



The *Consortium* Trust

Bereavement and Loss

Protocol

April 2020

PREAMBLE:

The *Consortium* Trust, is a family, a family of schools working in close partnership to support our local communities, families, staff and pupils. We truly care for each other and act in the best interest of the entire Trust. Our motto underpins our aspiration that we should not just pass through our Trust, but should strive for excellence and thrive.

Where together excellence and pupils thrive

There are on fortunately rare occasions that, individually and collectively we are unable to meet these goals and a significant disruption can occur when a member of our family, community or school suffers a bereavement or loss. It is noted that bereavement and loss are an inevitable part of life, learning and growing. No matter how prepared we think we are, death is often traumatic and unexpected. Its unpredictability can severely unbalance a school whose normal working environment is one based on routine. **This is particularly an issue during a period of national crisis, as we are experiencing currently with the covid-19 pandemic.**

The Trust will create an environment that is sensitive and compassionate to the needs of those wishing to grieve, whatever their cultural or beliefs framework. Our extensive set of policies will be used as a supportive framework to guide leaders and managers to approach each situation in a consistent and personal way, recognising that every situation will be different and that we are dealing with people and not a policy.

What is bereavement?

The loss of a close relative is an uncommon experience for children and it can present a particularly difficult challenge to caring school staff. Grief reactions can also be experienced following the death of friends or distant relatives, the death of a pet, parental separation or divorce, and other life events such as moving house. In a way such experiences act as preparation for the profound bereavements of life. Bereavement may bring with it many far-reaching changes in a person's mental health and material life including loss of a family member, colleague, friends or a change of housing for example.

Coping with bereavement

initially the reaction will be one of shock, which can last from a few hours to some days. The bereaved person may seem to comprehend what has occurred, seem free from distress and act as if nothing has happened. Alternatively, they may be unable to stop crying or to speak about their loss and they may be incapable of organising their daily routine.

Next comes an acceptance of what has happened which can last for days, weeks or a few months. It can be accompanied by severe emotional reactions such as distress, weeping, self-reproach and guilt, helplessness and despair. The bereaved person may be restless and irrational.

Then may come a time of idealisation where the bereaved person looks back with 'rose-tinted spectacles'. During this phase underlying anger or guilt may be expressed. Such a reaction may cause considerable difficulties for the remaining parent in situations where there has been a separation or divorce.

Finally adjustment will follow. After some months the emotional storm begins to subside. The bereaved person begins to take a more realistic view of events.

What else do I need to know?

Even very young children have a pretty clear idea of what death means. All will have encountered a dead beetle or a dead bird. They may not, however, understand the concept of spiritual life associated with physical death. Children are particularly apt to yearn for the deceased, to fantasise about their return and nourish hopes of reunion. Vivid images may occur. Bereaved children are particularly prone to feelings of guilt. They may blame themselves for the event. Later they may become healthily eager to hear more about the deceased and to amplify their picture of them.

Children's grief is less likely to follow the usual pattern than that of adults (as described above), because they are less in control of their own lives and have less knowledge of the processes of life and death. They may be misled by figures of speech and platitudes and be less well equipped to express emotions verbally. They live more in the present than adults.

The 24 hour news and intense social media exposure of the current covid-19 pandemic and rising worldwide death toll, poses further challenges for all but particularly for children to effectively process information.

Guidelines:

1 The Trust, including schools will respond in a planned and agreed manner, so that all staff know what is expected and can contribute their part in a way that is consistent with the ethos of the Trust.

2 The CEO will co-ordinate the Trust's response and be vital in creating an appropriate atmosphere. He will be the first point of contact and will liaise with all parties concerned and affected. He will allocate a specific person (usually the affected person's Academy Head or Line Manager) to support the bereaved. This person would, in the later stages of bereavement, offer support and check on the progress of any individuals involved.

3 In addition, a small group of staff will be identified to keep in touch with the family so contact from the family's point of view is manageable but also does not come to an abrupt end after all the initial attention. This group would probably consist of the Academy Head/Line Manager or their representative, and a member of staff particularly close to the individual affected.

4 The CEO or his representative will inform members of the relevant community.

5 Pupils and parents or carers will be informed at the same time and as promptly as circumstances will allow, usually by letter on the same day. Staff who are absent will be informed by their line manager.

