

Bereavement Policy

Approved by RET Policy Group & Board

Approved on July 2023

RET contact Headteacher

Revision due Every 2 years



RUSSELL EDUCATION TRUST

1. Rationale

- a. We understand that bereavement is faced by members of our school community at different times and that when the loss is of a member of our school community – such as a child or staff member, it can be particularly difficult. Students and staff need to be supported when they experience family bereavements and other significant losses in the course of their lives while they are studying or working 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.
- b. This school is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and students. We are dedicated to the continual development of a 'healthy school'. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that support and prepare students for coping with separation or loss of a loved one, either through death or other circumstances.
- c. Following a Bereavement
 1. We believe that children 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.
 2. We recognise that:
 - grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real.
 - differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment.
 - the death of a child has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/care team of that child and every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far-reaching contacts.
 - grief and bereavement are not reserved only for those who experience someone's death, they also occur when someone close leaves and does not return or is out of contact on a long-term basis.
- d. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Critical Incident Policy

2. The Management of Bereavement in School

- a. A universally accepted procedure outline will, in itself, not enable everyone to feel comfortable in dealing with the practicalities of death and bereavement. Each bereavement is unique and comes with its own specific challenges; however, it is helpful to have a framework on which to build. This framework will be organised by the Response Team.
- b. The Response Team in the first instance will comprise of the Headteacher, the Trust Lead Adviser and, in faith schools, the school chaplain, local vicar or other religious leader where appropriate. The Response Team will widen to members of the Senior Leadership, Heads of Year, the form tutor and other members of the safeguarding or inclusion team as required by the Headteacher. This will depend upon the situation.

3. Circumstances

- a. There are a number of circumstances that may occur (these are non-exhaustive). These will all need slightly different responses:

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1. A parent or carer dies.
2. A close or extended family member of a child or adult associated with the school dies.
3. A child or adult who attends or works at the school dies outside of school.
4. A child or adult who attends or works at the school dies on site.
5. A child or adult who attends or works at the school dies on a school arranged trip.
6. Multiple children or adults die in one of the aforementioned circumstances.
7. Pandemic e.g. COVID 19/contagion/pathogen specific – multiple children or family members of multiple children die.
8. Incident specific – multiple family members of a child or adult pass way.
9. A child may be estranged from a parent, carer or other loved one and contact may be cut off completely.
10. A child or adult who attends or works at the school or a family member is receiving end of life care

4. Initial Response

- a. The Response Team, co-ordinated by the Headteacher will:
 1. Establish the facts i.e. who has died and how they died with next of kin, parent/carers or another appropriate person.
 2. Inform and engage the support of the Trust.
 3. Assemble a wider team as necessary and ensure that those affected have a point of contact and support/pastoral care.
 4. Ensure that appropriate people are sensitively spoken to in line with the wishes of the family and the child or adult affected.
 5. Ensure that any response to the media is made by the Headteacher in consultation with the Trust. No other member of the school staff will communicate with the media.
 6. Ensure that any affected students or staff are given space, time and support as necessary in the first few hours and days of receiving such upsetting news. This includes ensuring that those affected know they have school support.
 7. Ensure that a counselling service and relevant religious leaders are invited to give staff and students someone to talk to on site immediately.
 8. Decide whether it is necessary to close the school – please see Critical Incident policy (only ordinarily applicable where there is a risk to the health and safety of others)
- b. In circumstances where support can only be remote e.g. national lockdowns, the Headteacher will ensure regular contact from the school to those affected and from appropriate services to those affected. This may mean an emergency referral to Children's Services needs to be made by the DSL.
- c. Where a child is estranged from a parent, carer or loved one and has lost contact, the DSL or the Senior Leader in charge of pastoral care will assume the lead role.

5. Information Sharing Longer Term

- a. It may be necessary for the Headteacher to call special assemblies to alert members of the school to the death/s in a sensitive fashion. Where this is the case, appropriate pastoral support and counselling services will be made available immediately following the delivery of such news. At the same time as/following such an event, parents must be contacted and given the same information including where support can be found.

