

Hove Learning Federation Bereavement and Grief Guidance

Amended: Spring 2024

Adopted by Learning & Teaching Committee on behalf of the Governing body:

We are committed to safeguarding and ensuring the health, safety and well-being of all pupils in accordance with safeguarding procedures and guidance for staff outlined in the school's Health and Safety, Child Protection, Security and Safeguarding policies.



Contents

1. Introduction
2. Statutory Duties
3. Policy Links
4. Role and Responsibilities
5. How we structure grief support
6. Supporting complex grief
7. Religious and Cultural Beliefs
8. Links to support
9. Appendixes for school staff

1. Introduction

Hove Learning Federation is a caring community and as such seeks to offer support in times of bereavement and grief. This guidance details the support we offer as a learning community when one of our members dies.

The ways death in our community can be categorised is:

- Death of a child
- Death of a child's family member
- Death of a member of staff
- A community tragedy, wherein multiple people die

This policy is for all staff, children, parents and carers, governors, visitors and partner agencies working within the school. It provides guidelines and procedures as to how our school can best prepare for, and respond to, bereavement in the school community.

We recognise that members of the school community will be affected by a range of losses including separation and divorce. Some aspects of this policy may also be helpful in these cases.

This policy was based on an exemplar developed by the council. It has included input from our staff, our governing body, our Learning Mentors, our Mental Health Lead and the PSHE Lead Teacher for Brighton and Hove.

2. Statutory Duties

Although there are no set laws around death and grief, as a community we have agreed the following, using the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child as a template:

- Children have the right to take as much time as they need to grieve without pressure to return to school. Their absence will be marked as 'C: Other authorised circumstances'
- Children have the right to attend a funeral for a loved one, as per the family's wishes
- We will provide additional emotional support, in collaboration with the family, when a child is grieving
- We know that grieving does not have a timescale and is not linear. We will always provide support for as long as the child needs it.

3. Policy Links

This policy also links to the following other policies we hold in school:

- Safeguarding policy
- PSHE policy
- Anti-bullying policy
- Equality policy
- Health and safety policy
- Leave of absence policy (staff)

4. Roles and responsibilities in dealing with bereavement

Person	Role
Governing Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the bereavement policy and ensure its implementation • Ensure the policy is reviewed every three years or when national or local policy directs a change • Ensure that appropriate attention is given to how bereavement issues are addressed within the curriculum • Ensure that approaches to bereavement are respectful of religious and cultural values and beliefs • Ensure that staff are given appropriate opportunities for training, reflection and access to support if they need it.
Head teacher and Senior Leadership Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead a whole-school approach to the effective management of loss and bereavement including ensuring appropriate training and support provided for staff • Contact the Brighton & Hove Inclusion Support Service in the case of a sudden and unexpected death or suicide– key professionals would be expected to be involved – e.g. link Educational Psychologist and Primary Mental Health Worker, alongside relevant colleagues and managers • Be the first point of contact for family/child/staff directly affected by a bereavement • Record bereavements affecting children • Designate liaison and support to other trained members of staff when appropriate • Monitor progress in supporting those impacted by a bereavement and liaise with external agencies • Keep the governing body appropriately informed • Deal with media enquiries – support is available if required from the council’s communications team via news@brighton-hove.gov.uk
School Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff if appropriate • Know how to access support for themselves, for other staff and for the family, if advice or information is needed • Know how to report a concern if the bereavement or sudden and unexpected death has placed a child at significant risk of harm • Have an understanding of a child’s needs when facing loss and change • Provide individual support as and when needed and in consultation with the head teacher and inclusion team • Teach about loss and bereavement as part of the planned curriculum or in the role of tutor (teachers only) • Inform the head teacher at the earliest possibility if they hear about a death of someone in the school community <p>We have learning mentors at each school site who have had specific training on bereavement and loss who can support your child, with your family’s input, through this difficult time.</p>

	We also have a Mental Health Lead, who can offer further support, including signposting or referrals to relevant support.
Brighton & Hove City Council Brighton & Hove Inclusion Support Service (BHISS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer specific support when there has been an incident affecting a section of the school community, and / or a critical incident, sudden unexpected death of an adult or child (e.g. road traffic accident, suicide, homicide etc.), initially meeting with the Headteacher and key lead staff in the school to discuss the immediate plan of action, with timeline outlined where possible for follow up actions • Inform and liaise with appropriate colleagues within the local authority on a need-to-know basis • Advise and support staff who are supporting bereaved children and young people including offering and providing training on request • Advise on referral pathways and offer triage to support pathways of support, through identification of those requiring more specialist support and those whose needs can be met through the Whole School Approach on request • Ensure that any staff significantly affected by a death are made aware of the support that's available to them. <p>BHISS can be contacted on 01273 293481 or out of hours: 07590005428 (Principal Educational Psychologist work mobile) email: BHISS@brighton-hove.gov.uk</p>

