



**Cambridge House Grammar School
Bereavement Policy
January 2023**

1. Introduction

1.1 For many people, death is a difficult subject, something they would rather not talk about, something best forgotten. The way adults deal with death shapes how they respond to and communicate this subject with children and young people. For many, death is so upsetting that we may find it difficult to cope ourselves, let alone provide support to pupils. This policy has been written to encourage discussion and to help staff and pupils more able to cope with the pressure of dealing with bereavement in school.

1.2 At Cambridge House Grammar School, we believe that we should provide:

- an environment that is sensitive and compassionate to the needs of those wishing to grieve.
- a policy authorising the school's proposed planned response to death and bereavement.
- opportunities for discussion that help lessen the stigma attached to death, reducing its status as a taboo subject. We will endeavour to incorporate the subjects of death and dying into existing classroom activities/subjects in a compassionate way e.g. through poetry in English, Religious Education and other subjects.

2. School Curriculum

2.1 Young people often begin to challenge and question parental values and belief systems. Schools can provide support and resources to help them answer these questions.

2.2 Popular television can be useful e.g. programmes that deal with hospitals (Casualty, Holby City, ER, 24 hours in A & E etc.) or soap operas can be used to open up discussion which allows opportunity for activities and misconceptions to be aired.

2.3 Religious Education provides an opportunity to study in more detail multi-cultural perspectives on death. Seeing that there are many other systems and many ways to mourn can be enlightening.

2.4 Personal Development the impact of bereavement on young people can be explained. Group work allows young people to openly discuss their fears and anxieties. Abstract methods may be useful, such as Drama, Art, prose or poetry.

2.5 It is during adolescence that we become aware and begin to consider our own mortality, therefore, it may be an appropriate time to look at it as a health issue - feelings of loss, a

stressful life event, a mental health issue. Pupils can then explore ways of reducing stress if such an event occurs

2.6 Mentor Systems: identified pupils will contact and support to the bereaved once the initial stages of grief have elapsed. A member of the Pastoral staff will support pupils. The benefits of such a scheme are that the bereaved find it less stigmatising to have contact with another pupil as opposed to a member of staff.

3. Staff Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 No matter how prepared we think we are, death is often traumatic and unexpected. Therefore, a considered, planned, and organised response to an event is much more effective than acting on impulse. It is for this reason we have created an Intervention Team in Cambridge House Grammar School.

- Principal: Mr P Elliott – He is the first point of contact and is responsible for liaising with all parties concerned and affected
- Vice Principals: Mrs K McClurg/Mrs A Proctor- They temporarily deputise for the Principal in the running of their routine day-to-day tasks.
- Media Spokesperson: Principal or Vice Principal/s – They liaise with the media (and possibly the Police) to decide what information should be released.
- Chair of Board of Governors: Mrs J Millar – If deemed necessary, Governors come into school to liaise with Principal and Vice Principal/s.
- Others:

Heads of Key Stage - liaise with members of staff, Principal, Vice Principal/s and Counsellor

School Counsellor - offers support, consultation, and guidance to the team and the bereaved should they require it; contact Bereavement Support team if required

School Secretary - Secretary should be briefed by Principal on information to be released; keep records of all phone calls made and information given; have a separate line - one that is not accessible for incoming calls

4. Managing the First Day

4.1 Whilst every situation that surrounds a death is unique there are similar implications and outcomes to most.

4.2 Upon hearing news of a death, members of staff should in the first instance contact the Principal. If a parent, relative or close friend of a child has died while the child is in school, the Principal will decide (after speaking to the child's next of kin) who should approach the child

- 4.3 A parent/guardian or relative will come into school to break the news with the support of the Principal
- 4.4 If no parents, nor relatives are available then the Principal will decide who is best suited/qualified to deal with the situation
- 4.5 The Principal will gather details surrounding any death. If the death/s have been particularly traumatic, the media may be involved.
- 4.6 If the Principal is involved with family or other members of staff, one of the Vice Principals will be responsible for dealing with the media after consultation with the Principal.
- 4.7 The Principal will meet with all teaching staff so that the correct information is disseminated.
- 4.8 The Principal will decide on hearing news of a death/deaths whether the whole team needs to be assembled e.g. the death of a parent, although traumatic would not normally warrant such action

