



Triumph Learning Trust

Aspiration - Collaboration - Innovation

Bereavement and Loss Policy

Policy Details

Policy Level	Trust
Document Approver	Trust Board
Document Status	Final
Applicable to	All Trust Employees
Review Frequency	Every 3 Years

Revision History

Revision	Date	Details	Approved by
0	June 2025	First Issue	PIC

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1. Introduction

Triumph Learning Trust is committed to the emotional health and wellbeing of its staff and students. We work towards this in all aspects of school life, seeking to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that support members of the school community in coping with loss of a loved one through separation or death. Bereavement and loss affect everybody at some time and, as a close community, our school aims to provide the best support for its members during such times.

This policy gives guidance on how to deal professionally, sensitively, and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances. It outlines the basic principles and procedures that underpin our approach. Staff training provides an understanding of the complexities surrounding bereavement and loss thus enabling the school to do what it can to best meet the needs of the bereaved.

It is recognised that each experience of bereavement and loss, and the circumstances in which it occurs, is unique. Therefore, the guidelines developed must take account of individual circumstances and the wishes of those most closely involved.

This policy outlines practical measures to be taken when people are in shock, or upset, especially with sudden or multiple deaths or traumatic circumstances.

It is important that children are helped to understand bereavement in clear and unambiguous ways, and given opportunities to experience the full range of emotions that may accompany it within a safe and supportive atmosphere. As a Trust, we recognise the importance of long-term support for those who are bereaved, and will endeavour to provide opportunities for remembrance where appropriate.

Our schools are well placed to help students to explore and develop an awareness and understanding of death, as well as to support those personally affected by it. An important part of this is the ability to support students, families, and staff at times of loss and bereavement, as well as helping students to support their peers, decreasing the sense of isolation that can be part of it.

Through providing a curriculum that acknowledges and addresses loss, death, bereavement, and grief we can improve the skills of children and young people to deal with and emerge positively from them.

The policy is for all members of the school community, including partner agencies working within our school. It has been developed to complement our Critical Incident Management Strategy. All aspects of safeguarding are embedded into the life of our school and are the responsibility of all staff.

2. Rationale

An estimated 46,300 dependent children (aged 0-17) are bereaved of a parent each year, that's 127 children newly bereaved each day. Many more children are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, and, sadly, around 12,000 children die in the UK each year. In our school community there will almost inevitably be some children who are struggling with bereavement – or sometimes the entire school community is

impacted by the death or terminal illness of a member of that community. We would hope to not encounter such circumstances, but the statistical likelihood of such an occurrence necessitates a Bereavement Policy, in order that we might be proactive, rather than reactive, when responding to challenging situations of this nature.

Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be sufficient bereavement support for some children or staff, though referral to more specialist support would be a consideration where the impact of grief was more complex.

Additional information and resources can be accessed on the Child Bereavement Website <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

3. Objectives

We aim to:

- Support all those affected by loss and death in a supportive and caring environment in which everyone can respond appropriately to individual circumstances
- Offer understanding of the impact of loss and grief on children and young people's physical and emotional health
- Gain insight into children's/staff reactions to loss and grief and how our school responds to meet the needs of grieving students, parents, and staff
- Provide pastoral support for students, parents and staff

4. Responsibilities

The Trust recognises it has a statutory obligation to adopt formal policies and establish workplace procedures for dealing with Bereavement and Loss. The Trust recognises that Bereavement and Loss rules and procedures promote good employment relations and is committed to dealing with matters in a fair and consistent way.

Headteacher

The Headteacher will have overall responsibility for support and liaison in event of a death or traumatic loss. If the Headteacher is absent then the most senior teacher will take responsibility. These responsibilities are:

- Implementation of the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities
- Co-ordinating the planned action to manage school-related incidents
- Deciding who will be responsible for communicating with the family directly involved
- Deciding who gives news to the school community and if necessary, who will communicate with the media
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies
- Liaison within the school

- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff

The person responsible will take into consideration the following short-term support:

- Who should break the news about a death
- What exactly the children will be told
- How they will be told (i.e., by group or individual)
- When they will be told
- How the information will be communicated to parents and staff
- What questions might be asked by students, staff and parents
- What links will be made with the family
- Consider what will be appropriate in holding some form of remembrance activity

Staff

Teaching staff will need:

- To be familiar with and guided by the policy
- To educate students to know about loss and bereavement
- To support students in school who have experienced loss and bereavement
- To liaise with the Headteacher and parents
- To seek support for themselves, if needed

5. Curriculum

Through Personal Development activities and intervention, students are educated to know about loss, what feelings they might experience and how they might cope with personal loss and respond to the loss of others. The teaching is based on an understanding of the principles stated above and a variety of approaches are used to meet the needs of our students, showing sensitivity to their age and experience.

