Bereavement policy

Buckleshams Primary School

Approved by:	Rachael Rudge	**Date:**	September 2026
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1. Aims

This bereavement policy aims to:

- Set out a guideline for how our school will respond to a death in our school community
- Set out a plan for communicating deaths in a timely manner that balances our school community's interests and transparency with the wishes of the family of the deceased
- Identify best practices for supporting pupils and/or members of staff experiencing bereavement
- Define the roles and responsibilities of key staff members and the governing board
- Provide a roadmap and framework for pupils or staff returning to school following bereavement

2. Roles and responsibilities

2.1 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, Governors 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
- 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

2.2 Pastoral support staff

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The pastoral support team (Rebekah Cordle - SENCo, Kim Weeks - TA, Charlie Beard - TA) has responsibility for monitoring and supporting bereaved pupils and staff members (including before their bereavement, where relevant – for example, in the case of terminal illness).

The pastoral support team will:

- Provide direct support to bereaved pupils and staff
- Signpost to external support available to bereaved pupils and staff
- Organise safe spaces for bereaved members of the school community to take a time out
- Organise memorials, such as temporary tributes, books of condolences, memorial web pages
- Arrange for the attendance and supervision of pupils at funerals (where permitted)
- Maintain a calendar of dates and holidays that may be particularly difficult for bereaved pupils or staff and ensure they're supported on those days
- Provide additional support during significant transitions – for example, when moving up to the next year group or transitioning to a new school

2.3 Governing board

The governing board is responsible for monitoring the implementation of this policy and supporting the headteacher.

The governing board will:

- Undertake regular monitoring of how the school is supporting the bereaved, and the staff who support them – for example, through regular catch-ups with the headteacher or pastoral team
- Monitor the headteacher's emotional wellbeing – for example, through regular meetings between the headteacher and chair of governors
- Assist the headteacher, where required, in responding to media requests for information in the case of a publicised death
- Where necessary, arrange for another staff member to take the lead if the headteacher is not available to respond to a death immediately

3. Provision for supporting staff who support the bereaved

Supporting pupils and staff who are grieving can be painful. Those staff members who carry out this essential work will be monitored and supported.

- Wellbeing support will be available to all staff through the Employee Assistance Programme and through our Staff Absence Insurance.
- The wellbeing of staff performing this role will be monitored regularly through meetings with the Headteacher and Chair of Governors.
- Bereavement training has been provided for Kim Weeks, Rebekah Cordle and Wellbeing training provided for Charlie Beard, who form the bereavement support team. The school will ensure that members of the pastoral/bereavement team receive regular bereavement response training and access to specialist CPD (e.g. Child Bereavement UK modules, Mental Health First Aid with bereavement content). An induction briefing on bereavement procedures will be provided to all staff, as appropriate.

4. Immediate actions following a death

4.1 Clarifying information and the wishes of the family

- The Headteacher will be responsible for contacting the family to confirm news of a death and determine the wishes of the family in terms of what can be shared with the rest of the school community and how. Preferred communication channels (phone call vs email) for the bereaved family will be established and

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respected. Where families do not wish the school to name the deceased, the school will respect their wishes and use agreed language.

- If the family can't be immediately contacted following the death, other emergency contacts will be contacted on Arbor.
- If news of a death is spreading via social media before confirmation can be made, an email will go out from the Headteacher to all staff and to parents to inform them of the actions school are taking.
- The school will record decisions, times/dates of contacts, who was informed and the family's wishes in a secure incident log held by the Headteacher. Copies of key communications will be retained on the school's secure system for audit and safeguarding review.

4.2 Sharing the news with staff

- The Headteacher will be responsible for sharing the news with staff and explaining what support will be available to those who need it
- Steps will be taken to ensure that staff will be informed promptly e.g. calling a staff meeting, activating a phone tree from our Major Incident Plan or using staff Whatsapp to bring staff together virtually if school is closed

4.3 Sharing the news with pupils

- The Headteacher will be responsible for sharing the news with pupils and explaining what support will be available to those who need it
- Steps will be taken to ensure pupils are informed in a timely and appropriate way using child appropriate language e.g. calling a whole-school assembly, having the Headteacher inform each class to share the news, or using school email to alert parents to the information shared

4.4 Informing parents/carers

- Parents/carers will be notified of a death by the Headteacher via email to explain the steps taken during the day to inform pupils of the death, what additional support has been made available and where to go for more help and information. Communications to parents will be clear about what was shared with pupils and signpost support.