5. Managing the First Week and After

- 5.1 The work of the team initially should be pro-active, the second phase should be re-active (sympathetic and supportive).
- 5.2 Team should meet to assess progress and developments
- 5.3 Principal or person appointed by the Principal should make a home visit to prepare the bereaved for the return to school. Returning to school will be traumatic
- 5.4 In most cases, providing the parents/guardians of the bereaved pupil agree, it is advisable that everyone is aware of the situation before the bereaved return (teaching, ancillary staff and pupils)
- 5.5 Bereavement of a member of staff, the Principal should follow their wishes
- 5.6 Ensure that pupil's loss is acknowledged, and teachers should endeavour to foster an environment that is compassionate yet disciplined, the bereaved need to get back into routine and school may be the only place this is available
- 5.7 They should be assigned a personal contact e.g. Form Tutor or School Counsellor who should listen sensitively, answer questions and support the child. This is vital in bridging the gap until the adults in the bereaved family are able to function normally again

On-Going Remembrance

- 5.8 Anniversaries often spark feelings associated with the initial bereavement
- 5.9 Birthdays, anniversary of the death are often remembered by pupils
- 5.10 Form Teachers/School Counsellor should keep a record of deaths and make Form Teachers aware of a forthcoming anniversary

- 5.11 Be aware that emotions/reactions may not surface until much later sometimes months, years after the event

After the Bereavement

- 5.12 Discuss how the plan of action was implemented
- 5.13 Discuss useful and less useful courses of action/support
- 5.14 Revise Action Plan and consider what skills do members of staff wish to acquire/need to improve

6. Multiple Deaths, or Death in School

6.1 These instances may warrant assembling the entire Intervention Team

6.2 The Principal will:

- 6.2.1 gather together facts and details
- 6.2.2 determine the likely impact of the event on the whole school
- 6.2.3 in the case of multiple deaths, additional support and resources may be needed, e.g. Bereavement Support
- 6.2.4 assemble the team
- 6.2.5 after consulting with deceased's family, call a general staff meeting
- 6.2.6 discuss with staff how they feel about meeting with their Form Class as not all staff will feel confident and should not be pressurised
- 6.2.7 announce the news to the rest of the school - either by assembly or through Form Teachers

Special Assembly/Form Class

6.3 It is important to be honest and open and to not make any assumptions. Be prepared for a mixture of emotions - disbelief, panic, fear or anger

After Assembly/Form Announcement

- 6.4 In Form rooms and, preferably in small groups, pupils should be allowed to express their emotions, their feelings and thoughts
- 6.5 The teacher should be there to support them and not let them feel in any way inhibited
- 6.6 It must be remembered that pupils will react in different ways, so sensitivity must be shown to those pupils who are not ready to show their feelings

Other Considerations

6.7 In the event of multiple deaths there will be considerable media interest and the Principal will act as media spokesperson

- 6.8 The Head of Year will retrieve personal belongings for next of kin
- 6.9 The Principal's Secretary will amend/update information on school database including references and addresses
- 6.10 The Head of Year will update/amend notice boards,
- 6.11 The Principal will send a letter to parents to allow them to explain to their children the meaning and implications of what has happened. It is important for the parents and school to be consistent i.e. giving the children the same message and deal with the after effects similarly
- 6.12 The staff will be mindful of the need to return the school to a state of normality and while also making decisions which to some might appear insensitive (taking pupil's work down off walls, removing their desk/chair, rearranging a classroom and so on)

