



CORNWALL EDUCATION LEARNING TRUST

Bereavement Policy

1) Introduction

- a) This policy provides guidance for schools in the event of a bereavement within the school community. 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 this policy has been constructed to guide on how to deal professionally, sensitively and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances.
- b) The CELT policy is to provide honest, factual information, to pupils and staff appropriately and sensitively. In the event that a staff member suffers a bereavement of a member of their family, they may be entitled to compassionate leave as detailed in the CELT Leave of Absence Policy.
- c) ***At the time of writing the nation is engaged in a period of social distancing. This means that only a small minority of pupils and staff are physically on school sites and so a nuanced approach is required.***
- d) CELT is committed to supporting the emotional health and wellbeing of all staff and pupils. The school will provide immediate pastoral care to affected pupils and staff and where appropriate, provide a safe place for them to come for timeout, comfort and reflection. Further guidance and support can be sought from Penhaligon's Friends, the Local Education Authority, CaMHS and other organisations as required. External agencies might be engaged to provide immediate support/counselling to students.

2) Death of a pupil

- a) **During this time where most children are not attending school, families are likely to contact whoever they know best in the school community. In that instance the member of staff who takes the call should immediately contact the Headteacher.** The Headteacher will normally be contacted by the family and will assume responsibility for the dissemination of the information. (See Appendix A for Bereavement Response Plan).
- b) Wherever possible, the Headteacher will contact the bereaved family/families to offer condolences and discuss the school's response. The wishes of the family will be respected and taken into consideration within the response to the situation.
- c) **Communication**
 - i) It is important to agree with the family 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 school will consider those with special education and complex needs when giving bad news and information and ensure additional support is available to them.

- ii) The school will notify CELT of any death and the Local Authority of the death of a pupil.
- iii) The Headteacher will respond to any media enquiries about the death in liaison with the Trust Lead of CELT.

3) The Death of a Member of Staff

- a) All of the principles and procedures listed above apply to the death of a staff member. The Headteacher should contact the family to offer condolences and discuss the school's response. The wishes of the family will be respected and taken into consideration within the response to the situation.
- b) All school staff should be told of a colleague's death at the earliest opportunity in a supportive and sensitive manner. This includes school staff who may be absent at the time.

4) Communicate with Pupils about a death

- a) Pupils should be told as soon as possible of a person's death. This is to prevent them learning from some other, possibly inappropriate, source. Whenever possible they should hear the news from someone close to them, in familiar surroundings. In line with this, the news should be given to parents/carers who will then have the opportunity to inform their children themselves. We should do this by sending an email or a letter in a sealed envelope. It is very important to tell the truth as far as it is known. Even 'white lies' will have to be renegotiated later on and therefore **should not be told**.
- b) Children may not take everything in at this stage. They will go over and over the facts later, asking more questions and gradually assimilating the information. Do not worry about having to keep on giving the same answers.
- c) These points encapsulate the overall message in helping bereaved children:
 - i) Try to maintain feelings of security, of being cared for and loved.
 - ii) Maintain all the necessary practical care.
 - iii) Be honest at the child's level of understanding.
 - iv) Continue to talk and communicate.
 - v) Do not pretend to believe what you don't believe.
 - vi) Try to understand the child's feelings and reassure where possible.
 - vii) Don't be afraid to say 'I don't know'.
 - viii) Don't be afraid to share your own feelings.
 - ix) Remember there are others who can help.
 - x) Don't be afraid to admit to colleagues and family that you can't cope at any particular time.

5) Communicate with the wider school community about a death

- i) All School Staff
- ii) Previous school staff who worked closely with the child
- iii) Social Work team if applicable
- iv) Chair of LGB
- v) TRUST LEADS of CELT
- vi) Other professionals who work with the child – Ed Psych

- vii) Other parents – if children have been informed, the school needs to send a note to parents informing them of the loss, and they may need to support or comfort their children.
- viii) Some parents may need to be telephoned if their relationship is closer but whom the family may not have informed.

6) The funeral

- a) In usual circumstances the family would be asked what involvement they would like the school to have in the funeral. **At this present time only immediate family are able to attend funerals.**
- b) A donation from the school or Trust should be considered in memory of the child to a charity of the family's choosing.
- c) If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed.

