Springwell School

Bereavement Policy

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Next review: January 2027

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Principles

The death of a loved one can be a life-changing experience, grief is non-linear and is sometimes a life-long, life changing process. Springwell School acknowledges the personal nature of bereavement and grief and is committed to supporting employees and the children that attend the school setting in practical and reasonable ways. Our school is fully committed to the emotional health and well-being of our children and that of our staff.

We understand that bereavement is an experience which will likely be faced by all members of our school community at some point, and that it will be a more difficult experience when the loss is of a member of our school community – a child or staff member.

This policy gives guidance on how the school will support professionally, sensitively and compassionately with regards to a death that affects any members of our school community.

We recognise that every bereavement is unique, and that any guidelines we have, will need to take account of individual circumstances and the wishes of those most closely involved. It is important that the support needed by a child or adult will be tailored to that individual and we understand that this will need to be both practical and emotional.

Objectives

The core intentions of the policy are:

- To support pupils and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement.
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family, and community.
- To identify key staff within school and the Local Authority and clarify the pathway of support.
- Springwell will work in partnership with parents, as we endeavour to counter any adverse effects of bereavement and maintain pupils' emotional well-being.
- To provide a framework for all staff, teaching, and non-teaching, to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with difficult and upsetting circumstances.
- To have clear expectations about the way school will respond to the death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.
- To meet the needs of all its children and staff and to be a place that both child and family can rely on and gain much needed support.
- For children to have the opportunity to tell their story, express their feelings, share their memories, and develop coping strategies through support by sensitive staff.

FOLLOWING A BEREAVEMENT:

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

- Be given space and time to grieve.
- Be given 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.
- That differing religions/culture's view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment.
- That 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.

Staff

Springwell recognises that staff will need both practical and emotional support when experiencing a bereavement. It is important that all staff are able to access the appropriate support when it is needed, and it is recognised that this support may be needed for some time after they return to work. Staff will be given time to grieve in a supportive, safe environment.

Paid leave

Bereavement leave is paid leave that allows an employee time off to deal with their personal distress and related practical arrangements, primarily, but not limited to, when a member of their family dies.

Springwell acknowledges that bereavement impacts all individuals differently and the guidelines in the Staff Leave of Absence policy are intended to show the minimum paid leave an employee is entitled to in different circumstances.

Springwell acknowledges that not all employees will need to take the full allowance, and some employees will need additional time, depending on their relationship with the person who has died and the circumstances of the death. The Headteacher will consider each request individually.

Staff should notify the school of their need to take leave as soon as possible or, at latest, on the first day of absence.

Support

Springwell recognises that staff may need support whilst at work and when outside of work. The well-being of staff remains a priority at all times but particularly when staff may be experiencing a bereavement.

The school will ensure that there are staff in school that are available to support when needed and that there are private spaces in school to give this support in a safe and secure way.

When supporting staff in school following a bereavement, Springwell will ensure that they consider the following.

The school will:

- Be caring and compassionate.
- Offer condolences.
- Ask how they would like to stay in contact.
- Stay in regular contact.
- Consider any family or children who are affected.
- Be conscious of diversity and accommodate religious beliefs and customs where it is reasonable and practical.
- Consider what action to take if the death is in the media.
- Ensure the bereaved employee knows they need not come to work on the day of the death, and that work comes second.
- Ask how much information they want co-workers to know, and if they wish to be contacted by colleagues.
- Discuss with the employee when it is appropriate to return to work.
- Be aware of changes in personal circumstances, such as caring responsibilities.
- Consider adjustments that may be needed, such as a phased return to work or temporary change of duties.
- On return, hold regular reviews with the bereaved employee.
- Give the employee appropriate leaflets and information about internal and external support, (Appendix 1).
- Take bereavement into account should there be an impact on performance.
- Deal sensitively with requests for further time off in line with staff absence policy.
- Be aware that special dates such as inquests, birthdays and the anniversary of a death may have an impact on your employee.
- Remember that the full impact of a bereavement may not be felt until sometime after the death.
- Consider the impact on other members of the team and watch out for bullying or harassment.

The school will not:

- Ignore the situation.
- Assume they know how the bereaved employee is feeling – every bereavement is unique.
- Say anything that may minimise or undermine the loss, such as ‘we all have to go sometime’ or ‘she had a good innings.
- Say anything to make light of bereavement, such as ‘time will heal’; ‘pull yourself together’; ‘it must be a great relief for you’.
- Assume that just because they are back at work they are ‘over it’ and ‘back to normal’.

Cruse Bereavement Care

Children

Whatever the level of understanding about bereavement, staff at Springwell have a duty to help support anyone when they could be feeling their most vulnerable, in the way that best meets their needs. By adopting a planned, open, and considered approach the school can support the emotional well-being of the child, family and staff. Springwell will always work in partnership with the family to ensure consistency of approach and that the family wishes and beliefs are at the centre of any planning.

