



# Moreton Church of England Primary School



## Bereavement Policy and Procedures

Written by: N Batt, Headteacher

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Agreed by CoG (email):

Ratified by Governors (Date):

Signed (CoG):



## ***'Growing Together in Faith, Knowledge and Love'***

### **Vision and Rationale**

Moreton Church of England Primary School is a Christian community where the teachings of Jesus are used to support and guide everything we do and where we share God's love for us. Our relationships with others are based on mutual respect and consideration for others and underpinned by Christian values. We believe that all people are made in the image of God and are unconditionally loved by God. At Moreton we aim to create a caring atmosphere in which everyone feels safe and secure, and in which we can appreciate the importance of developing positive relationships with others to enable children to learn. We aim to promote a family atmosphere where all members of our community feel valued and respected for the positive contributions they make to the school. It is in this climate that we believe our children will develop further social, personal and academic skills that will lay sound foundations for their future.

The purpose of this policy is to set out the approach that we have in place in order to support members of the school community affected by bereavement. This policy is part of a wider focus that we have for the wellbeing of pupils, their families, our staff and the local community. It should be read in conjunction with our Behaviour policy, Anti-Bullying policy, e-Safety & Internet use policy, Critical incident policy and the information on our Website Wellbeing page.

Moreton Church of England Primary School is committed to the emotional health and wellbeing of its staff and pupils. We are dedicated to the continual development of a 'healthy school'. 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, either through death or divorce.



## Introduction

- Bereavement affects everybody at some time, and as a close community, our school aims to provide the best support for those experiencing bereavement.
- 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.
- We aim to 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.
- The school recognises the importance of long-term support for those who are bereaved, and will endeavour to provide opportunities for memorials and remembrance where appropriate.

## Procedures

To best support staff and pupils during times of bereavement it will be necessary to ascertain sensitive and potentially distressing information regarding the nature of an illness or cause of death. We will always ensure that any meetings with families are conducted in a comfortable, private space, in an unhurried manner. If this information must be shared we will always be clear with parents beforehand about how we will respect confidentiality and share information sensitively, only where it is in the interests of the bereaved and the school community.

Depending on the circumstances contact will be made either by the Class teacher or a member of SLT. The Headteacher will always be informed and future communications will be supported by a trained bereavement counsellor/learning mentor.

In the case of terminal illness, the school will liaise with the family to arrange for a member of staff to be the main point of contact throughout the illness. This member of staff will support the family regarding school procedures to support them during the illness and will help keep the pupil informed about events at school during any prolonged periods of absence. Occasionally, the child may wish to talk to their fellow classmates about their predicament themselves. Honesty about death and dying may be the best line of approach. Sometimes there is just no other way. A member of staff will support the pupil during their time in school, and be available to the family before, during, and after the death.



Staff members will also co-ordinate attendance at the funeral, and any memorials the family may wish the school to facilitate. Where possible this may be a staff member who has an existing relationship with the family. In turn, this staff member will be given close support by the Headteacher, and will be supported in developing their professional practice in this regard.

At times of bereavement it is important that rumour and speculation are avoided. We will take time to talk to the affected family or staff member about the circumstances surrounding the bereavement. Knowing the background will help us provide the best support for those affected by bereavement. We will discuss with the family the extent to which the circumstances should be shared with other staff members and pupils, in order to provide the best support for the grieving child. Staff will be informed before pupils to enable them to understand how to share the information in an age appropriate way for the circumstances.

To help pupils understand bereavement we will typically aim to inform groups of children of the death of a pupil or staff member in small groups, supported by staff with whom they are familiar. We will allow children to ask questions, and will endeavour to answer sensitively, factually and using unambiguous language to help all children understand what has happened. We will seek to involve the bereaved family in these decisions, and will offer to draft a letter to parents explaining the situation; this will be by the Headteacher. Letters and announcements will only be made with the permission of the family.

Where there is media interest no member of staff should engage with the media. All comment and press statements should be made through the Headteacher or Chair of Governors if the Headteacher is unavailable. The Headteacher will seek support from ECC and Chelmsford Diocese Board of Education.

At times there may be a need for the school timetable to have a degree of flexibility to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of children affected by the situation. During national times of mourning, packs of resources will be prepared and delivered as part of our ongoing PSHE sessions. However, minimal disruption to the timetable, once we return, also offers a sense of security and familiarity.



