

2023 -24

Rationale

At Great Academy Ashton we understand that bereavement is an experience which is likely to be faced by all members of our school community at some point. We appreciate that there will be significant challenges when the loss is of a member of our school community, a child or staff member. Students will need to be supported when they experience family bereavements and other significant losses during their lives.

This policy has been created to provide guidelines to be followed after a bereavement. The aim is to be supportive to both students and adults, and for staff to have greater confidence and be better equipped to cope when bereavement happens. Every death and the circumstances in which it occurs is different and this policy has been constructed to guide us on how to deal professionally, sensitively and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances.

Great Academy Ashton is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and Students. We are dedicated to the continual development of a 'healthy school'. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that supports and prepares students for coping with separation or loss of a loved one, either through death, divorce or separation.

Following a Bereavement:

We believe that children and adults alike have the right to:

- be given space and time to grieve
- be given or signposted to support from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate – if possible, of their own choice.
- encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement.

We recognise that:

- grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real.
- differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment.

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- the death of a child has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/care team of that child and every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far-reaching contacts.

The Management of Bereavement in School

A universally accepted procedure outline will not enable everyone to feel comfortable in dealing with the practicalities of death and bereavement. Each bereavement is unique and comes with its own specific challenges; however, it is helpful to have a framework on which to build. One of our main concerns must be the immediate family of the deceased and as an academy we state our commitment to any such family as may need practical, emotional and ongoing support.

Guidelines

- 1 The academy will respond in a planned and agreed manner, so that all staff know what is expected and can contribute in a way that is consistent with the ethos of the academy.
- 2 The Principal will co-ordinate the academy's response (having consulted with the LA offer) and be vital in creating an appropriate atmosphere. They will be the first point of contact and will liaise with all parties concerned and affected. They will allocate a specific person to support the bereaved. This person would, in the later stages of bereavement, offer support and check on the progress of any students involved.
- 3 In addition, a small group of staff will be identified to keep in touch with the family so contact from the family's point of view is manageable but also does not come to an abrupt end after all the initial attention. This group may include the Designated Safeguarding Lead or DDSL, the emotional health and wellbeing officer and a Pastoral Lead or member of the year team.
- 4 The Principal or their representative will inform all staff of the death(s).
- 5 Where possible students and parents/carers will be informed at the same time and as promptly as circumstances will allow. Students in the academy will be informed face to face, parents or carers by letter/email on the same day. Absentees from the academy will be noted to ensure that they are also informed on their return by their pastoral year team. Staff who are absent will be informed by their line manager.
- 6 The academy should ensure that they do not deny young people the opportunity to grieve and mourn within the traditions of their own culture and religious beliefs.
- 7 Where required the Principal or a representative from GAET will liaise with the media and if appropriate the Police.

The Death of a Student

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The school may be notified in a number of ways.

- It is usually parents or a close relative that inform the school directly about the death. The person answering the phone will put them through to the most senior member of staff on site.
- Where death occurs in the holidays or at weekends parents or close family will usually contact whoever they can. Whichever member of staff is contacted they must contact the Principal as a matter of urgency to inform them.
- However, deaths are often reported on social media and it may be that members of staff (particularly those living within the community) may discover the news before senior staff.

In this instance staff should immediately contact the most senior member of the school team possible and that person will then assume responsibility for the dissemination of the information.

Death of a Student on the Academy’s Site

- If any member of staff has concerns regarding a child’s health, they will contact a first aider and a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT)
- In the case of serious concern, the academy will call for an ambulance. Due to the seriousness of the situation, this decision can be taken by the first aider or a member of the SLT.
- The incident will be logged on CPOMS by the first aider and any other staff attending the incident.
- Inform the Principal or, in their absence, the most senior member of staff on site.
- The Principal, Lead DSL or member of SLT will then ensure that the parents are contacted and seek their agreement to meet the ambulance at the hospital.
- If the child stops breathing a trained school staff member will administer CPR. In some cases, parents may have given the school a protocol to be followed in the event of a serious health incidence.
- Once the ambulance has arrived at the academy, the child is given over to their care and it is the ambulance team’s decision as to where the child is taken, or which form of treatment is administered.
- In the rare event where the parents have given the school a protocol to be followed in the event of an emergency medical issue occurring - e.g. no resuscitation - this protocol will be handed to the paramedics.
- Any change in circumstance following the first call to parents should be reported to them as soon as possible. **NB:** Staff must not impart shocking or worrying news to a parent if they are travelling in a car alone.
- Once the child is placed in the ambulance a member of staff will be appointed to travel to the hospital either in the ambulance or in their own transport. The purpose of this is to be a familiar face to the child’s family on their arrival at the hospital. This person will remain in regular contact with Principal or designated member of staff.
- The school will notify the Trust (GAET) and the local authority if there is a death in school at the earliest opportunity.