Guidelines for informing children and talking to them about a death

Springwell School recognises that the needs and understanding of the children that attend the setting vary widely and that there will be a need to tailor any resources used appropriately. Consideration will take place, on whether further support may be needed through the ELSA in school or external agencies and will discuss this with parents/carers as necessary.

Springwell will follow the guidelines suggested by Winston’s Wishes;

- **Tell them what has happened**, appropriate to the child’s understanding.
- **Use real words and no half-truths**, use correct terms for example, dying, death, dead, rather than ‘passing away.’ This makes it clearer and easier for the child to understand.
- **Answer the child’s questions,** immediately or where not possible, inform that you will find out and tell them as soon as possible. These questions are likely to be hugely significant for the child and will help to reassure them.
- **Accept their feelings**, even if they are not as you thought they would be.
- **Let them know it is not their fault**, some children may worry that a person has died as a result of something that they have or haven’t done.
- **Deliver information in small chunks**, rather than giving the information all in one go.
- **Provide information on the death to the level of their understanding**, this can develop over time as their understanding increases. Their questions may help to guide the level of their understanding.
- **Ensure the child trusts the person speaking to them**, the child will need regular reminding that they will be listened to, that they can ask questions and share their thoughts and feelings at any time.
- **Are you sitting comfortably?** Staff will need to think about the environment when talking about death, the physical environment and positioning, staff should be sat alongside the child and be prepared to give comfort when needed.
- **Reiterating the news,** the information concerning the death, may need to be given several times before the child really understands it.

- **Give the child enough processing time,** ensure enough time is left between each sentence, this allows the child time to process what they are being told.
- **Try to speak at a similar speed and level as the child.** Mirroring the way that the child speaks gives them comfort and also helps to ensure their understand.
- **Echo,** saying back to the child anything that they say and share but in a slightly different way. This helps them further understand the loss and shows the child that you have listened and care.
- **Do not rely on words alone,** ensure that the information is delivered in the child's preferred mode of communication.
- **Ensure that the child can express their thoughts and feelings**, having the appropriate resources available.

We All Grieve, Winston's Wishes

Supporting staff who are supporting bereaved pupils

Working with bereaved children is painful, and Springwell recognise that a variety of staff may be involved in supporting children through a bereavement and this will be determined based on the needs of the child and those with which they have the best relationship. Where staff members are supporting bereaved children, Springwell will consider the following guidelines from Child Bereavement UK:

- **Don't let them go at it alone** – make sure more than one staff member is assigned to each bereaved child. Not only will this share the load, but it'll also ensure that all staff assigned to a child have someone to talk to without breaching confidentiality
- **Check in with them regularly** – be proactive and be the one reaching out. Staff may feel guilty about asking for your time right now.
- **Be prepared to step in** – tell them to step back if it becomes clear they're overwhelmed
- **Make bereavement training available** – many organisations offer training for school staff, including Winston's Wish, Simon Says and Child bereavement UK.

A death within the school community

A death within the school community can affect the school community in many different ways and may depend on many factors such as:

- The role the deceased had within school.
- How well known they were within the local community.
- The circumstances surrounding the death, particularly where this may be violent or a suicide.

Springwell recognises the importance of keeping adults and children informed, to reduce the risk of rumours and to ensure that death remains an open subject that staff and children feel able to talk about to aid the normal grief process.

Springwell will inform the local authority as appropriate and follow their guidelines when managing a death within the school community. (Waiting on details of LA bereavement team, will add to appendices.)

Guidelines and considerations for informing Staff, Pupils, and Governors

- Where possible, a discussion will take place with the bereaved family and their wishes considered before any decisions are made in relation to how and what to tell the staff and wider school community. This contact should be made by the Head teacher or a Senior leader. The school will establish one person as a point of contact for the family to ensure free flow of accurate information to and from the school. Discussion with the family should include:

    - Acknowledging what's happened.
    - Sharing condolences.
    - Understanding what has happened so that the school community can be supported.
    - Expressing support on behalf of the school.
    - Discussing how to share the information with the school community.

- Springwell will consider any cultural or religious implications and seek advice if necessary.
- School will, if necessary, consult with the Local Authority Bereavement Service for guidance and support.
- If appropriate, Springwell will arrange a briefing to inform all staff (including support staff and other staff that may work in school.) Measures will be taken to inform absent staff where possible. If the family have asked that this information is not shared, then this will need to be further discussed to ensure staff and pupils are supported.
- Staff who will be alone that night should be identified, and arrangements made for colleagues to contact them by phone if necessary.
- Briefing should include factual explanation of how the death occurred and if applicable the circumstances of what happened leading up to the death. Springwell recognise that it is important that this is handled sensitively and effectively.
- Identify any vulnerable staff members or pupils, or those staff/pupils that were closest to the person that has died.
- If appropriate arrange a time for teachers to inform their class what has happened, how this is to be done and EXACTLY what is going to be said. Identify any absent pupils. Information will be shared using the guidelines previously outlined for talking about death with children and young people.
- Springwell will consider how to follow this up any briefings, such as a special assembly, memorial service, or memorial tree/garden.
- Consider whether contacting parents may be appropriate and how this should happen, parents will need to be able to support children and may in some cases be the best person to be involved in explaining the death to a child.

