

Bereavement and Loss – guidelines

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1. Introduction

At Olive Academies we understand that bereavement is an experience which is likely to be faced by all members of our school community at some point. We appreciate that there will be significant challenges when the loss is of a member of our school community, a child or staff member. Pupils will need to be supported when they experience family bereavements and other significant losses during their lives.

These guidelines have been created to provide steps to be followed after a bereavement. The aim is to be supportive to both pupils 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 these guidelines have been constructed to guide us on how to deal professionally, sensitively and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances.

Olive Academies is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and pupils. 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 supports and prepares pupils for coping with separation or loss of a loved one, either through death, divorce or separation.

Following a bereavement:

We believe that children and adults alike have the right to:

- be given space and time to grieve
- be given or signposted to 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.

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.

The management of bereavement in an Olive academy

A universally accepted procedure outline will 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. One of our main concerns must be the immediate family of the deceased and as a school we state our commitment to any such family as may need practical, emotional and ongoing support.

2. Guidelines

1. The school will respond in a planned and agreed manner, so that all staff know what is expected and can contribute in a way that is consistent with the ethos of the school.
2. The headteacher will co-ordinate the school's response and be vital in creating an appropriate atmosphere. They will be the first point of contact and will liaise with all parties concerned and affected. They will allocate a specific person to support the bereaved. This person would, in the later stages of bereavement, offer support and check on the progress of any students 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 could include the Designated Safeguarding Lead and a Pastoral Lead.
4. The headteacher or their representative will inform all staff of the death(s)
5. Where possible students and parents/carers will be informed at the same time and as promptly as circumstances will allow. Students in school will be informed face to face, parents or carers by letter/email on the same day. Absentees from school will be noted to ensure that they are also informed on their return by their coach or appropriate tutor. Staff who are absent will be informed by their line manager.

6. The school should ensure that they do not deny young people the opportunity to grieve and mourn within the traditions of their own culture and religious beliefs.
7. In line with each academy's emergency plan, the headteacher will agree with OA central who should liaise with the media and if appropriate the police.

3. The death of a pupil

The school may be notified in a number of ways:

- It is usually parents or a close relative that inform the school directly about the death. The person answering the phone will put them through to the most senior member of staff on site.
- Where death occurs in the holidays or at weekends parents or close family will usually contact whoever they can. Whichever member of staff is contacted they must contact the Head Teacher as a matter of urgency to inform them.
- However, deaths are often reported on social media and it may be that members of staff (particularly those living within the community) may discover the news before senior staff.
- In this instance staff should immediately contact the most senior member of the school team possible and that person will then assume responsibility for the dissemination of the information.

4. Death of a pupil on the school site

- If any member of staff has concerns regarding a child's health, they will contact a first aider and a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT)
- In the case of serious concern, the school will call for an ambulance. Due to the seriousness of the situation, this decision can be taken by the first aider or a member of the SLT.
- The incident will be logged on CPOMS by the first aider and any other staff attending the incident.
- Inform the headteacher or, in their absence, the most senior member of staff on site.
- The headteacher, DSL or member of SLT will then ensure that the parents are contacted and seek their agreement to meet the ambulance at the hospital.
- If the child stops breathing a trained school staff member will administer CPR. In some cases, parents may have given the school a protocol to be followed in the event of a serious health incidence.
- Once the ambulance has arrived at school, the child is given over to their care and it is the ambulance team's decision as to where the child is taken, or which form of treatment is administered.
- In the rare event where the parents have given the school a protocol to be followed in the event of an emergency medical issue occurring - e.g. no resuscitation - this protocol will be handed to the paramedics.
- Any change in circumstance following the first call to parents should be reported to them as soon as possible. **NB:** Staff must not impart shocking or worrying news to a parent if they are travelling in a car alone.
- Once the child is placed in the ambulance a member of staff will be appointed to travel to the hospital either in the ambulance or in their own transport. The purpose of this is to be a familiar face to the child's family on their arrival at the hospital. This person will remain in regular contact with headteacher or designated member of staff.