5. How we structure grief support

Stage of grief	Our support structure:
Pre-bereavement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In some situations, it is known in advance that a death is going to occur. This is usually as a result of a long illness. • In cases where this is an adult within the school community, individual conversations will be held with the headteacher in terms of support, information exchange and practical considerations. • When the expected death is of a child or a member of a child's family we will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -contact the family to confirm information and explore what support could be provided to them -allocate member(s) of staff to be the key point of support for the affected pupil or pupils and ensure there is support in place for these staff members if required -ensure that all relevant adults are clear about what information has and needs to be shared with the pupil -keep lines of communication open to ensure that all information is received in a timely fashion -explore the possibility of signposting to other organisations such as: a local hospice, Winston's Wish, Child Bereavement UK, Chestnut Tree House Children's Hospice -look to involve faith or community leaders where appropriate -explore what support for the pupils affected might look like in practice -arrange training for specific members of staff to ensure all involved are confident in their ability to support the pupil -if appropriate, consider and reflect on how to communicate with the wider school community for example the pupil's class mates

	-if appropriate, begin conversations around practical considerations in the events leading up to the death and following the death
Following a bereavement Initial response-first day and week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the deceased's family with the aim to establish the facts and avoid rumours (head teacher) • Consider any religious beliefs that may affect the timing of the funeral or impact on other aspects of the bereavement process • Find out, if possible, how the family would like the information to be managed by the school • Send letters or cards of condolence to families or individuals directly affected • Will prepare a press statement, with support from the council's communications team if required (head teacher) • Inform staff of the death before pupils are informed. Staff will be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways to make sure all staff have the same version of the event • Inform pupils who are most directly affected (such as a friendship group), preferably in small groups, by someone known to them and in keeping with the wishes of the family and expertise of the school • Inform the wider school community in line with the wishes of the family. We would normally do this through assemblies and / or letters to parents. • Make small changes to the school timetable to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of the child or children affected by the situation. However, we will aim for minimal disruption to the timetable as this can offer a sense of security and familiarity. • It may be appropriate to make a school mental health referral, in collaboration with the family. This may offer further support, via signposting to further agencies for enhanced or specialist support.
Following a bereavement For the funeral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out the family's wishes and follow these in terms of the involvement of members of the school community (or not) • Identify which staff and pupils may want to attend and the practicalities of issues such as risk assessment, staff cover and transport. In some rare circumstances it may be appropriate to close the school • Organise tributes such as flowers or a collection in line with family wishes and the wishes of staff and pupils • Be sensitive to religious and cultural aspects of mourning
Following a bereavement After the funeral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit the child and family affected at home and plan a return to school • Ensure friendships are secure – peer support can be very important for a bereaved child or young person • Continue regular contact with the family and show we still care about them and their child over time • Monitor the emotional needs of staff and pupils and provide listening time and ongoing appropriate support • Continue to assess the needs of children most affected, and record and plan for support accordingly.
Following a bereavement Continued response-the months following a death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise that grief can last a lifetime and can surface at any time with new questions and many reflections and if needed we will refer on to counselling or other support services. • Be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life. We will record information and share with relevant people, particularly at transition points. This could include ensuring significant dates and events for the child are recorded and shared with appropriate staff for future reference. • Ensure that learning about loss and bereavement is embedded into appropriate curriculum areas including PSHE education. When teaching about loss and bereavement we will give careful thought as to how to support those affected by loss and bereavement.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It may be appropriate to make a school mental health referral, in collaboration with the family. This may offer further support, via signposting to further agencies for enhanced or specialist support. Often, this support is more appropriate after some time has passed after the bereavement.
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6. Our support in cases of complex grief

