

WOLFRETON SCHOOL and SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

Policy Document BEREAVEMENT POLICY

Status:	Live
Policy Owner (Position)	Headteacher
Statutory / Recommended	Recommended
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Advisory Group	SLT
Linked Documents	Pastoral Bereavement Resource File People Services Policies

1. Introduction

At Wolfreton School and Sixth Form College we understand that bereavement will be experienced by members of our school community at different times, whether this is the death of a family member, a friend or a member of the school community. We understand the importance of providing support to students, staff, governors and the wider school community during and after bereavement. Equally, we appreciate that the impact of bereavement on individuals will differ considerably, and we recognise that it is important to remember that students, staff and the wider school community will react in very different ways. This policy provides a framework whereby this support is provided and outlines how the school will respond to these sensitive situations.

NB. In this policy, all mentions of ‘the family’ refer to the family of the deceased individual. The wishes of the family will always be considered when carrying out any of the actions outlined in this policy. If the family objects to any of the procedures, the school will work to ensure reasonable adjustments are made.

In all cases, references to actions undertaken by the headteacher may be undertaken an identified representative on the Senior Leadership Team.

2. Legal framework

2.1. This policy has due regard to legislation, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Children Act 1989
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- The Equality Act 2010
- DfE (2018) ‘Mental health and behaviour in schools’

2.2. This policy also has regard to the following guidance:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025)
- DfE (2018) ‘Mental health and behaviour in schools’
- Whiston’s Wish (2019) ‘A Guide to Supporting Grieving Children and Students in Education’
- Whinston’s Wish (2019) ‘A Strategy for Schools: Positive Responses to Death’

- Samaritans (2017) 'Help When We Needed it Most'
- Child Bereavement UK (2018) 'Schools' Information Pack'
- East Riding of Yorkshire Council guidance

2.3. This policy should be read alongside the following school policies and procedures:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Behaviour Policy and Procedures
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Critical Incident Plan
- Social Media Policy
- Working with the Media Procedure (Staff Planner / Handbook)

3. The initial response

- **If the family or a member of staff makes telephone contact to inform the school of a death, in most cases the member of staff that answers the telephone will transfer the call to the headteacher or deputy headteacher – pastoral.**
- Recognising their close communication with families, if the Pastoral Team are made aware of a death directly, they will update the headteacher or deputy headteacher – pastoral as soon as possible afterwards. In the event a member of the Pastoral Team receives this information, they may naturally collect information however, a follow up call by the headteacher or deputy headteacher may be judged more appropriate. In this instance the Pastoral Team will confirm the information and communication they have already received as soon as possible.
- **If the school is made aware of a death through a source other than the family, the headteacher or as delegated by the headteacher, will contact the family either by phone or through a home visit.**
- During the call, the school will listen to factual information about what has happened and establish the family's wishes with regards to what information will be communicated to the school community and how. The headteacher, or a member of the wider pastoral team will be identified by them will be the primary point of contact.
 - If the death affects the entire school, e.g. the death of a student or member of staff, the headteacher will convey to the family that staff and students will be informed as soon as possible.
 - If the death affects an individual member of staff, e.g. the death of a relative, the headteacher will ask the member of staff if they would like this to be communicated to any of their colleagues. If it is decided that the death will be communicated, the headteacher will discuss with the staff member what information will be communicated and how they would like it to be delivered.
 - If a death affects an individual student, e.g. the death of a parent, the headteacher will ask the family if they would like this to be communicated to a group within the school community e.g. the tutor group and / or staff. If it is decided that the death will be communicated, the headteacher will discuss with the family, and student if possible, what information will be communicated and how the family would like it to be delivered.
- If the death of a student's family member occurs whilst the student is at the school, a request will be made that a member of the student's family come to the school to inform the student of what has happened and to take them home. If this is not possible, arrangements will be made for a member of staff to take the child home as soon as possible.
 - In all circumstance involving students, members of the Year / Sixth Form Team or other pastoral staff may be contacted to consult and help provide support.
 - In all circumstances involving students, staff or governors, the Trust will be contacted.
 - The headteacher will make contact with any other agencies as required, e.g. the police, the Local Authority.
 - The Deputy Headteacher (Pastoral) will decide if any temporary variation needs to be made to the school timetable e.g. rearranging individual lessons or arranging assemblies.

- In the event of the absence or death of the headteacher, the Deputy Headteacher (Pastoral) or their representative will be responsible for the duties outlined above.