- The headteacher will notify the Trust and the local authority if there is a death in school at the earliest opportunity. The headteacher agree next steps with OA central leaders in line with the academy's emergency plan
- The headteacher will agree with OA central where all press enquiries should be directed to - the Headteacher, the CEO of the Trust or Chair of Trustees.

5. If a child dies on a school trip (refer to emergency plan for further step by step guidance)

- If a crisis situation occurs whilst a child is out on an educational trip, then the adult with the child - or the teacher in charge - should telephone for an ambulance first and then contact the school to inform the headteacher.
- The school will then take the responsibility of contacting the parents.
- Once the ambulance team reaches the child, the child becomes the responsibility of the ambulance team and they will direct any subsequent actions.
- The offsite visit protocol gives guidance for such situations and should be followed.
- A written record of what has happened should be made as soon as possible – see section 2 of the emergency plan.
- The school will notify the CEO of the Trust and the local authority at the earliest opportunity, if there is a death out of school. The above procedures and protocols along with the academy's emergency plan guidance will then apply.

6. Sharing information

It is important to agree, with parents/carers, before the school can take on the role of informing concerned parties within, or outside, the school community. There can be no definitive list of people to contact and, therefore, it will be different for each child. The school should ensure that all people who are close to the child are told in a sensitive and supportive manner rather than risk them hearing it 'on the grapevine'. The school needs to ensure it does not add to the sorrow by leaving people feeling marginalised.

The following people should be considered:

- Current school staff not in school that day – including therapeutic support staff, counsellors etc
- Previous school staff who worked closely with the child
- Social Work team if applicable
- SEND team
- Chair of Academy Advisory Board and Chair of Trustees
- Other professionals who work with the child – e.g. Ed Psych

7. Informing children and young people of a death within the school community

The process for telling the pupils will be decided by the headteacher following consultation with senior leaders. For example, the age of pupils will be considered and a decision made as to who the best person/people would be to speak to the children about the death.

We are aware that children and young people, even very young children will want to know what happened, how it happened, why it happened and perhaps most importantly of all, what happens next? We recognise that children and young people have a healthy curiosity and if they are not

informed of the circumstances, or feel they are unable to ask questions, their normal grief process may be affected.

The following guidelines are to be used when informing children of the death of another pupil, a teacher or other member of staff:

- Identify those children who had a long-term and/or close relationship with the deceased so they may be told together as a separate group.
- Pupils with specific needs including pupils with past history of loss; pupils with a learning disability and pupils who have difficulty managing their emotions or behaviour will be identified and informed appropriately.
- The pupils in the school community will be informed either in their classes or in assemblies.
- In an attempt to reduce the shock of the news of the death to the children and young people the language used to inform them will be carefully chosen and delivered by a senior member of staff.
- The school will signpost pupils to or seek direct, additional support from external agencies/charities to ensure all children and young people feel supported.

8. Informing staff, trustees and AAB members of a death within the school community

A death can affect the school community in different ways and depends on:

- The role that the deceased person had in school.
- How well known they were in the local community.
- Circumstances surrounding the death, particularly suicide, or other violent or sudden deaths.

Adults and children benefit from being kept informed of a death. Rumour and gossip can be very damaging and can lead to the attitude that the death is not a topic to talk about. The following guidelines may help when informing staff and governance volunteers:

- A staff meeting will be held as soon as practicable. Identify absent staff.
- If a death has occurred in a holiday period all staff will be informed on the first day of term or through the school's urgent communication system.
- The headteacher will inform staff what happened leading up to the death and give a factual explanation of how the death occurred.
- Be prepared for obvious upset and feelings of anger/guilt. People may connect the incident to their own personal experience of bereavement, so feelings about past bereavements may need to be discussed.
- To enable absent staff to feel part of a caring team, arrangements should be made to inform them over the telephone if a personal visit is impractical. Consider the relationship between the absent colleague and the deceased.
- For a death that may attract media coverage (e.g. if the member of staff or pupil (pupil family) are well-known within the community or died tragically), identify a nominated spokesperson (e.g. headteacher, CEO) to provide a 'media statement' at an agreed time, as a way of dealing with media intrusion. Liaison with the individual's family is essential, prior to reporting

information to the media, in order to respect their privacy and wishes. Refer to OA's emergency plan for guidance – OA's communication manager will be able to support with this.

- Establish good lines of communication with all relevant parties, this will always include family and staff, in some cases it may involve communication with emergency services, health, the local safeguarding team, Social Care, and other support services.
- Provide details of someone who can be available to talk things through with a member of staff, parent or child if they are finding the situation particularly hard. This person could advise the family of support services available if required.
- The headteacher will prepare a letter/email to parents and carers to inform them of the situation.
- Staff will be provided with a script about what has happened so that consistent information is given to all of the pupils. Guiding responses to difficult questions that staff may be asked by the children will be included.
- Encourage everyone to consider how to meet their own support needs and take care of themselves, this may be from friends, family, support services and/or buddying up with other members of staff.
- Provide contact details for support in your local area.

9. The funeral

- It is essential to sound out the family's wishes. The family may well welcome involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to keep things private.
- The headteacher and/or the deputy headteacher will make arrangements for the school to be represented at the funeral, and identify which staff and pupils may want to attend, together with the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport. For some schools it is appropriate to close, for others it is not, consequently difficult decisions will sometimes have to be made concerning attendance.
- Will flowers be sent and/or a collection made? Involve staff and pupils in the decision.
- Cultural and religious implications need consideration.
- If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed. Past experience has shown that this can be helpful in their grieving.

10. Informing parents of the death of a pupil or member of staff

We consider that it is vital that parents and carers are provided with information as soon as possible so that they can support their children and help them make sense of what has happened. The headteacher, possibly the Chair of Trustees and the Trust CEO will communicate information in relation to the death(s) to parents/carers via email or letter.

11. Support for pupils

- In most cases, each child will have a favoured member of staff to approach to speak to when they need support with their emotions.
- Staff from external agencies who are regularly in the academy, e.g. the OA counsellor

- It may be that there are faith leaders locally who can offer spiritual support to children and their families.
- The PSHE co-ordinator will ensure that we have suitable books and other materials to help children discuss death and come to terms with loss.
- Areas for reflection may benefit pupils. The provision of a calm environment in which to meet with others and spend some time in reflective mode could offer support to individuals.
- Some children may be further supported by the onsite counsellor or a referral for therapeutic support or for focused counselling.

12. Memorial assemblies

It may be appropriate to hold a memory assembly for the child. Staff need to be able to show pupils that it is perfectly normal to feel upset at the loss of a friend and that helpful rituals, prayers, and remembering can be shared in a manageable way together.

Schools may also work with pupils and staff to decide on other ways of remembering those who have died. Schools may develop a prayer garden/outside space for quiet reflection, have a dedicate bench or seating area etc.

13. Transition

It is vitally important to ensure that if a child has experienced bereavement that this information is passed on to the relevant persons when they move on to a new class or school. This is particularly the case in our academies when pupils are returning to mainstream settings.

14. Support for staff

All staff have access to the Employee Assistance Programme offered by Health Assured - 0844 891 0352 – who can provide support. Consideration would also be given to:

- provision of 1:1 counselling within the academy for staff
- allocation of a specific room to enable staff to meet and share their thoughts in a confidential space
- providing information about accessing bereavement support outside school, e.g from CRUSE
- working with the local authority to access any additional sources of support that are relevant

Where **death has been through suicide** children, families and staff may benefit from the support from charities such as Papyrus, the Samaritans or Winston’s Wish.

