



## beatrice tate school

<b>Policy status</b>	<b>Non-statutory</b>
<b>Adopted</b>	<b>15<sup>th</sup> May 2023</b>
<b>Review date</b>	<b>May 2024</b>

### Safeguarding Statement

At Beatrice Tate School we respect and value all children and young people and are committed to providing a caring, friendly and safe environment for all our students so they can learn, in a relaxed and secure atmosphere. We believe every student should be able to participate in all school activities in an enjoyable and safe environment and be protected from harm. This is the responsibility of every adult employed by, or invited to deliver services at Beatrice Tate School. We recognise our responsibility to safeguard all who access school and promote the welfare of all our learners by protecting them from physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect and bullying.

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## 1. Rationale

Bereavement is faced by members of our school community at different times and when the loss is of a member of our school community, such as a child or staff member, it can be particularly difficult. Students need to be supported when they experience family bereavements and other significant losses in the course of their lives while they are at school.

This policy provides 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.

This school is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and students. We aim to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that support and prepare students for coping with separation or loss of a loved one, either through death or divorce.

The policy is based on practice that has grown over time as the school has previously experienced bereavements, and provides a resource as a working document to support our community.

## 2. Following a bereavement

We believe that children, young people 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, if possible, of their own choice.
- Encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement.

The school recognises 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.
- The death of a child has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/care team of that child and every effort should be taken to sensitively inform concerned parties within, or outside, the school community (see Sharing Information)

## 3. The management of bereavement in school

This policy and the procedures contained in it will not, in itself, 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 a school we state our commitment to any such family as may need practical, emotional and ongoing support.

## 4. Death of a student

The school may be notified in a number of ways. Past experience has shown that if death occurs parents usually let the school know directly and the person answering the phone will put them through the Headteacher, or to the most senior member of staff on site.

Where death occurs in the holidays or at weekends the parents will contact whoever they can – they may have the phone number of a member of staff who cares for the child outside of school for example.

In that instance the member of staff who takes the call will immediately contact the Headteacher, or the most senior member of the school team possible and that person. The Headteacher assumes responsibility for the dissemination of the information.

### 4.1. *Sharing information*

It is important to agree with parents before the school can take on the role of informing concerned parties within, or outside, the school community. Evidence from many special schools has shown that parents are often happy to have this burden taken away from them, as they have many people unconnected with the school to contact. There can be no definitive list of people to contact and, therefore, it will be different for each child. The school 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 school needs to ensure it does not add to the sorrow by leaving people feeling marginalised.

The following persons should be considered:

- Current school staff not in school that day
- Previous school staff who worked closely with the child/young person
- Social Work team if applicable
- The Local Authority including the Director of Children and Culture, the Director of Education and the Head of SEND
- Health care team – the school nursing team and therapists
- Transport driver and escort/s
- The Chair of Governors
- Respite centres if applicable
- Other professionals who work with the child – e.g Music Therapist, Educational Psychologist
- Other parents – if students have been informed, the school must inform other parents of the loss and advice on how to support or comfort their children.

Some parents may need to be telephoned if their relationship is closer but who may not have been informed by the family.

The process for sharing the information with other students will be decided by the Headteacher following consultation with the SLT and Teaching staff. For example, with different students there may be different decisions made and the Tutor of the class with the loss will usually be the best person to tell the rest of the children in that class. It is important that staff avoid adding worry – for example, if the child died in hospital we do not want to give children a fear of hospitals. Children must be told that, while they may feel sad, they do not have to feel guilty if they go on to have fun and pleasure in their day ahead. They must not feel obliged to assume a burden of grief. Children must be allowed to ask questions at this time or at any point in the following days or weeks. Staff must answer honestly and to the best of their knowledge. [See Appendix B](#)

## 4.2. *The funeral*

- It is essential to seek and ascertain 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 Headteacher and/or Deputy Headteacher 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. In exceptional circumstances it may be appropriate for the school to close, for others it is not appropriate, consequently difficult decisions will sometimes have to be made concerning attendance. Where possible the Headteacher will attend with a selected cross-section of staff.
- Flowers be sent from school on behalf of governors, staff and students
- The school will involve family, staff and students in any decision regarding a collection, memorial or gifts from school
- 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.

## 4.3. *Special assembly*

It may be appropriate to hold a special memory/memorial 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.

