



Hart Hill Nursery School

Bereavement Policy

Updated Spring Term 2023

Ratified by SLT on 01/03/2023

Signed 

To be reviewed Spring Term 2026



Rationale

Hart Hill Nursery School is an inclusive school that strives to ensure that all children feel safe when with us. We work with the strengths of each individual child to ensure that they achieve the best they can, even when they face challenges in their personal, school or home life.

Around 41,000 children are bereaved of a parent every year in the UK. This amounts to almost two children, under 16 years old, every hour. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, possibly even a loved pet.

Experiencing bereavement can make children more vulnerable. Bereavement, whether it is an expected death because of illness or a sudden and unexpected death or suicide, is something that can impact on members of our school community at any time.

Our school is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and children. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that prepare children for coping with bereavement, at an age appropriate level.

This policy is for all staff, children, parents, carers, governors, visitors and other relevant stakeholders working within the school. It provides guidelines and procedures as to how our school can best prepare for, and respond to, bereavement in the school community. This bereavement policy supports us to provide effective support to children and staff before and after bereavement. It covers both expected and unexpected deaths. Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children and staff require. However, we also need to be prepared to call on more specialist support where there is a sudden and unexpected death, or where the impact of bereavement is complex.

We recognise that a range of losses including separation and divorce will affect members of the school community. Some aspects of this policy may also be helpful in these cases.

This policy was based on an exemplar developed by the national charity Winston's Wish.

Policy Links

This policy also links to the following other policies we hold in school:

- Safeguarding policy
- Anti-bullying policy
- Educational visits policy
- Confidentiality policy
- Health and safety policy
- Leave of absence policy (staff)

Aims

The aims of this policy are to:

- Ensure that bereaved children receive support from the correct people, at the correct time
- Help bereaved children to find appropriate ways to express all of their feelings and thoughts associated with grief
- Understand that bereaved children have a right to remember the person who has died and to support children to share special and difficult memories
- Help child to receive answers to their questions, including questions such as what, why and how a death may have happened
- Understanding that children will need help and support without having to ask for it
- Work with families to involve children in important decisions that will impact their lives, such as plans for the funeral or remembering anniversaries
- Support any bereaved child's right to enjoy their lives even though someone important has died
- Enable bereaved children to continue activities and interests, so parts of their lives can still feel 'normal'
- Help bereaved children to understand that they are not responsible, and not to blame, for any death
- Encourage bereaved children to tell an accurate story of what happened, so that they have a clearer understanding of their world and life

Safeguarding, Confidentiality and Recording

We follow our school's safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure that the welfare of the child remains paramount throughout, and that all children are protected from harm. It is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure. However, children will need to be made aware that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

To retain the trust of children, parents and carers, we will ensure that the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. Sensitive information will only be disclosed internally or externally with careful attention to the rights and needs of individuals and in line with GDPR. If a child is suffering from trauma, we will share this as appropriate with staff, but not necessarily the details of their experience. We will discuss with the bereaved child and their family which adults in the school community they would like made aware of the experiences impacting on the child.

We will use our usual school systems (Cpoms) to record when a child has experienced a close bereavement.

Roles and Responsibilities

The role of the governing body is to approve the bereavement policy and ensure its implementation. They will ensure the policy is reviewed every three years or when national or local policy directs a change. The curriculum governor will ensure that appropriate attention is given to how bereavement issues are addressed within the curriculum and will discuss how approaches to bereavement are respectful of religious and cultural values and beliefs with school staff. The governors will ensure that staff are given appropriate opportunities for training, reflection and access to support if they need it.

The role of the head teacher and senior leadership team is to lead a whole-school approach to the effective management of loss and bereavement including ensuring appropriate training and support provided for staff. They will contact the Local Authority in the case of a sudden and

unexpected death or suicide, eg Educational Psychologist and other relevant colleagues and managers. The Headteacher will be the first point of contact for family/child/staff directly affected by bereavement. They will record bereavements affecting children and keep the Governing Body appropriately informed. The Assessment Co-ordinator will monitor progress in supporting those impacted by bereavement and liaise with external agencies.

The role of all staff in our school is to access bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff if appropriate. They need to know how to access support for themselves, for other staff and for the family, if advice or information is needed, discussing this with the family worker team if they are unsure. They need to know how to report a concern if the bereavement or sudden and unexpected death has placed a child at significant risk of harm and follow school safeguarding procedures. They need to know how to support a child when they are distressed and how to refer to specialist support if needed, through training provided by Winston Wish Online Training. All staff play a role to provide individual support as and when needed and in consultation with the head teacher and family working team. Class Teachers and Room Leaders are responsible for teaching about loss and bereavement as part of the planned curriculum, at an age appropriate level. All staff are responsible to inform the head teacher at the earliest possibility if they hear about a death of someone in the school community.

