



# Capel Primary School



## Bereavement Policy

Next Review Due: **Autumn 2014**

**Staff0**

1/10/13

**Sub Committee**

3/10/13

**Govs**

7/11/13

## Capel Primary School Bereavement Policy

### **Introduction:**

This policy is a statement of the aims and good practice strategies for (school name) when supporting the school community in the area of bereavement.

It should be read in conjunction with the PSHE policy, the critical incidents policy and the equal opportunity policy and can be applied consistently to all children and members of the school community with sensitivity to their ethnicity and/or faith and beliefs. It forms part of the schools commitment to meeting the outcomes of Every Child Matters as it recognises that the experience of bereavement can present a real challenge to pupils and their families.

### **Rationale:**

Death is an inevitable part of living and may sadly have to be faced by children and adults alike, often with little warning. The school can play a vital role in educating pupils and supporting the school community when it is grieving. This policy acknowledges that every death is individual and every experience of grief unique but that by setting out and planning ways to respond the school can make an agreed response and is better prepared to meet the needs of its community at a time of real sadness. It also acknowledges that the wishes of the bereaved family are paramount and may supersede the contents of this policy.

### **Aims:**

- To encourage learning about death and loss as a natural part of life so as to allow pupils to develop their own emotional, spiritual and intellectual responses.
- To provide a framework for action in the event of a death within the school community.
- To ensure bereaved pupils are supported to the best of the schools ability.

### **Good Practice:**

#### ***Ethos and School Approach***

##### ***The school:***

- Has the emotional well being of pupils as a priority. It encourages pupils to develop their emotional intelligence and has systems in place for children to talk about their feelings both good and bad. Pupils know who they can talk to, when and where.
- Has rigorous systems of communication to ensure pupils' needs are known by all relevant staff and that appropriate support is offered in line with the pupil's and family's wishes.
- Provides opportunities for pupils to learn about loss and death as part of the formal curriculum, through PSHE and citizenship as well as in other subject areas where appropriate.
- Seeks to raise awareness of bereavement and loss in a variety of ways e.g. in assemblies, by addressing events in the local and national news, by supporting appropriate charities.
- Has named School Bereavement Contacts who have attended training and facilitate the support of bereaved pupils. These are Mrs Galbraith and Mrs Wickham.
- Recognises that the school environment can provide much needed normality, structure and support to a grieving pupil.

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### ***Learning about Life, Loss and Death:***

- The school recognises that pupils need to learn about life and death as natural processes and be encouraged to speak openly about the feelings associated with these.
- The school recognises that in addition to bereaved pupils, many others will have experienced losses and changes in their lives as well.
- The school identifies ways in which learning about life and death can be included in both the curriculum and through other non-curricula opportunities.
- By allowing learning about loss and death in a variety of ways pupils will develop a healthy understanding of this difficult concept and will be less likely to believe that this is a taboo subject.
- Particular note will be taken of any subject areas or events in the school calendar which may be difficult for a grieving pupil or staff member. They will be asked how they would like to be supported in this.

### **When there is an anticipated death within the school community**

The school will:

- Liaise with the family and arrange who will keep in contact with them and how the family would like this to happen.
- Find out what information the family wish to be shared with staff and then arrange a short staff meeting where this news is shared.
- Be prepared for staff to make emotional responses to this news and provide support to staff members who need it.
- Identify a person who will be available to listen should any staff need to talk.
- Follow up in person where possible or by a telephone call to any absent staff.
- Find out from the family what their child knows, the language used and how their child wishes to be supported.
- Ensure this information is shared with relevant staff as appropriate to the pupil.
- Nominate a member of staff to make sure the pupil is told that school knows e.g. 'your mum has told me all about her illness so if you want to talk to me then you can.'
- Find out from the family if they wish the news of the anticipated death to be shared with other pupils and parents.
- Seek support and advice from relevant organisations e.g. Macmillan nurses, the local hospice and the Educational Psychology service in how to support pupils at this time.

### **When someone dies**

**IF THE SCHOOL, STAFF AND CHILDREN ARE FEELING OVERWHELMED BY AN EVENT, AND THE SITUATION IS CONSIDERED CRITICAL, THE SCHOOL CAN CONTACT THE EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE.**

### ***In the event of a death the school will:***

- Identify the roles and responsibilities of members of the Senior Leadership Team, the Governing body and draw on the resources, training and experiences of the School Bereavement Contact.

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- Consider the actions below for the bereaved family, the staff, the pupils and parents in the school community
- Identify outside sources of support through the Local Education Authority, child bereavement services and faith organisations relevant to the bereaved family and school community.