## 4.4. *If a student dies in school*

- If any member of staff has concerns regarding a student's health they must contact a first aider and the Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher or Assistant Headteacher.
- If the student has a Health Care Plan or exhibits life threatening symptoms, the School Nursing Team must be contacted immediately.
- In the case of serious concern, the school will call 999 and request an ambulance. Due to the seriousness of the situation, this decision must be taken by the Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher or where necessary a first aider or a member of the School Nursing Team.
- In all instances staff must immediately inform the Headteacher or, in their absence, the most senior member of staff on site.
- The Headteacher will then ensure that the parents are contacted and seek their agreement to either come to the school or meet the ambulance at the hospital.
- If a child/young person 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. In rare cases, this may include a request that mechanical resuscitation is not administered. However, whilst the school respects the parents' preference

in this matter, due to the statutory responsibility imposed on school regarding “duty of care”, the need for school staff to administer manual CPR overrides such preference. Once the ambulance has arrived at school, the child/young person will be handed-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.

- 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 the parent is travelling in a car alone.**
- Once the child/young person is transferred to the ambulance, a member of the Senior Leadership Team will be appointed to travel to the hospital in the ambulance. The purpose of this is to be a familiar face to the child/young person’s family on their arrival at the hospital and to act in ‘loco parentis’ if required. This person will remain in regular contact with Headteacher and/or the Deputy Headteacher.
- The school will notify the LA if there is a death in school at the earliest opportunity. All press enquiries will be conducted by the Headteacher, Chair of Governors and LA Media Team.

#### *4.5. If a student dies on a school trip*

If a crisis situation occurs whilst a child/young person is on an educational trip, then the teacher in charge (Visit Leader) must telephone for an ambulance first and then contact the school to inform the Headteacher. The school will then take the responsibility of contacting the parents. Once the ambulance reaches the child, the child becomes the responsibility of the ambulance team and they will direct any subsequent actions. The Educational Visits Policy and Procedures gives guidance for such situations and should be followed. The school will notify the LA, at the earliest opportunity, if there is a death out of school. The above procedures and protocols will then apply.

#### *4.6. Responding to the media*

Some deaths, particularly those in sudden or traumatic circumstances, attract media attention. All members of staff are advised not to respond to media requests and to refer all enquiries to the Headteacher, who will make a considered response after seeking assistance from the Local Authority Press Office.

In accordance with the E-safety Policy and the Code of Conduct, all staff, Governors, visitors and health professionals associated with the school must not post messages, comments or images on social media.

#### *4.7. On-going support for staff*

Following bereavement, it is only to be expected that some members of staff will be emotionally affected and would benefit from the provision of some time for reflection. The following support may be helpful:

- A specific room could be allocated- e.g. the Meeting Room - for the duration of a lunchtime 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 someone who is trained in bereavement support

- The LA offer counselling support and staff will be reminded about this service.
- Availability of information about accessing bereavement support outside of school, e.g.: CRUSE

## *4.8. On-going support for students*

Experience in many special schools has shown that most students can be supported by the school staff.

- All students have staff who know them well and are able to identify changes in mood and/or behaviour.
- The PSHE coordinator will ensure that we have suitable resources to help students discuss death and come to terms with loss.
- The use of Social Stories may be one way to help students to understand loss.
- The Educational Psychology team can offer support to students who may need more help.
- Students will be made aware that a quiet private space is available if needed and further support available for them

## *4.9. On-going support for the family*

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support. Send a letter of condolence from the school.
- Give parents and family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died.
- Send school representatives to the funeral.
- Flowers to be sent as appropriate.
- Invite parents/family to any commemorative events held by the school, both at the time and in subsequent years. If memorial gifts have been made, for example a remembrance book, then this should be given to the parents at an appropriate time and students informed.
- If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed.

Parents should be advised that they are welcome in the school and will be encouraged to come and visit. Past experience has shown that this can be helpful in their grieving. The first visit to the school is often difficult and will be arranged sensitively in accordance with the parents' wishes. It will then be for the parents to decide if they wish to maintain on going links. Each family will be different, with differing needs.

The school will always be available to act as a source of support, information and guidance to other services.

## 5. Death of a member of staff

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

In addition to the above, the school will notify the LA as employer.

In some circumstances it may be appropriate for the school to close, for others it will not be appropriate, consequently difficult decisions will sometimes have to be made concerning attendance.

Where deemed appropriate (and with the prior full consent of the staff member's family) the Headteacher will seek permission from the Chair of Governors to close the school so that all members of staff are able to attend the funeral.

## 6. Roles and Responsibilities

The **designated person** within the school who has overall responsibility for support and liaison in event of a death or traumatic loss is the Headteacher. In the event that they are absent, the Deputy Headteacher will take responsibility.