The role of the local authority is to offer specific support through referrals to the Educational Psychology Service. They are also responsible in supporting the Headteacher when there has been an incident in the school community or a critical incident during the school day. The school Liaison Officer is responsible for informing appropriate colleagues within the Local Authority on a need to know basis and to advise and signpost the school to services within the Local Authority in addition to the Educational Psychology Service. The Safeguarding in Education Team is responsible for supporting the family working team to advise on referrals pathways. The HR department and Occupational Health Service are responsible for ensuring that any staff significantly affected by a death are made aware of the support that is available to them, in support with the Headteacher.

Procedures

Pre-bereavement

In some situations, it is known in advance that a death is going to occur. This is usually because of a long illness. In cases where this is an adult within the school community, individual conversations will be held with the Headteacher in terms of support, information exchange and practical considerations.

When the expected death is of a child or a member of a child's family we will:

- Contact the family to confirm factual information and explore what support could be provided to them
- Identify a key point of contact in school in terms of information exchange and to update when things change
- Ensure that all relevant adults are clear about what information has and needs to be shared with the children
- Keep lines of communication open to ensure that all information is received in a timely fashion
- Explore the possibility of signposting to other organisations such as Winston's Wish or a local hospice, such as Keech
- Explore what support for the children affected might look like in practice

- Arrange training for specific members of staff to ensure all involved are confident in their ability to support the children
- If appropriate, consider and reflect on how to communicate with the wider school community
- If appropriate, begin conversations around practical considerations in the events leading up to the death and following the death

Following a bereavement

We will consider each individual situation carefully to ensure that the response from the school is sensitive, accurately reflects the gravity of the situation, and involves those affected as appropriate.

As an immediate response we will:

- Contact the deceased's family with the aim to establish the facts and avoid rumours (head teacher)
- Consider any religious beliefs that may affect the timing of the funeral or impact on other aspects of the bereavement process
- Find out, if possible, how the family would like the information to be managed by the school
- Allocate member(s) of staff to be the key point(s) of support for the affected child or children and ensure there is support in place for the staff members if required
- Send letters or cards of condolence to families or individuals directly affected
- Inform staff of the death before children are informed, recognising that some children may have found out through other means. Where possible, staff will be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways to make sure all staff have the same version of the event. Where this has not been possible, staff will be supported to share the information.
- Inform children who are most directly affected (such as a friendship group), preferably in small groups, by someone known to them and in keeping with the wishes of the family and expertise of the school
- Inform the wider school community in line with the wishes of the family. We would normally do this through letters to parents.
- Make small changes to the school timetable to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of the child or children affected by the situation. However, we will aim for minimal disruption to the timetable as this can offer a sense of security and familiarity.

For the funeral we will:

- Find out the family's wishes and follow these in terms of the involvement of members of the school community (or not)
- Identify which staff may want to attend if invited by the family and the practicalities of issues such as staff cover. In some rare circumstances it may be appropriate to close the school
- Organise tributes such as flowers or a collection in line with family wishes and the wishes of staff and children
- Be sensitive to religious and cultural issues.

After the funeral we will:

- Consider whether it is appropriate to visit the child and family affected at home and plan a return to school
- Ensure friendships are secure – peer support can be particularly important for a bereaved child or young person
- Continue regular contact with the family and show we still care about them and their child over time
- Monitor the emotional needs of staff and children and provide listening time and on-going appropriate support
- Consider practical issues and make thoughtful and sensitive updates to parental and other contact details when needed
- Continue to assess the needs of children most affected, and record and plan for support accordingly.

In the Long term we will:

- Be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life. So, we will record information and share with relevant people, particularly at transition points. This could include ensuring significant dates and events for the child are recorded and shared with appropriate staff for future reference.
- Signpost families to relevant bereavement support
- Ensure that learning about loss and bereavement is embedded into appropriate curriculum areas including PSED education. When teaching about loss and bereavement we will give careful thought as to how to support those directly affected by loss and bereavement.

Following a sudden and unexpected death – suicide

Suicide is not just a really difficult event to deal with. It also presents the unique risk of potentially being the trigger for another suicide. We will seek advice from the Educational Psychology Service and relevant Local Authority services, when supporting any child who has lost a significant person in their life due to suicide.