### **When a staff member or pupil dies or someone in the school community is bereaved:** (\* denotes actions more appropriate when a staff member or pupil has died)

#### ***Initial response to the bereaved pupil and family***

The school will:

- Nominate a member of staff (usually Head Teacher) to make contact with the family to offer condolences and provide reassurance that their child will be supported on return to school.
- Inform the family that the pupil's classmates and teachers will be told about the death to protect him/her from lots of unnecessary questions on return to school.
- Ensure the family are given the name of the School Bereavement Contact/s and told how they can contact them and/or other appropriate named staff.
- Find out the family's faith or beliefs so that the school can respond sensitively to these. Check with the family rather than making assumptions as each response to grief will be individual.
- Send a card to the family.
- Get permission from the family for members of staff to attend the funeral.
- If the bereaved pupil is absent from school, contact the family (ideally with a home visit) to find out how the pupil is, what they know about the bereavement, when they are planning to return to school, whether they would like support in talking to their classmates / colleagues and what support they might like for themselves.
- If the death is likely to be in the media signpost the family to the Press Complaints Commission who can prevent unwanted attention by the media directly to the family.
- \*Suggest that the school would like in due course to consider a permanent way to remember the person who has died in line with the family's wishes.

#### ***Initial response to the school staff***

The school will:

- \*Arrange a staff meeting (including governors) as soon as is practicable and identify absent staff.
- Inform staff of the death and give any factual details known.
- Be prepared for staff to make emotional responses to this news and provide support to staff members who need it. Be aware that is perfectly natural to feel emotional about a death and that it may remind staff of their own personal experiences of bereavement.
- Identify a person who will be available to listen should any staff need to talk.
- Follow up in person where possible or by a telephone call to any absent staff.
- For a death that is likely to be in the media – inform the Local Education Authority press office who will facilitate any dealings with the media. Staff should not respond directly to any media invitations.
- Inform staff of when and how the news of the death will be shared with pupils and how they can support pupils with this.

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- \*Discuss with staff an initial way in which staff and pupils can make a response to this news e.g. providing an area where messages of condolence, memories or flowers can be left.
- Remind staff that other pupils may be affected by the bereavement as they feel unsettled about the death or it reminds them of their experiences of loss.
- If practicable arrange a short staff meeting at the end of the day to 'check in' with staff and share how the day has been.
- Notify staff of the pupil's wishes about returning to school when these are known and if support will be available to the pupil how, when and where this can be accessed. Ensure that any beliefs the family share are made known to staff.
- Identify the most appropriate staff members to open communication with the bereaved pupil by saying 'I was sorry to hear that your mum died last week' or 'I do know the story about what happened to your sister. If you ever want to talk then let me or ... know.' By actively facilitating communication the pupil will know that the teacher knows and know where and how to seek support.

### ***Initial response to the rest of the school community***

The school will:

- Share the factual information known about the death with pupils as soon as possible to prevent rumour and gossip from spreading.
- Identify any groups that are most likely to be affected by the news of the death e.g. the closest friends and inform them of the death in as small a group as possible.
- Inform the rest of the school within their usual class groups ideally at the same time so that a break time does not happen before all pupils have been told.
- Encourage pupils to ask questions and share their feelings about this news and their own experiences of grief.
- Use clear and unambiguous language avoiding euphemisms and answering questions as truthfully as possible as appropriate to the pupils' age and understanding.
- Give pupils the details of whom, when and where they can access additional support if needed by providing a staff member to be in a pre-arranged area for pupils to visit if they would like to talk.
- \*Ensure that pupils will be given opportunities to remember their friend/ teacher by the setting up of a suitable area to leave messages. Pupils will be involved in deciding about this where possible.
- Ask the classmates of the bereaved pupil to consider ways to support their friend by sending home messages, a card or even a 'comfort box' to show they care. They may need some guidance on how to respond to their friend when he/she returns to school.
- Send a letter home informing the parents/carers of the death enabling parents to discuss and support their child with this news at home. Sources of additional support for pupils and their families will be given in this letter. Sample letters **Appendix 1a / 1 b / 1 c**

### ***Ongoing response to the bereaved pupil and family:***

The school will:

- Support the family through regular communication with the School Bereavement Contact or other nominated staff member.

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- Give the family information on sources of support and other bereavement services they may wish to access (see Slide Away toolkit).
- Offer referrals to the School Bereavement Contacts or Slide Away for additional support or advice.
- Offer regular opportunities to find out how the pupil is managing in school and at home and whether he/she would like support with information, resources or someone to listen to them.
- Check whether the pupil is managing with their workload and homework commitments and be flexible where possible as grieving is exhausting and time at home may be spent talking not studying.
- Consult with the family about any dates which are likely to be significant for the pupil so these can be communicated to the relevant staff.