6 In living in a multi-ethnic and multi-faith society it is necessary to be aware of the differing cultural and religious traditions of grieving and mourning. The school should ensure that they do not deny children, staff or families the opportunity to grieve and mourn within the traditions of their own culture and religious beliefs.

7 The CEO will liaise with the media and possibly the police.

8 Managing the First Day

- Upon hearing news of a death, members of staff should contact the CEO immediately.
- A parent or relative coming into school to break the news, possibly with support from a member of staff, would normally be the best and usual approach. If no parents, relatives or carers are able to attend, the Academy Head/Line Manager will need to decide who is best suited/qualified to deal with the situation.
- The Academy Head, supported by the Senior Leadership Team and the CEO, should gather all details surrounding any death. It is vital to have all the facts. If the death/s have been particularly traumatic the media may be involved. It is essential that correct information is passed to the CEO

9 Multiple Deaths, Death in School

- In the event of multiple deaths, additional support and resources will probably be required. The Trust Critical Incident team should meet to agree a planned course of action.
- It is likely that there will be considerable (if unwanted) media interest. The CEO will decide what information should be released. Clearly information that might upset, confuse or exacerbate the situation should be withheld.
- It is important that one individual, pre-selected and briefed by the team, acts as spokesperson, relaying consistent information, this is most likely to be the CEO. Another consideration might be the setting up and running of an emergency Trust hotline.
- It may be necessary to retrieve the personal belongings of the deceased for their return to the next-of-kin. Information on the school's database, including references and addresses will probably need to be amended and updated. This also applies to notice boards etc. The school may decide to write to parents to allow them to explain to their children the meaning and implications of an event.

10 Funerals, Memorial Services/pupil Participation

- Before the bereaved pupil or member of staff returns to school there is likely to be a funeral. It is probable that pupils and staff will express a wish to attend, or take part in the service, but they should only do so with the agreement of the deceased's family or relatives' prior agreement, as well as the agreement of their own parents/carers. The CEO/Academy Head, or their representatives, should be the only person representing the Trust and in contact with the family/relatives, will need to discuss funeral arrangements.
- If the bereaved family wish families and staff to attend, the team should be available to offer support before and after the service. Utilising the Trust's Mental Health First Aiders, family support workers and where appropriate TIS practitioners. If they do not wish members of the Trust to attend, their wishes should be respected and the Trust/school should consider arranging an alternative.
- Planning a memorial service, reading lessons, poems, or choosing hymns may all assist in the grieving process.

11 Death of a Member of Staff

- When such an event occurs it is usually extremely traumatic, especially for members of staff forced to deal with their own grief as well as comforting pupils and the wider community. Planning how the Trust/school manages such an event is important. To avoid rumours it is advisable that the news is broken as soon as possible. A gathering together of staff to allow them to grieve in private before announcing the news to the rest of the school is something that should be considered. **[Subject to covid-19 restrictions on gatherings]**
- Generally such news is broken in assembly (where the school is operating), in a space where everyone maybe told simultaneously. Later in class pupils should be allowed the opportunity to express their grief individually with the support of the teacher and or teaching assistant. Some pupils may have already experienced death and their way of coping with such events is sometimes observed in emotional outbursts. Some may express feelings of anger, panic or relief. It is important to try to remember that this is a time when everyone is hurting.
- For a community as close knit as a school, a memorial service in keeping with the ethos and beliefs of the Trust is normally a good idea. The coming together of the whole school collectively for one purpose helps each individual come to terms with his/her own grief in a shared experience – ie helping to initiate the grieving process. Such services also offer the opportunity for those who may have been unable to attend the funeral to express themselves through drama, poems and letters.
- In the current period of restricted school openings, online provision maybe considered and waiting until the school re-opens, to allow closure at a later date.
- It is at times like these when members of the staff often feel insecure of their own abilities, finding it difficult to cope. Without encroaching on their privacy staff might keep an eye on those teachers particularly affected by the death of a close colleague.

