



Three
Spires
TRUST

'Life in all its fullness'

Bereavement Policy

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Statement of intent

At Three Spires Trust, we understand that bereavement is faced by members of our trust family at different times, whether this is the death of a family member, a friend or a member of the trust's community. We understand the importance of providing support to all: to our children, our staff, our governors and the wider community during and after bereavement.

This policy provides a framework whereby this support is provided and outlines how the academy and trust will respond to these sensitive situations.

NB. In this policy, all mentions of 'the family' refer to the family of the deceased individual. The wishes of the family will always be considered when carrying out any of the actions outlined in this policy. If the family objects to any of the procedures, the trust and our academies will work to ensure reasonable adjustments are made.

As a Diocesan multi-academy trust, we seek to ensure that those who know the love of Jesus are able to access pastoral support through chaplaincy as well as through the more general pastoral offer of support available to all members of our trust family; however, this is invitational and nobody will be expected to meet with a chaplain or a member of the clergy – this is, however, available to all; those of Christian faith, of other faiths and of no faith.

1. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Children Act 1989
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Equality Act 2010
- Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act 2018
- The Parental Bereavement Leave Regulations 2020

This policy has been created with due regard to the following guidance:

- DfE 'Keeping children safe in education'
- Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (2018) 'Good Work Plan'
- DfE (2018) 'Mental health and behaviour in schools'
- Winston's Wish (2019) 'A Guide to Supporting Grieving Children and Young People in Education'
- Winston's Wish (2019) 'A Strategy for Schools: Positive Responses to Death'
- Samaritans (2017) 'Help When We Needed it Most'
- Child Bereavement UK (2018) 'Schools' Information Pack'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following policies:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Policy
- Behavioural Policy
- Anti-bullying Policy
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
- Maternity, Paternity, Adoption and Parental Leave Policy

2. Roles and responsibilities

The board of trustees will be responsible for:

- Overseeing the implementation of this policy.
- Reviewing this policy with the CEO on an tri-annual basis to ensure its effectiveness.

The CEO will be responsible for:

- The overall implementation of this policy.
- Informing governors and staff when a death of a principal or a member of the central team occurs and arranging for staff and children to be informed, as appropriate and with approval from the family.
- Responding to any enquiries from the media or the wider trust community, or appointing a member of staff to undertake these duties.

The principal will be responsible for:

- Liaising with external agencies, as appropriate.

- Informing governors and staff when a death occurs and arranging for pupils to be informed, as appropriate and with approval from the family.
- Being the first point of contact for staff, pupils and parents directly involved in a death, or designating this role to another appropriate member of staff.
- Responding to any enquiries from the wider academy community, or appointing a member of staff to undertake these duties.
- Ensuring staff have the necessary training to support bereaved pupils and to deliver sensitive news.

Pastoral staff will be responsible for:

- Undertaking bereavement support training and conducting training with colleagues in their own academy to share their knowledge with other staff.
- Supporting the principal in carrying out the procedures outlined in this policy.
- Supporting staff, pupils and parents following a death, as directed by the principal.
- Supporting other staff members with communicating the news of a death.
- Making referrals for pupils, staff and other members of the academy's community to receive support.

The media spokesperson will be responsible for:

- Liaising with the media as required.
- Monitoring media and social media activity regarding the death.
- Respecting the family's wishes in relation to what information can be provided to the media.

All staff members will be responsible for:

- Undertaking any bereavement support training arranged by the principal or pastoral staff.
- Seeking support from pastoral staff as appropriate.
- Supporting their colleagues and pupils following a death, as appropriate.

3. The initial response

If the family or member of staff contacts the academy or the trust to inform them of a death, the member of staff that answers the phone will transfer the call to the principal, the DSL, or the most senior member of staff available.

If the academy or the trust is made aware of the death through a source other than the family, the principal or the DSL will contact the family either by phone or through a home visit.

The principal or the DSL will gather factual information about what has happened and establish the family's wishes with regards to what information will be communicated to the wider trust and academy community and how.

If a death affects the entire academy or trust, ie the death of a pupil or member of staff, the principal will inform the family that staff and pupils will be informed as soon as possible.