### ***Ongoing response to the school staff:***

The school will:

- Communicate with staff about the colleague/pupil's well being and any support which is being accessed in line with their wishes.
- Remind staff that the pupil may need additional support maintaining concentration and motivation for learning and they may need to be flexible with work commitments for a grieving pupil.
- Provide staff with any significant dates for the bereaved pupil. These may need to be provided yearly for teachers as a pupil moves up through the school.
- Remind staff to be aware of content of any lessons or events in school which might be emotionally difficult for the pupil to manage. Suggest that the pupil is given advance warning where possible and asked how they feel about the lesson and what support they might like.
- Offer staff continued support if needed and make details of services that can provide this e.g. KCC Support Line.
- Discuss whether the peer group are able to support the pupil at school so that the pupil does not receive unwanted attention or feel bullied.
- Ensure that records of the bereavement are included in transition documents when the pupil moves to another school.
- \* Discuss ways in which the school community can permanently remember their colleague or pupil who has died and identify those that would like to be actively involved in doing this.

### ***Ongoing response to the rest of the school community:***

The school will:

- Provide ongoing opportunities for pupils to express their own feelings about loss and explore how they can be a supportive peer group to a friend who is grieving.
- Monitor the closest friends of the pupil who has been bereaved as they may need help in supporting their friend.
- Ensure pupils know who, where and when they can access support if needed.
- \*Liaise with pupils about when the initial area for remembering needs to be moved e.g. a memory wall with flowers that have since died.
- Offer pupils ways of being involved with a permanent way to remember their friend/teacher.

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- Offer referrals to the School Bereavement Contacts or Slide Away for additional support or advice to any pupils struggling with their grief.

### **A permanent way to remember:**

In the event of the death of a pupil or staff member the school community will consider ways in which they can say 'goodbye' to and permanently remember their colleague / friend. These might include a service or balloon release, an area in the school grounds or an award in the person's name and would be in line with the bereaved family's wishes. The planning of a permanent way to remember will be as inclusive as possible to allow all staff and pupils and parents who wish to be involved to do so. Sample letter **Appendix 1d**

As a result, staff and pupils will feel acknowledged and respected in their grief and the school community as a whole will have a place to grieve and remember. By having something or somewhere permanent, the school will be providing pupils with ongoing opportunities to communicate with school about their own losses.

### **When a bereaved pupil transfers to the school**

The school will:

- Check whether records show the pupil has experienced bereavement.
- Give the family the name of the School Bereavement Contact and how he/she may be contacted.
- Ask the family if they are able to share any details about the bereavement that it would be helpful for the school to know e.g. key dates and circumstances.
- Find out if the pupil has already accessed bereavement support previously and if appropriate contact the previous school to liaise with the School Bereavement Contact.
- Follow the good practice strategies as detailed above in order to provide ongoing support.

### **The School Bereavement Contact/s will:**

- Have available a list of resources and information (books, websites, activities) suitable for the bereaved pupil and can make these available as appropriate. (Many of which can be found in the Slide Away toolkit)
- Provide details of bereavement services and organisations for staff, pupils and bereaved families from the Useful Contacts list **Appendix 2** and also in the Slide Away toolkit.
- Facilitate and advise on any referrals for bereavement support for the pupil or family.
- Have access to further training opportunities to enable them to develop their understanding and support of bereavement.
- Co-ordinate the transfer of records of a bereavement and significant dates to the relevant staff as the pupil moves through the school and ensure that this information is used in transition when the pupil leaves the school.

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### Outcomes

By adopting a planned and considered approach the school can promote desired, positive outcomes for both staff and pupils within the school and those in the wider school community. These may include:

Staff will:

- Feel equally valued.
- Have an opportunity to prepare themselves for the challenging role they face and feel supported in this.
- Be given the opportunity to work through their own feelings.
- Become aware of the skills needed, and be offered support, to develop them.

Pupils will:

- Be offered support by sensitive, trained staff working in unison.
- Be more able to manage their feelings and adjust to losses that they face.
- Develop a sense of perspective about their own lives and the fears that this might engender.

The school will:

- Have clear expectations about the way it will act, not simply react.
- Promote a sense of unity and identity in the whole community.

The family will:

- Have real support to draw on.
- Be given an opportunity to reinforce feelings of worth rather than a sense of loss.

The parents/carers will:

- Be drawn into a closer partnership with the school.
- Be given guidance on how to support their sons and daughters.
- Have time to prepare their own responses to loss and bereavement.