7. Funerals, Memorial Services/Pupil Participation

- 7.1 Before the bereaved pupil or member of staff returns to school there is likely to be a funeral. The Principal will represent the school in contact with the family. He will discuss funeral arrangements. It is probable pupils and staff will express a wish to attend, but they should only do so with the agreement of the deceased's family, as well as the agreement of their own parents/guardians.
- 7.2 If the bereaved family wish pupils and staff to attend, the team should be available to offer support before and after the service
- 7.3 If the family do not wish the school to attend, their wishes should be respected, and the school should consider arranging an alternative
- 7.4 Planning a Memorial Service, reading lessons, poems or choosing hymns can assist in the grieving process
- 7.5 Class most affected might like to write down their thoughts and feelings; these could then be given to the bereaved family
- 7.6 The Principal will ensure that no inappropriate remarks or comments are made
- 7.7 After the funeral/memorial service, staff and pupils should be encouraged to meet and express their thoughts and feelings. Refreshments should be provided
- 7.8 If a child expresses a wish to attend a funeral and feels he/she is able, they should be encouraged. Allowing children to attend such events gives them the opportunity to express their grief, allowing them to accept the reality of their loss, say goodbye and begin the grieving process
- 7.9 On the other hand, if a child does not wish to attend, they should not be encouraged to go. This also applies to staff members.

8. Death of a Member of Staff

- 8.1 The Principal will break the news as soon as possible to avoid rumours. He will call a staff meeting to allow them to grieve in private before announcing the news to the rest of the school.
- 8.2 The news will then be broken in assembly where everyone can be told together.
- 8.3 Pupils will then go to their Form class where they have the opportunity to express their grief.
- 8.4 Arrangements will be made by Principal/Vice-Principal for the class of the deceased.
- 8.5 Principal and Vice Principal/s will decide if there is a need to involve other services e.g. Bereavement Support Service
- 8.6 The Principal will decide, after discussion with the deceased's family, as to school arrangements on the day of the funeral.
- 8.7 The school will hold a memorial service or special assembly to provide an opportunity for everyone to come to terms with their grief in a shared experience and for those who have been unable to attend the funeral to express themselves through drama, poems and letters.
- 8.8 The school will liaise with the family, e.g. Choir sing at the funeral service, pupil/member of staff do a reading, always with the wishes/permission of the deceased's family
- 8.9 The Principal will monitor those teachers particularly affected by the death, and offer them support and make them aware of additional support which is available e.g. Cruse Bereavement Care or Staffcare - Freephone NI 0500 127079, support@carecallwellbeing.com.
- 8.10 Classes will be informed of changes in daily routine
- 8.11 The Principal, in consultation with staff, will decide how long the school may need for a settling down period, must be flexible, may need to be revised
- 8.12 Staff will be sensitive and aware of children who over-react

9. Death of a Pupil

- 9.1 If faced with sudden death, the Principal will contact the 'Bereavement Support Service' for advice.
- 9.2 The Principal will meet with members of staff to break the news
- 9.3 Immediate class friends will be gathered, and the news be broken to them
- 9.4 A school assembly will be held (as for member of staff)

10. Death occurs in school

- 10.1 The Principal will immediately contact family and emergency services.
- 10.2 Vice Principal/s organise to clear the area around the deceased e.g. classroom, playing field
- 10.3 If there are any siblings in school, they will be removed from class following the wishes of the family e.g. family member may wish to break the news or may prefer the Principal or other member of staff to break the news
- 10.4 The Principal will contact Bereavement Support Service to deal with the immediate aftermath i.e. witnesses of the tragedy
- 10.5 A room will be designated for meeting relations or Police

11. Memorials

11.1 Consideration will be given to everyone's thoughts and ideas - pupils, staff and family. A memorial will be individualistic and reflect the personality of the deceased. It must also benefit both the school and the family. Examples might include:

- Photographs
- Paintings
- Murals
- Benches
- Planting a tree
- Wildlife area
- Scrap book
- Cup/Shield

11.2 Capital may be raised through fund raising activities, which can be very helpful in bringing people together to share their grief whilst raising money for beneficial causes.

11.3 Examples:

12. Grief Reactions

The following will be borne in mind by staff:

12.1 Adolescents are able to think about death's long-term consequences, its justice or injustice, its inevitability and their own mortality. Adolescence is a time of loss and separation, loss of childhood and the care and safety this brings and a striving for independence and identity. Any bereavement at this time is complicated.