If the death affects an individual member of staff, ie the death of a relative, the principal will ask the member of staff if they would like this to be communicated to any of their colleagues. If it is decided that the death will be communicated, the principal will discuss with the staff member what information will be communicated and how they would like it to be delivered.

If a death affects an individual child, ie the death of a parent, the principal will ask the family if they would like this to be communicated to the academy community, to individual friends or simply to key adults in the academy or trust. If it is decided that the death will be communicated, the principal will discuss with the family, and the child if possible, what information will be communicated and how the family would like it to be delivered.

If the death of a child's family member occurs while the pupil is attending the academy, a member of the child's family will be asked to come to the academy to inform the child of what has happened and to take them home. If this is not possible, arrangements will be made for a member of staff to take the child home – or to an agreed address.

The principal will make contact with any other agencies as required, ie the police, and will decide if any temporary variation needs to be made to the timetable, ie rearranging or cancelling certain lessons.

In the event of the death of the principal, the CEO will be responsible for the duties outlined above.

4. Informing staff and governors

Staff and governors will be informed of the death before children. All staff and governors will be invited to a meeting by the principal as soon as practicable (in the event of the death of the principal, the CEO will lead the meeting). Absent staff and governors, including part-time and peripatetic staff, will be identified so they can be informed as soon as possible. If it is not possible for absent staff to be told in person, a phone call will be arranged.

Any information provided to staff and governors during the meeting will have prior approval from the family.

During the meeting, the principal (or the CEO), with the support of pastoral staff, will:

- Explain what happened leading up to the death.
- Give a factual explanation of how the death occurred.
- Allow time for staff and governors to discuss what has happened and how they feel.
- Share the identity of the media spokesperson (from the trust central team) who will be responsible for liaising with the media as required.
- Identify what internal and external support is available to staff and governors.
- Discuss the arrangements for informing children, including whether all children will be told and who will be responsible for informing them.

Staff members that will be responsible for informing children about the death will be provided with a script which sets out what children should be told and includes information on how to answer some difficult questions. The principal and relevant pastoral staff will create the script, with input from the family.

5. Informing children

The principal will have a discussion with the family about whether all children need to be informed about the death. If the death affects the whole academy or trust, ie the death of a staff member or child, the principal will strongly recommend to the family that all children should be informed; however, if the death does not affect the whole academy or trust, it may be more appropriate to just inform certain groups of children. The principal (in discussion with the DSL and the DSS) will make the final decision regarding which children will be informed.

Where possible, children will be informed about the death in small groups at the same time by a member of staff that is familiar to them, ie during form time by their form tutor in secondary settings or by their class teacher during worship in primary settings. It should not be communicated to all children in the same place at the same time – smaller groups are much more personal and much more manageable.

Pupils with specific needs that may influence their response to being informed about the death will be identified and told separately. These needs include the following:

- Children that had a long-term and/or close relationship with the individual who has died
- Children with a history of loss
- Children with SEND
- Children who have difficulty managing their emotions or behaviour

Staff responsible for informing children will use the script provided to them. To ensure all children are told about the death in an age-appropriate way, a number of scripts may be created and distributed to staff with clear instructions of which script to use for which year group.

Where possible, a member of pastoral staff will be present when children are told about a death so they can help with answering any questions. Pupils will be given time to ask questions about what has happened and to talk about how they are feeling. Any questions that are asked by children will be answered factually. Children will be told where they can go to within the academy for support and will also be directed to any external support.

6. Informing parents

The principal will have a discussion with the family about whether any parents need to be informed about the death. If the death affects the whole academy or trust, ie the death of a staff member or child, the principal will strongly recommend to the family that all parents should be informed; however, if the death does not affect the whole academy, it may be more appropriate to just inform parents of children that are directly affected, if any.

The central team will support with the composition of a letter to parents about the death. The letter will contain the basic, factual information about the death, information about how the academy is supporting children, how they can support their children, and who to direct questions or concerns to. The family will see the letter in advance of it being sent.

7. Funerals

If appropriate, the principal will discuss with the family whether any staff, governors or children are able to attend the funeral. With the family's approval, the principal will arrange for the academy and trust to be represented at the funeral and identify which staff and children may want to attend.

