (where possible) may help them to voice their worries and ease the process.

9. Procedures- Long term illness

We will:

- Designate one person to contact the child/ staff family to find out their wishes about staff visiting.
- Ensure they keep abreast of any developments without causing distress to the family.
- Advise staff of the wishes of the family.
- Support the school community with accurate information and support.

10. Procedures- Learning of a child affected by their parents separation/ divorce

It takes a long time for children to adjust to their parents' separation/ divorce and it is not usually a smooth road, but the more opportunities children have to express and understand their feelings, the easier this transition will be. However, some children may not wish to talk, and this must be respected to.

Remember, family breakdown is not an event but a process. The process may take years to settle down.

- Be sensitive towards the child and his/ her parents.
- Acknowledge the child's loss privately and assure them of your support and availability.
- Inform the necessary staff in a confidential manner.
- Make arrangements to ensure both parents are kept up to date with their child's progress, if possible.
- Address issues of loss through PSHE sessions.

11. Confidentiality

Although it is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure, children will be made aware that complete confidentiality in some circumstances cannot be totally guaranteed. This will help in retaining the trust of the child and their parents/ carers 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. When the child/ young person returns to school it is important to discuss with them whether they want certain people with whom they come into contact to be informed, such as The Bridge staff.

12. Inclusion and Equality

Our school recognises 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.

We will try to present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. Children and staff will be made aware that there is a range of different responses to bereavement and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

13. Responding to the Media

Some incidents and deaths, particularly those in sudden or traumatic circumstances, may attract media attention. All members of staff will be advised not to respond to journalists and to refer all enquiries to the Headteacher, who will make a considered response after seeking assistance from the DMBC Press Office. Children will also be given advice of how to respond.

14. Staff Support and Training

It is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for children and mutual support for each other. Bereavement awareness training will be provided for all staff. We will ensure members of staff update their skills and knowledge as required.

15. Useful Contacts

| | | |
|--|--------------|--|
| Dudley Educational Psychology Team | 01384 814368 | dawn.goodall@dudley.gov.uk |
| Dudley Counselling Service | 01384 814368 | cs@dudley.gov.uk |
| Dudley School Nursing Service | 01384 408990 | |
| DMBC Press Office | 01384 810374 | pressoffice@dudley.gov.uk |
| Health & Wellbeing Team | 01384 816264 | |
| HR Operations | 01384 817778 | rachel.a.jones@dudley.gov.uk |
| Safeguarding in Education | 01384 816822 | rebecca.jessup@dudley.gov.uk |
| Workplace Health & Wellbeing | 01384 813848 | healthywork@dudley.gov.uk |
| Corporate Health & Safety Team | 01384 814745 | CorpHealth.Safety@dudley.gov.uk |
| Marie Steven's Hospice- Marie Faux & Sarah Doyle | 01384 443010 | Marie.faux@marystevenshospice.co.uk |

16. Useful Online Resources and Information

- **Winston's Wish-** www.winstonswish.org.uk

A useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community.

- **Child Bereavement-** www.childbereavement.org.uk

A bereavement support service for children who have suffered loss.

- **Child Bereavement UK-**
www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=4b13d694-2038-4918-90b3-13c06100aafb

Guide available to download to support schools in managing bereavement.

- **British Heart Foundation-** www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/support/emotional-support-wip.parents-and-carers-with-a-heart-condition

Guidance to support children to come to terms with their loss through the use of cartoon characters.

17. Books on Bereavement

- Grandpa by John Burningham
- When Dinosaurs Die by L&M Brown
- Liplap's Wish-Jonathan London & Sylvia Long
- The Memory Tree by Britta Teckentrup
- Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine by Diana Crossley

A more extensive list of books can be accessed at: www.childbereavement.org/resources-for-children-and-young-people

18. 10 Things to say instead of 'Stop Crying!'

- It's okay to be sad.
- This is really hard for you.
- I'm here with you.
- Tell me about it.
- I hear you.
- That was really scary, sad etc
- I will help you work it out.
- I'm listening.
- I hear that you need space. I want to be here for you. I'll stay close so you can find me when you're ready.
- It doesn't feel fair.

19. Links with other policies and documents

This policy links to the following policies:

- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Attendance Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Managing Critical Incidents Policy
- Religious Education Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection

Template Letter to Parents of a Deceased Child

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear the sad news of <Name's> death. There are no words to express our sadness and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through.

As a school community, we will miss <Name's> very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to his/ her friends, classmates and teachers. <Name's> was a <valued/cherished/highly regarded/ well-liked/ popular/ friendly> member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help you as you plan <Name's> funeral, please let us know.

We will continue to keep in touch and will support you in any way we can.

With sympathy

Template Letter to Parents- Death of a pupil

Dear parents and carers.

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>.

<Name> died <suddenly/ in hospital/ after a short illness yesterday/ last week/ over the weekend/ during half term>.

<He/she> was a <valued/ cherished/ highly-regarded/ well-liked/ popular/ friendly> member of the school community and will be missed by everyone who knew <him/her> .

When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some children may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are normal. We have tried to answer the children's questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit Child Bereavement UK website- www.childbereavementuk.org .

Our thoughts are with <Name's> family at this sad time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/ remember <Name's> life.

<Sign-off>

Headteacher

Template Letter to Parents and Carers- Death of a member of staff

Dear Parents/ carers,

I am sorry to inform you that a <well respected/ long standing/ well-loved/ popular/ well known> member of our staff, <Name>, died <suddenly/ in hospital/ after a short illness>.

The children were told today by their <class teacher/in assembly> and many will be reacting to this news. When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some children may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are normal.

For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit Child Bereavement UK website- www.childbereavementuk.org .

Our thoughts are with <Name's> family at this sad time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/ remember <Name's> life.

<Sign-off>

Headteacher