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Primary School



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High School



The John Milton
Sixth Form
AT STOWUPLAND HIGH SCHOOL



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JOHN MILTON ACADEMY TRUST

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Bereavement and Loss Policy

JMAT 050

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Introduction

At John Milton Academy Trust we understand that bereavement is an experience which is likely to be faced by all members of our school community at some point. We appreciate that there will be significant challenges when the loss is of a member of our school community, a child or staff member. Learners will need to be supported when they experience family bereavements and other significant losses during their lives.

This policy has been created to provide guidelines to be followed after a bereavement. The aim is to be supportive to both learners and adults, and for staff to have greater confidence and be better equipped to cope when bereavement happens. Every death 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. The Trust is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and learners.

1. Aims

This bereavement policy aims to:

- Set out a guideline for how our schools will respond to a death in our school community.
- Set out a plan for communicating deaths in a timely manner that balances our school community's interests and transparency with the wishes of the family of the deceased.
- Identify best practices for supporting learners and/or members of staff experiencing bereavement.
- Define the roles and responsibilities of key staff members and the Trustees or Local Board.
- Provide a roadmap and framework for learners or staff returning to school following bereavement.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

2.1 The Executive Head / Headteacher

The Executive Head / Headteacher has overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy and for delegating any responsibilities under this policy to other members of staff.

The Executive Head / Headteacher will:

- Liaise with the family of the deceased.
- Where appropriate, communicate details of a death to learners and staff as set out in this policy, or activate communication teams.
- Allocate a specific person to support the bereaved and identify staff to keep in touch with the family, so contact is manageable.
- Respond to media requests for information in the case of a publicised death, in liaison with the Trust and Prominent PR, our designated media coordinators.
- Participate in any multi-agency reviews as requested.
- Lead reintegration meetings for learners or staff returning to school after a bereavement.
- Arrange for monitoring and support of the pastoral support team or any individual staff members who are supporting bereaved learners or staff.

2.2 Pastoral support staff

The pastoral support team has responsibility for monitoring and supporting bereaved learners and staff members (including before their bereavement, where relevant – for example, in the case of terminal illness).

The pastoral support team will:

- Provide direct support to bereaved learners and staff.
- Signpost to external support available to bereaved learners and staff.
- Organise safe spaces for bereaved members of the school community to take a time out.
- Provide the opportunity to grieve and mourn within the traditions of their own culture and religious beliefs.
- Organise memorials, such as temporary tributes, books of condolences, memorial web pages.
- Arrange for the attendance and supervision of learners at funerals (where permitted).
- Maintain a calendar of dates and holidays that may be particularly difficult for bereaved learners or staff and ensure they're supported on those days.

- Provide additional support during significant transitions – for example, when moving up to the next year group or transitioning to a new school.

2.3 Local Board

The Local Board is responsible for monitoring the implementation of this policy and supporting the Executive Head / Headteacher.

The Chair of the Local Board will:

- Undertake regular monitoring of how the school is supporting the bereaved, and the staff who support them – for example, through regular catch-ups with the headteacher.
- Monitor the headteacher's emotional wellbeing – for example, through regular meetings between the headteacher and chair.

2.4 Trust Central Team

The Trust Central Team will:

- Assist the headteacher, where required, in responding to media requests for information in the case of a publicised death. The Trust uses Prominent PR for all media contact.
- Where necessary, arrange for another staff member to take the lead if the headteacher is not available to respond to a death immediately.
- Provide additional support in school where required.

3. Provision for supporting staff who support the bereaved

Supporting learners and staff who are grieving can be painful. Those staff members who carry out this essential work will be monitored and supported.

- Internal and external resources will be available to support these staff members.
- The local authority's 24 Hour Crisis Team will be able to offer school leaders advice and guidance as well as offering families support.
- A specific room will be allocated to enable staff to meet and share their thoughts over a coffee or tea. Anything shared on such occasions should be deemed as confidential and not for public airing.
- Information on accessing bereavement support outside of school can be found in Appendix A.

4. Immediate actions following a death

The school will respond in a planned and agreed manner, so that all staff know what is expected and can contribute in a way that is consistent with the ethos of the school.

We believe that children and adults alike have the right to:

- Be given space and time to grieve.
- Be given or signposted to support from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate – if possible, of their own choice.
- Encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement.

We recognise that:

- Grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real.
- Differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all

viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment.