4. Informing staff and governors

- In the event of the death of a student or member of staff, staff and governors will be informed of the death before students wherever possible.
- Wherever possible, staff will be called to a meeting as soon as practicable however information will be shared by the most appropriate means possible in the given circumstances.
- Absent staff and governors, including part-time and peripatetic staff, will be identified so they can be informed as soon as possible.
- During the meeting, the headteacher or their representative will:
 - Provide a factual account.
 - Allow time for discussion and expression of feelings.
 - Confirm that the headteacher will act as the sole media spokesperson if this is required.
 - Communicate the internal and external support available for staff and governors.
 - Confirm the arrangements for informing students. Including whether all students will be told and who will be responsible for this.
- Staff members that will be responsible for informing students about the death will be provided with a script that sets out what students should be told and includes information on how to answer foreseeable difficult questions.

5. Informing students

- If the death affects the whole school, e.g. the death of a staff member or student, the headteacher or their representative, will have a discussion with the family and recommend that all students should be informed, however if the death does not affect the whole school, it may be more appropriate to just inform a smaller group of students.
- The headteacher will make the final decision regarding which students will be informed.
- Every effort will be made to identify students with specific needs that may influence their response to being informed about the death will be identified and a decision will be taken whether they should be told separately. Needs may include:
 - Students that had a long-term and/or close relationship with the individual who has died
 - Students with a history of loss
 - Students with SEND
 - Students who have difficulty managing their emotions or behaviour
- Where larger groups need to be informed, staff will be provided with a script.
 - Wherever possible, a member of the Year / Sixth Form Team or other pastoral staff will be present when students are told about a death so that they can support in answering any questions. A designated room(s) will be identified for use as required.
 - Students who require support will be given the time and opportunity to ask questions and talk about how they are feeling. Any questions will be answered factually in line with the script provided.
 - Students will be told where they can go for further support in the school and will also be directed to any external support.

6. Informing parents and carers

- The headteacher or their representative will discuss with the family about whether any parents and carers need to be informed of the death.
- If the death affects the whole school, e.g. the death of a staff member or student, the headteacher will strongly recommend that all parents and carers should be informed; however if the death does not affect the whole school, it may be more appropriate to just inform parents and carers that can be identified as directly affected, if any.

- A letter will be composed to parents and carers containing factual information about the death as appropriate, information about how the school is supporting students and how parents and carers can support or access support for their children, and who to direct any questions or concerns to.

7. Funerals

- If appropriate, the headteacher or their representative will discuss with the family whether any staff, governors or students are able to attend the funeral.
- With the family's approval, the headteacher or their representative will arrange for the school to be represented at the funeral and will identify which staff and students may want and be able to attend.

8. The media and social media

- The school will make every effort to handle the event and the communication in a sensitive and efficient manner.
- Any communication with the media or social media activity on behalf of the school will be agreed with the family.
- The headteacher will liaise with the Trust Head of Marketing and Communications who will deal with media enquiries and communications. Staff, governors and students will not respond to any media enquiries themselves or make any public statements about the death.
- School social media accounts will only reflect any communication agreed with the family and these must be approved by the Operations Manager in advance of publication.
- Staff and governors will not post information about the death on social media; students will also be advised not to post information. The Trust Head of Marketing and Communications will monitor social media and will refer any concerns to the headteacher.
- If information about the death is circulated on social media prior to the school making an official statement, the headteacher and Trust Head of Marketing and Communications will release a statement on the school's social media channels, with the agreement of the family, to prevent rumours from spreading.
- Comments and other activity on school-posted social media statements will be monitored and moderated by the Operations Manager / Trust Head of Marketing and Communications.
- If an individual in the school community is found to have been posting content on social media or providing information to the media that is false, negative or malicious, action will be taken in line with the most appropriate school policy e.g. the Behaviour Policy, the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.
- Media personnel will not be permitted onto the school site in relation to any bereavement at any time.

9. Support for the family

- The headteacher, or another member of staff agreed by the headteacher, will be the main point of contact between the school and the family.
- The contact will invite to meet the family to discuss how the school can best support them.
- The family's wishes and feelings will always be considered and respected when making decisions and conducting activities relating to the death.
- Any support that is put in place will be decided on a case-by-case basis, depending on the family's needs and wishes at the time. Support could include, but is not limited to the following:
 - Sending a letter of condolence
 - Providing an opportunity for the family to collect or receive any personal belongings or work of the student who has passed away.
 - Inviting the family to commemorative events held by the school.

10. Support for staff

- Staff directly affected by the death, e.g. if they are a relative or close friend of the individual that has died, will be identified by the Operations Manager and appropriate support offered or signposted.

- The level of support will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the headteacher, and may include the following:
 - Ensuring the staff member is not left on their own
 - Arranging for lessons or other duties to be covered
 - Organising compassionate leave
- Any member of staff who loses a child under the age of 18, or suffer a stillbirth will receive access to advice and support through the Trust People Services Team with respect to Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay and Leave.
- All staff members will be offered the opportunity to speak to one of the Trust Mental Health Managers or a member of the Senior Leadership Team one-to-one.
- Staff members will be given information about the in-school and external support they can access.
- A room can be made available to staff as where they can go during break and lunchtimes to meet with other staff and share their thoughts and feelings.
- Staff will be vigilant to the signs that indicate their colleagues have been affected by bereavement and will offer them support or make a referral to the Operations Manager.

