



# Bereavement Policy

## Clarity Independent School

Bridge Barn Farm  
Woodhill Road  
Sandon  
CM2 7SG

***Clarity Independent School is committed to safeguarding...***

*"Our school is committed to our whole-school approach to safeguarding, which ensures that keeping children safe is at the heart of everything we do, and underpins all systems, processes and policies... We promote an environment where children and young people feel empowered to raise concerns and report incidents and we work hard in partnership with pupils, parents and caregivers to keep children safe."*

Clarity Safeguarding Policy September 2024

**Written by Debbie Hanson**

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**Updated Name:** Richard Clow and Mary Weidner

## Contents

<b>Rationale.....</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>Roles and Responsibilities.....</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>Following a Bereavement.....</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>The Management of Bereavement in School.....</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>If a Child Dies in School.....</b>	<b>Page 7</b>
<b>If a tragedy occurs on a School trip.....</b>	<b>Page 8</b>
<b>Death of a Member of Staff.....</b>	<b>Page 10</b>
<b>Death of a Family Pet.....</b>	<b>Page 10</b>
<b>Death of a Celebrity.....</b>	<b>Page 11</b>
<b>Covid-19 and Other Infections e.g. Strep A / Scarlet Fever.....</b>	<b>Page 11</b>

## Rationale

We understand that bereavement is an experience which will be faced by all members of our school community at some point. It will be a more difficult experience when the loss is of a member of that school 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 a school pupil or staff member, pet or celebrity and will also address the procedures which will be followed should a child become terminally ill or die whilst at school.

## Roles and Responsibilities

### The Headteacher

The headteacher has overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy and for delegating any responsibilities under this policy to other members of staff.

The Headteacher will:

- Liaise with the family of the deceased
- Where appropriate, communicate details of a death to pupils and staff as set out in this policy, or activate communication teams
- Respond to media requests for information in the case of a publicised death
- Participate in any multi-agency reviews as requested
- Inform the Local Authority of a death
- Lead reintegration meetings for pupils or staff returning to school after a bereavement
- Arrange for monitoring and support of the pastoral support team or any individual staff members who are supporting bereaved pupils or staff



## Following a Bereavement

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 school 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.

The Headteacher will be informed as soon as possible so that she can plan, implement and monitor the school's response as set out below.

## The Management of Bereavement in School

The purpose of this policy is to give all staff confidence in recognising and adopting a particular procedure. One of our main concerns must inevitably 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.



## **Upon notification of the death of a pupil**

The school may be notified in an infinite number of ways. If death occurs during school hours parents usually let the school know directly and the person answering the phone will put them through to the most senior member of staff on site.

Where a death occurs in the holidays or at weekends the parents will contact whoever they can – they may have the phone number of a member of staff who cares for the child at home for example.

In that instance the member of staff who takes the call will immediately contact the most senior member of the school team possible and that person will then assume responsibility for the dissemination of the information.

## **Dissemination**

It is important to agree, if possible, with the parent that the school will take on the role of informing concerned parties. Parents may be happy to have this burden taken away from them as they have many people unconnected with the school to contact.

There can be no exact list of people to contact. 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'. Bereavement is very difficult, and the school needs to ensure it does not add to the sorrow by leaving people feeling marginalised.

If school is in session, the Headteacher will inform teaching staff and admin staff, as they need to help in the next part of the process. She will then immediately inform the child's class staff. These staff then need to be given as much time as they need to process the news and start to grieve.

The Deputy Headteacher will arrange cover for the class and the Headteacher will begin the process of informing other classes – those with staff closest to the child first. This is never easy in a busy school. It is easy to see where these two functions will overlap as staff may need to be taken from one class to manage the 'bereaved class'.



It may be practical to call a teacher out of a class and ask them to let their staff know.

The next step will be informing people not at school. Again, there can be no definitive list, but these should include:

- Current school staff not in school that day - including therapy staff
- Transport department
- Other professionals who work with the child e.g. Wellbeing coach
- Parents – if children have been informed it is appropriate to put out a note to parents informing them of the loss as 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.
- Telling the other pupils will be a decision for the Headteacher and the class teachers. With different aged pupils there will be different decisions made. The class teacher of the class with the loss may be the best person to tell the rest of the children in that class.

Children must be allowed to ask questions and talk about it as much as they need to 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 time will not be used to promote stakeholders' own religious beliefs, but it has always been seen as generally acceptable to tell the children that their friend is now in heaven or a better place. This is acceptable across cultures and whilst not a concept that can be fully grasped by the students, it does seem, to have had benefit in helping the children understand that the child has moved on to a new and happy place.

## **The Funeral**

The Headteacher will make sure that all staff are asked if they wish to attend the funeral. It may be that the school 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.

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



## Reflection

Following a bereavement in school, it is only to be expected that many members of staff will be emotionally affected and would benefit from the provision of a calm environment in which to meet with other colleagues and spend some time in reflective mode. One such means of accomplishing this would be to allocate a specific room e.g. the Staff Room for the duration of a lunchtime to enable staff to meet and share their thoughts over a coffee or tea. It should be emphasised that anything shared on such occasions should be held as confidential and not for public airing.