Teaching methods adopted in the classroom will include:

- A range of teaching and learning styles including individual and group discussions, role play and drama
- Use of supporting resources such as stories, photographs, music and mementoes
- Giving clear, truthful and accurate information, not trying to soften the blow with vague language which does not tell the truth
- Practising the collaborative social skills necessary to help cope with the feelings of loss
- Giving relevant and appropriate advice and support
- Providing continuity and progression by visiting and re-visiting issues as students develop and their needs and understanding change

- Considering the attitudes and values of students

6. Procedures

Learning of the death of a student

Our schools will:

- Speak to the family, if possible, to offer condolences and support before ascertaining what they would like to happen
- Give the family a named contact that they can contact in school
- Obtain information to avoid unnecessary speculation
- Inform staff as soon as possible
- Inform the School Nurse 0 to 19 Service
- Decide where students will be told, if this necessary
- Identify the most vulnerable students and give the support they might need
- Tell the students as soon as possible, in familiar groups, by someone they know
- Send a letter to families as soon as possible
- Give guidance to parents on supporting bereaved children

Funeral Arrangements for a student

Our schools will:

- Find out the family's wishes and if/how they wish the school to be involved
- Identify which staff and students may want to attend and the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport
- Send flowers/cards, if acceptable
- Consider the cultural and religious implications, if appropriate
- Enable the person(s) who had the closest relationship with the child to attend the funeral – this would usually be the current class teacher, however may be a staff member who had worked closely with the child in another class

Support for parents

Our schools will:

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support
- Send a letter/card of condolence
- Give out information to appropriate people depending on the family's wishes
- Give parents and family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died ☐ Send a representative to the funeral if appropriate
- Hold a collection/flowers to be sent as appropriate

- Invite parents/carers to any commemorative events held by the school

Learning of the death of a member of staff

Our schools will:

- Provide information to Governors, Staff, Students and Parents
- Provide information to absent staff
- Headteacher makes news statement, if necessary
- Arrange for staff/student condolences
- Teacher in charge of Pastoral Care arranges for support for individual/group members of staff
- Headteacher plans, as appropriate, for:
 - Expression of feelings
 - Personal belongings
 - Card / wreath
 - Death notice in local newspaper
 - Services
 - Funeral
 - Commemoration

Learning of the death of a parent or carer

Our schools will:

- Convey information to staff, students
- Make arrangements for expression of sympathy
- Personal visit
- Sympathy card
- Attend funeral

Acknowledgements

Our Schools will give the following opportunities to commemorate loss for parents/carers, staff, and students:

- Hold celebration assembly / other commemorative activity as per the wishes of the family
- Offer support to individuals who wish to talk about their experiences
- Offer support to students who need to explore and learn to understand their emotions
- Give students opportunities to talk within a group about their experiences

7. Support for bereaved students

Not all children and young people will need the support of specialist practitioners; they most often need familiar people who care. Pupils will react to bereavement/loss in a variety of ways; no two reactions are the same. Personality, family support and life experiences will all impact on children's responses.

Adults often wish to shield children from pain and distress. Experience and research have shown, however, that children are best supported by having the incident acknowledged in an appropriate way, rather than having it ignored.

It is important to be available and receptive to pupils, to listen to them, to empathise with them and normalise their emotions, thus enabling the development of healthy coping strategies.

It is normal for adults to be upset and it can be appropriate for children and young people to be aware of this because it can help them to understand their own emotions. Staff working directly with students can show that they are upset, but not out of control. It is important to maintain a safe, secure and predictable environment for the students in their care. Staff should remember that they are modelling a response for children and young people and helping them to develop coping skills.

The positive effect that concern and support from a caring, familiar adult can have on a student should never be underestimated.

Primary Effects

First reactions to bereavement or loss may be:

- Disbelief
- Anger
- Panic
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Crying
- Talking: repeating what they have experienced / heard
- Inability to process information well (and so they not hear/take in what has happened or what has been said to them)
- Regression: we all regress when we hear bad news. We want to be looked after and protected
- Sadness
- Withdrawal
- Aggression

Grieving tasks (Worden) include the following:

- Shock, disbelief, numbness – Life has lost its meaning. Shock can take the form of physical pain or numbness, but more often consists of complete apathy and withdrawal or abnormal calm, in some case with anger.
- Denial – This generally occurs within the first 14 days and can last minutes, hours or weeks. No loss is acknowledged.
- Growing Awareness – waves to savage feelings, over which there is temporarily no control – tears, anger, guilt, sadness, loneliness, depression (feelings of redundancy, lack of self-worth)
- Acceptance – re-learning the world and situations

Secondary effects

Employees should be aware of secondary effects which are associated with the above primary effects. Effects which teachers should be aware of:

- Change in behaviour
- Change in peer groups
- Loss in motivation
- Lack of achievement
- Poor hygiene
- Change in family role
- Effects on relationships

Employees are aware that grief may be delayed or may re-emerge years later. Feelings and needs of bereaved children may vary. Some children see school as a haven of peace and normality in contrast to the trauma at home. Conversely other children may find school is the place to express their feelings.

