

# Impact Education MAT

## Bereavement Policy



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

We understand that bereavement is an experience which will be faced by all members of our academy community at some point. It will be a more difficult experience when the loss is of a member of that academy community - a child or staff member.

We believe that it is an issue to be addressed openly and guiding principles need to be outlined and developed in an objective manner. This policy will deal with bereavement following the death of an academy pupil or staff member or a member of their family.

## **Aims**

The Trust believes in adopting a holistic approach to the support and care of students and staff. This approach is underpinned by our values of Heart, Mind and Connect and worked out in practice through the application of our Core Principles. Our aim is to ensure that all academies within the Trust have clear and consistent guidance on how to deal with the death of a staff member or student.

## **Objectives**

This policy will:

- Reflect our ethos and values and our place at the centre of our communities
- Ensure that all students and staff members faced with a bereavement are provided with appropriate level of support and guidance
- Signpost student, parents, carers and staff to the appropriate agencies/support where necessary

## **2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES:**

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

- Be given space and time to grieve
- Be given 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.
- That differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the academy environment.
- That 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.

## **3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Trust Executive Team are responsible for the development and maintenance of this policy which will be ratified by the Trust Board.

Headteachers are responsible for ensuring the policy is implemented and local procedures followed which support the management of bereavement situations in their academies. They will ensure effective delegation of tasks to key members of staff as appropriate.

There is a joint responsibility for all staff to adopt a caring and sensitive approach to dealing with all children and adults affected by bereavement.

#### 4. COMMUNICATING A DEATH AND DEALING WITH INITIAL SHOCK

Messages communicating the death of a staff member or student are probably the hardest messages that a Headteacher will need to deal with. Such messages should be considered and delivered with the utmost sensitivity. There will be different messages to deliver to students, adults and professionals who might have been associated with the individual and care should be taken to ensure that the timing of the messages ensures that no-one is left to hear on the grapevine. A list for consideration for both staff and students is:

- Current academy staff not in academy that day - including therapy staff who work closely with a staff member or child
  - Previous academy staff who worked closely with the child/staff member
  - Social Work team
  - SEN team
  - Medical team - the academy nurse will communicate to them
  - Taxi driver and escort
  - Chair of governors
  - Respite centres
  - Other professionals who work with the child/staff member - E.G Ed Psych
  - Parents - if children have been informed it is appropriate to put out a note to parents informing them of the loss they may need to support or comfort their children. Some parents may need to be telephoned if their relationship is closer but may not have been informed by the family
- The Headteacher will make the decision on how to inform the wider academy population considering the circumstances and the closeness of staff/students to the individual who has died. It may be appropriate to write out to parents to inform them of a bereavement within the academy community. Example letters are attached at **appendix 1**.
  - Partial or full closure of the academy may be considered to enable the academy community to absorb the information and to deal with the initial shock. Headteachers will make this decision based on the circumstances and their knowledge of the academy and its community.
  - The Headteacher will also take the decision as to whether immediate counselling for shock and trauma needs to be provided depending on the circumstances.

#### 5. MANAGING BEREAVEMENT SITUATIONS

##### 5.1 Death of a close family member of a student

Before a student returns to academy

- Anyone informed of the death should inform the Headteacher as soon as possible.
- The Headteacher should make contact with the family to express the condolences of the academy and to offer support to the young person when they return.
- If possible, the pastoral lead should meet the nearest relative to discuss changes in daily routine e.g. where they will live, how they will come to academy (if appropriate the student should be consulted as to whether they mind their class talking to them about the bereavement). A definite date of student's return should also be agreed.

On a student's return to academy

When a student returns to academy after the death of a family member:

- The tutor/learning mentor or pastoral team should meet the student at the start of the first day back - the student should be given 'space to grieve' - reassured that they may feel emotional and given channels of help to talk to if they so wish: tutor, Pastoral Leader and access to a counsellor;
- The academy will talk to the parents/carers to ascertain if any mention of the death should be made to the student involved and to what extent;
- The appropriate Pastoral Leader should make a short note of the death and its cause including the date, and place this on the student's file;
- The student's record should be updated to reflect changes in family relationships on the academy's MIS;
- It is recognised that peer support is vital. Where appropriate the tutor will discuss with the affected student (and/or relevant relatives) the level of peer support that can be provided within academy.

## 5.2 Bereavements affecting members of staff

The Trust wishes to support staff who are going through a period of bereavement and loss. All staff have access to the Employee Assistance Programme for telephone/face to face counselling and Academies have the flexibility to support further counselling to be agreed on an individual basis. Staff should also refer to the Trust's Leave of Absence (LOA) Policy for details on leave for bereavement and funeral attendance.

Close or Immediate family

The CEO/CFOO (for Trust Central Team members) and the Headteacher (academy-based staff), or other delegated member of senior staff, will contact the member of staff at the appropriate time to discuss:

- The manner in which their situation will be communicated to staff
- When they expect to be able to return to work

Other Bereavements

All requests for bereavement leave should be made in line with the Trust's LOA Policy and members of staff should contact the Headteacher to discuss any additional support which may be required.

Before a staff member returns to work:

- The Headteacher will contact the member of staff to offer support and convey the condolences of the Trust/academy.
- Any requests to attend funerals should be made in writing through the normal channels.
- Where appropriate, staff may be invited to contribute towards a sympathy card or a gift. (The Academies Financial Handbook does not allow this to be paid from out of academy funds).

When a staff member returns to work:

- As a general rule it is better to acknowledge the death of a relative than to ignore it, however, the Headteacher will advise members of the person's wishes.
- The Trust is sensitive to the tasks that the person will be asked to undertake for a specified period on return to work.
- A 'Return to Work' meeting will take place to enable the Trust/academy to best support the individual concerned.

