



Samuel Whitbread Academy
BEREAVEMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURES
Responding to death within the school community

1. Rationale and Aim

Rationale

The governing body believes that bereavement and loss are an inevitable part of 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. As a community, we have sought to prepare with sensitivity for this eventuality.

Aims

The governors feel strongly about the way death is handled and discussed in school and as such believe that the school should endeavour to provide:

- an environment that is sensitive and compassionate to the needs of those wishing to grieve, whatever their cultural or religious beliefs.
- a commitment to an education about death and the associated rituals and traditions of mourning.
- opportunities for discussion that help lessen the stigma attached to death, reducing its status as a taboo subject.

2. Policy

We acknowledge that should our school community be informed of a death, our response should be a planned and considered one. This ensures that due time is given to reflect, consider and most of all to be effective in our communication. Samuel Whitbread Academy follows the Bedfordshire Prepared “suspected pupil suicide community action plan” which is referenced throughout this policy.

There is a ‘School Bereavement Team’ to be chaired if and when necessary by a ‘Bereavement Team Leader’ the SLT member who is the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), who will be the most senior appropriate member of staff in school. Other members of the team will be the Principal and the Head of Year. The DSL will be the only person to make contact with the family at this time to ensure that privacy and space for the family is a priority. Contact details for the DSL can be found here <https://www.samuelwhitbread.org.uk/page/?title=Safeguarding&pid=22>

We acknowledge that the communication of any death within our community must be planned and handled with great sensitivity. While recognising the need to act at times swiftly, we will ensure that the immediate family of the deceased have been consulted prior to any wider communication. It is of the utmost importance that their wishes at such a sad time are respected. In effect the DSL only will make contact with the family after notification and will assure confidentiality. In this conversation the relatives will be assured that no announcement regarding the death of their loved one will be made without them phoning the school first to say that this is the right time for information regarding the death to be released. The DSL will await this contact.

We acknowledge our responsibility to all those who grieve as a result of a life changing significant loss in their lives. We will provide opportunities for students to share their feelings in the school environment supported by trained staff and when appropriate, through the use of age related structured programmes as outlined in this document. Appropriate support will also be offered to staff.

The bereavement team will ensure all staff and governors are aware of our policy and procedures. This policy and the accompanying procedures will be reviewed annually or in the event of a death within the school community. Training for the bereavement team to inform of updates to policy will be carried out annually with the DSL.

3. Potential student suicide

This policy aims to ensure that we are prepared and can react within 48 hours with a planned response that helps rebuild the wellbeing of our community and reduces the risk of further suicides. As an academy, we recognise:

- That suicide is the leading cause of death in young people.
- That we play a vital role in helping to prevent young suicide.
- We want to make sure that children and young people at our school are as suicide-safe as possible and that our governors, parents and carers, teaching staff, support staff, pupils and other key stakeholders share our commitment to this policy.
- We are committed to tackling suicide stigma. In our language and in our working relationships, we will promote open, sensitive talk that does not stigmatise and perpetuate taboos.
- Our governors and leadership team will be clear about how we will respond in event of a suicide or unexpected death (of a student or staff member). Each member of our named response team will have a defined responsibility within our plan.

4. Procedures to be followed in the event of a death of a student within the school community:

- a) Notification of a suspected suicide will be made to the DSL by Central Bedfordshire Children's Social Care using the emergency contact list for all schools held by social care.
- b) Where the pupil is under 18, the child death overview manager will maintain links with family, child health services and the multi-agency Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP).
- c) The DSL will be invited to a CDOP Rapid Response Meeting within 48 hours and information sharing will be with prior agreement of the family.
- d) If the student is over 18, CDOP is not activated, but the rest of this policy is adhered to.