7) On-Going Support (see Appendix B for a list of organisations providing support)

a) For staff:

- i) Following bereavement, it is only to be expected that some members of staff will be emotionally affected and would benefit from the provision of some time for reflection. The following support may be helpful:
- ii) The chance to meet ("**virtually at the current time**") with other staff.
- iii) Availability of information about accessing bereavement support outside of school, for example: CRUSE, or the confidential counselling available online for Education professionals.

b) For Pupils:

- i) **At this time, the burden of support will be from their immediate family.** All teaching staff should make themselves available to talk on the phone to children who are particularly struggling and require extra support.

c) For the Family:

- i) Communicate with the family straight away and offer support. Send a letter of condolence from the school.
- ii) Give parents and family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died.
- iii) Open a condolences book or hold a collection /flowers to be sent as appropriate.
- iv) Invite parents/family to any commemorative events held by the school in the future.
- v) If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed.

8) Responsibilities

- a) **The designated person** within the school who has overall responsibility for support and liaison in event of a death or traumatic loss is the Headteacher.

b) His/her responsibilities are:

- i) Policy development and review, involving pupils, staff, governors, parents/carers and relevant local agencies.
- ii) Implementing the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
- iii) Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities.
- iv) Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies.
- v) Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary schools.
- vi) Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff.

Bereavement Response Plan

If a pupil, staff member, or someone within our school community is affected by a death, our response will be guided by the table below. There may be situations where it is more appropriate for another person, in place of the one stated, to carry out that role.

Action	
Confirm facts regarding death from a reliable source e.g. family member, professional services	Head Teacher or nominated Deputy/Assistant Head Teacher.
Agree with the family who will be informed of the death, and the manner in which it will be carried out	Head Teacher or nominated Deputy/Assistant Head Teacher.
Inform ALL Staff and TRUST LEADS of CELT Consider absent staff	Head Teacher or nominated Deputy/Assistant Head Teacher.
Brief all staff about possibility of press involvement and use of Facebook	Headteacher to delegate e.g. Deputy/Assistant Head Teacher – relevant year group responsibilities.
Contact bereaved family and send letter of condolence	Head Teacher or nominated Deputy/Assistant Head Teacher.
If appropriate and within current guidelines, visit family	Head Teacher or nominated Deputy/Assistant Head Teacher.
Liaise with family regarding school's response, including funeral	Head Teacher or nominated Deputy/Assistant Head Teacher.
Inform pupils <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In all settings (with the exception of the 6th Form), inform parents first to allow them the opportunity to tell their children - Consider smaller friendship groups first - Use a prepared format - Identify any vulnerable pupils & those with any complex needs - Consider absent pupils 	Class Teacher/Form Tutor of class or, of those siblings or family in school.
Notify parents (refer to model letters within policy (Appendix C) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By telephone - By letter 	Head Teacher
Contact Local Education Authority and/or Penhaligon's Friends for additional support	SENDCo/ Pastoral Lead/Head of Year
For a child returning to school arrange a meeting with them to discuss return to school and support needs	Head Teacher, SENDCo or Pastoral Lead/Head of Year
Liaise with family regarding special remembrance event/memorial	Headteacher, Class/Form Teacher or Head of Year if appropriate.
Monitor on-going needs of pupil/family	Class/Form Teacher or Head of Year.

List of Online Resources and Information

www.penthaligonsfriends.org.uk A Cornish charity supporting bereaved children, young people, parents and carers throughout the county.

www.schooladvice.co.uk The Schools Advisory Service offers confidential advice and support.

www.winstonswish.org.uk A useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community. Has particularly good advice regarding talking to bereaved children about the Coronavirus.

www.chums.info A bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

www.childbereavement.org.uk A bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

www.juliesplace.com A support resource for bereaved siblings

www.bhf.org.uk/smallcreature British Heart Foundation site to help children come to terms with loss using cartoon creatures. An animated film and we have a printed pack to go with it.

www.bbc.co.uk/.../bereavement/bereavement_helpchildren.shtml Information on the way bereavement affects children

<http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk> An organisation offering local bereavement support to both adults and children

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/index.htm> Federation of organisations

Example letter informing parents of a pupil's death following long term illness***School letter head******Date***

Dear Parent/Carer,

It is with huge sadness that I write to inform you of the death of one of our Year [...] pupils, [*insert name*]

As many of you will be aware [*insert name*] had been battling with a [*insert brief summary of illness e.g rare form of cancer*] for a considerable time and as a school we have worked hard to support both [*insert name*] and [*his/her*] family.