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- All press enquiries are to be rooted through the Principal, Chair of Governors, the CEO of the Trust and the local authority media team.

If a Child Dies on a School Trip

- If a crisis situation occurs whilst a child is out on an educational trip, then the adult with the child - or the teacher in charge - should telephone for an ambulance first and then contact the school to inform the Principal.
- The school will then take the responsibility of contacting the parents.
- Once the ambulance team reaches the child, the child becomes the responsibility of the ambulance team and they will direct any subsequent actions.
- The off sites visit protocols give guidance for such situations and should be followed.
- The school will notify the CEO of the Trust and the local authority at the earliest opportunity, if there is a death out of school. The above procedures and protocols will then apply.

Sharing Information

It is important to agree, with parents/carers, before the school can take on the role of informing concerned parties within, or outside, the school community. There can be no definitive list of people to contact and, therefore, it will be different for each child. The academy should ensure that all people who are close to the child are told in a sensitive and supportive manner rather than risk them hearing it 'on the grapevine'. The academy needs to ensure it does not add to the sorrow by leaving people feeling marginalised.

The following people should be considered:

- Current school staff not in the academy that day – including therapeutic support staff, counsellors etc
- Previous school staff who worked closely with the child
- Social Work team if applicable
- SEND team
- Chair of Governors
- Other professionals who work with the child – e.g. Ed Psych

Informing Children and Young People of a Death Within the School Community

The process for telling the students will be decided by the Principal following consultation with senior leaders. For example, the age of students will be considered and a decision made as to who the best person/people would be to speak to the children about the death.

We are aware that children and young people, even very young children will want to know what happened, how it happened, why it happened and perhaps most importantly of all, what happens next? We recognise that children and young people have a healthy curiosity and if they are not informed of the circumstances, or feel they are unable to ask questions, their normal grief process may be affected.

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The following guidelines are to be used when informing children of the death of another student, a teacher or other member of staff:

- Identify those children who had a long-term and/or close relationship with the deceased so they may be told together as a separate group.
- Students with specific needs including students with past history of loss; students with a learning disability and students who have difficulty managing their emotions or behaviour will be identified and informed appropriately.
- The students in the school community will be informed either in their classes or in assemblies.
- In an attempt to reduce the shock of the news of the death to the children and young people the language used to inform them will be carefully chosen and delivered by a senior member of staff.
- The academy will signpost students to or seek direct, additional support from external agencies/charities to ensure all children and young people feel supported.

Informing Staff and Governors of a Death within the School Community

A death can affect the school community in different ways and depends on:

- The role that the deceased person had in the academy.
- How well known they were in the local community.
- Circumstances surrounding the death, particularly suicide, or other violent or sudden deaths.

Adults and children benefit from being kept informed of a death. Rumour and gossip can be very damaging and can lead to the attitude that the death is not a topic to talk about. The following guidelines may help when informing staff and governors:

- A staff meeting will be held as soon as practicable. Identify absent staff.
- If a death has occurred in a holiday period all staff will be informed on the first day of term or through the school’s urgent communication system.
- The Principal will Inform staff what happened leading up to the death and give a factual explanation of how the death occurred.
- Be prepared for obvious upset and feelings of anger/guilt. People may connect the incident to their own personal experience of bereavement, so feelings about past bereavements may need to be discussed.
- To enable absent staff to feel part of a caring team, arrangements should be made to inform them over the telephone if a personal visit is impractical. Consider the relationship between the absent colleague and the deceased.
- For a death that may attract media coverage (e.g. if the member of staff or student (student family) are well-known within the community or died tragically), identify a nominated spokesperson (e.g. Principal, Chair of Governors) to provide a ‘media statement’ at an agreed time, as a way of dealing with media intrusion. Liaison with the individual’s family is essential, prior to reporting information to the media, in order to respect their privacy and wishes.