The CEO and principal will decide if it is necessary for the academy to be fully or partially closed during the funeral and will inform the chair of governors accordingly. Transportation to and from the funeral will be arranged for staff and children, as appropriate. Necessary cover arrangements will be made for staff attending the funeral.

8. The media and social media

Any communication with the media or social media activity will be agreed with the family. Only the appointed media spokesperson will deal with media enquiries and communications. Staff, governors

and children will not respond to any media enquiries themselves or make any public statements about the death.

Staff, governors and children will not post any information about the death on social media. The media spokesperson will investigate any post made regarding the death and will refer any concerns to the principal. If information about the death is circulated on social media prior to the academy making an official statement, the principal and media spokesperson will release a statement on the academy's social media channels, with the agreement of the family, to prevent rumours from spreading.

Comments and other activity on academy-posted social media statements will be monitored and moderated by the media spokesperson. If staff, governors or children find any false, negative or malicious information being posted about the death on social media, they will report this to the principal.

If a member of staff is found to have been posting content on social media or providing information to the media that is false, negative or malicious, action will be taken in line with the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure. If a child is found to have been posting content on social media or providing information to the media that is false, negative or malicious, action will be taken in line with the Behavioural Policy.

9. Support for the family

The principal, the CEO or the DSL will be the main point of contact between the academy and the family. The principal will invite the family into the academy to discuss how the academy can best support them. The family's wishes and feelings will always be considered and respected when making decisions and conducting activities relating to the death.

Any support that is put in place will be decided on a case-by-case basis, depending on the family's needs and wishes. Support may include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Sending a letter of condolence
- Giving the family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died
- Inviting the family to commemorative events held by the academy

10. Support for staff

Staff directly affected by the death, ie if they are a relative or close friend of the individual that has died, will be identified and the appropriate support will be put in place. The level of support will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the principal, and may include the following:

- Ensuring the staff member is not left on their own
- Arranging for lessons or other duties to be covered
- Organising bereavement leave

See the staff Time Off policy.

A designated room will be made available to staff where they can go during break and lunchtimes to meet with other staff and share their thoughts and feelings. Staff will be vigilant to the signs that indicate their colleagues have been affected by bereavement and will offer them support or make a referral to a member of pastoral staff.

11. Support for children

Children that have experienced a significant bereavement, ie of a family member

A member of staff that is familiar with the child will be appointed to act as their main point of contact – the child will be made aware of who the staff member is. The DSL will contact the child's family to discuss whether the pupil will be attending immediately. Any support put in place for a child will be child-led, based on their needs and wishes.

When deciding what support will be put in place for a child, the impact the death will have on the child will always be considered in the context of pre-existing factors. The following contextual factors will be considered:

- The circumstances surrounding the death, ie was it under traumatic circumstances, was the death expected, or did multiple people die?
- The relationship between the child and the person who has died.
- The ability of the child's family to support them following the death, ie. if a child's parent has died, how able is the surviving parent to support the child(ren)?
- Family factors such as size, financial state, structure, style of coping, communication and stressors that affect the child.
- The support the child has from their peers and other organisations and people.
- Characteristics of the pupil, including their age and any SEND they have.

The child will be a part of discussions regarding who should be informed about the death and how, where appropriate.

If a child chooses to attend immediately after a bereavement, they will be allowed a flexible approach to their timetable and staff members will be made aware that the child may not be able to work to their usual capacity. The designated staff member will keep in communication with the child's family to inform them about how the child is doing. If the child is absent following the bereavement, they will be made aware of who has been informed about what has happened and what they were told.

The designated staff member will make regular contact with the child during their absence. The principal, designated staff member, child and the child's family will make arrangements for the child's return to attending for their education, ie a phased return.

If a death occurs soon before or during a time where the child will take an exam, the principal will report the circumstances to the exam board who will decide if special considerations apply. If a child misses an exam due to the death of a close family member or friend, the principal will report this to the appropriate exam board who will then make a decision as to whether special considerations can be applied.

