

The Auriga Academy Trust

Bereavement and Loss Policy

(school community excl. staff)

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Rationale

All schools will have to deal with bereavement and loss both within the school community and the wider community at some point. Pupils may experience the death of a loved one in their family/friendship circles.

When a child or staff member from the school community dies, this can be a time of high emotion both for staff, pupils and the wider school community. Every death and every person's reaction to it is unique to their situation. It will be affected by the relationship with the person, the circumstances of the death, their sources of resilience, the development of the child or young person. Most children and young people, with the support of a loving parent/carer and supportive adults in school will be able to manage the range of emotions that they experience. How we support bereavement can have a significant impact on how people are able to manage during this difficult time and in the future.

Having a bereavement and loss policy will help schools to be prepared for these times.

When to use this policy

This policy has been developed to support the school community when a pupil, staff member, governor or other prominent member of the local community has died, including family members of pupils. This policy will also help to support bereavement and loss over the longer term.

Objectives

The core intentions of the policy are:

- To understand what action will be taken immediately and in the longer term.
- To provide a framework to support pupils and/or staff before, during and after a bereavement.
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and community.
- To identify key staff within school and wider agencies and clarify the pathway of support.
- To have clear expectations about the way school will respond to a death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all
- Make appropriate plans, produce guidelines and draft letters
- Collect resources for support
- Know where to find relevant information that you will need to refer to
- Prepare staff and organise any training

Developing the curriculum

Learning about loss and bereavement equips pupils to support themselves now or in the future, and to respond kindly and supportively to bereaved peers. The majority of young people will have experienced the death of someone close to them by the time they leave school – and almost everyone will face this at some point. Many children and young people will have heard talk about dying and bereavement.

In the DfE RSE Framework (July 2025) [Relationships and sex education \(RSE\) and health education - GOV.UK](#), there is a specific provision for schools to ensure that pupils are given the opportunity to learn 'that change and loss, including bereavement, can provoke a range of feelings, that grief is a natural response to bereavement, and that everyone grieves differently.'

The school curricula provide opportunities for teaching and learning about change, loss, death and bereavement to help build students' skills and knowledge in areas such as changes and differences in families; lifecycles and understanding death; and managing feelings and seeking help.

This may be through the school's PSHE and/or SRE curriculums.

The Role of the Headteacher

- To be a point of contact for family/pupil concerned.
- Be available to the family; keep in touch and offer help and support as needed.
- To discuss and prepare potential media communications with the Trust CEO and Richmond Press Office for further advice and guidance.
- To keep the Trust Executive Leaders, Trustees and Governors fully informed.
- To monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.

Procedures

- Contact should be established by the Head or a member of staff designated by the Head with the deceased's family and their wishes respected in communicating with others.
- The Head (or their designated member of staff) should be the sole point of contact with the family for the school. Staff should not initiate contact with the family themselves (unless they are also family friends outside of school) without first confirming with the Headteacher.
- We will respect family wishes regarding their cultures and beliefs and communication preferences.
- A clear process of communication should be followed, giving consideration to the multi-agency involvement families may have (**see Appendix C**).

- Staff should be informed before pupils and be prepared to share information in ways appropriate to the pupils' understanding, as agreed for each individual circumstance.
- Pupils who are affected should be informed, preferably in small groups (or individually when necessary), by someone known to them.
- In most cases a letter to all school families affected should be composed at the earliest opportunity and a decision made as to whom, and how, it should be distributed (**Appendices A&B**).
- The school should be aware that the school timetable may need a degree of flexibility to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of pupils and staff affected by the situation. However, minimal disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security and familiarity.
- Arrange a staff meeting at the end of the day to catch-up with staff and have a chance to debrief on their day.
- In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance may be clarified, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances.
- Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Trust CEO with advice and guidance from Richmond Press Office.
- Do not rush into organising a memorial event. This needs time and discussion with the family once the news has had time to settle. Appropriate memorialisation activities should be discussed with families and students, bearing in mind that any future deaths will require the same response. This should be in consultation with parents. Some ideas can be found in **Appendix D**.

Support

Empathetic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some pupils or staff require. However, more specialist support may be a consideration (see **Appendix E**).

Details of support services should be included to support families who may require further help and information.

Support for pupils

- It helps to feel prepared when delivering sad news, so a script can be useful. Again, do not be afraid or surprised to show emotion, this is a human reaction, but be careful not to overwhelm children.