Support for staff and governors

- Springwell will ensure a member of the Leadership team or Welfare/HR Teams is available to members of staff, parents, or children if they are finding the situation particularly hard. They will seek the advice of external support services as appropriate.
- Springwell will ensure Senior Leadership team are prepared for reactions to this news, staff may show many emotions, including being visibly upset and feelings of anger/guilt. People may connect the incident to their own personal experience of bereavement, so feelings about past bereavements may need to be discussed. This is perfectly natural.
- Bereavement support or counselling will be available to all as necessary (requesting external bereavement support if needed – Simon Says, Winston's Wish, Cruse, Butterflies

Bereavement, Compassionate Friends and the Educational Psychology Service, if psychological de-briefing is thought necessary, see appendix 1.)

- Arrange staff/pupil condolences with collaborative agreement if felt appropriate.
- Welfare Team or Senior Leadership Team will be on hand at the end of the working day for staff to de-brief and reflect upon the day's events and to agree upon any further action or support that may need to be put in place.
- Staff who will be alone that night could be identified, and arrangements made for colleagues to contact them by phone if necessary.
- Where possible staff who have requested to attend the funeral or memorial should be released, they should only do so with prior agreement of the deceased's family, relatives or next of kin.
- Springwell acknowledge that support for a bereavement may need to continue long after the event itself and have mechanisms in place to support this through the Welfare and HR teams across the school.

Resources

Springwell will ensure that there are resources available appropriate to the children's understanding. External places for support will be shared with staff and parents as appropriate. These can be found in the appendices at the end of the policy.

The ELSA in school will add to these resources as they become available and will ensure that they remain up to date and appropriate.

Monitoring and Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed at least every two years and more often if necessary, in line with updated guidance. It will be shared with all stakeholders.

Appendix 1

Resources

Cruse Bereavement Care

https://www.cruse.org.uk/

Helpline: 0808 808 1677 or helpline@cruse.org.uk

Butterflies Bereavement Support

https://www.butterfliesbereavement.co.uk/

02381 550066/07889009393

Child Bereavement UK

https://www.childbereavementuk.org/young-people

National Helpline: 0800 02 888 40

Email support: support@childbereavementuk.org

Winston's Wish

https://www.winstonswish.org/

Helpline: 08088 020021

Simon says

Child bereavement support https://www.simonsays.org.uk/

Support line: 023 80647550

Southampton City Council Bereavement services

https://www.southampton.gov.uk/funerals/

Employee Helpline 0844 891 0353

https://www.healthassured.org/your-eap/

NHS Choices – Coping with bereavement

Citizens Advice – what to do when someone dies

Mind – understand the emotional impact of loss and bereavement

Young Minds –https://www.youngminds.org.uk/

When the bereavement involves suicide:

Rethink Mental Illness – download a factsheet on coping with loss through suicide

Support After Suicide – https://supportaftersuicide.org.uk/supporting-someone-else/

UKSOBS – overcoming the isolation experienced by people over 18 who have been bereaved by suicide

The Loss Foundation - UK charity dedicated solely to providing bereavement support following the loss following cancer. Also offers specific Covid-19 loss support.

Further information for bereavement in the work place:

ACAS Good Practice Guide to managing bereavement in the workplace

Funeral Guide - Guide to managing bereavement at work

Supporting other people - Cruse Bereavement Support

Appendix 2

Resources

My dad and me

https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDM

When someone special dies

https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=3053ca76-0a7c-488b-8ae3-528317e90cf1https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=1448a7a6-8823-4f15-bfb0-4d478d13527e

Supporting bereaved children under 5 years of age

https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=0590bf84-7261-41a5-8b16-3ca3f87557cc

Supporting a bereaved child with Additional needs

https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=74e7be4a-022a-4400-a398-bd6922440292

https://www.childbereavementuk.org/supporting-a-bereaved-child-with-autism-spectrum-disorder

https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=e99e1f53-01c0-4112-bfa4-e2a58dfb4e24

When a Grandparent dies
https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=6d1294d7-758f-401e-80fd-89c85c2205d2

We All Grieve – Supported bereaved children who have special needs and disabilities

https://shop.winstonswish.org/products/we-all-grieve

Copies in school