

# ALDER COPPICE PRIMARY SCHOOL

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*Achievement through Commitment*

## Bereavement Policy

Policy for the Attention of			
<i>Audience</i>	<i>Key Audience</i>	<i>Optional Audience</i>	<i>Additional/Notes</i>
Senior Leadership Team	✓		
Teachers	✓		
Teaching Assistants	✓		
Administrative Staff	✓		
Curriculum Support	✓		
Lunchtime Supervisors	✓		
Site Manager	✓		
Cleaners	✓		
Governors	✓		
Parents	✓		
Website	✓		
Local Authority		✓	

*Policy Written – Autumn 2024 ~ Review Date – Autumn 2027*

# **Bereavement Policy**

## **Rationale**

Alder Coppice is an inclusive school that strives to ensure that all children feel safe when with us. Our values of Be Safe, Be Kind and Work Hard include a focus on openness, honesty and trust and working with each individual child in order for them to achieve the best of their abilities.

According to Child Bereavement UK.org, an estimated 46,300 dependent children are bereaved of a parent each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person in their life.

Experiencing a bereavement can make children more vulnerable. Bereavement, whether it is an expected death because of illness or a sudden and unexpected death or suicide, is something that can impact on members of our school community at any time.

As a school, we are committed to the emotional health and well-being of all of our staff, pupils and parents. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that prepares children for coping with a bereavement.

This policy is for all staff, parents and carers, governors, visitors and agencies that work within Alder Coppice. It provides the guidelines and procedures as to how the School can best prepare for, and respond to, bereavement in the School community.

We also recognise that members of the School community will also be affected by a wider range of loss such as bereavement of pets, separation or divorce. Some aspects of this policy may also be helpful guidance in these cases.

This policy was based upon guidance provided by the national Charity Winston's Wish.

## **Policy links**

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

- Child Protection & Safeguarding policy
- Wellbeing Policy
- School Emergency Guidelines
- PSHE Scheme
- Anti-bullying Policy
- Confidentiality Policy
- Equality Policy
- Health and safety Policy
- Leave of Absence Policy (staff)

## **Aims**

The Bereavement Policy supports Alder Coppice to provide effective support to members of our School community both before and after a bereavement: both expected and unexpected.

It also aims to:

- Enhance effective communication at a difficult time
- Clarify the pathway of support between school, family, community and wider services
- Make the best use of the support available both in and outside of School.

## **Roles and responsibilities**

### **Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team**

- Lead a whole-school approach to the effective management of loss and bereavement including, where appropriate, ensuring that effective training and support is in place for staff
- Contact the Local Authority in the case of a sudden or unexpected death or suicide, alongside relevant colleagues.
- Be the first point of contact for a family/child/member of staff directly affected by a bereavement
- Designate the liaison and support to members of staff
- Monitor those impacted by bereavement
- Keep the Governing Board appropriately informed
- Deal with media enquiries.

### **Designated Safeguarding Lead and Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)**

- Ensure staff follow our School's safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure that the welfare of the person/child remains paramount, and that all children remain protected from harm. It is important to maintain confidentiality when dealing with any incident or disclosure, but those affected should be made aware that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.
- Ensure only appropriate information is shared. Sensitive information will only be made disclosed internally or externally with careful attention to the rights and wishes of the individuals and in line with General Data Protection Regulations.
- Liaise with External Agencies
- To share information on a 'need to know' basis if a child has or is suffering trauma.
- To discuss with the bereaved family and their child, which adults in school they would like to be made aware of their experiences.
- Record necessary information linked to a bereavement and its impact on the child on CPOMS.

### **Pastoral Support Staff**

- Provide direct support to bereaved pupils or staff
- Arrange for safe spaces for bereaved members of the School community to take time out
- Help with the organisation of tributes, memorials
- Help to maintain a calendar of dates or holidays that bereaved pupils or staff might find difficult and look at ways of finding support.
- Provide additional support during transition.

## **Governing Board**

- The Governing Board will approve the policy, any changes that are made to it and its implementation
- Ensure that it is reviewed every three years or when national or local policy directs that change is required
- Ensure that attention is given to how bereavement is tackled in the curriculum
- Ensure that approaches to bereavement are respectful of religious values and beliefs
- Ensure that staff are provided with opportunities for training, reflection and access to support if they require it.
- Support the Headteacher, where required, in responding to requests from the media in the case of a publicised death

## **Procedures – School Community Members**

### **Pre-bereavement**

In some situations, it is known in advance that a death is going to occur i.e. in the case of a long illness.

Where this is an adult in the School community:

- The Headteacher will hold individual conversations regarding support, the exchange of information and any practical considerations.