We will therefore advise and support parents with the following:

- sticking to normal routines and activities as much as possible as this is reassuring and helps children to feel safe and makes events feel predictable;
- give advice as to manage anxiety for adults so that they can provide calm reassurance to the child about their own safety;
- provide advice as to how to give children the opportunity to talk about events and to ask questions without forcing them to talk at an appropriate level of understanding;

There is a fine line between being honest and overloading a child with information they do not want. Children may also start to worry about themselves or others close to them being ill and they will require reassurance. Due to increased use of social media in times of lockdown or extended periods of mourning, the school community can become more aware of the realities of life, and much of what they hear about is skewed towards the bad. This can leave them feeling that the world is a scary and dangerous place. Therefore, we will provide supporting resources which will be communicated through letters, emails, Class Dojo and via our well-being page on our website:

<https://www.moretonceprimaryschool.co.uk/well-being/>

In the event of the pupil being bereaved of a loved one or close friend we will discuss what the pupil has already been told in order to provide clarity and consistency for the pupils. As a Church of England School, we shall deal with this through our understanding of death and loss. However, where there are other religious considerations, we will also seek the views of family, and endeavour to respect those beliefs. We will allocate a member of staff to whom the pupil relates well to be a mentor in school and encourage the pupil to feel free to express themselves when and how they choose, by providing time-out space and a range of activities and channels through which the pupil may wish to express their feelings .

Subject to the wishes of the family, in the event where a pupil or staff member has died, the school may be closed if necessary, in order to allow staff and pupils to attend the funeral.

At times, there may be an extended period of absence whilst the grief is processed. During this time attendance will be reviewed and authorised as appropriate by the Headteacher.



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We will endeavour to communicate with those who may be working at distance. Some ideas that may be used are:

- Voice notes or video calling to make contact particularly more so for larger groups;
- A team of staff 'trained' in what to do to support other staff in the event of a death;
- Issue advice about communication to staff and parents;
- Written comments or texts which can easily be misunderstood will be considered carefully;
- Keep lines of communication open to support each other as a community;
- Staff to 'man the phones' at set times during each day to allow people to call in;
- Set up a specific e-mail or form for children or parents to ask questions, express worries or seek support;
- Use of prayer chain through [prayer@moreton.essex.sch.uk](mailto:prayer@moreton.essex.sch.uk) with key members of staff, including clergy;
- Set up some kind of memorial or online remembrance (if relatives approve) this could become a physical remembrance garden in the future or 'peace garden';
- support for SLT and school counsellor through supervision *"Put on your life jacket first"* .

Where a member of the school community has died, the school will endeavour to provide additional space and time for those staff or pupils most likely to be particularly affected. Staff will be expected to be particularly vigilant regarding the emotional wellbeing of pupils close to the deceased.

Staff affected will also be offered on going counselling. Depending on the circumstances this will either be in-house or through our HR provision.

We will ensure long term support for the pupil by keeping a diary of significant days and ensuring that this information is communicated (with consent) to the pupils next teachers and/or school. We will endeavour to include the child in commemorative days such as mother's/father's day, by sensitively providing time for reflection and remembrance where appropriate.



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## Appendix 1 - Resources



Winston's wish is a charity which has many resources to help us specifically through this challenging time.

They include:

- How to say goodbye when a funeral isn't possible;
- How schools can support children;
- Talking to children about coronavirus;
- Telling a child someone is seriously ill;
- Telling a child someone has died from coronavirus;
- Ways to manage your anxiety about coronavirus;
- Death through serious illness.

**Winstons wish** have a freephone National Helpline on 08088 020 021 for therapeutic advice on supporting a grieving child or young person after the death of a loved one. Alternatively, you can access the above resources here:

<https://www.winstonswish.org/>

Explaining death to a child:

<https://www.winstonswish.org/how-to-help-bereaved-children-understand-grief/>

Building resilience in children after bereavement:

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/building-resilience-in-a-bereaved-child>

Supporting children on return to school:

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/for-teachers-when-a-pupil-returns-to-school-after-being-bereaved>

**Education Support** offer a free, confidential helpline for staff : 08000 562 561

<https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/helping-you/coronavirus-supporting-education-staff>

Managing own anxieties:

<https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/search?s=Anxiety>

**Child bereavement UK** is a national helpline 0800 02 888 40 (Freephone. Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm)

Email for bereavement support: [support@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:support@childbereavementuk.org)

support@childbereavementuk.org Chat (Monday - Friday, 9am - 5pm)



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## Appendix 2 – Books



### **Books dealing with death and loss**

Beyond the Rough Rock - Supporting a Child who has been Bereaved through Suicide - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley

As Big As It Gets - Supporting a Child when Someone in their Family is Seriously Ill - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley

The Secret C - Straight Talking about Cancer - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley

I Miss You - First Look at Death - Pat Thomson

Grandpa- John Burningham

Always and Forever – Alan Durant

The Huge Bag of Worries – Virginia Ironside

What on Earth Do you Do When Someone Dies? – Trevor Romain

Badger's Parting Gifts- Susan Varley

Saying Goodbye to Daddy – Judith Vigna

Waterbugs and Dragonflies – Explaining Death to Young Children

### **On-line books**

<https://saintaugustines.ie/resources/when-someone-dies/>

[https://issuu.com/bloomsburypublishing/docs/thebookofhopes\\_interactivepdf/2?ff](https://issuu.com/bloomsburypublishing/docs/thebookofhopes_interactivepdf/2?ff)





Parents and carers often feel that teachers are experts on their children. They may turn to the school for advice and information, especially on matters of bereavement. It is important to remember that the family, friends and the immediate community often best support those suffering from bereavement, as is the case with other stressful life events. Teachers need not be experts on the subject but they do need to use sensitivity and their skills in understanding children's development and emotional needs. The following are some points that may be helpful to bear in mind when talking to parents and carers:

- A death will disrupt the family for many months; in fact the family will never be the same again;
- Family members are grieving, relationships alter, and members may take on new roles;
- Sometimes there is a change of carer, house or school, all of which add to the disruption and distress experienced by the child;
- To support the child it is helpful to minimise, if possible, changes and disruptions in their normal daily routine and life in school;
- Bereaved family members may emotionally and physically withdraw from the child, to protect themselves from more distress;
- Some adults will deny the bereaved child is grieving, as it will be too distressing for them to acknowledge the child's pain. This may cause distress and confusion, causing grief reactions of anger, withdrawal or psychosomatic behaviours such as headaches, stomach-ache or sickness;
- The bereaved child may regress in behaviour, becoming clingy, difficult or withdrawn. His/her schoolwork may suffer. These changes will be partly due to grief but also to the disruption and changes within the family, causing the child to feel confused and unsafe;
- The child may feel resentment, jealousy or guilt towards the dead person or child. The expression of this verbally can cause the remaining family members distress and shock. Parents and carers need to know this is normal and will decrease as the child and the family become more stable and settled;
- Parents and carers need to be informed of the benefits that a child gains in being involved in the ceremonies and rituals that follow death. An explanation as to how mourning practices help children to express their feelings and come to terms with and accept the reality of their loss can be very beneficial;
- Teachers should remember that parents and carers will often use them as role models, counsellors or extended family; looking to them for support for themselves as well as finding appropriate ways of supporting and talking with their children;
- Teachers may require their own support structures. Supporting bereaved families, whilst rewarding, can also be emotionally draining. Make sure you seek support from the Headteacher or school counsellor/learning mentors where you can.



## Support and Further Suggestions for Teachers

### Do

- Let the child know that you genuinely care
- Make time to be available and listen
- Accept all that the child is saying
- Allow them to express their feelings their way
- Let them know their feelings are normal
- Let them know that it is OK to cry
- Talk honestly and share your feelings
- Be honest
- Have eye contact
- Have appropriate physical contact
- Let them know that it is not their fault
- Be aware of the home situation

### Don't

- Stop the child talking
- Tell them how they should or should not feel
- Avoid contact
- Change the subject
- Deny your pain and feelings
- Point out things for which they should be grateful
- Be frightened of sharing your own feelings

Explaining death to a child:

<https://www.winstonswish.org/how-to-help-bereaved-children-understand-grief/>

Supporting children on return to school:

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/for-teachers-when-a-pupil-returns-to-school-after-being-bereaved>



Developmental Stages in understanding Death

Age	Understanding of Death	Child's Needs	Phrases/Techniques
<b>Infancy</b> Birth – two years	Death as separation and /or abandonment Careful listening and watching Death is when the body stops working	Brief simple, honest explanations with familiar examples Reassurance of safety, parental support and attention	"We'll be here to take care of you.
<b>Pre- school</b> 2 – 6 Years Uses magical and intuitive thinking	Death as sleep, temporary, reversible, impersonal. Or as a person who comes to get you, can be catching Egocentric thinking causes feelings of responsibility or guilt	Clarification and expanded answers. Permission to attend funeral with assistance Acceptance of feelings without qualification, corrections or judgement.	Avoid euphemisms such as sleep, lost. Check and see if explanations are understood Expect repeat questions Acknowledge everyone's feelings of sadness and loss. Anticipate and counteract guilt Look out for unusual or subtle expressions of grief
<b>School Years</b> 6- 11 years Uses concrete thinking, begins rational thinking	Death is final, perhaps not inevitable Occurs to others Perhaps retaliatory	Reassurance that grief is OK, to feel bad is normal Open communication and opportunity to express feelings when ready. Encouragement to attend the funeral	Acknowledge adult feeling, including anger and guilt. It's OK to cry Accept fluctuating grief

<https://saintaugustines.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/FiveStagesOfGrief-1.pdf>

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