12 Death of a pupil

- The death of a pupil is probably the most demanding situation a young person might be forced to face whilst in school. Comprehending and coming to terms with such an event is going to be equally difficult and will require great emotional support from the school staff.
- If faced with a sudden death the Academy Head should contact the deceased parents/carers/next of kin as soon as possible thus enabling compliance with any of their wishes. The immediate class friends and siblings of the deceased should be gathered and the news, if not already known, be broken before an announcement is made to the rest of the school, thus allowing private grief. To avoid rumours an announcement should be made to the whole of the school as soon as practically possible. Additional support from fellow teaching colleagues may well be required as well as the assistance of the Trust's pastoral support structures. It is important that all interactions are based on accessible and child friendly language.
- In event of a child becoming terminally ill their wishes and those of their parents or carers should always be respected. Should the child wish to attend school year staff may need to inform students of the young person's condition. Occasionally the pupil may wish to talk to their fellow classmates about their predicament themselves. Honesty about death and dying we feel is the best line of approach. . It is important that all interactions are based on accessible and child friendly language.

13 Supporting the Family

- Parents and carers often feel that teachers are experts on their children. They may invariably therefore turn to the school for advice and information, especially on matters of bereavement. It is important to remember that the family, friends and the immediate community often best support those suffering from bereavement, as is the case with other stressful life events. The following are some points that may be helpful to bear in mind when talking to parents and carers:
- A death in the family will disrupt the family for many months; in fact the family will never be the same again. Family members are grieving, relationships alter, and members may take on new roles. Sometimes there is a change of carer, house or school, all of which add to the disruption and distress experienced by the child. To support the child it is helpful to minimise, if possible, changes and disruptions in their normal daily routine and life in school.
- The bereaved family members may emotionally and physically withdraw from the child, to protect themselves from more distress. Some adults will deny the bereaved person is grieving, as it will be distressing for them to acknowledge the child's pain. This may cause distress and confusion, causing grief reactions of anger, withdrawal or psychosomatic behaviours such as, headaches, stomach ache or sickness.
- The bereaved child may regress in behaviour, becoming clingy, difficult or withdrawn. His/her schoolwork may suffer. These changes will be partly due to grief but also to the disruption and changes within the family, causing the child to feel confused and unsafe. Even the simple withdrawal of attention from the child can lead to problems; the child may feel resentment, jealous or guilt towards the dead person. The expression of this verbally can cause the remaining family members distress and shock. Parents and carers need to know this is normal and will decrease as the child and the family become more stable and settled.
- Parents and carers need to be informed of the benefits that a child gains in being involved in the ceremonies and rituals that follow the death. An explanation as to how mourning practices help young people to express their feelings and come to terms with and accept the reality of their loss can be very beneficial.
- Finally, teachers and school staff need to remember that parents and carers will often use them as role models, counsellors or extended family; looking to them for support for themselves as well as finding appropriate ways of supporting and talking with their children. Teachers therefore may require their own support structures, so they too can turn to others for emotional support, advice and information if needed. Supporting bereaved families, whilst rewarding, can also be emotionally draining.

14 Self-care for those working with the bereaved

- It's easy to overlook the stressed and anxieties placed on those dealing with the bereaved. In many instances these can be quite exacting and yet because our sympathy and attention naturally rests with those grieving we can easily forget the emotional weight resting on the shoulders of those offering support. To assist, the following points we think are worth bearing in mind:
- Anticipate possible reactions you may experience with grief and loss. Each one of us is likely to react differently depending on our age, personality, cultural and religious background. If you are ever unsure about how you should react to others' grief, honesty is always the best line of approach.
- Try to accept that you may experience emotional reactions yourself. Such an event might trigger thoughts of your own past grief experiences. You may even find yourself doubting your own abilities. It is not unusual to experience existential thoughts and find yourself querying life's injustices, questioning perhaps your own beliefs.
- Panic attacks and worries about death – your own, or perhaps that of your family – may also become a preoccupation.
- Try to accept that giving such support can affect you in perhaps ways you had not considered. Normally these reactions will subside after a few days or weeks but if they persist do not be afraid to ask for professional support.
- Never take on too much. If you find that you are having difficulty in managing to cope, look to others to offer support – a partner, friend, or colleague.
- It is important to remember that you alone cannot carry other peoples' grief.