- Employees should be alert to:
- Changes in behaviour
- Mood swings
- Low self-esteem
- Psychosomatic symptoms - headaches, stomach aches
- Insecurity, feeling unwanted, friendship difficulties
- Depression
- Isolation and withdrawal

Useful responses from staff

There are a number of useful responses for staff to address bereavement:

- Acknowledge the event to students, in a confidential way, letting them know that you are available to help and support them
- Be willing to listen and giving them time
- Be willing to answer questions (it is not important that staff answer all questions but that they listen to students' fears and worries and take their queries seriously)
- Be genuine and professional
- Be non-judgemental
- Give information to them including the 'normalisation' of their reactions (i.e. their reactions are normal reactions)
- Encourage students to talk, share their feelings and seek help as appropriate
- Maintain a routine in school (flexible, caring and containing)
- Offer sensitivity, care, and empathy

Our Schools

Our Schools will offer

- A routine, which can have a stabilising effect
- Some space, away from an emotional intense atmosphere
- Neutral space and people to share their feelings without the worry of upsetting a loved one
- Time for the students to be themselves without feeling guilty (being with friends, time to play in a safe space outside the home environment)
- Regular correspondence with home, providing reassurance about behaviour and general well-being, ensuring the child or young person is managing their grief
- Access to appropriate resources via class teacher
- Preparation time for children and young people to discuss what to say and how to behave when the bereaved child or young person returns to school
- Time for staff to be aware of changes in behaviour that may be related to the death
- An individual link person to support the students when necessary
- A suitable place in school for students who need some space if too upset to stay in the classroom and people to whom they can go for support. A time out card may be used.

8. Support for employees

Our Schools will:

- Support bereaved staff and acknowledge they may be struggling with their own reactions and emotions while supporting students

- Plan for informal mutual support to give staff an opportunity to share feelings and reactions
- Give people time to attend the funeral, if appropriate
- Offer general training for all staff
- Be aware of all supporting information and resources available

9. Multiple deaths and deaths in school

In the event of multiple deaths, additional support and resources will probably be required. The senior leadership team should meet to agree a planned course of action.

The Headteacher will decide what information should be released if there is any associated media interest. Clearly information that might upset, confuse or exacerbate the situation should be withheld.

It is important that one, pre-selected individual, who is briefed by the Headteacher acts as spokesperson, relaying consistent information. Another consideration might be the setting up and running of an emergency school hotline. It may be necessary to retrieve the personal belongings of the deceased for their return to the next-of-kin. Information on the school's database, including references and addresses will probably need to be amended and updated. This also applies to notice boards etc. The school may decide to write to parents to allow them to explain to their children the meaning and implications of an event

10. Supporting a child returning to school

What are the needs of a bereaved child?

- Friendship
- Support
- Understanding
- To talk and be listened to
- Reassurance
- Increase in self-esteem
- An alleviation of isolation
- Routine
- Space
- Time to express feelings, if they wish to

11. Long term illness

Our Schools will:

- Designate one person to contact the child/staff family to find out their wishes about

staff visiting

- Ensure they keep abreast of any developments without causing distress to the family
- Advise staff of the family's wishes
- Support the school community with accurate information and support

12. Supporting Children affected by their parent's separation/divorce

It takes a long time for children to adjust to their parents' separation/divorce and it is not usually a smooth road, however the more opportunities children have to express and understand their feelings, the easier this transition will be. Some students may not wish to talk, and this must be respected too.

- Be sensitive towards the child and his/her parents
- Acknowledge the student's loss privately and assure them of your support and availability
- Inform the necessary staff in a confidential manner
- Plan to ensure both parents are kept up to date with their child's progress, if possible
- Address issues of loss through personal development activities or pastoral intervention.

13. Confidentiality

Although it is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure, students will be made aware that complete confidentiality in some circumstances cannot be totally guaranteed. This will help in retaining the trust of students and parents/carers and will ensure that the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. Sensitive information is only disclosed internally or externally with careful attention to the rights and needs of individuals. When the child/young person returns to school it is important to discuss with them whether they want certain people with whom they come into contact to be informed, such as after-school club leaders.

14. Inclusion and Equality

We recognise that there is a range of cultural and religious customs and procedures concerning death and that there may be different expectations of the bereaved child and family. We will try to present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. Students and staff will be made aware that there are a range of different responses to bereavement and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

15. Responding to the Media

Some incidents and deaths, particularly those in sudden or traumatic circumstances, may attract media attention. All members of staff will be advised not to respond to journalists and to refer all enquiries to the headteacher, who will make a considered response after seeking

assistance from the Education Authority Communications Office. Students will be given advice.

16. Staff support and training

It is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for students and mutual support for each other. Bereavement awareness training will be provided for all staff. We will ensure members of staff update their skills and knowledge as required.