11. Support for students

11.1 Students that have experienced a significant bereavement, e.g. of a family member

- A member of staff that is well known to the student will be appointed to act as their main point of contact, this will usually be a member of the Year / Sixth Form Team or other pastoral staff – the student will be made aware of who the staff member is.
- The headteacher or the designated staff member, will contact the student's family to discuss whether they will be attending the school.
- Any support put in place for a student will be child-led, based on their needs and wishes.
- When deciding what support will be put in place for a student, the impact the death will have on them will always be considered in the context of pre-existing factors. The following contextual factors will be considered:
 - The circumstances surrounding the death, e.g. was it under traumatic circumstances, was the death expected, or did multiple people die?
 - The relationship between the student and the person who has died.
 - The ability of the youngster's family to support them following the death, e.g. if a parent has died, is the surviving parent to support the child?
 - The support the student has from their peers and other organisations and people.
 - Characteristics of the student, including their age and any SEND they have.
- The student will be a part of discussions regarding who should be informed about the death and how, where appropriate.
- If a student chooses to attend the school immediately after a bereavement, Year / Sixth Form Team will support a flexible timetable and staff members will be made aware that the student may not be able to work to their usual capacity. The designated staff member will keep in communication with the student's family to inform them about how the child is doing.
- If the student is absent from the school following the bereavement, they will be made aware of who has been informed about what has happened and what they were told.
- The designated staff member will make regular contact with the student during their absence.
- The headteacher, designated staff member, student and the student's family will make arrangements for the return to school, e.g. a phased return, access to the SWAY facility in the Achievement Centre.
- If a death occurs soon before or during a time where the student will take an exam, the headteacher or their representative will liaise with the Examinations Officer to report the circumstances to the exam board who will decide if special considerations apply.
- If a student misses an exam due to the death of a close family member or friend, the headteacher or their representative will liaise with the Examinations Officer to report this to the appropriate exam board who will then make a decision as to whether special considerations can be applied.

- Any safeguarding concerns regarding a bereaved student will be addressed in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

11.2 The wider student community

- A wider range of students, even those not directly affected by the death, may need to be supported following a death, particularly if the death affects the whole school community, e.g. the death of a staff member.
- Students will be given information and where required the opportunity to speak to a member of the Year / Sixth Form Team or other pastoral staff.
- Staff will talk to students about what has happened using age-appropriate and developmental stage appropriate language.
- Following a death in the school community, students will be invited to take part in remembrance activities, e.g. signing a remembrance book, remembrance events.
- Staff will identify any students that may need more direct support and make a referral to the Deputy Headteacher (Pastoral) who will assess what support might be required in collaboration with the Assistant Headteacher (Key Stage), the Year / Sixth Form Team or other pastoral staff.

12. Behaviour and SEMH

- Staff will remain vigilant to the following behaviours that a student may display immediately after the death of someone close to them:
 - Inability to concentrate
 - Lack of motivation
 - Tiredness and irritability
 - Heightened sensitivity to comments and remarks
 - Inability to take others' feelings into account
 - Anger, frustration or aggression
 - A general change in behaviour, e.g. becoming unnaturally quiet or withdrawn
 - Anxiety
 - Being easily upset by events that would normally be trivial to them
 - Physical complaints, such as headaches, stomach aches and a general tendency to be prone to minor illness
- The Year / Sixth Form Team will keep in contact with the student's family and share any behaviour information.
- Any challenging behaviour displayed by bereaved students will, where necessary, be addressed using the reasonable adjustment facility in the Behaviour Policy.
- Any incidents of bullying, where a bereaved student is the victim or perpetrator, will be addressed in line with the Anti-Bullying Policy, taking into account the student's needs and circumstances.
- All staff members will remain vigilant to signs that a bereaved student is facing difficulties in relation to their psychological, physical and social development and will refer the child to the Year / Sixth Form Team who will put appropriate support in place.

13. Specific circumstances

- The procedures outlined in this policy will be followed where appropriate for all deaths affecting the school community and individual students; however, specific measures will be implemented for certain circumstances.

13.1 Pre-bereavement – when a family member is not expected to live

- If a student or a member of their family has an illness where they are not expected to live, their family will usually make the school aware of the situation and the school will endeavour to provide the most appropriate support.
- A member of the Year / Sixth Form Team or another designated member of pastoral staff will meet with a student who is in the school or contact a child who is at home regularly (regularity will be agreed with

the family) to maintain contact and provide the student with an opportunity to talk where the family believe this is beneficial.

- All staff will remain vigilant to signs that the student is facing challenges in relation to their psychological, physical and social development and will refer any concerns to the Year / Sixth Form Team who will ensure appropriate support is put in place.