<https://papyrus-uk.org/>

<https://www.winstonswish.org/death-through-suicide/>

<https://www.samaritans.org/>

15. The death of a member of staff

All of the principles and procedures listed above apply to the death of a staff member.

Please also refer to the school’s Health and Safety Policy regarding a reportable incident – RIDDOR. hse.gov.uk/riddor/reportable-incidents.htm

16. Talking to children about the death of someone close

When talking to a child about the death of someone close, the language used, and the child's need for information and understanding, will vary according to their age and developmental stage and the specific cause of the death. However, the child's basic needs will always remain the same.

17. Support for bereaved pupils who may have lost someone close to them/in their family

People are often at a loss as to what to say or do to help a child or young person who has been bereaved by the death of someone important to them. Every situation is different, and children will be affected to a greater or lesser degree, dependent on the circumstances of the death and the nature of the relationship they had with the person who has died. When thinking about how to support a bereaved pupil, it is suggested that staff consult the 'managing bereavement guide' produced by Child Bereavement UK. Sections 6 and 7 provide guidance on how to support pupils in this case. This is available here: <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/managing-bereavement-a-guide-for-primary-schools>

18. Sources of support

Winston's Wish - www.winstonswish.org.uk – a useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community.

- National Freephone Helpline*: [08088 020 021](tel:08088020021) (open 9am – 5pm, Monday – Friday)
- ASK email support: ask@winstonswish.org
- Crisis Messenger: Text WW to 85258 (available 24/7)
- Online chat: [click here](#) (available 12-4pm, Wednesdays and Fridays)

www.childbereavementuk.org.uk-a bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

<http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk/> An organisation offering bereavement support

Appendix A – guidance on COVID-19

The following information is taken from Winston’s Wish website in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although COVID-19 is a shocking new situation, our general guidance on talking to children about the death of someone close holds true. Put simply this would be:

- Use simple, direct language appropriate to their level of understanding
- Use the terms ‘died’, ‘dead’, and ‘death’ – euphemisms such as ‘we’ve lost Grandpa’ or ‘Grandma has gone to another place’ are confusing. Children are helped to understand by hearing the language that fits this new experience
- Keep children informed about what has happened and what will happen (e.g. about the funeral)
- Check how much they have understood
- Answer questions openly. If you don’t know an answer, say you will find out and come back to them. If you feel the answer is too difficult for them to hear, explain that honestly
- Repeat explanations more than once
- Reassure them that they are not to blame
- Allow and encourage the safe sharing of feelings and thoughts
- Listen to their feelings, worries, memories

Ways to explain to a child that someone has died

Some suggested words:

“We know that all living things will die someday. Flowers, animals, trees, butterflies, people all die eventually...”

“... however, the great majority of people will die when they are very old.”

“Occasionally, someone will die before they are old because, for example, of an accident or serious illness.”

“When someone dies, their body stops working and they are no longer able to do the things they could when they were alive, such as move or talk or hug or play.”

“Sadly, [name] has died. Everyone wishes they had not died and had lived for many more years. However, their body was not able to keep working and so they died. Their heart stopped beating, their lungs stopped breathing and their brain stopped thinking, and so they died.”

“We are very healthy and we’re going to do all we can to keep that way, because I want to be around to [play with my great grandchildren/travel to Mars/celebrate the year 2100].”