Key Trust Contacts:

Name	Email	Role
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Liz Frere-Smith	l.freresmith@consortiumacademy.org	Head of Service People (HR)
Nigel Shaddick	hoswisa@consortiumacademy.org	Head of Service Welfare, Inclusion, Safeguarding, Attendance

Employee Assistance Programme:



A 24/7 counselling and support helpline available to provide advice and support for a variety of health, legal, finance, wellbeing and family concerns. Sometimes face to face counselling can be more beneficial which is why Health Shield provides up to 8 counselling sessions including cognitive behavioural therapy in any 12month period.

We believe that the best way to support you is by supporting your family as well. That's why the EAP service from Health Shield is available to you, your partner and your dependants* with access to a professional telephone service 24 hours a day, seven days a week through Health Assured.

What's available? Emotional support / Telephone counselling / Practical information

You can also get help and advice and support on a range of subjects including:

Debt / Housing / Consumer issues / Adoption / Family related matters / Work related problems /

Domestic abuse / Stress / Medical information

How do I claim? It's simple, just call: 0800 028 1963, quote 'SCHOOLS UK' for assistance.

Useful Resources:

Attached PDFs

At a time of Bereavement Booklet

Managing Anxiety in a pandemic

Supporting children with bereavement through covid-19

Book for talking to young children about Bereavement

Michael from Leicester emailed to let me know about a series of books that help younger children learn about a number of sensitive issues. One book in the series is 'Frog and the Birdsong' by Max Velthuijs, Andersen Press.

The book concerns Frog, who one autumn day discovers a blackbird lying motionless in the grass. Worried, he asks his friends what can be the matter. Very gently and simply, then animals begin to understand the meaning of death and the beauty of life in this moving story.

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businesssupport@consortiumacademy.org

Benny's Hat by Juliet Clare Bell and Dave Gray (Picture Book)

Benny's Hat tells the story of Benny's illness and death, from the point of view of little sister Friz, in an honest but gentle way. This is an ordinary family, dealing with something extraordinarily painful together, the best way each of them can.

Buy at Amazon: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Bennys-2017-Juliet-Clare-Bell/dp/1999729609>

See the trailer video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7gCXYA0N5k>

Response re support following staff/pupil bereavement [Covid-19 specific]:

In normal circumstances schools would come together physically to support anyone in the community who was bereaved, and in particular when a member of the school community dies. This is clearly impossible while schools are only open to a very few, and whilst social distancing needs to be observed. Once schools are reopened there may well need to be a time to reflect on such losses and to grieve together. Local Authorities are usually well placed to help with counselling, and immediate assistance and support could also be provided at a MAT level where relevant.

At the moment, the best resources for this appear to be online. CRUSE (www.cruse.org.uk) has an excellent section on coronavirus and the additional challenges that it is bringing to the bereaved, but it also has a very extensive section on supporting children who are grieving. They also have a helpline. GPs can also help with access to counselling, and the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (www.bcap.org.uk) has a directory of registered counsellors and some advice on coping with the coronavirus epidemic

Websites and Charities:

Child Bereavement UK: <https://childbereavementuk.org>

Marie Curie: <https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/>

Winston's Wish: <https://www.winstonswish.org/>

Child Bereavement charity working in Norfolk: <http://www.nelsonsjourney.org.uk/professionals/>

Managing a sudden death in the school community (LGfL): <http://bereavement.lgfl.org.uk/>

Talking about death with your little one (CBeebies):

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/grownups/our-family-talking-about-death-with-your-little-one>

How to support a bereaved child (Video, Child Bereavement UK): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aix0ted9Nkk>

What helps grieving children and young people (pdf):

<https://childbereavementuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/1.4-What-helps-grieving-children-and-young-people-1.pdf>

[https://www.goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk/content/resources/Whole_School_Approach_to_LossAndBereavement\).pdf](https://www.goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk/content/resources/Whole_School_Approach_to_LossAndBereavement).pdf)

Support Organisations:

Child Bereavement UK

(e) enquiries@childbereavementuk.org

(t) 01494 568900 / 0800 02 888 40

Child Death Helpline

(t) 0800 282986

Cruse Bereavement Care

(t) 0870 167 1677

(e) helpline@crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Winstons Wish

(t) 08452 03 04 05

(e) info@winstonswish.org.uk

Consortium resource box – please contact Sam Cutler, Head of Service – Curriculum Innovation

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