

Seagoe
Primary School



Bereavement Policy

Ethos

Our school is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its pupils and staff. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that support and prepare pupils for coping with difficult experiences.

Our school will endeavour to help children to explore and develop an awareness and understanding of death as well as to support those who are personally affected by it.

Rationale

Within a school community there will almost always be some pupils who are struggling with bereavement; or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil.

It is important that children are helped to understand bereavement in clear and unambiguous ways and given opportunities to experience the full range of emotions that may accompany a bereavement within a safe and supportive atmosphere.

Objectives

This Policy will provide a framework for all staff and provide guidance on how to deal sensitively and compassionately with a bereavement.

We aim to:

- Support pupils and/or members of staff before, during and after bereavement.
- Enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between members of staff, pupils, the family/carers and the community.
- Identify key staff within school, the Board of Governors and EANI.
- Have clear expectations about the way school will respond to a death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.

Roles and Responsibilities

In Seagoe Primary School the Principal, Vice Principal and members of the Pastoral Care Team will lead the school response. The Principal and Vice-Principal, with the support of the Pastoral Care Team, will be responsible for communicating with the family and school community and providing support to pupils and staff.

Procedures

Our school will:

- Speak to the family and offer them condolences;
- Obtain factual information to avoid unnecessary speculation;
- Inform staff as soon as possible;
- Decide where pupils will be told, if this is necessary.
- Identify the most vulnerable pupils and give the support they might need;
- A familiar adult/teacher will tell the pupils as soon as possible in small groups;
- Send a letter to parents/carers as soon as possible if required.
- Give guidance to parents on supporting bereaved children.

Some families may want to share information with the school community while others may not. Confirmation of the death must be confirmed by speaking with a family member.

Funerals

Our school will:

- Find out the family's wishes and how they wish the school to be involved;
- Consider the cultural and religious implications if appropriate;
- Send cards if acceptable
- Identify which staff and pupils may want to attend. Enable the person(s) who had the closest relationship with the child/children to attend the funeral - this would usually be the current class teacher but may be a staff member who had worked closely with the family in a previous class.

Support for Pupils

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

Adults often wish to shield children from pain 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.

Support for Staff

Supporting bereaved pupils can be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions. At certain points in time, some members of staff may be more vulnerable due to circumstances in their own lives.

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 feelings and reactions.
- Give people time to attend the funeral, if appropriate.
- Offer general training for all staff.
- Be aware of all supporting information and resources available.

Remembering

The family will be consulted about any plans for a memorial or other tribute. A more permanent memorial such as a tree, a special garden, a piece of artwork or a bench may be appropriate. Any future relocation or replacement will be managed sensitively.

Supporting a Bereaved Pupil on Return to school

It is important to plan for a pupil's return to school following the death of a family member:

Our school will:

- Acknowledge what has happened
- Ask our pupils how we can help
- Be flexible and understanding
- Create a supportive environment
- Maintain routine
- Listen with our eyes, ears and heart.

Our school will offer:

- A routine, which can have a stabilising effect
- Neutral space and people to share their feelings without the worry of upsetting a loved one;
- Time for the pupils to be themselves without feeling guilty (being with friends, time to play in a safe space outside the home environment);
- Regular communication with home, providing reassurance about behaviour and general well-being, ensuring the child or young person is managing their grief;
- Access to appropriate resources via Class teacher or Pastoral Care Team;
- 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;
- An individual link person to support the pupils when necessary;
- A suitable place in school for pupils who need some space if too upset to stay in the classroom and people to whom they can go for support.

Long Term Support

Alongside the maintenance of a purposeful and supportive environment will be the need for a high level of staff vigilance for the bereaved pupil's emotional wellbeing. The Pastoral Care Team will also consider the need for action plans of support for individual children and continue close liaison with external agencies for guidance and reassurance. This period of high-level vigilance (watchful waiting) for pupils' emotional wellbeing may need to be maintained for some time. Our staff will be on the lookout for signs of delayed or complicated grief reactions. In Seagoe Primary School, a bereaved pupil who continues to show signs of significant distress will be considered for referral to appropriate personnel for specialist intervention.

When a bereaved pupil is due to return to school, the Pastoral Care Team will give due consideration as to how best to facilitate this and plan support for the pupil and his/her peers.

Within our school environment, teachers may have to cope with relevant issues as they arise during teaching and learning. The curriculum will also provide opportunities to deal with these issues in a more extensive way.

At key transition points, such as moving class, the class teacher will be responsible for passing on details of the bereavement and the level of support required.

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 pupil and family. We will try to present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. Pupils and staff 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.

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 Principal, who will make a considered response.

Staff Support and Training

It is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for pupils and mutual support for each other. We will ensure members of staff update their skills and knowledge as required. All staff will be reminded that they have access to support from Inspire.

Links to Other Policies

Seagoe Primary School does not consider the Bereavement Policy is a stand-alone policy document. Therefore, we will have ensured that we have established links with the other relevant school policies such as the Critical Incident Management, Pastoral Care and Safeguarding & Child Protection Policies.

Monitoring and Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed regularly by the Principal in consultation with staff and pupils. Consideration will be given to any developments and will take into account the learning from ongoing practice and experience. Any changes made will be shared with the staff and presented to the Board of Governors for approval.