Explaining that someone has died through coronavirus

There are some complicating factors about deaths from COVID-19 that may affect children

- **Unpredictability:** It's not only very old, very frail people who are dying. The person they know may have been a little frail before they contracted the virus or they may have appeared perfectly well.
- **Suddenness:** People may sicken and die quite rapidly; children will have little time to adjust to a rapidly changing future.
- **Distance:** Children won't be able to spend time with their dying relative, won't be able to touch or hug them or even be in the same room.
- **Fear:** People may react to the news that this person had died with instinctive fear rather than instinctive comfort.
- **Separation:** Children and young people will be physically distant from those who might support them – friends, teachers, wider family.
- **Support structures:** The current disruption of normal routine may mean children and young people have fewer places in which to switch off and focus on something else: for example, school, sports club, etc.
- **Anger:** Children and young people may feel angry about things they perceive to have contributed to this death: people being slow to self-isolate, lack of ventilators etc.
- **Anxiety:** While children and young people will worry about other family members dying after any death, in the present situation, such anxiety is sharper and less easy to soothe.
- **Lack of 'specialness':** More and more people will be or will know someone affected by a death due to coronavirus. The death of a child's important person won't receive as much attention as before this crisis.
- **Constantly reminded:** It will be hard for children to avoid hearing other stories of people affected by coronavirus.
- **Absence of rituals:** With heavy restrictions on funerals, children and young people will have less chance to 'say goodbye' in a formal sense

Some of these factors can make it more complicated to talk about. For example, it will be harder to explain why their special person died, (when perhaps someone else with similar symptoms didn't) as there is much still unknown about how the virus works. It may also feel harder to assure children that other people they know won't die yet.

Telling a child that someone important has coronavirus

Hopefully there will be time, even if only a short time, to prepare a child for the news that someone important has coronavirus. Here are some guiding words:

"I have something important to tell you. [Name] has become ill, and s/he has the illness called 'coronavirus'. S/he is feeling ill, has a bad cough and feels hot. The illness means that s/he needs to stay in hospital. We won't be able to visit them for at least a week. Perhaps you'd like to draw a picture/make a card/send a message to let her/him know you're thinking about them. The doctors and

nurses are all working really hard to get [name] better and we're all hoping that s/he will be well again soon."

Telling a child or young person that someone they know has died through coronavirus

"I have something very sad and difficult to tell you. [Name] died. You remember I told you that s/he had this illness called 'coronavirus' and that everyone was doing all they could to make them better? Sadly, despite all that [name] and the doctors and nurses did, the illness became too strong and their body could not get better. Their lungs stopped working and their heart stopped beating and they died."

Talking to children about the death through coronavirus of other people/people they don't know

Children and young people will also be aware of people outside their family and circle of friends who have the virus and there will be people they have heard of who might die. This is likely to make children wonder about the safety of those close to them. Acknowledging their anxiety is important, alongside realistic reassurance.

"It seems so shocking, doesn't it, that [name of public figure] has died from the coronavirus? I know we didn't know them, but it still feels very sad. I wanted to say that, here in this family, we are doing all the right things to avoid catching the virus. I know it can get dull sometimes, but my job is to keep you safe and we'll do all we can to keep us all well."

Balancing truth and reassurance

One continual challenge for parents and carers supporting children facing bereavement or those who have been bereaved is hitting the right mixture of truth and reassurance. Children are expert at knowing if they are not being told the truth; if there are things that seem too difficult to share, explain that.

Equally, they will know the difference between genuine and false reassurance. Rather than saying "nobody we know is going to die", maybe consider saying: "from all I've heard, it is extremely unlikely that anyone we know will die and we will do everything we can do to keep safe."

Look after yourself

Super-parents or super-carers don't really exist. Simply doing the best you can at this time is all that your children need. Take time to look after yourself too.

Reach out for support

We have many resources on our website to help parents and carers support grieving children.

The Winston's Wish Helpline is continuing to operate during this period and can offer guidance, support and information, call 08088 020 021. To protect our staff, our Helpline is currently operating a remote service, we ask that you leave a message on our answering machine and one of our experienced practitioners will call you back.

Other articles you might find helpful:

[Coronavirus: Supporting bereaved children and young people](#)

[Death through serious illness](#)

[Ways to manage your anxiety about coronavirus](#)

[Should children attend a funeral?](#)

[Preparing a child to attend a funeral](#)

[Alternative ways to say goodbye when a funeral isn't possible](#)