



# **Cookstown High School**

## **Bereavement & Loss Policy**

**Reviewed: March 2023**

**Next Review: March 2026**

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## POLICY OVERVIEW

### DETAILS

<b>TITLE</b>	Bereavement and Loss Policy
<b>TARGET AUDIENCE</b>	Governors', Staff, Parents/Guardians
<b>REVIEW DATE</b>	March 2023
<b>REVIEW LEAD</b>	Pastoral Vice-Principal
<b>POLICY DEVELOPED BY</b>	EA and Senior Leadership Team
<b>POLICY RATIFIED BY THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS ON:</b>	March 2023
<b>EFFECTIVE FROM:</b>	March 2023
<b>REVIEW FREQUENCY:</b>	Every three years (minimum)
<b>REVIEW DATE:</b>	March 2026
<b>PRINCIPAL</b>	Miss G J Evans
<b>CHAIR OF BOARD OF GOVERNORS</b>	Mrs L Dripps

This procedure has been reviewed to include reference to the remit of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) in investigating complaints from members of the public in relation to maladministration in publicly funded schools.

## RECORD OF POLICY AMENDMENTS

The following table outlines any significant changes/amendments made to this procedure since it was ratified by the Board of Governors on:

<b>DATE OF REVIEW OR AMENDMENT</b>	<b>SUMMARY OF CHANGED / AMENDMENTS TO PROCEDURE</b>	<b>AMENDED BY</b>

## Ethos and Rationale

This Policy aims to outline the basic principles and procedures that underpin our approach to supporting members of the school community with bereavement and loss.

Bereavement affects everybody at some time, and as a close community, our school aims to provide the best support for its members during times of bereavement.

This policy should be read and applied in a manner consistent with the school ethos which is based on Christian principles, the uniqueness of individuals and the importance of mutual respect.

***'Death neither obeys the school timetable nor appears on it ...it enters the classroom without knocking.'***

*Winston's Wish*

We recognise that each bereavement is unique, and that any guidelines we have developed must take account of individual circumstances and the wishes of those most closely involved. We have suitably trained staff in school who understand the complexities surrounding bereavement and can help support families at times of bereavement to ensure that the school does what it can to best meet the needs of the bereaved.

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 bereavement within a safe and supportive atmosphere. As a school, we recognise the importance of long-term support for those who are bereaved and will endeavour to provide opportunities for remembrance where appropriate.

Equally we recognise that a loss can occur due to a change in family circumstances such as separation or divorce which is a complex process which can have a long-term impact on the emotional well-being of a pupil.

Cookstown High School is well-placed to help children and young people to explore and develop an awareness and understanding of death and loss as well as to support those personally affected by it. An important part of this is the ability to support pupils, families, and staff at times of loss and bereavement, as well as helping children and young people to support their peers, decreasing the sense of isolation that can be part of it.

Every bereavement or loss and the circumstances in which it occurs is different and this policy has been constructed to guide us on how to deal professionally, sensitively, and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances.

Our school is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and pupils. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that support and prepare pupils for coping with separation or loss of a loved one.

This policy is for all staff, pupils, parents/carers, governors, visitors, and partner agencies working within our school. It has been developed to complement our Critical Incident Management Strategy and in acknowledgement that most of the bereavement experienced by pupils and staff will not be related to a critical incident.

All aspects of Safeguarding will be embedded into the life of our school and will be the responsibility of all staff.

## Policy Aims

Cookstown High School will endeavour:

- To support all those affected by loss and death in a supportive and caring environment in which everyone can respond appropriately to individual circumstances
- To offer understanding of the impact of loss and grief on children and young people's physical and emotional health
- To gain insight into children, young people's and staff reactions to loss and grief and how our school responds to meet the needs of grieving pupils, parents, and staff
- To give pastoral support for both pupils, parents, and staff.

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

## Roles and responsibilities

The Principal will have overall responsibility for support and liaison in event of a death or traumatic loss. In the event that the Principal is absent then the Vice Principal Pastoral will take responsibility. ***(If deemed necessary, those responsible may consult the Critical Incident Policy)***

*These responsibilities are:*

- Implementation of the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice
- Using the expertise within our 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 press
- Establishing and coordinating links with external agencies
- Liaison within the school
- Accessing and coordinating 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 or young people will be told
- How they will be told (e.g. whole school assembly, class, individual)
- When they will be told
- How the information will be communicated to parents and staff
- What questions might be asked by pupils, staff, and parents
- What links will be made with the family
- Consider what will be appropriate in holding some form of remembrance activity

## Procedures

Our school will endeavour to (if deemed appropriate):

- Speak to the family, if possible, offer them condolences and support before ascertaining what they would like to happen
- Give them access to a telephone number for someone they can contact in school
- Obtain factual information to avoid unnecessary speculation
- Inform staff as soon as possible
- Decide where pupils will be given information if necessary

- Identify the most vulnerable pupils and give the support they might need
- Tell the pupils as soon as possible in familiar groups by someone they know
- Send a letter to families as soon as possible (if deemed necessary)
- Offer advice and guidance to parents on supporting bereaved children

## The Funeral

Our school will:

Support the family in a way deemed appropriate by the school and family that is both appropriate and practical. This may include input into the funeral arrangements, representation of pupils and staff and sending of cards or other gestures of sympathy.

## Support for Bereaved Children

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 or 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 bereavement or loss 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 pupils can show that they are upset, but not out of control. It is important to maintain a safe, secure, and predictable environment for the pupils 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 pupil should never be underestimated.