- The death of a child has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/care team of that child and every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far-reaching contacts.

4.1 Clarifying information and the wishes of the family

The school may be notified in a number of ways.

- It will usually be parents or a close relative that informs the school directly about the death. The person answering the phone will put the parent/carer/relative through to the most senior member of staff on site.
- Where death occurs in the holidays or at weekends, parents or close family will usually contact whoever they can. Whichever member of staff is contacted they must contact the Headteacher as a matter of urgency to inform them.
- News of a death can often be reported on social media and it may be that members of staff (particularly those living within the community) may discover the news before senior staff. In this instance, staff should immediately contact the most senior member of the school possible and that person will then assume responsibility for the dissemination of the information.
- We will agree with the bereaved, before the school informs stakeholders within, or outside, the school community.

4.2 Sharing the news with staff

- A staff meeting will be held as soon as practicable. For any staff that are absent, arrangements will be made to inform them over the telephone, if a personal visit is not possible.
- The Headteacher will inform staff what happened leading up to the death and give a factual explanation of how the death occurred.
- If a death has occurred in a holiday period all staff will be informed on the first day of term or through the school's communication system.
- Staff will be provided with a script about what has happened so that consistent information is given to all learners. Guidance for responding to difficult questions that staff may be asked by learners will be included.
- Staff will be encouraged to consider how to meet their own support needs and take care of themselves. This may be from friends, family, support services and/or buddying up with other members of staff. Contact details for support services can be found in Appendix A.

Consideration will also be given to informing the following people:

- Chair of Local Board
- Previous school staff who worked closely with the child or member of staff
- Social Work team
- SEND team
- Other professionals e.g. Educational Psychologist, Counsellor

4.3 Sharing the news with learners

The process for telling the learners will be decided by the Headteacher following consultation with senior leaders. For example, the age of learners will be considered and a decision made as to who the best person/people would be to speak to the children about the death. We will ensure learners are informed in a timely and appropriate way (e.g. calling a whole-school or year group assembly, or class teachers sharing the news).

We are aware that children and young people, even very young children will want to know what happened, how it happened, why it happened and perhaps most importantly of all, what happens next? We recognise that children and young people have a healthy curiosity and if they are not informed of the circumstances, or feel they are unable to ask questions, their normal grief process may be affected.

The following guidelines are to be used when informing children of the death of another pupil, a teacher or other member of staff:

- Identify those children who had a long-term and/or close relationship with the deceased so they may be told together as a separate group.
- Learners with specific needs including learners with a past history of loss; learners with a learning disability and learners who have difficulty managing their emotions or behaviour will be identified and informed appropriately.
- The learners in the school community will be informed either in their classes or in assemblies.
- In an attempt to reduce the shock of the news of the death to the children and young people, the language used to inform them will be carefully chosen and delivered by a senior member of staff.
- The school will signpost learners to or seek direct, additional support from external agencies/charities to ensure all children and young people feel supported.

4.4 Informing parents/carers

We consider that it is vital that parents and carers are provided with information as soon as possible so that they can support their children and help them make sense of what has happened. The Headteacher and the Trust CEO will communicate information in relation to the death(s) to parents/carers via email or letter.

Parents/carers will also be notified of the steps the school has taken during the day to inform learners of the death, what additional support has been made available and where to go for more help and information.

The school's notification system (Arbor) will be used to alert parents if the school is closed or where to find important news online.

4.5 Responding to specific causes of death

Some deaths need to be handled more sensitively due to their potential to cause fear, anger or imitation.

- If the death is the result of suicide, Samaritans provides a [step-by-step programme](#) to support schools if this happens.
- If the death is due to homicide or family violence, Child Bereavement UK has a guide to 'Supporting children and young people bereaved by murder or manslaughter', which you can find at [Appendix A](#).
- If the death is due to contagious disease, the school will follow procedures as determined by the local health protection team.

4.6 Responding to the media

In the event that a death that affects the school raises media interest, we will respond in the following manner:

- The Headteacher and CEO will liaise with Prominent PR (our designated media coordinators) who will respond to any media interest on behalf of the school. Staff members should not respond to media requests, and should instead refer enquiries to the Headteacher.

4.7 The Death of a Member of Staff

All of the principles and procedures listed above apply to the death of a staff member.