- e) The public health suspected suicide lead will liaise with The DSL to discuss available support for the academy and its community and will mobilise the rapid support team (CAMHS, CHUMS, school nursing service and the Samaritans service).
- f) A whole school response meeting will be arranged at the school within 3 days of notification to coordinate support required.
- g) A 6-month learning review will be arranged by the pupil health suspected suicide lead in agreement with the DSL and the Principal.

The following procedure in school will happen to confirmation of death:

- a) As soon as formal notification has been received as detailed in the Community Action Plan, The DSL will contact the parents to offer condolences and discuss their wishes. In this conversation, the relatives will be assured that no announcement regarding the death of their loved one will be made without them phoning the Academy first to say that this is the right time for them to let people know of the death. The DSL will await this contact. When contacted, confirm the information, check it, record it and check it again. (It is essential to have the facts confirmed)
- b) The DSL will notify the Academy bereavement team consisting of: The Principal, the welfare lead, the safeguarding leads, the head of year. Emergency contact details are shared with The DSL.
- c) After liaising with the pupil's family, The DSL or The Principal will notify other staff members and governors using guidance at appendix A (Suspected pupil suicide community action plan), with the understanding that details shared may be unsubstantiated and/or sensitive and may need to be kept confidential at this stage. Notification will initially be made to those involved with the deceased, followed by other staff members. The DSL will notify the school administration team to ensure standard pupil correspondence to the family is stopped.
- d) After liaising with the pupil's family, pupils close to the deceased will be informed by a familiar member of staff individually-ideally face-to-face using the script guidance at appendix A of the suspected pupil suicide community action plan. Other pupils will be informed concurrently in class tutor groups following appendix A of the suspected pupil suicide community action plan. Information will be restricted to the facts and in line with the family's wishes.

4a The sudden death of a parent or close relative

We acknowledge that in the case of death of a student's parent or close relative, it is best that a family member breaks the news with the support of an appropriate member of staff. If this is not possible, The DSL will ensure someone suitable to break the news to the student or member of staff concerned.

The news of the death will be given to all relevant staff as soon as the permission of the family is given for this to be released.

4b The death of more than one student (For example on a school trip)

Should we receive such news, members of the bereavement team will be called together to be briefed with the salient facts and to decide what steps are to be taken. Information may already have been 'sent' from the incident.

We will consider:

- Who will contact parents, if necessary?
- Who will meet with parents who arrive at school and where?
- Who will inform the staff? When will they be informed and where?

- Who will inform the students? When will they be informed and where?

It is imperative that rumours and interpretations of the truth be avoided. In a case of multiple deaths there is bound to be some media interest. Members of the bereavement team responsible for dealing with the media will prepare all necessary statements, supported by the Appendix C of the Suspected Pupil Suicide Community Action Plan. Such statements should deal only with the facts in as sympathetic a way as possible. We will agree a format of response to telephone inquiries, including approaches from the media.

4c The death of a member of staff

We acknowledge that if such a death occurs it is doubly traumatic for the staff; supporting the students but also grieving on a personal level for a colleague. **Information of a death must only be released with the explicit permission of the relatives of the member of staff.**

Should we receive the news of the death of a member of staff; the bereavement team will be called together to seek an appropriate way forward. If it is on the school site:

- Who will contact the next of kin?
- Who will meet with the next of kin who arrive at school? Where will they meet?

Confidentiality in this situation must be upheld until such time as the next of kin and family wish to make the situation public. The official school contact with the family will be the DSL

We will use the guidance notes below: -

- a) Communicate to the staff how the announcement will be made at the appropriate time once the permission of the next of kin has been expressed to the DSL or The Principal.
- b) Gather together the staff and inform them of the news.
- c) Allow time for staff to respond and to express grief.
- d) Allow the staff to share how they feel about what has happened.
- e) Inform the teachers that they may need to address what has happened in their classes.
- f) Impress on the staff what facts are to be announced to the students. To avoid rumours, exaggerations and development of the event, the agreed facts should be stated simply by The DSL, the Bereavement Team Leader.
- g) It must be remembered that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotional feelings. Some will deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some may show feelings of anger. There may be tears and distress; everyone will react in their own way.
- h) Under such circumstances some staff may have difficulty coping with the loss themselves. Colleagues will need to be aware of those staff who seem particularly affected by the death.

