



# KING EDWARD VI Handsworth Wood Girls' Academy

## Bereavement and Loss, Advice and Support Policy 2023-24

Values:  
Scholarship – Character - Community

Intellectual Virtues

Reflection  
Critical Thinking

Moral Virtues

Tolerance  
Respect  
Gratitude

Civic Virtues

Social Justice  
Volunteering

Performance Virtues

Resilience  
Ambition  
Confidence



## Document Control

|   |                             |                          |                        |
|---|-----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Document Ref:</b>                                  |                             | <b>Date Implemented:</b> | October 2018           |
| <b>Version:</b>                                       | 5                           | <b>Date Modified:</b>    | 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 |
| <b>Revision due date:</b>                             | March 2024                  | <b>Date Modified:</b>    | March 2023             |
| <b>Governor Committee and date (where applicable)</b> | N/A                         |                          |                        |
| <b>Reviewed by:</b>                                   | Stacy Dennis and Emma Jones | <b>Sign and Date:</b>    |                        |
| <b>Authorised by:</b>                                 |                             | <b>Sign and Date:</b>    |                        |

## Related Documents/Policies

| Reference | Title                                    |
|-----------|--|
|           | Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy |
|           | Suicide-Safer School Policy              |
|           | Self-harm Policy                         |

All policies can be found [here](#) on the school website.

Stacy Dennis (DSL) is responsible for reviewing and updating this procedure.

## Aims and values

King Edward VI Handsworth Wood Girls' Academy is fully committed to supporting all those affected by loss and death in a supportive and caring environment, in which everyone can respond appropriately to individual circumstances. Our schools are fully committed to the emotional health and well-being of our children and young people and that of our staff. We are dedicated to the continual development of mentally healthy and thriving school communities and strive to work towards this in all aspects of school life. We are passionate about providing an ethos, environment and curriculum that can provide support during difficult times, including a time of death or dying.

We will endeavour, to the best of our ability, to work in partnership with parents to provide the children with the support needed to manage the effects of bereavement and to maintain their emotional well-being.

This policy outlines practical measures to be taken when people are in shock, or upset, especially with sudden or multiple deaths or traumatic circumstances to include:

- Ensuring that there are designated, named members of the school staff who will provide support to children and/or staff before (where applicable) during and after bereavement
- Enhancing effective communication and clarifying the pathway of support between school, family and the community
- Setting out how to inform children/colleagues about a death and what to do if required to tell a child that someone close to them has died
- Identifying key staff within the school and Local Authority and clarifying the pathway of support that will be offered to staff/children if they have been bereaved
- Setting out clear procedures in respect of what to do in the case of a crisis or disaster situation on school premises or on a school trip
- Ensuring that all staff members are trained and are able to recognise common symptoms and behaviours associated with grief
- SLT to discuss how to respond to behaviours which may be exhibited as a result of grief and how to manage these in conjunction with our Behaviour policy.
- Ensuring that the contact details of local and national support agencies specialising in bereavement are available to those affected

### Unconscious Bias Key definitions:

**Conscious/explicit bias** is an inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group, especially in a way considered to be unfair.

**Unconscious/implicit bias** is implicit bias. It is unintended and subtle, based on unconscious thought. People may have unfair beliefs about others but not be aware of them. Typically unconscious bias happens involuntarily without any awareness or intentional control. Everyone holds unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups

Under the 2010 Equality Act, it is unlawful to discriminate against people because of nine areas termed in the legislation as protected characteristics:

- age

- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

### **How to overcome unconscious bias**

- Be aware of unconscious bias.
- Don't rush decisions, rather take your time and consider issues properly.
- Justify decisions by evidence and record the reasons for your decisions
- Ensure that everyone knows what kind of behaviour is expected of them.
- Ensure that everyone knows how to report prejudice related incidents.
- Encourage people to work with a wider range of people and get to know them as individuals.
- Focus on the positive behaviour of people and not negative stereotypes.
- Employers should implement policies and procedures which limit the influence of individual characteristics and preferences.

### **Statement of Principles**

This policy relates to bereavement experienced by any member of our school community and applies to all at King Edward VI Handsworth Wood Girls School irrespective of their age. This policy also applies at times when a student or staff member is not in school. The procedures and support guidelines may be adapted as appropriate to meet our School's emotional health and well-being aims and the individual circumstances of each situation.

### **Roles and responsibilities**

#### **Governors**

As part of their general responsibilities for the strategic direction of the school, Governors have a key role to play in the regular review of King Edward VI Handsworth Wood Girls School Bereavement and Loss Advice and Support Policy.

#### **Headmistress**

The Headteacher will ensure that staff and parents/carers are informed about this policy, and that the policy is implemented effectively. The Headteacher will also ensure that staff receive training, so that they are able to handle any difficult issues with sensitivity and confidence.