## Primary Effects

First reactions to bereavement or loss may include some or all of the following:

- Disbelief
- Anger
- Panic
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Crying
- Talking: repeating what they have experienced/heard
- Inability to process information well (and so they may 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) may include some or all of the following:

- *Shock, disbelief, numbness* – the feeling that 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 cases 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 of savage feelings, over which there is temporarily no control - tears, anger, guilt, sadness, loneliness, depression (feelings of redundancy, lack of self-worth).
- *Acceptance* - relearning the world and situations.

***More information is available from the EA's Critical Incident Team, for staff, pupils, and parents***

### Secondary Effects

Associated with the above Primary Effects are Secondary Effects which staff should be aware of.

These may include some or all of the following

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

Staff are aware that grief may be delayed or may re-emerge years later. Feelings and needs of bereaved children may vary. Some children may 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.

*Staff should be alert to:*

- Changes in behaviour
- mood swings
- psychosomatic symptoms - headaches, stomach aches etc.
- insecurity, feeling unwanted, friendship difficulties
- low self-esteem
- depression
- isolation and withdrawal.

### Useful Responses from Staff

- Acknowledge the event to pupils, 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 pupils' 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 pupils to talk, share their feelings and seek help as appropriate
- Maintain a routine in school (flexible, caring and containing)
- Avoid using it as the opportunity to 'push' personal opinions particularly if this is uninvited
- Offer sensitivity, care, and empathy

School will endeavour to provide appropriate support through the following possible interventions

- Provision of 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 pupils to be themselves without feeling guilty (being with friends, time to socialise 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 their Head of Year
- 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 pupils when necessary
- A suitable place in school for pupils 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

## Support for Staff

*School will:*

- Support bereaved staff and acknowledge they may be struggling with their own reactions and emotions while supporting pupils
- Plan for informal mutual support to give staff an opportunity to share feelings and reactions to bereavement or loss
- Be cognisant that the needs of a grieving member staff will not end when they return to work
- Give people time to attend the funeral, if appropriate, in accordance with guidelines
- Provide other practical and emotional support as is reasonable within the framework of the school
- Offer general training for all staff
- Be aware of all supporting information and resources available

## Support for Parents

*School will:*

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support
- Send a letter/card or other appropriate act 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 (s) to the funeral if deemed appropriate



- liaise with the bereaved family regarding school representation at the funeral or memorial events
- Invite family or carers to any commemorative events held by the school

## Acknowledgements

School will (if deemed appropriate) consider the following opportunities to commemorate loss for parents or carers, staff, and pupils:

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

## Procedures on Learning of the Death of a Member of Staff

- Provide information to The Board of Governors, Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff, Pupils and Parents
- Provide information to absent staff
- The Principal makes press statement if necessary
- Arrange for staff and pupil condolences
- Vice Principal Pastoral Care arranges for support for individuals or groups of staff
- Contact Pupil Personal Development Services Tel: 028 3751 2515
- The Principal will consider the circumstances and make appropriate arrangements for:
  - Expressions of sympathy
  - Expression of feelings – Collection of Personal belongings - card/wreath
  - Services – Funeral – Communication of the Death via suitable methods
  - Commemoration

## Procedures on Learning of the Death of a Parent

- Convey information as appropriate to staff, and pupils
- Make arrangements for an appropriate expression of sympathy e.g. personal visit, sympathy card, attend funeral, etc.

## Procedures for Supporting a Child Returning to School

Refer to: iMatter: Promoting Emotional Health and Wellbeing - A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools - [www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/guide-to-managing-critical-incident-in-schools.pdf](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/guide-to-managing-critical-incident-in-schools.pdf)

*School recognises the following as possible needs of a bereaved child:*

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

- Space

## Long-term Illness

### *School will:*

- Designate one person to contact the child or 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

## Procedures on Learning of a Child Affected by their Parents' Separation or Divorce or Temporary Absence

It takes a long time for children to adjust to their parents' separation or divorce and it is often a complex process. The more opportunities children have to express and understand their feelings, the easier this transition will be. However, some pupils may not wish to talk, and this must be respected too.

***Remember: "Family breakdown is not an event but a process. The process may take years to settle down." (An Eye to Their Future, resource pack, for working with the impact of family breakdown).***

- Be sensitive towards the child and his or her parents. Acknowledge the pupil's loss privately (if appropriate) and assure them of your support and availability
- Inform the necessary staff in a confidential manner
- Make arrangements to ensure both parents are kept up to date with their child's progress, if appropriate
- Address issues of loss through circle time/PD

## Confidentiality

Although it is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure, pupils will be made aware that complete confidentiality in some circumstances cannot be totally guaranteed. This will help in retaining the trust of pupils and parents or 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 and in a manner consistent with GDPR. When the pupil returns to school it is important to discuss with them whether they want certain people with whom they come into contact to be informed.

## Inclusion and equality

School recognises 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 work to present an appropriate balance of different approaches to death and loss. Pupils 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.

## 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 media requests and to refer all enquiries to the Principal, who will make a considered response after seeking assistance from the Education Authority Communications Office. Pupils will be given advice regarding the above. This will be in a manner consistent with the Critical Incident Policy.

Staff and pupils must be cognisant of the effect of posting materials, comments, and opinions onto social media sites without considering the effect on families and other individuals.

## Staff Support and Training

It is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for pupils and mutual support for each other. Bereavement awareness training will be provided for staff as appropriate.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

The Board of Governors will review this policy regularly to consider any developments or Statutory Guidance. Any changes made will be shared with the pupils, staff and Governors.

## Linked documents

Anti-bullying Policy  
Assemblies Policy  
Critical Incident Policy & Procedures  
Pastoral Care Policy  
Positive Behaviour Policy  
Safeguarding & Child Protection policy  
School Attendance Policy  
Health and Safety Policy