Complex grief	Our support structure:
Support following a bereavement by suicide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As with any bereavement, as a school we will be guided by the family's wishes when disseminating information about a death by suicide. With the family's permission, we may reach out to Brighton & Hove Inclusion Support Service for advice and support for affected members of the community When discussing any suicide that has occurred, we will ensure that the information given: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -We will take care with the language used – for example using phrases such as 'died by suicide' or 'ended his/her/their life', and saying 'attempted to end his / her life'. -Is factually correct but does not include detail of the suicidal act itself -Does not include details of any suicide note -Does not include speculation over the motive for suicide It may be appropriate to make a school mental health referral, in collaboration with the family. This may offer further support, via signposting to further agencies for enhanced or specialist support.
Support following a bereavement by homicide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As with any bereavement, as a school we will be guided by the family's wishes when disseminating information about a death by homicide. Winston's Wish recommend taking an honest and consistent age-appropriate approach to talking with children about what has happened. It is not possible to shield them from what has happened completely. Winston's Wish can provide support to families bereaved in this way and further information can be found on their website With the family's permission, we may reach out to Brighton & Hove Inclusion Support Service for advice and support for affected members of the community It may be appropriate to make a school mental health referral, in collaboration with the family. This may offer further support, via signposting to further agencies for enhanced or specialist support.

Support for refugee and asylum-seeking children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As with any bereavement, as a school we will be guided by the family's wishes when disseminating information about tragic death • Many young asylum seekers and refugees have experienced the death of family members or friends, often in traumatic circumstances. This, and further traumatic experiences and losses can have a devastating effect on their emotional and physical health, behaviour, learning and relationships. • Sudden traumatic death complicates the process of grief and mourning, as usual ways of coping may be overwhelmed. We will consult specialist mental health services where appropriate. • It may be appropriate to make a school mental health referral, in collaboration with the family. This may offer further support, via signposting to further agencies for enhanced or specialist support.
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7. Religious and Cultural Beliefs

Aspect of Religious and Cultural Belief:	Our approach to support:
Recognition	We recognise that there is a range of cultural and religious beliefs, customs and procedures concerning death. It follows that bereaved children and families may have differing expectations.
Representation	We will present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. We will make pupils aware of differing responses to bereavement, and that we need to value and respect each one of these.
Right to mourn-funeral arrangements	We are aware that the time between death and a funeral differs across religions and cultures. We respect our community's right to grieve according to their religious and cultural beliefs. We also appreciate that many families travel great distances to mark their respects at a funeral and as such, families may need several days leave to attend a loved one's funeral.

8. Useful links and websites

School mental health pages:

<https://www.hovejuniorschool.co.uk/page/?title=Mental+Health+%26amp%3B+Wellbeing&pid=156>

<https://www.westhoveinfants.co.uk/our-curriculum/personal-social-and-health-education/well-being-at-west-hove/>

Child Bereavement UK: www.childbereavement.org.uk Support and resources for all those affected both when a child dies and when a child is bereaved.

Cruse Bereavement Care: www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk Support for anyone who has been bereaved.

Child Bereavement Network: cbn@ncb.org.uk

Hope Again: <http://hopeagain.org.uk/> a website for young people who have been bereaved.

Papyrus: <https://papyrus-uk.org/> support and advice to young people struggling with thoughts of suicide, and anyone worried about a young person

Samaritans: <http://www.samaritans.org/your-community/supporting-schools> range of guidance and support for schools.

Winston's Wish: www.winstonswish.org.uk Support information and guidance for bereaved children, young people and for those caring for bereaved families.

9. Appendix 1-Checklist for school staff

When supporting a bereaved child or young person we will keep in mind the following practical tips provided by bereaved children and young people themselves:

- Inform other teachers, especially supply teachers about my loss although I may not wish to talk to them about it. Keep this on record.
- Talk to me about what has happened. I may need more information, advice and education about loss.
- Arrange for me to get extra help with my work so I don't get behind, especially before exams.
- Realise that I have a lot on my plate. Try not to put the spotlight on me too much. I will participate when I can.
- Let me know about groups for children and young people who are also coping with loss and change.
- Ask me how I am feeling in the first week, month and year after my loss. It may not be obvious.
- Arrange a signal with me that allows me permission to leave class briefly, without having to explain myself if I feel overwhelmed.
- Understand that I will not 'get over it' or 'put it behind me' but with time I will learn to cope with all the changes.
- Give me extra encouragement for all the things I am managing to do and keep me in mind.

When supporting a bereaved child or young person and the wider community we will:

- check out and be clear about the facts
- acknowledge what has happened

- be honest
- be prepared to listen
- allow children to express emotion
- acknowledge the dead person and not be afraid to share any memories
- recognise the full tragedy
- reassure them that they are not in any way responsible
- give bereaved and grieving pupils time
- not assume that a lack of reaction means they do not care
- try not to judge – grief is very personal, as is an individual's response to it
- talk with the child or young person about the support they want and how they want others informed or involved
- remember that the impact of bereavement may be felt by the child or young person later on
- Allow ourselves appropriate time for reflection and support.