Any safeguarding concerns regarding a bereaved child will be dealt with in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

Support for all children

All pupils, even those not directly affected by the death, will need to be supported following a death, particularly if the death affects the whole community, ie the death of a staff member. Children will be given the opportunity to speak to a member of pastoral staff. Staff will talk to pupils about what has happened using age-appropriate and developmental stage appropriate language.

Following a death in the academy or the trust community, pupils will be invited to take part in remembrance activities, ie acts of remembrance or remembrance assemblies.

Staff will identify any pupils that may need more direct support and make a referral to the principal who will assess what support might be required in collaboration with pastoral staff.

In the event that the death meets the threshold of a 'critical incident', the DSL and / or SENCo will liaise with the Educational Psychology Service about arranging critical incident support.

12. Behaviour and SEMH issues

Staff will remain vigilant to the following behaviours that a child may display immediately after the death of someone close to them:

- Inability to concentrate
- Lack of motivation
- Tiredness and irritability
- Heightened sensitivity to comments and remarks
- Inability to take others' feelings into account
- Anger, frustration or aggression
- A general change in behaviour, e.g. becoming unnaturally quiet or withdrawn
- Anxiety
- Being easily upset by events that would normally not affect them
- Physical complaints, such as headaches, stomach aches and a general tendency to be prone to minor illness

The child's designated staff member will keep in contact with the child's family and share information about how the pupil is behaving in the academy and at home. Any challenging behaviour displayed by bereaved children will be addressed using the individual graduated response outlined in the Behavioural Policy.

A record will be made of anniversaries and days with regards to the death which may act as a trigger for challenging behaviour.

Any incidents of bullying, where a bereaved child is the victim or perpetrator, will be addressed in line with the Anti-bullying Policy, taking into account the child's needs and circumstances.

The principal will ensure that all staff members are aware of the lasting impact that bereavement can have on a child's mental health, behaviour and education.

All staff members will remain vigilant to signs that a bereaved child is facing difficulties in relation to their psychological, physical and social development and will refer the child to pastoral staff who will put appropriate support in place. The academy's Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Policy will be followed to ensure children that may be vulnerable to developing or experiencing SEMH issues following a bereavement can be identified and appropriately supported.

13. Specific circumstances

The procedures outlined in this policy will be followed for all deaths affecting the community and individual children; however, specific measures will be implemented for certain circumstances.

Pre-bereavement – when a family member is not expected to live

If a child has an illness where they are not expected to live, their family will make the academy aware of the situation and the academy will ensure the appropriate support is in place. A member of pastoral staff will meet with the child regularly (within a time frame that is agreed with the family) to provide the child with an opportunity to talk about what is happening and how they are feeling.

All staff will remain vigilant to signs that the child is facing challenges in relation to their psychological, physical and social development and will refer any concerns to pastoral staff who will ensure appropriate support is put in place.

Children with a life-threatening illness

Children with life-threatening illnesses will be encouraged to take part in academy routines as much as possible, and the academy will continue to expect the usual standards of behaviour as appropriate.

The principal, the child and their family, and other relevant staff members (ie a member of pastoral staff) will decide how to share the news that a child is terminally ill with the academy community. Other children will be informed about how they can best support the child in the most appropriate way.

If the child is receiving treatment from a local hospice or hospital, the key professional responsible for the child will be identified and the principal will contact this person for advice and support as necessary.

Suicide

Staff from the academy will respond to a suspected suicide within 48 hours. The DSL, or other appointed member of staff, will contact the police or the family as soon as possible to confirm the death and whether it is being treated as a suicide.

If the family does not wish the cause of death to be disclosed to the academy community, the academy will state that the nature and cause of death are still being determined and that additional information will be forthcoming. If the death is subject to an ongoing investigation, the DSL will check with the police before speaking about the death with children who may need to be interviewed by the police, in line with the child protection and safeguarding policy.

Staff will be told about the death first, in line with section 4 of this policy. The script that staff will use to inform children of the death will be factual while avoiding excessive detail about the suicidal act itself.

Immediate emotional support will be arranged for any child and staff who require it. A designated room will be set up where pupils and staff can go to if they are struggling with the news.