- Some schools may have access to an Arts Therapist who can help and support in liaison with the leadership team.
- School should be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a pupil throughout their school life so information should be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points.
- Research shows that adults who the most familiar to them are in the best position to offer tailored help and support. Therefore, we will not use the EP services to come in and talk to pupils but can be used to advise and support staff in having conversations.

Support for staff

If you are going to be able to support your pupils, you also need to remember to look after your own wellbeing.

It is important that you;

- Take time for yourself to grieve
- Talk to people about your feelings and memories and talk about the person who has died
- Look after your own physical well-being, making sure you are eating, drinking, and sleeping/resting
- Try to maintain normal routines – these provide an important sense of security for children and adults
- Tell yourself that although this is a difficult time it WILL get easier
- Allow pupils to see your grief and be open about your feelings, whilst being careful not to overwhelm them. Children learn how to deal with grief from those around them, and they need to know that it is good to express emotions

Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate. The number of the Employee Assistant Programme should be passed to staff.

The school may wish to use their assigned Educational Psychology service to offer a space for staff to reflect and to support with sharing information and addressing questions with pupils.

We understand that some staff may find talking to pupils about death difficult due to personal circumstances and staff can request not to speak to pupils in consultation with SLT.

SUPPORT FOR PARENTS/CARERS

Children and young people need to be acknowledged, listened to and supported.

Here are some ideas to help you at this difficult time:

- Answer your child's questions simply and factually
- Use language such as "death" and "dead" not "gone to a better place" or "gone to sleep"
- Help your child to understand that the person is not going to come back.
- Explain the cause of death in a simple way and make sure the child knows it was not his/her fault. Sometimes you may be asked the same questions over and over; be patient with this, it is the child's way of making sure that the facts have not changed
- Give the child the opportunity to take part in the mourning process. Explain what will happen at the funeral and help them to decide whether or not they want to attend. If they don't, they may like to put flowers or write a note to the person.
- Give your child plenty of love, affection and reassurance, so s/he knows that they are still loved in the middle of the sadness and grief.
- Keep to school routine and let the child continue to see friends, go to clubs etc. Keeping routine and consistency helps a child feel more secure
- Give the child a chance to be quiet and alone from time to time
- Let them talk at their own pace, in their own time. Allow them the chance to express their feelings openly and give reassurance that many different feelings are common to people who have been bereaved, including sadness and anger
- Help the child to remember the person who has died. Creating a memory box with photos and special mementoes can be helpful
- Let them know that there are adults around who can listen and help
- Children jump from sadness to joy quickly – if they are happy, let them be happy! This does not mean they do not care
- Be honest and show your own grief; it's ok to cry! But try not to overwhelm the child.
- Look after yourself – grief is tiring
- Be aware of changes such as clingy, aggressive or moody behaviour; these are all expressions of grief
- Don't feel like you have to have all the answers or get it right all the time – doing your best is good enough

- Keep in contact with school and let them know how you can be helped
- Take one day at a time

TALKING ABOUT DEATH WITH PUPILS WHO HAVE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

Members of staff may be unsure about how or if to approach the subject with the pupil. It is better to say something than nothing at all. It is ok to say 'I heard about your grandfather, I'm sorry he died'.

It is important to use concrete words like 'death' and avoid using terms like 'losing' someone, or that the person has 'passed away', as this can be confusing for children.

It is important to provide continued routines and to receive the emotional attention of their main caregivers.

Normalise emotions/reactions to the event. Reassure them that their feelings are normal. People grieve in different ways. Tell them that it's ok to feel different to how they feel usually. Reassure them that they will feel better with time.

Sharing stories about loss and bereavement can help adults to open conversations with children of all ages, and to help them to understand their loss and to accept that their feelings are normal.

When talking about death and bereavement to pupils with learning difficulties it might be helpful to consider:-

- **WHO** should be key worker working with the pupil and family – inform parents who this person will be and keep in contact.
- **WHERE** is the pupil most receptive to new ideas? – classroom, sensory room. Alone or with class peers.
- **WHAT** should be talked about? (as agreed with parents). Ensure that you use the same language and ideas as the family to avoid confusing the pupil.
- **HOW** is the new information normally given? – signs, verbally, pictures. Use the same format to talk about illness and death.
- **HOW** is new information normally backed up? – you will probably need to repeat information a number of times over a long period.
- **PROCEED** at a level, speed and language appropriate to the pupil.
- **BUILD** on information give – small bites of the whole, given gradually will be easier to absorb.
- **REPEAT** information as often as needed.