We will also seek to provide:

- Routine, providing a sense of normality
- Some space, away from an emotionally intense atmosphere
- Neutral space and people to share their feelings with, without the worry of upsetting a loved one (such as a surviving parent)
- Time for pupils to be themselves without feeling guilty (being with friends, time to play in a safe space outside of the home environment)
- Regular correspondence with home, providing reassurance about behaviours and general well-being, to ensure the child or young person is managing their grief
- Access to appropriate resources
- Following the wishes of the bereaved, create advice for children and young people to discuss what to say and how to behave when the bereaved child or young person returns to school. This can help young people to see death as a common experience for us all at different times and places.
- Time for staff to be aware of changes in behaviour that may be related to the death.
- An individual link person to support the pupils when necessary and share appropriate information to subsequent places of education

- A suitable place in school for pupils who need some space to go to if they are too upset to stay in the classroom
- People that pupils can go to for support.

Supporting children with bereavement and grief



Aims of this session

- ▶ How to talk to children about bereavement and loss
- ▶ How to support grieving children.
- ▶ Lesson plans and resources that are helpful in this area.

How can we categorise bereavement in a school context?



- ▶ Death can be categorised within our school communities into four groups:
 - 1) Death of a pupil
 - 2) Death of a family member of a pupil
 - 3) Death of a member of staff
 - 4) A school tragedy

Why is this important?



- ▶ As a teacher or member of staff within a school community, it is inevitable that you will work with children affected by death in one way or another. The immediacy and enormity of these experiences may vary, but in each situation, you have a genuine chance to positively affect a young life.

One young person told us: *"My Mum died and my life changed forever. It was the biggest thing that ever happened to me. My teacher never mentioned it."* Stories like this are not uncommon. The teacher had acted no doubt, with good intentions but the message that their pupil received was not a caring or helpful one.

(Winston's wish website)

Why is it hard?

- ▶ Have a moment to reflect:
what are your experiences of
children's talk about death?
How did you deal with it?



Stages of children's understanding of death. 2-5 years

- ▶ As the cognitive understanding of children in this age range is limited they can sometimes demonstrate less of a reaction to the news of the death than might be observed by an older child and might promptly 'move on' to another activity after hearing the news of the death.
- ▶ Children aged between two and five years old have difficulty with the abstract concepts surrounding death. For instance they might be confused as to how one person can be in a grave and also be in heaven at the same time. They will become further confused if they are told that the deceased person is simply sleeping and this in turn could make them fearful of falling asleep or seeing anyone else asleep. They might insist on waiting for the person who has died to wake up or similarly if they have been told that the person who has died has gone on a long journey they may await their return.
- ▶ At this age bereaved children can become involved in omnipotence or magical thinking. This refers to the concept that bereaved children believe that their actions, inaction, words, behaviours or thoughts are directly responsible for their loved one's death. This form of thinking is not exclusive to this particular age group and can be experienced by many bereaved children and young people of older ages. If a child is exhibiting this, reassuring them they did not cause the death is key.

Stages of children's understanding of death. 5-10 years

- ▶ Children at this developmental stage have acquired a wider understanding of death and what it entails. They begin to realise that death is the end of a person's life, that the person who has died won't return and that life functions have been terminated. By the age of seven the average child accepts that death is an inevitability and that all people including themselves will eventually die.
- ▶ This understanding can also increase a child's anxieties regarding the imminent deaths of other people who they are close to. Children of this age are broadening their social networks by attending school and are therefore open to receive both information and misinformation from their peers and social circles.

Stages of children's understanding of death. 5-10 years

- ▶ At this developmental stage children can empathise with and show compassion for peers that have been bereaved. Children aged between five and ten often copy the coping mechanisms that they observe in bereaved adults and they may try to disguise their emotions in an attempt to protect the bereaved adult. The bereaved child can sometimes feel that they need permission to show their emotions and talk about their feelings.
- ▶ The important thing is to let them do this. Avoid remarks such as, "Come on be a big brave girl for mummy" or "Big boys don't cry", such comments however well meant can make children feel they need to hide their feelings or that what they are feeling is wrong. This can cause complications as the bereaved child develops.