4.5 Responding to specific causes of death

Some deaths need to be handled more sensitively due to their potential to cause fear, anger or imitation.

- If a death is suspected or confirmed as suicide, the school will follow national postvention guidance (e.g. Samaritans, Public Health England/UKHSA and Child Bereavement UK). Communication will avoid sensational language, refrain from describing method, and will include signposting and specialist support. The school will liaise with LA and mental health services to assess contagion risk and provide targeted follow-up for vulnerable pupils and staff.
- The death is due to homicide or family violence (Child Bereavement UK has a guide to 'Supporting children and young people bereaved by murder or manslaughter', which you can find at the bottom of this page)
- If the death is due to contagious disease, we will follow procedures as determined by our local health protection team

4.6 Responding to the media

In the event that a death that affects the school raises media interest, we will respond in the following manner:

- The Headteacher or Chair of Governors is the designated media spokesperson. Other staff must refer media enquiries to them. The Headteacher will seek support and guidance from the Local Authority (LA) communications team before issuing statements and will prepare a brief written media statement if appropriate.

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- The Headteacher will gain assistance from the LA before responding to media requests, and will put out a written notification to the media

5. Follow-up actions and support following a death

5.1 Support for pupils and staff

Pupils and staff may require support to grieve in the initial days and weeks following a death.

- Support will be made available in school from the pastoral care team (Rebekah Cordle, Kim Weeks, Charlie Beard and children and staff offered time out of class where needed
- Pupils and staff will be signposted via email and face to face to external support, e.g. community mental health resources and bereavement charities
- When informing pupils, staff will use age-appropriate language and avoid graphic details. Teachers will be supported with a short script and suggested responses to pupils' questions. Curriculum adjustments (PSHE/wellbeing sessions) will be made to provide space for collective processing, and staff will be given resources or signposting to age-appropriate materials.

5.2 Timetables

- Some pupils may need to have their timetable adjusted and a quiet place to go, such as the library. This will be offered on a case by case basis. Where absence or reduced timetable impacts learning, teachers will plan targeted catch-up interventions and reasonable curriculum adjustments. These will be coordinated by the SENDCo/pastoral lead to ensure progress monitoring and alignment with school improvement priorities (e.g., maths and writing recovery strategies).

5.3 Tributes and condolences

- The school community will come together to memorialise the deceased through a special assembly
- Physical memorials will be permitted (e.g. a book of condolences or a temporary tribute) if appropriate
- Physical memorials should be temporary unless the family explicitly requests a permanent memorial and governors approve it. The school will consider safeguarding, inclusivity and maintenance implications before agreeing permanent tributes. Books of condolence may be kept centrally for a defined period and then archived or offered to the family.
- The school will seek to accommodate religious, cultural or other needs related to bereavement (e.g., time off for religious observances) and will consult families and the governing body where necessary to ensure reasonable adjustments and inclusivity

5.4 Funerals

We will consult the family as appropriate, to confirm:

- Whether members of staff and/or pupils are welcome to attend the funeral or memorial service
- How condolences should be made and how staff and pupils can contribute

If staff are welcome to attend the funeral and wish to do so:

- Staff should request leave to attend via the appendix in the leave of absence policy
- Considerations will be made in granting permission, e.g. availability of cover and the LA consulted if the school needs to close for part of the day to enable multiple staff to attend.

If pupils are welcome to attend the funeral and wish to do so:

- Parents should request leave for their child to attend via the request for absence form. The absence will be authorized for one of part of a day.
- Parents will be responsible for attending the funeral with their child.

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6. Support for pupils returning to school after bereavement

Whether a pupil has been away from school following a personal bereavement or after a death affecting the whole school community, the school will support them in their return to school and for as long as necessary afterwards.

6.1 Reintegration meeting

The Headteacher or SENDCo will meet with the bereaved pupil and their parents/carers to discuss how best to manage a return to school.

The purpose of the meeting will be to:

- Determine whether the pupil is emotionally ready to return to the classroom either full time or with adjustments to the timetable to allow for a phased return
- Address any concerns the pupil and their parents/carers have about the return to school
- Consult with the pupil about how or even if they want their classmates to know of the death (where relevant)
- Open lines of communication between the pupil and relevant staff to ensure support should the pupil feel overwhelmed
- Open lines of communication between the school and the pupil's parents/carers to coordinate support
- Consider any additional support needed for a pupil who is vulnerable or has special educational needs (SEN) or a disability
- Outcomes of reintegration meetings will be recorded in a confidential reintegration plan (signed by parent and Headteacher) detailing agreed adjustments, points of contact, monitoring dates and review arrangements. This plan will be reviewed at least monthly for the first term after return or sooner if concerns arise.