5. Follow-up actions and support following a death

5.1 Support

Learners may require support to grieve in the initial days and weeks following a death. The PSHE co-ordinator will ensure that we have suitable books and other materials to help children and young people discuss death and come to terms with loss.

The Pastoral support team may offer group or individual learners support including the provision of a calm environment in which to meet with others and spend some time in reflection.

5.2 Tributes and condolences

If appropriate, a memorial assembly will be held. This will enable staff to show that it is perfectly normal to feel upset at the loss of a friend and that rituals, prayers and remembering can be shared in a manageable way together.

Consideration will be given to tributes such as books of condolences, memorial web pages or development of a reflection space.

5.3 Funerals

We will consult the family as appropriate, to confirm:

- Whether members of staff and/or learners are welcome to attend the funeral or memorial service
- How condolences should be made and how staff and learners can contribute eg. with flowers, a collection or fund raising event
- Cultural and religious implications will be given consideration

If staff are welcome to attend the funeral, the Headteacher and/or other senior staff will make arrangements for the school to be represented at the funeral, and identify which staff and learners may want to attend, together with the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport. For some circumstances it may be appropriate to close the school, in others it may not, consequently difficult decisions will sometimes have to be made concerning attendance.

If staff wish to attend:

- Staff should request leave to attend
- Considerations will be made in granting permission, e.g. availability of cover

If learners are welcome to attend the funeral and wish to do so:

- Parents/carers should request leave for their child to attend

If the bereaved parents or family wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed.

6. Support for learners returning to school after bereavement

Whether a pupil has been away from school following a personal bereavement or after a death affecting the whole school community, the school will support them in their return to school and for as long as necessary afterwards.

6.1 Reintegration meeting

A Senior Leader will meet with the bereaved learner and their parents/carers to discuss how best to manage a return to school.

The purpose of the meeting will be to:

- Determine whether the learner is emotionally ready to return to the classroom either full time or with adjustments to the timetable to allow for a phased return
- Address any concerns the learner and their parents/carers have about the return to school
- Consult with the learner about how or even if they want their classmates to know of the death (where relevant)
- Open lines of communication between the learner and relevant staff to ensure support should the pupil feel overwhelmed
- Open lines of communication between the school and the learner's parents/carers to coordinate support
- Consider any additional support needed for a learner who is vulnerable or has special educational needs (SEN) or a disability

6.2 Ongoing support

- We will maintain regular contact with the learner's parents/carers to monitor how the learner is coping
- We acknowledge significant dates or holidays may be especially difficult. We will have a bereavement calendar in place so that we can monitor these dates and ensure additional support is available
- We know that grief may impact a learner's progress and affect their behaviour. To manage this, we will complete additional monitoring of learner's progress and put steps in place to support this
- We will take care to manage changes for bereaved learners by preparing them in advance (where possible) and taking extra steps to support necessary transitions
- We will ensure that this information is passed on to the learner's new class or school

7. Support for staff returning to school after bereavement

Whether a staff member has been away from school following a personal bereavement or after a death affecting the whole school community, the school will support them in their return to school and for as long as necessary afterwards.

7.1 Reintegration meeting

The Headteacher or senior member of staff will meet with the bereaved staff member to discuss how best to manage a return to school.

The purpose of the meeting will be to:

- Determine whether the staff member is ready to return to work and the best way to make that return (e.g. a phased return to work or a temporary change in duties)
- Address any concerns the staff member may have about the return to school
- Consult with the staff member about how or even if they want their learners and colleagues to know of the death (where relevant)
- Set guidelines for communication between the staff member and their line manager to monitor and support the staff member

7.2 Ongoing support

We acknowledge that grief can have an impact on a staff member's physical and mental health, which can then go on to impact their performance.

We also recognise that grieving is highly personal and that there can't be a one-size-fits-all solution for monitoring and supporting a bereaved person.

We will work with each individual to create a system of monitoring and support that works for that person.

This may include:

- Providing internal and external sources of support (see Appendix A)
- Reviewing the phased return programme, temporary change in duties or a flexible working request

8. Monitoring arrangements

This policy will be reviewed every three years by the Trust. At every review, it will be approved by the Executive Leadership Group.