Information provided to the school community in the immediate aftermath of a sudden and unexpected death within the community will depend on the age of the child but should be based on and reinforce:

- Facts (not rumours)
- Understanding that death is permanent
- Exploration of normal and wide-ranging reactions to sudden and unexpected death – expressions of anger and guilt are entirely normal

When discussing any suicide that has occurred, we will ensure that the information given is age appropriate and:

- Factually correct but does not include detail of the suicidal act itself
- Does not include details of any suicide note
- Does not include speculation over the motive for suicide
- Takes care with the language used – for example using phrases such as ‘died by suicide’ or ‘ended his / her life’ rather than ‘committed suicide’ or ‘successful suicide’, and saying ‘attempted to end his / her life’ rather than ‘unsuccessful suicide’ or ‘failed attempt at suicide’.

Following a sudden and unexpected death – homicide

The Childhood Bereavement Network and Winston's Wish estimate that around one child every day is bereaved of a parent or sibling through murder or manslaughter in Great Britain.

Children may experience profound and lasting shock, enormous anger at what has happened, rage at the person who caused their relative to die, deep fear at the perceived insecurity of the world around them. Sadly, in many cases, the child, resulting in great confusion and a double loss, for example, also knows the person who caused the death if one parent kills the other and is then imprisoned. In some families, the child may have to move to a new house, school, area – away from familiar and comforting places and routines.

Equality and Inclusion, Values and Beliefs

We recognise that there is a range of cultural and religious beliefs, customs and procedures concerning death. It follows that bereaved children and families may have differing expectations. Some of these may affect matters of school organisation. We will source training and guidance to develop our understanding of the range of beliefs to best support children. We will present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. We will make children aware of differing responses to bereavement, and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

Young Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Many young asylum seekers and refugees have experienced the death of family members or friends, often in traumatic circumstances. This, and further traumatic experiences and losses, can have a devastating effect on their emotional and physical health, behaviour, learning and relationships.

Sudden traumatic death complicates the process of grief and mourning, as usual ways of coping may be overwhelmed. We will consult specialist mental health services where appropriate.

Supporting staff

Support for bereaved staff

We are aware that staff also experience bereavement. When this happens, we will ensure they are provided with support to take care of themselves and to know where they can go for additional help should they need it.

This could include: their GP or staff counselling, information and advice through the school wellbeing counselling service (information available in the staff room or from the Senior Leadership Team).

We will work within our leave of absence policy and if necessary, with the council's occupational health team to ensure staff are provided with appropriate leave and support at a time of bereavement.

Staff who are dealing with their own bereavement are encouraged to speak with their class teacher or room lead about any areas of the curriculum which they feel uncomfortable to teach or want support to teach. Where this is a teacher or room leader, they should access support from someone in the Senior Leadership Team that they trust.

Staff training

We will ensure that regular training is provided to staff to support staff in meeting their roles and responsibilities as identified in this policy. All staff will complete online training via Winston Wish for supporting children of differing ages with grief and bereavement. The school is currently trying to source further, more detailed training for the Senior Leadership Team.

Curriculum

Children and young people explore the concept of loss, bereavement, and grief as part of the statutory elements of our PSED curriculum via the 'Jigsaw' and 'Picture News' scheme of work. It is also addressed through cross-curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles, as well as through Knowledge and Understanding the World. When appropriate, we respond to a tragedy or serious incident by discussing this in class, having discussed as a staff team the language we will use to respond to the incident.

All staff are provided with training on how to deliver this sensitive area of the curriculum within a safe, learning environment. We also point parents and carers towards appropriate advice on how to talk to their children about these events when necessary.

We will answer any questions relating to loss or death in a sensitive, age-appropriate, honest and factual way. Children and young people will not be expected to disclose any personal experiences but will be signposted to support if they want it. We give children opportunities to learn about and discuss cultural and religious issues around death and encourage them to express their own responses and feelings.

Additional support and links

As part of our curriculum and our safeguarding work we will also signpost to appropriate sources of support for pupils and adults in the school community:

Winston's Wish: www.winstonswish.org Support information and guidance for bereaved children, young people and for those caring for bereaved families.

Cruse Bereavement Care: www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk Support for anyone who has been bereaved.

Childhood Bereavement Network: <http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk> Find childhood bereavement support in your local area.

Hope Again: <http://hopeagain.org.uk/> A website for young people who have been bereaved.

Papyrus: <https://papyrus-uk.org/> Support and advice for young people struggling with thoughts of suicide, and anyone worried about a young person.

Samaritans: <http://www.samaritans.org/your-community/supporting-schools> A range of guidance and support for schools.

Review and Monitoring

The role of the governing body is to approve the bereavement policy and monitor its implementation. They will ensure the policy is reviewed every three years or when national or local policy directs a change. The curriculum governor will ensure that appropriate attention is given to how bereavement issues are addressed within the curriculum and will discuss how approaches to bereavement are respectful of religious and cultural values and beliefs with school staff. The governors will ensure that staff are given appropriate opportunities for training, reflection and access to support if they need it.