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- Establish good lines of communication with all relevant parties, this will always include family and staff, in some cases it may involve communication with emergency services, health, the local safeguarding team, Children’s Social Care, and other support services.
- Provide details of someone who can be available to talk things through with a member of staff, parent or child if they are finding the situation particularly hard. This person could advise the family of support services available if required.
- The Principal will prepare a letter/email to parents and carers to inform them of the situation.
- Staff will be provided with a script about what has happened so that consistent information is given to all of the students. Guiding responses to difficult questions that staff may be asked by the children will be included.
- Encourage everyone to consider how to meet their own support needs and take care of themselves, this may be from friends, family, support services and/or buddying up with other members of staff. Provide contact details for support in your local area.

The Funeral

- It is essential to sound out the family’s wishes. The family may well welcome involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to keep things private.
- The Principal and/or the Vice Principal will make arrangements for the school to be represented at the funeral, and identify which staff and students may want to attend, together with the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport. For some schools it is appropriate to close, for others it is not, consequently difficult decisions will sometimes have to be made concerning attendance.
- Will flowers be sent and/or a collection made? Involve staff and students in the decision.
- Cultural and religious implications need consideration.
- If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed. Past experience has shown that this can be helpful in their grieving.

Informing Parents of the Death of a Student or Member of Staff

We consider that it is vital that parents and carers are provided with information as soon as possible so that they can support their children and help them make sense of what has happened. The Principal, possibly the Chair of Governors and the Trust CEOs will communicate information in relation to the death(s) to parents/carers via email or letter.

Support for Students

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In most cases, each child will have a favoured member of staff to approach to speak to when they need support with their emotions.

The vicar of the academy's local church and also the Diocese will be able to offer spiritual support to children and their families.

The PSHE co-ordinator will ensure that we have suitable books and other materials to help children discuss death and come to terms with loss.

Social Stories may be one way to help some students to understand loss.

Areas for reflection may benefit Students. The provision of a calm environment in which to meet with others and spend some time in reflective mode could offer support to individuals.

Some students may wish to create artefacts or write in a book of condolences.

Some children may be supported by a referral for therapeutic support or for focused counselling.

Memorial Assemblies

It may be appropriate to hold a memory assembly for the child. Staff need to be able to show Students that it is perfectly normal to feel upset at the loss of a friend and that helpful rituals, prayers, and remembering can be shared in a manageable way together.

Schools may also work with students and staff to decide on other ways of remembering those who have died. Schools may develop a prayer garden/outside space for quiet reflection, have a dedicate bench or seating area etc.

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

The local authority's 24Hour Crisis Team will be able to offer school leaders advice and guidance as well as offering families support.

Staff also have access to Westfield Health as part of the trust's commitment to staff wellbeing.

A specific room could be allocated to enable staff to meet and share their thoughts over a coffee or tea. It should be emphasised that anything shared on such occasions should be held as confidential and not for public airing.

Access to one to one time with a member of staff who is trained in bereavement support.

Availability of information about accessing bereavement support outside of the academy, eg: CRUSE

Where **death has been through suicide** children, families and staff may benefit from the support from charities such as Papyrus, the Samaritans or Winston's Wish.

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<https://papyrus-uk.org/>

<https://www.winstonswish.org/death-through-suicide/>

<https://www.samaritans.org/>

The Death of a Member of Staff

All of the principles and procedures listed above apply to the death of a staff member.

Please refer to the school's Health and Safety Policy regarding a reportable incident – RIDDOR.

hse.gov.uk/riddor/reportable-incidents.htm

Talking to children about the death of someone close

When talking to a child about the death of someone close, the language used, and the child's need for information and understanding, will vary according to their age and developmental stage and the specific cause of the death. However, the child's basic needs will always remain the same. It is always best to use factual language, especially with students who have additional needs; nuanced language, whilst seeming softer in the circumstances, can create comprehension problems for these students.

Links for Support

www.winstonswish.org.uk – a useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community.

How to get support from Winston's Wish

- National Freephone Helpline*: [08088 020 021](tel:08088020021) (open 9am – 5pm, Monday – Friday)
- ASK email support: ask@winstonswish.org
- Crisis Messenger: Text WW to 85258 (available 24/7)
- Online chat: [click here](#) (available 12-4pm, Wednesdays and Fridays)

www.childbereavement.org.uk – a bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

<http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk/> An organisation offering bereavement support

www.juliesplace.com – a support resource for bereaved sibling

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