The Headteacher's responsibilities are:

- Policy development and review, involving students, staff, governors, parents/carers and relevant local agencies.
- Implementing the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities.
- Establishing and coordinating links with external agencies.
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary school.
- Accessing and coordinating training and support for staff.

The **nominated Governor** with responsibility for bereavement is the Chair of the Governing Body. The Chair of the Governing Body's responsibilities are:

- To contribute to developing and reviewing policy.
- To support the Headteacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is managed.
- To support the Headteacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is tackled in the curriculum.
- To review policy and practice.

## 7. Monitoring arrangements

This policy will be reviewed **every 3 years** by the Headteacher. At every review, it will be approved by the Governing Body.

## 8. Links with other policies

This policy links to the following policies and procedures:

- SEND

## 9. Appendix A: Online resources and information

[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)

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

[www.chums.info](http://www.chums.info)

Bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

[www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)

Bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

[www.juliesplace.com](http://www.juliesplace.com)

A support resource for bereaved siblings

[www.bhf.org.uk/smallcreature](http://www.bhf.org.uk/smallcreature)

British Heart Foundation site to help children come to terms with loss using cartoon creatures. An animated film and we have a printed pack to go with it.

[www.bbc.co.uk/.../bereavement/bereavement\\_helpchildren.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/.../bereavement/bereavement_helpchildren.shtml)

Information on the way bereavement affects children

<http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk>

Organisation offering local bereavement support to both adults and children

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/index.htm>

Federation of organisations

## 10. Appendix B: Supporting students

The following guidelines are taken from CRUSE bereavement care website. They are general principles, and need to be thought about whatever the needs of the child are. Adapt and aid communication as appropriate.

### Loss from a child's perspective

For many children and young people the death of a parent, caregiver, sibling or grandparent is an experience they are faced with early in life. It is sometimes incorrectly assumed that a child or young person who is bereaved by the death of someone close at a young age will not be greatly affected as they are too young to understand the full implications of death.

This is untrue and unhelpful. Even babies are able to experience loss. A baby cannot cognitively process the implications of the bereavement but that does not mean that they do not feel the loss.

### Accepting the child's experience

Children and young people need to be given the opportunity to grieve as any adult would. Trying to ignore or avert the child's grief is not protective, in fact it can prove to be extremely damaging as the child enters adulthood. Children and young people regardless of their age need to be encouraged to talk about how they are feeling and supported to understand their emotions.

It is also important to remember that children and young people grieve in different ways. Grief is unique and therefore it is not wise to assume that all children and young people will experience the same emotions, enact the same behaviour or respond similarly to other grieving children and young people. A child or young person's grief differs from that of an adult's grief because it alters as they develop.

### Time to grieve

Children and young people often revisit the death and review their emotions and feelings about their bereavement as they move through their stages of development. Children and young people do not have the emotional capacity to focus on their grief for long periods of time and therefore it is not uncommon for grieving children and young people to become distracted by play. This is a protective mechanism which allows the child or young person to be temporarily diverted from the bereavement.

Bereaved children and young people need time to grieve and in order for them to address the bereavement they need to be given the facts regarding the death in language appropriate to their age or level of comprehension. Avoid using metaphors for death such as, "..... has gone to sleep", this could make the child or young person believe that ..... could come back and

they may constantly ask when are they going to wake up. Similarly the child or young person might encounter problems with bedtime and not wanting to sleep for fear of not waking up.

## Talking to children

It is understandable that many caregivers are reluctant to talk to the child or young person about the death as they do not want to cause distress or fear. Children and young people who are bereaved need to know that their loved one has died, how they died and where they are now. Failure to be honest with the grieving child or young person means that their grief is not being acknowledged and this can cause problems later on.

If the bereaved child or young person wants to ask questions about death and what dying means, answer them truthfully and if you do not know the answer to a specific question don't be tempted to make the answer up. Assure the child or young person that although you do not know the answer to their question you will find out for them.

## Key points to remember

- Everyone can experience feelings of loss
- Be honest with the bereaved child or young person
- Avoid using metaphors for death
- Every child and young person's grief is unique
- Provide opportunities for the child/children to talk about the death and how they feel
- Children and young people may 'revisit' the death and review their feelings about the bereavement as they develop
- Use language that is appropriate to the child or young person's age and level of comprehension.

<http://www.cruse.org.uk/Children/loss-from-childs-perspective>

## 11. Appendix C: Children's understanding of death

The following information is based on developmental chronology, and is taken from CRUSE bereavement care website. It is helpful to consider these developmental levels when thinking about how children with special needs may experience grief.