Liaison with the media will be handled in line with section 8 of this policy. Any information distributed to the academy community and media regarding the death will:

- Be factually correct but not include detail of the cause of death or method used.
- Not romanticise, glorify or vilify the death.
- Not include details of any suicide note.
- Not include speculation over the motivation for suicide.

Research indicates that pupils that have been directly affected by suicide are at an increased risk of taking their own life. Staff will report any concerns about pupils to the principal and the appropriate support will be put in place or a referral to specialist services will be made in line with the Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Policy.

Any memorial activities conducted by the academy will be held within two weeks of the death; following this, any memorial material will be given to the family. Permanent memorials will not be held at the academy; however, the academy may set up a memorial on the website that will be moderated by a designated member of staff and removed after an agreed time.

Children and staff will be warned about the risks of un-moderated online memorials (ie those on social media), such as their comments becoming public without their permission and online memorials attracting negative comments.

The Educational Psychology Service will be informed by the DSL and / or SENCo and their support requested for the wide academy community.

Cultural and religious behaviours

The academy will keep in mind the cultural attitudes and behaviours relating to a death and will make sure these needs are taken into consideration when putting support in place for those affected, including the length of bereavement leave for members of staff.

Forces' families

The needs and feelings of bereaved forces' pupils will always be considered prior to any activities relating to the armed forces, e.g. commemorating Armed Forces Day, and additional support will be put in place for pupils as required.

Appropriate support will be implemented for bereaved forces' pupils, particularly during times of change. Bereaved forces' pupils will be protected from any unwanted media attention and there will be a designated area in the academy that the pupil can go to if they are feeling overwhelmed.

A death involving murder or manslaughter

The principal will contact the police or the family to establish the facts about what has happened. A designated staff member will be available to talk to the child to help them to answer any questions they may get from their peers about what has happened.

Research indicates that children that have been bereaved due to murder or manslaughter can be at significant risk of developing PTSD. Any concerns relating to the pupil will be addressed in line with the Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Policy. Media personnel will not be permitted onto the academy site at any time.

14. Remembrance activities

Following a death in the trust or academy community, the academy may conduct some remembrance activities, ie an act of remembrance or a remembrance assembly. The family will always be consulted prior to any remembrance activities being planned and will be invited to take part in the activities.

All members of the academy community, including staff, governors, children and parents, will be invited to take part in remembrance activities. All remembrance activities will be planned so that they are respectful of the culture and religious beliefs of the family.

15. Managing transitions

Information about children who have been bereaved will be recorded. This information will be shared with relevant parties at key transition points, including the following:

- If the child moves to a new education setting
- If the child moves class
- When the child will be taught by a new teacher

Good communication will be established with feeder primary schools and early years settings so children that have experienced bereavement can be identified.

16. Teaching about bereavement and grief

Different aspects of the curriculum will be used to discuss relationships, feelings and emotions, and to think about how to manage these in relation to family events and death. Before delivering any lessons that cover topics of death and bereavement, the teacher will consider how the lesson may affect the bereaved children they are teaching.

Bereaved children and their families will be consulted over whether it is appropriate for them to attend lessons about death or bereavement, and alternative arrangements or additional support will be put in place as required. Where appropriate, the teacher will discuss what the lesson is going to cover with the child and will work with the child to design activities that the child feels they are able to get involved with.

Any lessons covering topics of death or bereavement will take account of religious and cultural beliefs.

17. Staff training

All pastoral staff will receive training in bereavement support. Pastoral staff will organise training sessions for all staff so that they can share their knowledge with all staff members, including support staff, biannually.

If any members of staff are not confident in delivering some level of bereavement support to children or other staff members, or in implementing this policy, they will speak to the principal who will arrange for the staff member to undergo the appropriate training.

The principal will check if the staff that work for third party providers that deliver extra-curricular activities for pupils have received bereavement training and will recommend them to do so if this training has not been undertaken.

18. Monitoring and review

This policy will be reviewed on a triannual basis by the DSS. The next scheduled review date for this policy is April 2028. Any changes to this policy will be communicated to all employees and all relevant stakeholders. All staff are expected to familiarise themselves with this policy as part of their induction.