Where the expected death is of a child or a child's family member we will:

- Contact the family to confirm factual information and explore the support we could provide to them
- Identify a key point of contact for the family in terms of further information exchange and update.
- Ensure that the adults who have contact with the child are clear about the information which has been shared with the child and needs to be shared with the child
- Keep lines of communication open so that all information is received in a timely fashion
- Explore the possible support from other organisations such as Winston's Wish or local hospices
- Where appropriate, seek the support of community or faith leaders
- Explore what support might look like in practice
- Arrange for any necessary training for members of staff so that they are confident in delivering support
- Consider how to, and then communicate with the wider school, for example, a child's peers
- If appropriate, begin conversations about the practical consideration in the lead up to and following the death.

## **Following a bereavement of a Child/Member of the School Community**

As a School we will consider each situation individually to ensure that the response is sensitive, accurately reflects the gravity of the situation and involves those affected as appropriate.

As an immediate response we will:

- Contact the deceased's family with the aim to establish facts and avoid rumours (Headteacher or other designated Senior Leader)
- 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 School
- Allocate member(s) of staff to the key points of support for the young person/children
- Ensure there is support in place for members of staff if required
- Send letters or cards of condolence to the families or individuals directly affected
- If necessary, and with due regard to the family, prepare a press statement
- Inform staff of the death, before pupils, recognising that some pupils may have found out through other means.
- Separately inform those pupils who will be most affected i.e. a friendship group, using someone known to them and, where possible, in keeping with the family's wishes
- Inform the wider school community, in line with the family's wishes, i.e. via assemblies or letters to parents
- Make necessary timetable changes to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of children affected, however, we will always aim for minimal disruption as this can offer a sense of security and familiarity.

## **For the funeral of a child/Member of the School Community**

- Find out the family's wishes and follow these in terms of the involvement of the School community
- Identify staff and pupils who may wish to attend if invited by the family. This should include the practicalities of staff cover, transport and in rare circumstances, the closure of the School.
- Organise tributes or collections as per the family's wishes
- Ensure that we are sensitive to religious and cultural issues.

## **Following the funeral of a child/Member of the School Community**

- Consider whether it is appropriate to visit the child/family affected at home and plan a return to school
- In the case of a bereaved child – ensure that friendships are secure
- Continue to keep regular contact with the family to show we still care
- Decide on the appropriateness of in school tributes/memorials/services
- With input from the family, plan 'time-out' activities such as journals, arts and crafts and memory boxes
- Monitor the emotional needs of staff and pupils and provide listening time and ongoing support as appropriate.

## **In the long-term**

- Be aware that the impact of a bereavement follows a child throughout their life. This means that we will continue to record information as relevant and share appropriately at transition points.
- Signpost families to bereavement support
- Be aware of difficult times such as Mother's Day/Father's Day, and make alternative arrangements if necessary.

## **Following a sudden and expected death – suicide**

Information provided to the School community in the aftermath of a sudden and unexpected death will depend upon the age of the pupils but should always reinforce:

See Appendix 1 for Understanding beliefs around death and bereavement in other cultures.

## **Following a sudden and expected death – homicide**

The Childhood Bereavement Network and Winston's Wish estimate that around one child every day is bereaved of a parent or sibling through murder or manslaughter in Great Britain.

Children may experience profound and lasting shock at what has happened, rage at the person who caused the death and a deep fear and insecurity about the world around them. Sadly, in most cases, the person who caused the death is also known to the child, resulting in a double loss, when this person is then imprisoned. In some families, it may mean that a child has to move to a new school, home and area – away from all that is familiar to them.

## **Talking to a bereaved child**

### **DO**

- ✓ Let the child know you genuinely care
- ✓ Make time to be available and listen
- ✓ Accept all that they say
- ✓ Allow them to express their feelings their way
- ✓ Let them know that feelings are normal
- ✓ Let them know that it is okay to cry
- ✓ Talk honestly and share your own feelings
- ✓ Be honest
- ✓ Make eye contact
- ✓ Have appropriate physical contact
- ✓ Let them know it is not their fault

### **DON'T**

- Stop the pupil talking
- Tell them how they should or should not feel
- Avoid contact
- Change the subject
- Deny your own pain and feelings
- Point out things that they should be grateful for
- Be frightened of sharing your own feelings

See Appendix 2 for guidance on how children understand or react to death and bereavement at different ages.

## **Equality and inclusion, values and beliefs**

We recognise that there is a range of cultural and religious beliefs, customs and procedures concerning death. It follows that bereaved children and their families may have differing expectations. (See Appendix)

Some of these may affect matters of school organisation.

We will present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. We will make our children aware of differing responses to bereavement, and that we need to value and respect each one of these. (See Appendix for beliefs/ customs of different faiths).

## **Curriculum**

Children explore the concept of loss, bereavement, and grief as part of the statutory elements of our PSHE curriculum. It is also addressed through cross-curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles, as well as through art, literacy, and RE.