6.2 Ongoing support

- We will maintain regular contact with the pupil's parents/carers to monitor how the pupil is coping
- We acknowledge significant dates or holidays may be especially difficult and will liaise with the child and parents/carers to see how the child will need to be supported on these dates
- We know that grief may impact a pupil's progress and affect their behaviour. To manage this, we will provide extra wellbeing support and interventions to support progress and behaviour
- We will take care to manage changes for bereaved pupils by preparing them in advance (where possible) and taking extra steps to support necessary transitions

7. Support for staff returning to school after bereavement

Whether a staff member has been away from school following a personal bereavement or after a death affecting the whole school community, the school will support them in their return to school and for as long as necessary afterwards.

7.1 Reintegration meeting

The Headteacher will meet with the bereaved staff member to discuss how best to manage a return to school.

The purpose of the meeting will be to:

- Determine whether the staff member is ready to return to work and the best way to make that return (e.g. a phased return to work or a temporary change in duties)
- Address any concerns the staff member may have about the return to school
- Consult with the staff member about how or even if they want their pupils and colleagues to know of the death (where relevant)

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- Set guidelines for communication between the staff member and their line manager to monitor and support the staff member
- Outcomes of reintegration meetings will be recorded in a confidential reintegration plan (signed by staff and Headteacher) detailing agreed adjustments, points of contact, monitoring dates and review arrangements. This plan will be reviewed at least monthly for the first term after return or sooner if concerns arise.

7.2 Ongoing support

We acknowledge that grief can have an impact on a staff member's physical and mental health, which can then go on to impact their performance.

We also recognise that grieving is highly personal and that there can't be a one-size-fits-all solution for monitoring and supporting a bereaved person.

We will work with each individual to create a system of monitoring and support that works for that person. This may include:

- Wellbeing support from Employee Assistance Programme or Staff Absence Insurance and external sources of support from bereavement organisations
- Adjustments may be made, e.g. provisions for flexible working or reduced timetables, if appropriate

8. Monitoring arrangements

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years by the Headteacher in consultation with the pastoral team, staff and the governing board, or sooner after any major bereavement incident or legislative change. At every review, it will be approved by the full governing body. Reviews will include a short log of incidents and an evaluation of how procedures worked in practice.

9. Links with other policies

This policy is linked to our:

- Child protection policy (Where a bereavement raises safeguarding concerns (e.g., risk of harm, domestic abuse, sudden unexplained death), the school will follow safeguarding procedures, make timely referrals to children's social care and involve the designated safeguarding lead (DSL).
- Critical incident policy and Major Incident Plan
- Behaviour policy
- Mental Health Policy
- Leave of Absence Policy
- Data Protection Policy (all personal information relating to bereavement incidents will be handled in line with data protection principles. The school will anonymise records where appropriate and only share information on a need-to-know basis)

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Appendix A: useful contacts

ORGANISATION	CONTACT DETAILS
Child Bereavement UK	• Helpline: 0800 02 888 40 • https://www.childbereavementuk.org/contact-us
Winston's Wish	• Helpline: 08088 020 021 • https://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/contact-page/
Cruse Bereavement Care	• Helpline: 0808 808 1677 • https://www.cruse.org.uk/about-cruse/contact-us
Mind	• Infoline (information and signposting to further help): 0300 123 3393 • Further contacts: https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/useful-contacts/
Employee Assistance Programme	• Education Support helpline - free and confidential emotional support for teachers and education staff | Education Support • Class Staff Absence Wellbeing support, ifeel app

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Appendix B: example template letters

Suggested template for letter to parents

Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the child's parents.
The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the parents and school
Sample letter on death of a pupil:
Dear Parents
Your child's class teacher/form tutor/had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>.
<Name> died from an illness called cancer. As you may be aware, many children who have cancer get better but sadly <Name> had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday.
He/She was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.
When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try to answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we would be more than willing to help you.
We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating <Name..'s> life.
Yours sincerely
<Name> Head Teacher

Sample letter on death of a staff member:

Dear parents
I am sorry to have to tell you that a much-loved member of our staff [name] has died. The children were told today and many will have been quite distressed at the news. No-one wants to see children sad, but we are very aware that factual information and emotional support are the best means of helping children deal with bereavement. I am sure there will be many parents who are also saddened by the news. Children respond in different ways so may dip in and out of sadness, and questions, whilst alternately playing or participating in their usual activities. This is normal and healthy.
You may find your child has questions to ask which we will answer in school in a way appropriate to their level of understanding, but if you feel you would like more support and advice yourself, please do not hesitate to contact the school office. You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at www.childbereavement.org.uk
We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Children who wish to attend will be welcome to do so, though it will not be compulsory. It is likely that school will be closed on the morning or afternoon of the funeral as staff will, of course, wish to pay their respects to a very popular colleague.
I am sorry to be the bearer of sad news, but I appreciate an occurrence like this impacts the whole school community. I am so grateful for the thriving

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partnership we have with parents and trust that we, together, will be able to guide and support the children through what may be, for many, a very new experience in their lives.
Yours.....

Sample letter to bereaved family

Dear
We are so very sorry to hear of *Toby's* death. There are no words to express the sadness of losing a child and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through.
Clearly, as a school community, we will miss *him* very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to *his* friends and classmates. *He* was a much loved member of our school family.
If we can do anything to help as you plan *Toby's* funeral service or other memorial opportunities, please let us know. In time, we will also ensure that anything of *Toby's* that remains in school is returned to you, including photographs we may have on the school system.
Be assured that you are in our thoughts at this very sad time and do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of support in any way.
With sympathy,

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Appendix C: Cultural and religious considerations

Different Cultures and Beliefs

Schools have to function within an increasingly multi-cultural society, in which various beliefs, religious and non-religious, require to be taken into account. Respect for the differing needs, rituals and practices is essential when acknowledging a death. It is this diversity that enriches our lives.

General points for Eastern Faiths:

Within a faith there are often many variations and it is wrong to be prescriptive beliefs can be moderated by life in a Western Culture.
This is especially so for the younger generation, who may find it difficult to fit in with the stricter requirements of older members of a family or community.
Families tend to be much more involved in preparing the body and the funeral arrangements than in Christian faiths.
Because of belief in an afterlife, it is important that the whole body is retained.
Post mortems therefore tend to be viewed as unwelcome procedures.
The coffin is likely to be kept at home until the funeral and may well be open. All who wish to pay their respects will be very welcome.
The following descriptions merely give an overview of the major religions and belief systems that are found in the UK.

Islam

Muslims believe in life after death when, on the Last Day, the dead will come back to life to be judged by Allah. The good will reside in Paradise, the damned in Hell. Muhammad teaches that all men and women are to serve Allah and that they should try to live perfectly, following the Qur`an. Devout Muslims believe that death is a part of Allah's plan and open expressions of grief may be viewed as disrespectful to this belief.
As cremation is forbidden, Muslims are always buried, ideally within 24 hours of the death. Ritual washing is usually performed by the family or close friends at the undertakers or mortuary. They will wrap the body in a clean cloth or shroud. The coffin is often very plain as traditionally one would not be used. The grave is aligned to enable the head of the deceased to be placed facing the holy city of Mecca. Muslim graves are unmarked but to meet UK requirements, a simple headstone is used as a compromise.
There is an official mourning period of three days when the family will remain at home and be brought food by friends and relatives. For forty days after the funeral relatives may wish to make regular visits to the grave on Fridays.

Hindu

Hindus believe in reincarnation and a cycle of rebirths. When a person dies, the soul is reborn in a new body, returning to earth in either a better or worse form. What a person does in this life will influence what happens to them in the next, the law of Karma. Those that have performed good deeds in this life will be reborn into higher

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order families, those whose behaviour has been bad will be born again as outcasts.
A Hindu funeral is as much a celebration as a remembrance service. Hindus cremate their dead as it is the soul that has importance, not the body which is no longer needed. White is the traditional colour and mourners usually wear traditional Indian garments. If attending, it may be worth asking what will be appropriate dress. During the service, offerings such as flowers or sweetmeats may be passed around and bells rung so noise is a part of the ritual. The chief mourner, usually the eldest son, and other male members of the family, may shave their heads as a mark of respect.
In India, the chief mourner would light the funeral pyre. Here, he will press the button to make the coffin disappear and in some instances, may be permitted to ignite the cremator. Ashes may be taken back to India to be scattered on the River Ganges. In the UK, some areas of water have been designated as acceptable substitutes.
The mourning period lasts between two and five weeks.