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- b. It is imperative that the school quash rumours associated with deaths that are untrue. These can be hurtful and damaging to staff and students close to the deceased. To these ends, communication will be regular and staff will be given the information that they can pass on and told what must not be said and why.
- c. There can be no definitive list of people to contact and, therefore, it will be different for each circumstance. The Headteacher will ensure that all people who are close to the person who has died are told in a sensitive and supportive manner rather than risk them hearing it 'on the grapevine'. The school will ensure it does not add to sorrow by leaving people feeling marginalised. The following people should be considered:
 - 1. Current school staff not in school that day – including peripatetic or sub-contracted staff
 - 2. Canteen, duty and cleaning staff
 - 3. Previous school staff who worked closely with the person who has died
 - 4. Local Authority Social Work team if applicable
 - 5. Local Authority SEN team if applicable
 - 6. Medical team – the school nurse for example
 - 7. Taxi driver and escort where relevant
 - 8. Chair of Governors and other members of the Governing Body
 - 9. Respite centres if applicable
 - 10. Other professionals who work with the child
 - 11. Ed Psych and/or school counsellor
 - 12. Other parents – if children have been informed, the school needs to send a communication to parents informing them of the loss, as they may need 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.
- d. Children must be allowed to ask questions at this time or at any point in the following days or weeks. Staff will need to feel comfortable that they can give some basic answers and to these ends will be carefully and sensitively briefed in an ongoing way by the Headteacher.
- e. There will be a visible Senior Leadership presence on corridors and in public places to ensure that staff and students feel supported.

6. Multiple Deaths

- a. Where there has been an incident or pandemic/contagion/pathogen that has caused multiple deaths, either of those directly involved in school life, or of their relatives, support services will be contacted immediately by the Headteacher. This may include
 - 1. The Trust
 - 2. The Local Authority
 - 3. Counselling services
 - 4. Religious services
 - 5. Children's Services
 - 6. Charitable specialist support services
 - 7. The Staff Support Package Provider
- b. As above, the media will only be spoken to by the Headteacher and no other staff member. Since in some circumstance there could be considerable interest from the media, staff should be carefully briefed by the Headteacher to defer direct contact from the media to the Headteacher and not give out any information at all, no matter how well-intentioned conversations are.

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7. In-School Action

- a. The school will ensure there are clear plans in place to support the following in an ongoing manner
- b. Staff and/or students directly associated with the person who has died
- c. The wider school community
 1. All actions and plans for individual children will be recorded on CPOMs, our recording method for those who need safeguarding. All actions and plans for adults will be recorded and kept on staff files in a separate envelope.
 2. Students and staff will be given a dedicated space and specific times to attend that space e.g. worship room or reflection room on their return to school and resumption of normal timetable. It is important that this facility/time is structured to avoid staff and students feeling overwhelmed by numbers of people and a loss of routine and calm.
 3. Students who need regular and ongoing time out of the normal school day will have separate and personalised arrangements made for them in consultation with their parents/carers.
 4. If a student or staff member dies, the Headteacher will consider opening a book of condolence for staff and students to write in at specified times. This book can then be passed to the family once complete.
 5. The school may engage and maintain the services of a counsellor and local religious leader to give ongoing support to the whole school community at regular times.
 6. The school will signpost services that provide support for bereavement locally and nationally.
 7. The school may allocate a 'key contact' staff member to support a child or adult as necessary.

8. Funerals/Memorial Services and Spaces

(in relation to the death of a member of the immediate school community)

- a. The Headteacher will establish the wishes of the next of kin and family. The family may well welcome involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to keep things private.
- b. Where required, the Headteacher and/or the 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.
- c. Occasionally, it is appropriate to close, in other circumstances it is not, consequently difficult decisions will sometimes have to be made concerning attendance. This decision should be taken by the Headteacher in consultation with the Trust.
- d. Arrangements will be made for flowers to be sent and/or a collection to be made in consultation with the family.
- e. Cultural and religious implications will be taken into consideration.
- f. If the parents of a deceased child wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be organised by the Headteacher.
- g. It might be that in addition to/instead of the funeral that a school memorial service is appropriate and would assist with the grieving process. After either service, staff and students will be encouraged to meet and express their thoughts and feelings. Such services are important in initiating the mourning process.
- h. A dedicated Memorial Space/garden may serve as a venue for gatherings and quiet moments of reflection in the event of the death of a member of the direct school community. Parents/carers/families will be involved in the dedication of any such space.