12.2 Grief reactions in an adolescent are similar to that of adults such as: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and lack of acceptance

12.3 Denial: often the first reaction. It serves as a protective reaction and is quite normal early on

12.4 Anger: denial disappears after a few days and may change to anger e.g. at nursing staff or doctors, other family members, sometimes at the deceased and sometimes at themselves (self-recriminations and guilt)

12.5 Bargaining: they attempt to preserve the belief in world being a just place. They will try to find a reason for the death

12.6 Depression: when the bereaved acknowledges the injustice and unpredictability of life's events and their own lack of control over them, they may become depressed. Although unpleasant, it allows them to face the reality of their loss

12.7 Acceptance: this is when the bereaved can accept the loss and start to make new relationships and a new life, looking to the future with some optimism

12.8 (NB The stages of grief can occur in a different sequence and sometimes some sequences can be revisited)

Additional Issues:

- 12.9 Resistance to communicating with adults
- 12.10 Peer pressure - sometimes do not show their true feelings
- 12.11 Act out their anger with aggressive and anti-social behaviour both at home and in the community
- 12.12 May develop disorders linked to health or sexuality e.g. eating disorders, obsessive compulsive disorders or self-harming behaviours
- 12.13 Some may take on the role of the deceased adult e.g. boy becomes the 'man of the house' and so does not go through the grieving process or move through the normal development of an adolescent
- 12.14 Become pathologically depressed, are unable to eat, are morose and unresponsive
- 12.15 For some adolescents, bereavement can provide an opportunity for growth and development as they mature and learn to cope with adversity and change
- 12.16 They can become confused and hold distorted views about life, death and their own mortality. Feeling indestructible and taking uncalculated risks one moment and the next feeling very vulnerable
- 12.17 They may develop a phobia that they will succumb to the same death. They may become obsessive about their own personal health and bodily functions

13. Supporting the Family

- 13.1 A death in a family will disrupt the family for many months, in fact they will never be the same again. Family members are grieving, and relationships alter. Sometimes there is a change of carer, house or school. Therefore, we will minimise changes and disruptions in daily routine and life in school
- 13.2 The family may emotionally and physically withdraw from the child to protect themselves from more distress. They will deny the child is grieving which can cause grief reactions of anger, withdrawal or psychosomatic behaviour such as headaches or stomach-ache
- 13.3 Regression is often common, and the child may become clingy, difficult, or withdrawn and schoolwork may suffer. These changes will be partly due to grief, but also the disruption and changes within the family. Even the simple withdrawal of attention can lead to the child feeling resentment, jealousy or guilt towards the deceased. Parents and carers need to know this is normal and will decrease as the family becomes more stable
- 13.4 Parents and carers need to be informed of the benefits that a child gains from being involved in ceremonies and rituals that follow the death. These help the child express their feelings and come to terms with their loss

13.5 The family can only benefit from the support of teachers if the teachers have their own support system in place. Supporting bereaved families can be emotionally draining and if one person is acting as the counsellor over a period of time they may need to turn to others for emotional support, advice or information

14. Self-Care

14.1 The school will anticipate possible reactions staff and pupils may experience with grief and loss. If you are ever unsure how you should react to others' grief, honesty is always the best line to take

Guidance for staff and pupils:

14.2 Accept you may experience emotional reactions yourself. You may start to doubt your own abilities, start to query life's injustices and perhaps your own beliefs

14.3 Panic attacks and worries about your own or family's deaths can be common

14.4 Never take on too much. Look to others for support - a partner, friend, or colleague

14.5 It is important to remember that you alone cannot carry other people's grief

14.6 Key Points for Counselling the Bereaved:

- Offer to support, but do not be obtrusive
- Share grief
- Allow discussion
- Allow expression
- Talk openly and honestly
- Be aware of other peoples' beliefs and values
- Reassure those who feel that they are in some way to blame
- Be honest with explanations
- Be compassionate, but firm
- Be prepared to ask for additional help if needed
- Expect regression
- Never avoid the bereaved
- Never pretend life will be the same
- Never put a time limit on how long you expect the grieving period to last
- Be honest at all times

Superseded documents

N/A

Review Date:

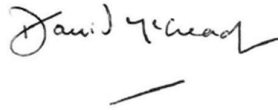
January 2027 or in light of DE Guidance

Signed:



(Principal)

Signed:



(Vice-Chair of Governors)

Date:

Tuesday 17 January 2023