We also use assemblies and Collective Worship to address aspects of loss – such as Remembrance Day or other commemorative occasions. We also observe national minutes of silence and explain the purpose of this.

When appropriate, we respond to a tragedy or serious incident by discussing this in classes, year groups or Key Stages, having discussed as a staff team the appropriate level and language we will use to respond to the incident.

Teachers carefully prepare the language that they will use to discuss incidents. Our DSLs are also equipped to point parents and carers towards appropriate advice on how to talk to their children about these events when necessary.

We will answer any questions relating to loss or death in a sensitive, age-appropriate, honest and factual way. Children and young people will not be expected to disclose any personal experiences but will be signposted to support if they want it.

We give children opportunities to learn about and discuss cultural and religious issues around death and encourage them to express their own responses and feelings.

## **National and Local Support Services**

**Winston's Wish:** [www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org) Support information and guidance for bereaved children, young people and for those caring for bereaved families.

**Childhood Bereavement Network:** <http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk> Find childhood bereavement support in your local area.

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

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

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



## **Appendix 1: Different Cultures and Beliefs**

The following information is taken from Child Bereavement UK.

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.

### **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 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.

## **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.

## **Hinduism**

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 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.

## **Sikhism**

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).

## **Buddhism**

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 non-religious 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.

## **Humanism**

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.

## **Appendix 2: Speaking to Children about Bereavement Guidance**

### **Children under 2 years of age**

Babies and young children have no understanding of the concept of death yet, long before they are able to talk, babies are likely to react to upset and changes in their environment brought about by the absence of a significant person who responded to their needs for care and nourishment on a daily basis. They will also be impacted by the emotional withdrawal that may happen if a parent or main carer is bereaved.

Up to the age of 6 months, babies will experience a sense of abandonment and insecurity which may result in increased crying and disruption of sleep and feeding. From around the age of 8 months or so, babies begin to develop a 'mental image' of the person who has died and have a sense of 'missing them'. Babies at this age may cry more or become more withdrawn; they may lose interest in toys or food and, as they develop motor skills and language, may call out for or search for the person who has died. You can help by giving lots of reassurance, and by keeping to normal routines as much as possible.

### **Children aged 2 to 5 years**

Young children are interested in the idea of death in birds and animals. They can begin to use the word 'dead' and develop an awareness that this is different to being alive. Children of this age do not understand abstract concepts like 'forever' and cannot grasp that death is permanent. Their limited understanding may lead to an apparent lack of reaction when told about a death, and they may ask many questions about where the person who has died is and when that person will come back.

Children at this age expect the person to return. Young children tend to interpret what they are told in a very literal and concrete way; therefore, it is important to avoid offering explanations of death such as 'lost', 'gone away' or 'gone to sleep' that may cause misunderstandings and confusion. Provide honest answers to their questions but do not feel you have to tell them everything in detail or all at once. Information can be built on over time.

Children may have disrupted sleep, altered appetite, less interest in play and may become more anxious about separation even when being left with familiar adults. There may be regression in skills such as language or toilet training.

### **Children of primary school age**

Between the ages of 5 and 7 years, children gradually begin to develop an understanding that death is permanent and irreversible and that the person who has died will not return. Children who have been bereaved when they were younger will have to re-process what has happened as they develop awareness of the finality of death.

Children's imagination and 'magical thinking' at this age can mean that some children may believe that their thoughts or actions caused the death, and they can feel guilty. Not being given sufficient information in age-appropriate language can lead them to 'make-up' and fill in the gaps in their knowledge.

Children increasingly become aware that death is an inevitable part of life that happens to all living things. As a result, they can become anxious about their own, and others', health and safety.

Children at this age need honest answers to their questions that can be built on over time, and opportunities to express their feelings. They can need reassurance that nothing they said or thought caused the death.

### **Teenagers**

Adolescence is a time of great change and grief impacts on the developmental task of moving from dependence to independence. Young people are moving from familial ties to increased involvement with peers. It can be difficult to ask for support while trying to demonstrate independence. Young people do not like to feel different to their peers in any way and being a bereaved young person can be extremely isolating. The support of peers with similar experiences can be very powerful.

Teenagers will have an adult understanding of the concept of death but often have their own beliefs and strongly held views, and may challenge the beliefs and explanations offered by others.

Some young people may respond to a death by becoming more withdrawn, some may 'act out' their distress while others cope with the awareness of their own mortality through risk-taking behaviour. Others may take on adult responsibilities and become 'the carer' for those around them. Keeping to the usual boundaries of acceptable behaviour can be reassuring for bereaved young people.

Young people who have been bereaved at an earlier age may need to re-process their grief as they think about and plan for their future and fully understand the impact of life without the person who died.