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9. Death of the Headteacher

- a. If the deceased is the Headteacher, the Trust CEO and Lead Adviser will assume all responsibility attributed to the Headteacher in this policy. It is recognised that this event would have a devastating effect on all members of the school and any action taken will be sensitive, carefully considered and in the best interests of the school community.

10. National Sources of Support for Bereavement

11. The school will signpost local sources of bereavement. In addition to this, the following national sources may be helpful.
 - a. NHS Bereavement Advice
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/coping-with-bereavement/>
 - b. Cruse Bereavement Support for children and adults
<https://www.cruse.org.uk/>
 - c. Child Bereavement UK
<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>
 - d. For over 18s Sue Ryder Online Bereavement Support
<https://community.sueryder.org/c/coping-with-bereavement>
 - e. Child Death Helpline (for anyone who has been impacted by the death of a child)
<http://childdeathhelpline.org.uk/>
 - f. The Compassionate Friends (supporting bereaved parents and their families)
<https://www.tcf.org.uk/>
 - g. Lessons on Loss and Bereavement for KS1 to KS4 (Winston's Wish)
<https://www.winstonswish.org/pshe-downloads/> and on the RET VLE for staff at
<https://moodle.russelleducationtrust.org.uk/course/view.php?id=40#section-2> and
<https://moodle.russelleducationtrust.org.uk/course/view.php?id=54#section-2>

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Appendix 1 - RET Faith Schools

Links with the community

In the event of the death of a member of the school community:

- The Headteacher will ensure that any services, worship spaces and/or dedications are completely in line with the family's wishes and what is appropriate for the school to take part in.
- The Headteacher will circulate a list of staff who are able to pray with students and/or staff.
- The Headteacher will make immediate contact with linked religious Leaders and invite them into school.
- The Headteacher will make contact with Governors and ensure they are involved in any religious form of worship associated with the sad event.

A Christian Response to Death

Christians believe that all people have been made in God's image. Every life is special. At the beginning of the Bible in the story of creation it says, *'God saw all that he had made, and it was very good'* (Genesis 1)

Christians believe that human beings have been created by God. Psalm 139 says *'you knit me together in my mother's womb'*. This shows that God made people and therefore they are precious to him. The person who wrote Psalm 8 asked *'what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?'* He goes on to answer this question saying God has *'crowned them with glory and honour.'* This emphasizes the fact that God really cares about every human being.

It is important to grieve for those who have died

In the Bible there are lots of examples of people mourning for those who have died. When Jesus' friend Lazarus died, he goes to where Lazarus is buried, grieves with his family and weeps (John 11). In Ecclesiastes, written by Solomon who was one of the wisest people in Bible history, we are told that there is a time for *'everything'*, including *'a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance'*. It is really important to allow time to grieve.

It is also important to continue to remember those who have died. Both Matthew and Luke's stories about the life of Jesus begin with a list of Jesus' ancestors. Those people who have been part of our families – of our lives, are significant and should be remembered. The death of a loved one is a great loss and grief acknowledges the magnitude of that loss.

Death is not the end

Christians believe that death is not the end. They believe that through Jesus' death and resurrection they can be certain of eternal life with Him. In John 5:24, Jesus says *'Truly, truly I say to you whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.'* This is a life free from pain and sadness, a life where there will be contentment beyond any sense of security and peace we have known in this life on earth. In the last book in the Bible, Revelation, there is a picture of Heaven where Jesus will *'wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain,'* (Revelation 21:4). Christians do not believe that death is the end. They believe that there is another life after this one, where all things will be made new.

There is hope in Jesus' death and resurrection

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul talks about grieving for those who have died. He writes *'We do not want you to be uninformed brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.'* For Christians, grief is hope-filled. It does not make it any lesser grief. Like an amputated limb it is a severing. The fact that Jesus died and rose again, in bodily form, gives Christians hope that there is a bodily resurrection in the future. Jesus' body was recognizable to his disciples so we will be able to recognize our loved ones when we meet them again in the next life.