## If a Child Dies in School

The school has a number of trained First Aiders on site at all times (each member of teaching staff) and they will always be called upon if there are any concerns about a child's health at any level. If assessed as necessary by the attending First Aider, an adult will be instructed to call an ambulance. If the First Aider requires a second opinion he/she will talk to the Headteacher or most senior team member on site. All efforts will be made in school to apply the appropriate treatment to preserve life until the emergency services arrive and confirm that they will take over.

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.

If the parents have given the school a protocol to be followed in the event of death occurring e.g. restricting the use of certain medications or treatments, this protocol will be handed to the paramedics.

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.

The First Aider or Headteacher as appropriate to that situation will then telephone the parents and ask that they meet the ambulance at the hospital.

**Even if it is obvious that a death has occurred in school, the procedures outlined above must still be followed. A First Aider is NOT able to confirm a death – that is the responsibility of a doctor.**

This person will remain in regular contact with the Headteacher.

A Crisis Management Team will be brought together. The CMT will make the necessary arrangements to inform the LA. The Police will give authority to the school to inform others.

All staff should respect the need for all communications with staff, parents, pupils, local community and media to only be done through the CMT.

The above procedures and protocols will then apply as for a death out of school.

## **If a Tragedy Occurs During a School trip**

If a crisis situation occurs whilst a child/staff member is out on a trip, then the adult with the child/staff member or the trip leader should telephone for an ambulance first and then contact the school to inform the Headteacher. 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 should follow the plan of action for a critical incident on page 6 of the Business Continuity Plan. A Crisis Management Team will be brought together. The CMT will make the necessary arrangements to inform the LA. The Police will advise the parents or next of kin of a staff member of the tragedy. Once this has happened, the Police will give authority to the school to inform others.

The leader of the trip, or nominated person, should ensure that they can keep telephone communication with senior members of the CMT at all times.

A member of the CMT should, if possible, travel to join participants. It may be necessary to take other members of staff to support both staff members and pupils.





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The off-site visits protocols give guidance for such situations and should be followed.

## Ongoing Support

For staff:

**Peninsula** can offer support in times of bereavement, through their 24 hour assistance hotline. The number is 0800 047 4097.

<https://www.peninsulagrouplimited.com/services/eap-employee-assistance-programmes/>

For Pupils:

- Most pupils can be supported by the school staff, and that each child will have a favored member of staff to approach. The Wellbeing Coach can offer support to pupils who may need more help.
- Social Stories may be one way to help pupils to understand loss. Teaching staff will ensure that a social story is available should this be deemed a good course of action.
- The Wellbeing Coach will ensure that we have suitable books and other materials to help children discuss death and come to terms with loss.
- The Wellbeing Coach will also be available to spend time with children whilst they grieve.

Websites dealing with grief and loss for pupils:

- Child Bereavement UK [www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)
- NHS [www.NHS.uk](http://www.NHS.uk) also <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/children-and-bereavement/>
- Winston's wish [www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)
- Cruise [www.cruise.org.uk](http://www.cruise.org.uk)
- Childhood bereavement network [www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk)



- [www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk](http://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk)
- [www.gingerbread.org.uk](http://www.gingerbread.org.uk)
- [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)
- [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

For the family:

- It will be for the parents to decide if they wish to maintain ongoing links, each family will be different, however the school will always be there to act as a source of support and information.
- Family support can also be found at many of the websites above.

## **The Death of a Member of Staff**

All the same principles and procedures apply as they do for the death of a pupil.

## **The Death of a Family Pet**

Clarity recognises the important part that pets can play in peoples' lives; both pupils and staff families. The above procedures are applied to the death of a family pet, with obvious omissions.

Advice and support can be gained from:

- <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/pet-death.html>
- [https://www.rainbowsbridge.com/grief\\_support\\_center/grief\\_support/children\\_and\\_petloss.htm](https://www.rainbowsbridge.com/grief_support_center/grief_support/children_and_petloss.htm) which also contains a printable work-book that children can personalise and work through with a supportive adult, processing their feelings about their lost pet.
- <https://bestow.com/blog/when-a-family-pet-dies/>
- <https://www.bluecross.org.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/Children%20and%20pet%20loss.pdf> is a downloadable booklet of support for children upon the loss of a pet.



## The Death of a Celebrity

Clarity recognises the importance that certain celebrities can hold in children's lives. The above procedures are also applied to the death of a favourite celebrity, with obvious omissions. This is because children can become very attached to celebrities they see and watch frequently, so that they feel like part of their friendship group e.g. YouTubers, Influencers, popular gamers etc.

## Covid-19 and Other Recent Infections (e.g. Strep A / Scarlet Fever)

The outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020 meant that many aspects of children's 'normal routines may have significantly changed. Even though the pandemic is not often referred to at the current time, many children are still feeling the impact, especially anxiety and fear, that the pandemic stirred. Many children are also still suffering the impact from spending long periods of developmental parts of their childhood alone and not having direct contact with their friends and wider family. This is especially critical for children with social, emotional, mental health difficulties, social communication difficulties and those who have faced trauma in their lives.

Children and staff may have been directly affected by the pandemic by suffering a bereavement. This may raise concerns about the emergence of new viruses or another pandemic hitting the world and should be considered where illness related bereavements occur.

In addition to the recommendations above, support and help can be found at the following website:

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief>

This policy will be updated annually in accordance with relevant guidance and regulations.

Overall responsibility for procedures following bereavement in **Clarity Independent School** rests with the Headteacher; Debbie Hanson.