9. Links with other policies

This policy is linked to our:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection policy
- Emergency Plan
- Behaviour policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- First Aid Policy

Appendix A: Useful Contacts

ORGANISATION	CONTACT DETAILS
Child Bereavement UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Helpline: 0800 02 888 40 ● https://www.childbereavementuk.org/contact-us
Winston’s Wish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Helpline: 08088 020 021 ● https://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/contact-page/
Cruse Bereavement Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Helpline: 0808 808 1677 ● https://www.cruse.org.uk/about-cruse/contact-us
Mind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Infoline (information and signposting to further help): 0300 123 3393 ● Further contacts: https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/useful-contacts/
Samaritans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Freephone: 116 123 ● https://www.samaritans.org/
Papyrus Prevention of young suicide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tel: 0800 068 4141 ● Text: 07860 039967 ● Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org ● https://papyrus-uk.org/
Employee Assistance Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Freephone 0808 168 2143 ● www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk <p>Username: ssc001 Password: oice1234</p>

Appendix B:

Guidance for Staff - Talking to children about the death of someone close

When talking to a child about the death of someone close, the language used, and the child's need for information and understanding, will vary according to their age and developmental stage and the specific cause of the death. However, the child's basic needs will always remain the same.

Links for Support

ORGANISATION	CONTACT DETAILS
<p>Winstons Wish <i>a useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community.</i></p>	<p>www.winstonswish.org.uk</p> <p>How to get support from Winston's Wish</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Freephone Helpline: 08088 020 021 (open 9am – 5pm, Monday – Friday) • ASK email support: ask@winstonswish.org • Crisis Messenger: Text WW to 85258 (available 24/7) • Online chat: click here (available 12-4pm, Wednesdays and Fridays)
<p>Child Bereavement UK <i>a bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss</i></p>	<p>www.childbereavement.org.uk</p>
<p>Cruse Bereavement Care <i>An organisation offering bereavement support</i></p>	<p>http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk/</p>

The following information has been taken from the Winston's Wish website:



Our general guidance on talking to children about the death of someone close holds true. Put simply this would be:

- ★ Use simple, direct language appropriate to their level of understanding
- ★ Use the terms 'died', 'dead', and 'death' – euphemisms such as 'we've lost Grandpa' or 'Grandma has gone to another place' are confusing. Children are helped to understand by hearing the language that fits this new experience
- ★ Keep children informed about what has happened and what will happen (e.g. about the funeral)
- ★ Check how much they have understood
- ★ Answer questions openly. If you don't know an answer, say you will find out and come back to them. If you feel the answer is too difficult for them to hear, explain that honestly
- ★ Repeat explanations more than once

- ★ Reassure them that they are not to blame
- ★ Allow and encourage the safe sharing of feelings and thoughts
- ★ Listen to their feelings, worries, memories

Ways to explain to a child that someone has died

Some suggested words:

"We know that all living things will die someday. Flowers, animals, trees, butterflies, people all die eventually..."

"... however, the great majority of people will die when they are very old."

"Occasionally, someone will die before they are old because, for example, of an accident or serious illness."

"When someone dies, their body stops working and they are no longer able to do the things they could when they were alive, such as move or talk or hug or play."

"Sadly, [name] has died. Everyone wishes they had not died and had lived for many more years. However, their body was not able to keep working and so they died. Their heart stopped beating, their lungs stopped breathing and their brain stopped thinking, and so they died."

"We are very healthy and we're going to do all we can to keep that way, because I want to be around to [play with my great grandchildren/travel to Mars/celebrate the year 2100]."

Balancing truth and reassurance

One continual challenge for parents and carers supporting children facing bereavement or those who have been bereaved is hitting the right mixture of truth and reassurance. Children are expert at knowing if they are not being told the truth; if there are things that seem too difficult to share, explain that.

Equally, they will know the difference between genuine and false reassurance. Rather than saying "nobody we know is going to die", maybe consider saying: "from all I've heard, it is extremely unlikely that anyone we know will die and we will do everything we can do to keep safe."

Look after yourself

Super-parents or super-carers don't really exist. Simply doing the best you can at this time is all that your children need. Take time to look after yourself too.

Reach out for support

We have many resources on our website to help parents and carers support grieving children.

Other articles you might find helpful:

[Death through serious illness](#)

[Coronavirus: Supporting bereaved children and young people](#)

[Ways to manage your anxiety about coronavirus](#)

[Should children attend a funeral?](#)

[Preparing a child to attend a funeral](#)

[Alternative ways to say goodbye when a funeral isn't possible](#)