[*Insert name of school*] is a school founded on family and togetherness, and it is always our aim to support our children and our staff to the best of our ability. Therefore, I have already been in contact with a range of bereavement support professionals so that we can draw upon their support to help us all, children and adults alike, to find a way through this difficult time.

Please be aware that the school has not told the children of [*insert name*] passing today, but are providing you with the opportunity to convey this yourself. We will then talk to the children tomorrow, class by class, as appropriate to their age and the capacity in which they knew [insert name]. We realise that many of our pupils, especially those in [*insert year groups*] may not have known [insert name] and therefore we will not routinely discuss [*him/her*] with the younger classes in particular. However, we will monitor all children closely and provide relevant support.

Over the days and weeks ahead we will continue to provide bereavement support and I will keep you informed as to the nature of this; we are also able to provide you with further information regarding support services should you require further involvement. In addition, as a school we will begin to think of how we can honour [*insert name's*] memory and celebrate [*his/her life*], and once again will keep you informed as they emerge.

Please do not hesitate to let me know if there is anything further you feel we can do to help.

All best wishes,

Headteacher

Example letter informing parents of a pupil's unexpected death

School letter head

Date

Dear Parent/Carer,

It is with huge sadness that I write to inform you of the death of one of our Year [...] pupils, [*insert name*]

[insert name] was [insert nature of death e.g. unexpectedly taken seriously ill recently and sadly did not recover, involved in a tragic accident and sadly did not recover]. Our hearts go out to [insert name's] family and friends and I have sent condolences on behalf of us all here.

[Insert name of school] is a school founded on family and togetherness, and it is always our aim to support our children and our staff to the best of our ability. Therefore, I have already been in contact with a range of bereavement support professionals so that we can draw upon their support to help us all, children and adults alike, to find a way through this difficult time.

Please be aware that the school has not told the children of *[insert name]* passing today, but are providing you with the opportunity to convey this yourself. We will then talk to the children tomorrow, class by class, as appropriate to their age and the capacity in which they knew *[insert name]*. We realise that many of our pupils, especially those in *[insert year groups]* may not have known *[insert name]* and therefore we will not routinely discuss *[him/her]* with the younger classes in particular. However, we will monitor all children closely and provide relevant support.

Over the days and weeks ahead we will continue to provide bereavement support and I will keep you informed as to the nature of this; we are also able to provide you with further information regarding support services should you require further involvement. In addition, as a school we will begin to think of how we can honour *[insert name's]* memory and celebrate *[his/her life]*, and once again will keep you informed as they emerge.

Please do not hesitate to let me know if there is anything further you feel we can do to help.

All best wishes,

Headteacher

Example letter informing parents of a staff member's unexpected death

School letter head

Date

Dear Parent/Carer,

It is with deep sadness that I write to tell you that our much-loved teacher *[insert name]* passed away on *[insert date]*

[insert name] was *[insert nature of death e.g taken seriously ill recently and sadly did not recover]*. *[She/He]* has been a teacher at *[name of school]* for *[...]* years and during this time has been a wonderful teacher, a great friend and a much-loved and respected part of our team. We are all going to miss *[him/her]* dearly.

Please be aware that the school has not told the children of *[insert name]* passing today; I am writing to inform you so that you are now able to explain and talk to the children about this. Our aim is to inform you now, so that you can decide how best to support them with this news. We would advise that, if appropriate, you talk to your children about this and provide them with simple, factual information. All children react differently to sad news, it is important to give your children time to ask questions and that you try to answer them as honestly as you can and allow them to express their feelings.

Tomorrow all children will have the opportunity to talk through with their teacher, senior leaders, TAs, or any adults which they are close to. Children in Year *[...]* who knew *[him/her]* the most, will spend more time in class remembering *[insert name]* and celebrating their life.

If you feel you would like further advice or guidance on how to support your child with this news, then please contact Penhaligon's Friends on 01209 210624. There is also a recommended document to support parents/carers which we have attached.

This sad news will leave all of those who have had the pleasure to know *[insert name]* with a mixture of emotions. We are a very strong school community and I am sure that everyone will be supportive of each other.

Our thoughts are with *[insert name's]* family at this difficult time. We will make available a condolence book, which will be in the staff room for anyone who would like to write in it before and after drop-off and collection times throughout next week. This is something that, in time we will pass on to the family.

Please do not hesitate to let me know if there is anything further you feel we can do to help.

All best wishes,

Headteacher