13.2 Life-threatening illness

- Students with life-threatening illnesses will be encouraged to take part in school routines as much as possible, and the school will continue to expect the usual standards of behaviour as appropriate.
- The headteacher or their representative, the student and their family, and other relevant staff members (e.g. a member of the Year / Sixth Form Team) will decide how to share the news that a student is terminally ill with the school community.
- Other students will be informed about how they can best support their friend and peer in the most appropriate way.
- If the student is receiving treatment from a local hospice or hospital, the key professional responsible for the child will be identified and the headteacher or their representative will contact this person for advice and support as necessary and in agreement with the family.

13.3 Suicide

- The headteacher, or another appointed member of staff, will contact the police or the family as soon as possible to confirm the death and whether it is being treated as a suicide.
- If the family does not wish the cause of death to be disclosed to the school community, the school will state that the nature and cause of death are still being determined and that additional information will be forthcoming.
- If the death is subject to an on-going investigation, the headteacher or their representative will check with the police before speaking about the death with students who may need to be interviewed by the police.
- Staff will be told about the death first, in line with arrangements in this policy.
- The script that staff will use to inform students of the death will be factual while avoiding excessive detail about the suicidal act itself.
- Emotional support will be sought for any students and staff who require it. The Trust Mental Health Support Manager will be contacted, alongside the Educational Psychologist Team at the East Riding of Yorkshire Council to identify if support is available.
- A designated space will be set up where students and staff can go to if they are struggling with the news.
- Liaison with the media will be handled in line arrangements in this policy.
- Any information distributed to the school community and media regarding the death will be agreed with the media representative prior to release:
 - Be factually correct but not include detail of the cause of death or method used.
 - Not include speculation over the motivation for suicide.
- Research indicates that students that have been directly affected by suicide are at an increased risk of taking their own life. Staff will report any concerns about students to the headteacher and the appropriate support will be put in place or a referral to specialist services will be made.
- Students and staff will be warned about the risks of un-moderated online memorials (e.g. those on social media), such as their comments becoming public without their permission and online memorials attracting negative comments.

13.4 Cultural and religious behaviours

- The school will keep in mind the cultural attitudes and behaviours relating to a death and will make sure these needs are taken into consideration when putting support in place for those affected.

13.5 Forces' families

- The needs and feelings of bereaved forces' children will always be considered prior to any school activities relating to the armed forces, e.g. commemorating Armed Forces Day, and additional support will be put in place where required.
- Appropriate support will be implemented for bereaved forces' children, particularly during times of change.

13.6 A death during a school activity

- In the event of a death during an school activity the Critical Incident Policy will be initiated.
- The school work with the family, Trust and Local Authority to identify the most Initial and ongoing support.

13.7 A death involving murder or manslaughter

- The headteacher will contact the police or the family to establish the facts about what has happened.
- A designated staff member will be available to talk to the student to help them to answer any questions they may get from their peers about what has happened.
- Research indicates that individuals that have been bereaved due to murder or manslaughter can be at significant risk of developing PTSD. Where required, advice from the Trust Mental Health Support Manager or external services will be sought to support any concerns that arise.

13.8 Traumatic circumstances

- If the death occurs in particularly traumatic circumstances, such as suicide or murder, bereavement support specialists may be utilised such as the following:
 - The East Riding of Yorkshire Council Educational Psychology Service
 - The Compassionate Friends: <http://www.tcf.org.uk/>
 - The Samaritans: <http://www.samaritans.org/>

14. Remembrance activities

- Following a death in the school community, the school may conduct some remembrance activities, e.g. opening a remembrance book, a remembrance assembly.
- The family will always be consulted prior to any remembrance activities being planned and will be invited to take part in the activities.
- All remembrance activities will be planned so that they are respectful of the culture and religious beliefs of the family.

15. Managing transitions

- Information about students who have been bereaved will be recorded Arbor and thereby will be accessible to staff in the school.
- The Year / Sixth Form Team will seek to alert new staff, including Consortium Sixth Form staff to any student who has been recently bereaved or who continues to suffer following a bereavement.
- During primary to secondary transition, the transition team will work with partner primaries and will seek to identify any students from beyond partner primaries who have experienced bereavement.
- Where a student transfers to a new school, information will be shared following usual information transfer protocols led by the pastoral team.

16. Resources and training

- All pastoral staff will have access to this policy and to a copy of the School Bereavement Resources file.
- Youth Mental Health First Aid training will be scheduled regularly and all pastoral staff will be invited to complete this.

- Advice and support in additional training will be sought from the Trust Mental Health Support Worker as required.

17. Review

- This policy will be reviewed by the headteacher by the review date.
- In the event of a bereavement, staff are required to re-familiarise themselves with all processes and procedures outlined in this policy.