#### **School staff**

All school staff will use this document to enable them to effectively support students and colleagues affected by bereavement. They will follow the detailed guidance [here](#) and if necessary:

- [dealing with an accident or crisis at school/on a school trip](#);
- [The death of a pupil](#);
- [Cruse Bereavement Support: Coping with the death of a staff member](#);
- [Cruse Bereavement Support: Supporting students after a violent death](#)
- [Ways of dealing with the impact of a traumatic bereavement](#): advice for all members of our school community
- [Resources for staff, students and parents](#)

Staff are also welcome to request further training through the [UK Trauma Council](#) or view videos on [traumatic bereavement](#) to aid their own personal understanding and to better prepare them to support young people.

## Parents

Parents should notify the school Attendance Officer, Ms Morgan, on 0121 554 8122 of any bereavement which is likely to impact on their child's attendance. Parents should also email their child's Form Tutor or Pastoral Team with any details that will enable them to provide relevant support in school; this support may be general check-ins with their Form Tutor, or more specific 1:1 support from the Year Group or Key Stage Pastoral Leader. Information regarding staff and responsibilities can be found [here](#).

There are no set policies that say how much time bereaved students can take off school; it depends on the individual and the relationship between the child and the deceased person. It is therefore important that a parent/carer get in touch with the school as soon as possible.

Ask your child what they'd like you to tell school so they feel involved and have a say. Make sure they know what you've said and to whom, and check that the member of staff has received your message.

If your child will be attending a funeral, please ensure you complete a Leave of Absence form available from the Attendance Officer, so that we are aware of the absence in advance.

Parents are encouraged to use the information in this document based on material available from the bereavement support charity, Cruse, to aid their understanding of the grieving process; the impact of bereavement on them and their child; and follow the advice recommended to support both adults and young people affected by the bereavement, including signposting [here](#) and below:

- [NHS: children and bereavement](#)
- [Winston's Wish: supporting a bereaved child](#)
- [Child bereavement UK: supporting bereaved children and young people](#)
- [Sue Ryder: How do I support a bereaved child](#)
- [Ataloss.org: self care when you are bereaved](#)
- [Marie Curie: Supporting someone who is grieving](#)
- [Complicated bereavement in children](#)

[Edward's Trust](#) is a specialist provider of holistic family bereavement support for the West Midlands area. Enquiries can be made by family members, professionals or the parent/child/young person.

Enquiries will be accepted where a young person has been bereaved of an individual where a significant attachment existed (e.g. parent, grandparent, sibling, friend or carer) and where the bereavement is having a substantial impact upon that individuals' wellbeing. Edward's Trust will also accept enquiries for parents, children/young people for pre-bereavement intervention if their child or someone significant in their life has a life limiting progressive illness and is receiving end of life care.

## Students

Students will have access to this document in order to aid their understanding of bereavement and the grieving process and who to go to for support. This includes:

[Woodside Bereavement Service: supporting a grieving friend](#);  
[Resources for staff, students and parents](#) and  
[Ways of dealing with the impact of a traumatic bereavement](#)

In the first instance, students (or their parents/carers) can inform their Form Tutor about their bereavement, who will respond to needs according to the wishes of the child.

## An introduction to bereavement and loss

The scale of bereavement in the UK is that:

- A parent of children under 18 dies every 22 minutes in the UK; around 23,600 a year. This equates to around 111 children being bereaved of a parent every day.
- Up to 70% of schools have a bereaved pupil on their roll at any given time – about 1 in 25 children have experienced the loss of a parent/sibling.

- 92% of young people will experience significant bereavement before the age of 16 years.  
Source: (Child Bereavement UK)
  - An estimated 1% of children born between 1971 and 2000 experienced maternal bereavement before the age of 16 years in England and Wales.
  - This could mean that around 7,000 children are currently born each year who will go on to experience the death of their mother before the age of 16 years across both countries.
  - It is estimated that the number of children who lost a father by this age could be around twice as high as the number who lost a mother.

Source: Office for National Statistics 2019

Bereavement and loss are essential to the human experience. For most of us, bereavement will be the most distressing experience we will ever face. Grief is what we feel when somebody we are close to dies. Everyone experiences grief differently and there is no 'normal' or 'right' way to grieve. For details of the [grieving process](#) and changes in behaviour follow the link.

At some point in their childhood or adolescence, most children will experience the death of a family member or friend. Oftentimes they will manage this grief with the support of their family and friends, however, the death of a parent or main carer remains the most traumatic and painful loss for a child. Following the loss of a parent, 19% of children continue to experience significant psychological problems, such as trauma or a prolonged grief reaction, one year later, according to research by William Worden (1993). Research from [Boingboing](#) has suggested that children reach acceptance sooner if they are well supported by families and the school community in the early stages of grief.

### The developmental perspective

A child's stage of development partially determines their ability to grieve and understand the notion of death.

- Seven- to 11-year-old children begin to grasp the finality of death but may have difficulty processing that it will or could happen to them.
- In early adolescence, young people begin to accept that they too will die.
- The significance of death is not fully realised until adulthood. Even as adults, we continue to struggle to accept our own mortality (Kalish & Reynolds, 1976).