4e Managing anticipated death and the terminally ill

We acknowledge that the anticipated death of a member of our community, whilst very difficult to manage, enables us to establish appropriate communication with the family to support those likely to be most affected before and after the death.

We acknowledge our responsibility to support adults, children and young people within our community who have to face the painful reality that a parent or someone close to them is terminally ill. For this reason, the school will work with the support agencies surrounding the death of a child.

When supporting children and young people who are experiencing anticipatory grief, we will:

- Confirm the facts concerning the student's sick relative or friend.
- Communicate the information as appropriate (in line with school procedures and the family's wishes).
- Never give false hope to the child or young person.
- Discover what the student has been told of the illness.
- Allow the student to talk freely about the sick person in an appropriate setting.
- Enable the student to talk freely about how he/she is feeling.
- Be honest! If we do not know the answer to a question we will say so.
- Not inform the student about any progression concerning the illness unless the family have given permission and requested us to do so.

Long term support for those who grieve

We will offer students access to a range of age related support services and we will signpost students and parents to the relevant agencies.

Support for staff who support bereaved students and colleagues

We will ensure that all staff are familiar with this policy and these procedures for responding to bereavement and will offer training as part of our staff induction programme. Whenever necessary we will request additional support from colleagues or from external support agencies. Suggested support for pupils and staff:

- Avoid talking about the specific case but discuss the topic of death and suicide in more general terms.
- Provide facilities for students/colleagues who require a quiet area and offer opportunities for further support.
- Ensure that relevant support resources are communicated to all staff and to the school community. See Appendix D from the suspected pupil suicide action plan.
- Reassure pupils that grief is a normal response to death, and there is no wrong or right way to grieve. Take everyone's expression of grief seriously and offer support.
- Recognise that it is natural for pupils and staff to discuss the event but encourage all pupil and staff to be mindful that any communication of social media must be respectful as it is in the public domain and that any messages they read may not be factual.
- Recognise that pupil distress might manifest in their behavior and/or performance.
- Continue the conversation about the death in a reassuring and safe way to reduce stigma and encourage openness. Use helpful language when talking about suicide, following the guidance in appendix E of the suspected pupil suicide community action plan.
- Debrief colleagues and "check in" with pupils and encourage an ethos of care and support throughout the school.
- Ensure that staff know what risk factors and signs to look out for in colleagues and pupils including self-harm.
- Strike a balance between sensitivity to those who are grieving and in school with the need to maintain school routine.
- Be sensitive to the impact of the death within different faiths.
- Consult with the family about disseminating funeral arrangements.
- Consult with the family about a short-term memorial site, but avoid romanticizing suicide with a prolonged memorial site. To be discussed with the bereavement team and the family.
- Support to continue in PSHE lessons.

5. Links with other Policies

This policy has been written in conjunction with:

- School guidance: responding in the event of a suspected pupil suicide (Central Bedfordshire) 2019
- Suspected pupil suicide community action plan (Bedfordshire Prepared) July 2019

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

In the event that this policy is enacted, a debrief of process will be implemented post event. All parties discussed in this document will evaluate the process.

7. Implementation and Review

This policy will be made known to all staff, parents/carers and governors, and published on the Academy website. Copies are also available upon request from the Academy office. This policy will be reviewed every two years or as required.

8. Author and Date

Clare Hood, Assistant Principal – March 2020

Reviewed CLH/TAR - March 2021

Reviewed CLH/TAR - February 2022

Reviewed TAR – January 2022

Reviewed TAR – January 2023

Reviewed TAR – January 2025

Date ratified by Governors – February 2025

Next review date – January 2027