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Appendix 2: Planning for what happens in the event of the death of a student or teacher

This plan is in place for the tragic occasions when the school will have to deal with the death of a student or teacher.

Communications

- If any member of staff hears that a student or teacher has died, they should immediately inform the Headteacher.
- The Headteacher will alert RET and the Local Authority.
- The Headteacher will organise for staff to be informed at the earliest opportunity, in the best possible way. SLT will be informed first and then all teaching and support staff will be informed at the same time. This may be an extraordinary morning briefing, afternoon briefing or email if no meeting is possible given the timing of the news being received. If the news is given via a briefing it will be backed up with an email to all staff to ensure that no-one is missed (see list in policy).
- The Headteacher will call an assembly for the year group of the student who has died or for each year group in turn if a member of staff has passed away. The Headteacher will deliver this assembly/these assemblies. The HOY will be present (if they are able to be), tutors will be present (if cover allows), pastoral/inclusion non-teaching staff will be present.
- If it is a student who has died, other year groups will be informed by their class teacher/tutor (depending on time of day) with a standard wording (to be circulated by the Headteacher). The Leadership Team will circulate around classes for support.
- The Headteacher will inform parents in writing (once agreement has been given by family of the deceased).
- All communication with the family of the deceased will go via the Headteacher.

Immediate support

- A place for reflection and/or support will be identified immediately. Careful planning will be needed to ensure it is not overwhelmed at any given time.
- Members of the pastoral team to be briefed regarding what is expected of them and when.
- Thought will be given regarding whether it is appropriate to have governors on site. If so, they will need a location.
- Students to be allowed out of lessons to seek support. SLT to manage numbers and to try to ensure 'revolving door' so that students are not in the support space for very long periods of time.
- Pastoral staff to set up activities for students in the reflection space including memory book, prayer jar/tree, baffle board for memories of student (flowers etc. can be left by this, opportunity to look at Bible verses and poems on death which may provide comfort. Pastoral staff will have colouring/gentle craft activities also available for those who may need them.
- The Headteacher will speak to the family regarding a funeral and/or memorial, a condolence book and/or a memorial space.
- Any fundraising activity will be organized by the Headteacher in line with the wishes of the family.

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Appendix 3: Guidance for staff on dealing with conversations on death

Death can be a challenging topic to discuss with students. It can be difficult to know how to answer questions and what to say to best support students coping with a death in their family or in the school community. This guidance document is designed to be read in conjunction with the school's bereavement policy and the school's plan for dealing with the death of a student(s) in the community. If you would like any more support, having read this guidance, please do not hesitate to speak to your line manager, a member of pastoral staff, or a member of SLT. Please note that you are not required to enter into any such conversations with students if you do not feel able to do so. If a student would like to speak to you, and you are unable to have this conversation, please ensure that you refer them onto a colleague who can support them.

- Allow conversations on death to be instigated by a student(s) rather than instigating them yourself.
- Reassure the student(s) that it is OK to talk about death and normal to seek support from others when dealing with a bereavement.
- Give students facts if a death has occurred in the school community. Stick to agreed lines of communication (which will be given to you by the Headteacher) but do answer questions within these and address any untrue rumours.
- Allow the student(s) to express their feelings; be aware that bereaved people can commonly feel a mixture of sadness, anger, anxiety, confusion or guilt. Reassure them that their emotions are normal and that grief is complex.
- Encourage the student(s) to talk about the person they have lost and to share their memories. They may also wish to share other experiences of grief and loss – reassure them that this is normal.
- Encourage the student(s) to find outlets for their emotions which might include physical activity; meditation; prayer; writing; art; music etc.
- Encourage the student(s) to make use of the support being offered in school to work through their feelings.
- If a student asks you to share your own experiences of grief, do so if you are content to, but feel no pressure to and be aware of the emotional toll this may take on you.
- If a student asks you to pray with them/for them and you are comfortable doing this you can. If you are not comfortable, please introduce them to a member of staff who can pray with them and have a dialogue around Christian beliefs on death.
- Encourage the student(s) to discuss their feelings with their parents/carers or a member of their family they are close with.
- Refer the student(s) for additional pastoral support if you feel they need to work through their feelings at greater length. CPOMs referrals should be made for any CP concerns.