Children and young people who have experienced significant loss or multiple bereavements may come to understand the inevitability of death far sooner than their peers.

### Children's grief

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. Sometimes people think a child or young person who is bereaved 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.

However, children do not have the emotional resources or cognitive capacity to stay with feelings of grief for a prolonged time (a common adult experience). The [Child Bereavement Network](#) likens this to 'puddle jumping', whereas in contrast adults 'may wade through rivers of grief or become stuck in the middle of seas of distress'.

After losing a loved one, children may swing from crying one minute to playing the next. This can be distressing for their parents or carers, who may also be grieving, to observe. This fluctuation in mood does not mean the child isn't sad or they have finished grieving. On the contrary, it can form an important defence mechanism against becoming overwhelmed by loss. It is also normal for children to feel depressed, guilty, anxious or angry with the person who has died, or another close person to them.

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 and can be damaging. 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.

Some children may, however, struggle to express their feelings through words, so exploring sensitive children's books about death (such as Michael Rosen's *Sad Book*) or drawing pictures are important alternative ways of expressing feelings.

### **Teenagers' understanding of death**

- A bereaved young person may appear to be grieving like an adult but they are not an adult and should be treated as a young person.
- The bereaved young person shouldn't be burdened with tasks that a responsible adult can undertake.
- Grieving young people may prefer to speak with their friends or people outside of the immediate family about the death. This should be encouraged.
- Due to the developmental and hormonal changes that a young person will be undergoing, the emotions related to the death of someone close may be very intense.
- The young person needs to be encouraged to express how they are feeling and the emotions they are encountering.
- The death of someone important, may make them feel different at the time when, developmentally, they want to be the same as everyone else.
- The reality of death conflicts with the teenage 'task' of being invincible.

### **Adults' experience and response to loss**

- Low motivation;
- Difficulty problem solving;
- Fear of being alone;
- Use of substances to medicate;
- Vulnerable immune system;
- Denial;
- Difficulty finding consolation;
- Irritability and mood swings;
- Sleep difficulties;
- Change in eating habits.

### **Navigating change and loss**

Whilst this document refers to the death of a person, the impact of the death of an animal or even the 'death' of a marriage for example, can result in the same grieving process. Remember that loss is not just about death.

We experience loss in all different parts of our lives:

- Relationship breakdowns;
- Prolonged absence;
- Loss of teacher;
- Disenfranchised grief;
- Moving - house and friends;
- Starting school, college, work;
- Serious illness or disability;
- Redundancy.

In the context of the recent pandemic some teenagers lost opportunities such as end of key stage transitions, including celebrations/goodbyes; being able to access usual ways of maintaining good well-being e.g. playing outside, meeting friends or going to the gym; routines shaped by a school day and support from teachers; and the usual social interactions which come with being in school. Some of these lost opportunities have had an impact on the habits of young people and they are still relearning them.

### **Other people's reactions**

One of the hardest things to face when we are bereaved is the way other people react to us. They often do not know what to say or how to respond to our loss. Because they don't know what to say or are worried about saying the wrong thing, people can avoid those who have lost someone. This is hard for us because we may well want to talk

about the person who has died. It can become especially hard as time goes on and other people's memories of the person who has died fade.

Young people are also significantly affected by the grief processes of those around them. Parents, carers and involved friends should seek help for their own distress in order to both support and protect grieving children.

### **Coping and adapting**

When someone close to us dies we have to cope and adjust to living in a world which is irreversibly changed. We may have to let go of some dreams built up and shared with the person who has died.

The length of time it will take a person to accept the death of someone close and move forward is varied and will be unique to the mourner. How we react will be influenced by many different things, including:

- age;
- personality;
- cultural background;
- religious beliefs;
- previous experiences of bereavement;
- personal circumstances.

No one can tell us how or when the intensity of grief will lessen; only we will know when this happens. It is not unusual for bereaved people to think they are finally moving towards acceptance only to experience the same strong emotions they experienced shortly after the death.

Life will never be the same again after a bereavement, but the grief and pain should lessen. There should come a time when we are able to adapt and adjust and cope with life without the person who has died. The pain of bereavement has been compared to that of losing a limb. We may adapt to life without the limb but we continue to feel its absence. When a person we are close to dies we can find meaning in life again, but without forgetting their meaning for us. Many people worry that they will forget the person who has died; how they looked, their voice, or the good times they had together. There are, however, many ways we can keep their memory alive (see [anniversaries and reminders when you are bereaved](#)).

### **Monitoring, evaluation and review**

1. Governors, the Headteacher and the DSL will review this policy annually and assess its implementation and effectiveness. The policy will be promoted and implemented throughout the school.
2. Any information shared in relation to a bereavement is logged in the student CPOMS file.
3. Any information with regard to a pupil/staff death will be reported to the Governing Body by the Headmistress.
4. The DSL and Subject Leader for PSHE will regularly review curriculum/assembly/form time content to ensure pupils are provided with appropriate information.