

Valence Loss Guidance and Bereavement Policy

Rationale

“To be wise before the event” - Yule and Gold 1993

Aims

- To recognize that death sadly does sometimes occur in the school community, and have a plan to manage the consequences when required.
- To have a range of strategies in place to support bereaved students, staff and families.

When a death happens

The first point of contact will always be the Headteacher and the SRD group, who will plan a management strategy with an awareness that every death is individual and therefore the actual management will vary in each case. They will also appoint a key coordinator for day to day contact and support.

Issues to be considered -

- Informing staff about the death, by phone, group contact, one to one. Special consideration will be given to those who were closest to the person who has died. The actual method chosen will be also be considered according to the timing of the event ie, whether in term time or school holidays.
- Informing students about the death, in small groups, one to one, by parents when a letter has gone home, or in an assembly. Special consideration will be given to students closest to the person who has died.
- Informing parents about the death, by phone, if their child already knows, or by letter.
- Special consideration for staff, students and those especially affected by the death. (Staff groups, individual support, circle time for students, and time and space for asking and answering difficult questions and giving reassurance).
- Time for students to consider funeral attendance. (Not just because of peer pressure). Consideration will be given to what might be expected at the funeral, such as open coffins and other rituals, and space available in church or chapel for wheelchairs.
- Adherence to the deceased family’s wishes for the funeral.
- Support for students from carers if they do decide to attend the funeral.
- Sending letters of condolence from staff and students to the family.
- Planning and holding a Memorial Service in school. (A named person to organize this – special consideration given to the family’s wishes, support for them whilst in school for the event, and appropriateness of content for the person who has died).
- Ongoing support for those particularly affected by the death, after the initial arrangements have been put in place.
- Informing the Local Authority, if necessary.

Helpful advice for parents when supporting their child about the death at home is available on the school's website.

Additional considerations specific to the death of a student

- Special support for the student's friends and classmates, and those students in school with similar conditions as the person who has died.
- School support for the student's family, (liaising with them, home visits and keeping in touch, preparation of a Memory Book compiled by students and staff).
- The student's work and belongings. (Keeping these around the building or removing them.)
- Special support for staff and students in the adjustment to the new situation in class and around the school in daily life – particularly in the bungalow where the student may have boarded.

A Student dying in School unexpectedly or any other situation requiring crisis management, such as an accident involving several students and staff.

In this situation at least one and preferably two members of the SRD team will immediately assume responsibility for planning and organizing. The team recognizes the need for plans to be put in place rapidly.

Specific issues to be considered in this situation in addition to those for other kinds of death in the school community.

- Special care and consideration as to how the parents of the child are contacted.
- Special care and consideration as to how staff, other parents and students are told about what has happened.
- Informing the police and other authorities if necessary.
- Dealing with the media coverage if necessary, by someone who is aware of the Education Authority's protocol in these circumstances.
- Notifying the Chairman of the Governors.
- Appointment of a police liaison person if required.
- Attendance at court proceedings by the relevant staff if required to do so.

Staff will always receive full support in these cases.

An ambulance will always be called to take the child's body to hospital.

Considerations on the Death of a member of staff

- Informing other members of staff, with special consideration for those who have worked with the person.
- Informing parents who may have been closely involved with the person.
- Funeral attendance with special consideration of the family's wishes.
- Holding a Memorial Service in school.
- Letters of condolence for the family and a Memorial Book.
- Consideration as to who will coordinate this

Considerations for staff who are personally bereaved

- Appointment of a named coordinator who will Keep in contact with the member of staff before they return to work and support them if necessary.
- Opportunity for the member of staff to discuss how they would like their return to work managed. (Do they want staff and students to know what has happened, would they like a part time return to begin with, do they want staff and children to talk with them about what has happened, or would they prefer nothing was said?)
- Opportunity for the named coordinator to discuss with appropriate staff and students as above, before the member of staff returns to school.

Considerations on the Death of a Parent

- Liaising with the family for accurate information.
- Discussion with the student and their family as to how they would like their return to school managed. (Do they want all staff and students to know what has happened, would they like a part time return to begin with, do they want staff and children to talk to them about what has happened, or would they prefer nothing was said?)
- Support for student's friends with reference to the student's wishes.
- Special support for the student in school as appropriate, and as required by student and his or her family.
- Special consideration and awareness by staff for step families and estranged parents.
- Awareness of a student's possible difficulties in speaking about their feelings with regard to the death.
- Provision for students to release feelings in a safe managed manner without judgments.

Considerations/issues where a death is imminent but has not yet happened.

- Appointment of a coordinator who will be responsible for coordinating this stage, and reporting to the SRD team as appropriate.
- Awareness of the level of the family's desire for support and contact with school during this stage.
- Awareness of the need for staff support.
- Awareness of the needs of other students, especially those who may have similar conditions to the dying student.
- Awareness of how students can support their dying friend.

Support for bereaved families of students who have left Valence

On hearing of the death of a pupil who has left, the school will always attempt to support the student's family wherever possible. This would include –

- Attendance by staff and pupils at the funeral where appropriate.
- Invitations to the parents to return to the school to revisit areas where their child lived.

Staff Training

Training will be provided on a regular basis to enable staff to support students and parents and other colleagues around bereavement and loss .

General aims of staff Training

- To allow participants to explore their own attitudes and feelings towards loss, death, dying, and bereavement in a safe and controlled space, and be comfortable with these.
- To provide participants with a framework for understanding the normal process of grief.
- To help participants to identify and practice some of the skills for working with normal grief in order to work with bereaved parents, students, and other staff, so as to increase their confidence when involved with this difficult issue.
- To help participants recognize complicated grief.
- To stress the importance and professionalism of having support for themselves.

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