The nature of a child's understanding of death and bereavement will be different at different stages of development. Although a child's grief is individual, their understanding of the loss of a loved one progresses as they mature. In this section you will find the most common understandings of death by children at certain stages of their development.

Bear in mind that a child's understanding of death during their development will differ in circumstances where the child may have educational difficulties.

### Birth to six months

Babies do not cognitively understand the notion of death; however that does not mean to say that they do not respond to the loss of someone close, or that they don't experience grief. A baby up to six months old experiences feelings of separation and abandonment as part of their bereavement. The bereaved baby is aware that the person is missing, or not there and this can cause the baby to become anxious and fretful. This can be heightened if it is the baby's primary caregiver who has died and the baby is able to identify that the one who is now feeding them, changing them and cuddling them is not the deceased person. Similarly if it is the baby's mother who is grieving a loss, the baby can pick up on these feelings and experience grief too.

### Six months to two years

At this developmental stage the baby is able to picture their mother or primary caregiver internally if she/he is not present. If it is the primary caregiver who has died the baby will protest at their absence by loud crying and angry tears. It is common for babies to become withdrawn and lose interest in their toys and feeding and they will likely lose interest interacting with others. At the more mature end of this developmental stage bereaved toddlers can be observed actively seeking the deceased person. For instance, if grandad spent much of his time prior to death in his shed the toddler might persistently return to investigate the shed in the hope that they will find him there.

### Two years to five years

During their development between the age of two to five, children do not understand that death is irreversible. For instance a four year old child may be concerned that although nanny was dead she should have come home by now. This example illustrates how children at this stage do not understand the finality of death and nor do they understand what the term "dead" actually means. It is common for a young child to be told that their aunt has died and

still expect to see them alive and well in the immediate future. Children do not understand that life functions have been terminated and will ask questions such as:

“Won’t Uncle Bob be lonely in the ground by himself?”

“Do you think we should put some sandwiches in Grandpa’s coffin in case he gets hungry?”

“What if Nan can’t breathe under all that earth?”

As the cognitive understanding of children in this age range is limited they can sometimes demonstrate less of a reaction to the news of the death than might be observed by an older child and might promptly go out to play on hearing the news of the death.

Children aged between two and five years old have difficulty with the abstract concepts surrounding death. For instance they might be confused as to how one person can be in a grave and also be in heaven at the same time. They will become further confused if they are told that the deceased person is simply sleeping and this in turn could make them fearful of falling asleep or seeing anyone else asleep. They might insist on waiting for the person who has died to wake up or similarly if they have been told that the person who has died has gone on a long journey they may await their return.

At this age bereaved children can become involved in omnipotence or magical thinking. This refers to the concept that bereaved children believe that their actions, inaction, words, behaviours or thoughts are directly responsible for their loved one’s death. This form of thinking is not exclusive to this particular age group and can be experienced by many bereaved children and young people of older ages. It is essential that you explain to the bereaved child that the death was not in any way their fault or responsibility. The need to reassure the grieving child that nothing they said / didn’t say, did or didn’t do caused the death is paramount.

## Five years to ten years

Children at this developmental stage have acquired a wider understanding of death and what it entails. They begin to realise that death is the end of a person’s life, that the person who has died won’t return and that life functions have been terminated. By the age of seven the average child accepts that death is an inevitability and that all people including themselves will eventually die.

This understanding can also increase a child’s anxieties regarding the imminent deaths of other people who they are close to. Children of this age are broadening their social networks by attending school and are therefore open to receive both information and misinformation from their peers and social circles.

With this in mind it is important that the cause of death, the funeral and burial process and what happens to the deceased person’s body are explained in a factual and age appropriate manner to the bereaved child. Children will ask many questions and may want to know

intricate details pertaining to the death and decomposition of the body. Again, it is vital that children have such details explained to them clearly so that they understand.

At this developmental stage children can empathise with and show compassion for peers that have been bereaved. Children aged between five and ten often copy the coping mechanisms that they observe in bereaved adults and they may try to disguise their emotions in an attempt to protect the bereaved adult. The bereaved child can sometimes feel that they need permission to show their emotions and talk about their feelings.

The important thing is to let them do this. Avoid remarks such as, “Come on be a big brave girl for mummy” or “Big boys don’t cry”, such comments however well-meant can make children feel they need to hide their feelings or that what they are feeling is wrong. This can cause complications as the bereaved child develops.

From CRUSE <http://www.cruse.org.uk/Children/children-understanding-death#birth>