Sikhs

Sikhs believe the soul goes through a cycle of rebirths, with the ultimate objective being to reach perfection, to be reunited with God and, as a result, break the cycle. Thus death holds no fear and mourning is done discretely. The present life is influenced by what happened in previous ones and the current life will set the scene for the next.
The deceased is cremated as soon as possible after death. The coffin is taken to the family home where it is left open for friends and family to pay their respects. It is then taken to the Gurdwara where hymns and prayers are sung. A short service follows at a crematorium, during which the eldest son presses the button for the coffin to move behind the curtain. In India, the eldest son would light the funeral pyre and no coffin would be used. After the funeral, a meal may held at the Gurdwara. The ashes may be taken back to India to be scattered. Here they may be sprinkled in the sea or river.
The family remain in mourning for several days after the funeral and may listen to readings from the Guru Granth Sahib (Holy Book).

Buddhist

Buddhists believe that nothing that exists is permanent and everything will ultimately cease to be. There is a belief in rebirth but not of a soul passing from one body to another. The rebirth is more a state of constantly changing being rather than a clear cut reincarnation. The ultimate objective is to achieve a state of perfect peace and freedom. Buddhists try to approach death with great calmness, and an open minded attitude of acceptance.
There are few formal traditions relating to funerals and they tend to be seen as nonreligious events. Cremation is the generally accepted practice and the service is kept very simple. It may be conducted by a Buddhist monk or sometimes family members.

Christianity

Christians believe that there is just one God and that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. They believe that Jesus died on the cross (The Crucifixion), and that three days later, God raised him from the dead (The Resurrection).
Christians believe in an afterlife and also the idea of resurrection but the details

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around what actually happens at the time of death and afterwards, varies within the different denominations. For some, as soon as a person dies, he or she is judged by God and will immediately go to Heaven or Hell, dependent on how good or bad a life they led. For Roman Catholics, there is a half-way place called Purgatory, where an impure soul can stay until fit to enter Heaven. Others believe in the Day of Judgement, when the world will end and the dead will return to life to be judged by God.

Within the different Christian denominations, there are many variations on what happens at a funeral. When someone dies, the body is taken to an undertaker who will carry out the necessary preparations for the body to be laid out. This is to enable those who wish to view it before it is placed in a coffin. The funeral, organised by an undertaker, is about one week after the death. This usually takes place in a church, but sometimes a crematorium, or a combination of the two. The coffin will remain closed. Wreaths or bunches of flowers may be placed on the coffin. It is traditional to wear black but this custom varies. If held in a church, the funeral service may include a Holy Communion, Eucharist or Mass. The body will either be buried or cremated, dependent on the wishes of the deceased and the family. A churchyard grave is often marked by a headstone but for a cremation, the family may choose a more informal way to mark where the ashes are buried or have been scattered.

Humanist

Humanists are non-religious. They follow the principle that this life is the only one we have and therefore when you are dead there is no moving on to another one. The focus of a Humanist funeral is on celebrating the life of the deceased. The person people knew is talked about, stories shared, and memories recalled. Their favourite music may be played, whatever it is. This is done by friends and family who are supported by an Officiant. The ceremony, usually a cremation, will be tailored to meet the family's wishes rather than following a set pattern.

Resources

Death and Bereavement Across Cultures by Murray, Laungani, Pittu and Young
Covers rites, rituals and mourning traditions for adults and children from the major religious and secular belief systems. Published by Routledge.
Cost £18.99.

Supporting Young People Coping with Grief, Loss and Death by Weymont and Rae.
A programme designed to be delivered to groups or whole classes of secondary school students which includes a section on Beliefs and Customs. The session encourages students to explore how the concept of death varies according to different religions and cultures. Information is given on the main world religions and belief systems. Photocopiable work sheets and handouts are included. Includes a CD- ROM. Can be ordered online from www.luckyduck.co.uk.
Cost £17.99.

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Appendix D: Memorialisation ideas

- Be aware of significant dates – Christmas, Mothers' Day etc. – but also anniversaries, birthdays.
- Memory boxes can be constructed to contain mementoes and items of significance.
- Family trees and Life Story work can help to reiterate and reinforce the child's experiences.
- Art and craft work – memory mobiles; salt jars; decorating photo-frames; creating a collage; 'comfort cushions' made from a favourite item of clothing.... many ideas to express feelings and assist understanding.
- Releasing balloons; celebrating special days; lighting candles; visiting a memorial site.
- Collate group responses to a loss to help in understanding of shared grief.
- Plant flowers; create a memory garden

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