How to talk about bereavement and loss

- ▶ Where possible, talk to the family first so that you have a working knowledge of what has happened and what they have told their child about the death that has happened to them.
- ▶ Avoid euphemisms or religion specific language e.g. 'Sleeping, gone away, a journey, a transition, gone to heaven.' This confuses children and can be in direct opposition to a families belief, for example an Atheist or Hindu family.
- ▶ Try to answer questions practically, in a way they can understand.
- ▶ Avoid euphemisms: these only increase confusion or misunderstanding which can impact the child negatively.
- ▶ Let children talk freely for as long as they need to.
- ▶ Don't panic if other children 'join in'. They may well have their own experiences they would like to share. If the death is a difficult one, e.g. homicide, suicide, or military death, you may want to set up a small 'nook', where children can talk freely without being stifled and in turn, protecting others from potentially distressing conversations.



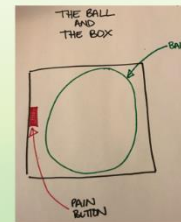
How to talk about bereavement and loss

- ▶ Children at this age may seem to be a bit 'ghoulish' in their talk around death. Try to bear in mind that this is due to their developmental stage.
- ▶ Avoid relating to one's own beliefs: always take a step back from your experiences.
- ▶ Be open and re-talk to the family if you are in any doubt about what to do or say to a particular question. It is ok to say 'I'm not too sure on that. Can I think about it and get back to you?' to a child, as long as you do get back to them.
- ▶ Do not offer your own personal experiences into the dialogue: always remain a step back. For example 'Yes, we do feel sad when someone dies', rather than 'I felt sad when XXXX died'.



How to support a grieving child

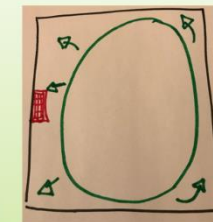
- ▶ Grieving children need support in the immediacy of death, as well as in the years following it. Be mindful of anniversaries, birthdays or key times e.g. father's day, Christmas shows etc. and actively plan for these.
- ▶ Take the time to talk about it as part of your everyday dialogue with a child: it is more upsetting if they feel everyone is 'ignoring it', or it is an afterthought.
- ▶ Grief as 'stages' is now believed to be an outmoded idea. The current thinking around this is that over time, the experiences that occur after the death help contextualise the grief. Around 10% of people do experience a 'complicated' grief which can last longer or recur.
- ▶ Children may well have what looks like 'complicated' grief as their understanding of death develops and matures along with them. Please take the time to re-support this at every stage.



Lauren Herschel
@laurenherchel

Replying to @laurenherchel
In the beginning, the ball is huge. You can't move the box without the ball hitting the pain button. It rattles around on its own in there and hits the button over and over. You can't control it - it just keeps hurting. Sometimes it seems unrelenting.

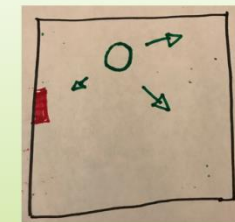
1,469 11:40 PM - Dec 29, 2017



Lauren Herschel
@laurenherchel

Replying to @laurenherchel
Over time, the ball gets smaller. It hits the button less and less but when it does, it hurts just as much. It's better because you can function day to day more easily. But the downside is that the ball randomly hits that button when you least expect it.

1,853 11:42 PM - Dec 29, 2017



Lauren Herschel
@laurenherchel

Replying to @laurenherchel
For most people, the ball never really goes away. It might hit less and less and you have more time to recover between hits, unlike when the ball was still giant. I thought this was the best description of grief I've heard in a long time.

2,332 11:45 PM - Dec 29, 2017 - Calgary, Alberta



Resources that can help

- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ks2DOoZtZ4A>
- ▶ These resources are no longer available online, but I have developed lessons and activities to follow on with



Resources that can help continued.

- ▶ This is a four session unit following the theme of 'The Little Creature'
- ▶ Session 1 is watching the video/reading the story (PSHE leads have this!) and sharing thoughts
- ▶ Session 2 is creating memory tags
- ▶ Session 3 is creating feeling rocks
- ▶ Session 4 is creating memory buttons
- ▶ (PSHE leads have resources for each of the sessions, such as tags, pebbles, acrylic paint pens and buttons)
- ▶ All the sessions have plans to go with them, stored in School Drive>PSHE>Bereavement and Grief



Books that can help

- ▶ The Scar Charlotte Moundlic
- ▶ The Sad Book Michael Rosen
- ▶ The Heart and the Bottle Oliver Jeffs
- ▶ What does dead mean? Caroline Joy & Jenni Thomas
- ▶ Badger's Parting Gifts Susan Varley

Thank you for coming

- ▶ Thank you for taking part in this: you can make all the difference to a child that needs support.