### 5.3 Death of a student on roll

It is recognised that the death of a student on role has a significant impact on staff and students within an academy. In the event of the death of a student on role:

- The Headteacher should be informed of the death of a student as soon as it is known
- If a death takes place outside academy, the Headteacher will work with the family and take steps which are bespoke to the circumstances
- If a crisis situation occurs whilst a child is out on a trip, then the adult with the child or the trip leader should telephone for an ambulance first and then contact the academy to inform the Headteacher. The academy will 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 Headteacher will inform the LA. The relevant risk assessments and protocols apply for all academy trips.
- Where relevant, the Headteacher should work with the LADO and attend Sudden Unexpected Deaths in Childhood (SUDIC) meetings and carry out an agreed action plan.
- The Headteacher should agree with the parent, if possible, what role the academy will take in the informing of concerned parties. An example of who might need to be told can be found at section 5.

### 5.4 Death of a member of staff

In the event of the death of a member of staff at the Trust or one of its academies:

- The CEO or Headteacher, if an academy member of staff, should be informed as soon as it is known.
- If a death is outside of work the CEO/CFOO will take steps which will be bespoke to the circumstances.
- In the event of a serious incident at work, First Aid and Health and Safety policies and procedures should be followed. The Emergency Services should be called and

the Headteacher informed immediately. Once the Emergency Services have arrived, they will deal with the situation and advise on any further actions needed. The Headteacher of the academy will advise the CEO of the Trust, The Health & Safety Executive and the Chair of the Local Governing Body as soon as possible.

## 6. DEALING WITH GRIEF

It is important that the academy community is given the opportunity to pay their respects and remember a student or a member of staff who have passed away. The decision on appropriate ways of doing this should always be made in conjunction with the family of the bereaved and they should be given the opportunity to attend if they feel it is appropriate. Actions such as special assemblies, installing a memorial branch, planting a tree, having a memorial book to sign or a memory table for younger pupils can be considered in helping the community to express its grief.

Children must be allowed to ask questions at this time or at any point in the following days or weeks. Staff must answer honestly and to the best of their knowledge. This is not a time to propound one's own religious beliefs and must be sensitive to religious and cultural issues when framing the answers to questions.

Staff and students must be given quiet spaces for reflection and access to professional support if appropriate. Staff can be signposted to the Employee Assistance Programme (insert website and free phone number here) if appropriate and consideration will be given to support for bereavement counselling on an individual basis for staff and students.

## 7. FUNERAL ATTENDANCE

If staff wish to attend the funeral, they should make a request using the normal process for this type of leave. It may be that the academy could not run safely if everyone were granted their wish and, in that case, difficult decisions will be made according to how close people are to the child and family/staff member. The needs of young people in the academy must come first in any decision making.

The Headteacher or in their unavoidable absence, the Deputy Headteacher, will always attend as a mark of respect.

## 8. TRAINING

All staff will have an awareness of this policy and specialist training will be available for those with specific responsibility.

## 9. OTHER RELATED POLICIES & PROCEDURES

- Staff Leave of Absence
- Academy Visits
- Health and Safety

## 10. FURTHER SUPPORT AND INFORMATION

[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk) - a useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and academy community.

[www.keech.org.uk](http://www.keech.org.uk) - the website of Keech Hospice Care, our local Children's Hospice. Gives details of its facilities and the support it offers.

[www.chums.info](http://www.chums.info) - a bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org> a bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

[www.juliesplace.com](http://www.juliesplace.com) - a support resource for bereaved siblings

[www.bhf.org.uk/smallcreature](http://www.bhf.org.uk/smallcreature) British Heart Foundation site to help children come to term with loss using carton creatures. An animated film and we have a printed pack to go with it.

[www.bbc.co.uk/.../bereavement/bereavement\\_helpchildren.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/.../bereavement/bereavement_helpchildren.shtml) Information on the way bereavement affects children

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

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

## LETTER TO PARENTS & CARERES REGARDING THE DEATH OF THEIR CHILD

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear the sad news of (Name's) death. There are no words to express our sadness and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through.

As an academy community, we will miss (Name) very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to (his/her) friends, classmates and teachers. (Name) was a valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly), member of our academy family.

If we can do anything to help as you plan (Names) funeral, please let us know.

We will continue to keep in touch and will support you in any way we can.

With Sympathy

Headteacher

## LETTER TO PARENTS & CARERS REGARDING THE DEATH OF A STUDENT

Dear Parents and Carers

Your child's Class Teacher/Form Tutor/Head of Year had the task of informing the students of the death of (Name), a student in (Year).

(Name) died suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness yesterday/last week/over the weekend/during half term.

He/she was a valued was a valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly), member of our academy family and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some students may feel shocked and upset by the news, whilst others might be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

We have tried to answer their questions in academy, using age appropriate and honest language. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Child Bereavement UK website [childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)

Our thoughts are with (Name's) family and friends at this time. We will be in touch about how the academy will celebrate/remember (Name's) life.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

LETTER TO PARENTS & CARERS - DEATH OF A MEMBER OF STAFF

Dear Parents/Carers

I am sorry to inform you that (a well-respected/long standing/well-loved/popular, well known) member of our staff (Name) died (suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness).

The pupils were told today by their (Class Teacher/Tutor/Head of Year) in assembly and many will be reacting to this news, while others might be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

We have tried to answer their questions in academy, using age appropriate and honest language. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Child Bereavement UK website [childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)

Our thoughts are with (Name's) family at this time. We will be in touch with the details about how our academy will celebrate/remember (Name's) life.

Your sincerely

Headteacher