- **WATCH** for reactions to show the pupil understands – modify and repeat as needed.
- **FOLLOW** pupil's lead – if indicating a need to talk or have feeling acknowledged, encourage as appropriate.
- **WATCH** for changes in behaviour to indicate the pupil is struggling more than they can say and offer support and needed.
- **LIAISE** with family and other agencies involved with the pupil to ensure accuracy and continuity of information.

All pupils benefit from being given, simple, honest 'bitesize' pieces of information about difficult issues – often repeated many times over. For some pupils with special needs, it might be more appropriate for symbols to be used to convey ideas rather than language.

Appendix A

Suggested template for letter to parents

Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the child's parents.

The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the parents and school.

Sample letter on death of a pupil

(A different letter would be produced each time to take into account the individual circumstances involved):

Dear Parents/Carers

Your child's class teacher/form tutor had the sad task of informing the pupils of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Class name and campus>.

<Name> had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday.

He/She was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The pupils have been told that their teachers are willing to answer their questions at school, but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we would be more than willing to help you. Alternatively, you may find useful information and resources online at www.childbereavement.org.uk

We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating <Name>'s life.

Yours sincerely

<Name>
Headteacher

Appendix B

Sample letter on death of a staff member:

Dear Parents

I am sorry to have to tell you that a much-loved member of our staff <Name> has died. The pupils were told today and many will have been quite distressed at the news. No-one wants to see children sad, but we are very aware that factual information and emotional support are the best means of helping children deal with bereavement. I am sure there will be many parents who are also saddened by the news. Children respond in different ways so may dip in and out of sadness, and questions, whilst alternatively playing or participating in their usual activities. This is normal and healthy.

You may find your child has questions to ask which we will answer in school in a way appropriate to their level of understanding, but if you feel you would like more support and advice yourself, please do not hesitate to contact the school office. You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at www.childbereavement.org.uk

We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Pupils who wish to attend will be welcome to do so, though it will not be compulsory.

I am sorry to be the bearer of sad news, but I appreciate an occurrence like this impacts the whole school community. Together we will be able to guide and support the children through this difficult time.

Yours sincerely

<Name>
Headteacher

Appendix C

COMMUNICATION PROCESS



Appendix D

MEMORIALISATION IDEAS

- Be aware of significant dates – Christmas, Mothers' Day, etc. – but also anniversaries, birthdays.
- Memory boxes can be made to contain mementoes and items of significance.
- Family trees and Life Story work – memory mobiles; salt jars; decorating photo frames; creating a collage; 'comfort cushions' made from a favourite item of clothing.... Many ideas to express feelings and assist understanding.
- Celebrating special days; lighting candles; visiting a memorial site.
- Collate group responses to a loss to help in understanding of shared grief.
- Plant flowers; create a memory garden.

NB. In an environment where further deaths may be experienced (schools with pupils with life-limiting conditions) it would be wise to consider a realistic approach to memorialisation, eg. Names on stones to be added to a water feature – rather than naming rooms after a specific person.

Appendix E

Support Services

Child Bereavement UK	Child Bereavement UK	
Childhood Bereavement Network	childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/	
Winston's Wish	winstonswish.org	08088 020 021
When a parent has cancer	ataloss.org	
Grief Encounter	griefencounter.org.uk/	
Hope Again	hopeagain.org.uk/	
Childline (24 hrs)	www.childline.org.uk	0800 1111
Cruse Bereavement Care	www.cruse.org.uk	
Cruse Helpline		0808 808 1677
Kingston Bereavement Service	Homepage Kingston Bereavement	020 8547 1552
Saying Good Bye Project (KBS)		020 8547 1552
Samaritans (24 hours)		116 123
Mencap	Dealing with bereavement and support with grief Speak to a bereavement counsellor Mencap	
Seahorse Project	Seahorse Project - St Wilfrid's Hospice (Eastbourne)	
Space to Grieve	Specialist bereavement support for Richmond Borough	
Employee Assistance Programme		0800 047 4097
At a Loss	AtaLoss.org: UK wide bereavement signposting and information website Find Support Now	
Education Support	Education Support, supporting teachers and education staff	08000 562 561
Sue Ryder	Sue Ryder Online Bereavement Community	
NHS Support/Advice	Get help with grief after bereavement or loss - NHS	