



Bereavement Procedure

This policy has been adopted by all schools
across The Golden Thread Alliance

Date Approved	Spring 2025
Next Review Date	Spring 2027

Bereavement Policy

This document outlines the basic principles and procedures that underpin The Golden Thread Alliance's approach to supporting members of the school community effected by bereavement.

Bereavement affects everybody at some time, and as a close community, our schools aim 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 colleagues across the schools who understand the complexities surrounding a death of a loved one 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 endeavor to provide opportunities for memorials and remembrance where appropriate.

Procedures

To best support colleagues 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 either via the phone or within a school setting. 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.

In the case of terminal illness the school will liaise with the family to arrange for colleagues to be the main point of contact throughout the illness. This colleague 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. The colleagues will support the pupil during their time in school, and be available to the family before, during, and after the death. Colleagues 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 colleague who has an existing relationship with the family.

At times of bereavement it is important that rumour and speculation are avoided. We will take time to talk to the affected family or colleagues 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 colleagues and pupils, in order to provide the best support for the grieving child.

To help pupils understand bereavement we will typically aim to inform groups of children of the death of a pupil or colleague in small groups, supported by colleagues with whom they are familiar. We will allow children to ask questions, and will endeavor 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.

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. Where there are religious considerations, we will also seek the views of family, and endeavor to respect those beliefs. We will allocate a colleague 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 colleague has died, the school may be closed if necessary in order to allow colleagues and pupils to attend the funeral.

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

We will endeavor to provide long term support for the pupil by ensuring that this information is communicated (with consent) to the pupil's next school.

Where there is media interest, no colleague should engage with the media. All comments should be made through the Chief Executive Officer.

Review

If you have any comments that you would like taken into consideration when this policy is next reviewed, please inform the Chief Executive Officer directly.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Template letter to parents and carers

Dear <Name>

We are so very sorry to hear the sad news of <Name's> death. There are no words to express our sadness and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through.

As a school community, we will miss <Name> very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to <his/her> friends, classmates and teachers. <Name> was a <valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly> member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help as you plan <Name's> funeral, please let us know.

We will continue to keep in touch and will support you in any way we can.

With sympathy
Headteacher

Appendix 2

Template letter to parents and carers - death of a colleague

Dear parents and carers

I am sorry to inform you that a <well-respected/long-standing/well-loved/popular/well-known> colleague, <Name>, died <suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness>.

The pupils were told today by their <class teacher/tutor/head of year/in assembly> and many will be reacting to this news. When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some pupils may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

We have tried to answer their questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Child Bereavement UK website childbereavementuk.org Our thoughts are with <Name's> family at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember <Name's> life.

Sign-off

Headteacher

Appendix 3

Template letter to parents and carers - death of a pupil

Dear parents and carers

Your child's **class teacher/form tutor/head teacher/head of year** had the sad task of informing the pupils of the death of **<Name>**, a pupil in **<Year>**.

<Name> died suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness yesterday/last week/over the weekend/during half term.

He/She was a **<valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly>** member of the **class/school community** and will be missed by everyone who knew **him/her**.

When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some pupils may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

We have tried to answer their questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Child Bereavement UK website childbereavementuk.org

Our thoughts are with **<Name's>** family and friends at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember **<Name's>** life.

Sign-off

Headteacher

Appendix 4

Resources Pack

1. Supporting Children and Young People following a sad event.
2. Grief and Loss- Ages and Stages of Development.
3. The Five Stages of Grief model.
4. Recommended resources.
5. Examples assemblies.

Supporting Children and Young People following a Sad Event

Remember:

- All children will experience loss and grief at some point.
- Grief is a painful but a natural process and most children and young people will work through this with the support of school, friends and family. The majority of children and young people do not require professional help.
- What children and young people need is the sensitive support of adults they already have an established and trusting relationship with.
- Children and young people will be helped by routines, and that includes school, to continuing in the usual and predictable way as much as possible. Obviously, adults will need to be sensitive to their needs and provide opportunities for time out and familiar adult support at times when the child or young person may feel overwhelmed.

Helping Children and Young People Cope

It is important that key colleagues acknowledge the loss that the child or young person has experienced.

Encourage full participation in school and usual routines as much as possible.

If the child or young person does not want to talk do not push them to. They will talk when they are ready.

If the child or young person wants to talk then:

- Recognise and keep in check any prejudices you may have about the nature of the loss and blame, for example regarding family/marital breakdown.
- Listen; do not give lots of advice.
- Allow the child or young person to express and accept their feelings and do not be critical of others, for example parents.
- Help the child or young person label their emotions. For example, I think you are feeling sad/angry/anxious/confused etc.

- Be realistic, for example do not promise a solution or say that everything will be fine.
- Encourage the child or young person to identify a relative or friend who could support them at this time.
- Respect confidentiality unless you are concerned that the child or young person is at risk.
- It is normal to find this work upsetting. Find a colleague you can discuss your own feelings and concerns with.

Helping students understand and adjust to the loss

- **Open and honest communication**
 - give age adjusted explanations
 - reduce confusion
 - refrain from abstract explanations
 - do not explain death as 'voyage' or 'sleep' or other euphemisms
- **Give time for cognitive mastery**
 - allow questions and conversations
 - accept short conversations
 - look at albums and photographs
 - accept children's play
- **Make the loss real**
 - let the child participate in rituals
 - do not hide your own feelings
 - keep reminders of the dead person present
- **Stimulate emotional coping**
 - work for continuity in home, school or playgroup
 - avoid unnecessary separations
 - talk with children about their anxiety about something happening to their parents or themselves
 - talk with children about eventual guilt feelings

Appendix 5

Grief and Loss and Ages and Stages of Development

Age 0-2

At this age children are very sensitive to separations, even short separations can be experienced as a permanent loss, their time sense not being fully developed. (Bowlby 1969,1973,1980; Erikson 1965)

Age 2-5

Children under 5 do not understand the finality of death. For them, death is reversible and they cannot grasp that all the functions of life have ceased.

They will often demonstrate this lack of understanding in how they speak about it, “Who will give Gran her tea in heaven?” or “Will Grandad be cold in the ground?” They will often cry, yearn and become clingy.

In play, they will may make attempts at reunion with the dead person.

Age 5 – 9

At this age, children are developing an understanding of death as irreversible with all life functions ended, but they are still resistant to thinking of it as a possibility for themselves.

It is also the age when they are learning who they can trust with their thoughts and feelings. They will watch adults’ reactions to grief and sometimes deny their own grief in order to avoid distressing their adult carers. They are prone to ‘**magical thinking**’ which can lead them into thinking of themselves as the centre of things, able to cause what happens to others through their wishes and actions.

This may lead to feelings of guilt and illogical reasoning about the cause of death.

This is also the age of fear and fantasy and a child will tend to personalise death as a skeleton, monster, ghost or bogey man. There is often a curiosity about the rituals surrounding death and the functions of death and decay.

Age 9-12

Children understand the finality of death and may become frightened by the possibility of their own death. Their distress can often be seen in altered behaviour and there is often a reluctance, especially by boys, to acknowledge their feelings.

Greater cognitive ability at this age gives the child an awareness of the finality of death, that it is common to all things, final, universal and inevitable. The child may recognise the possibility of their own death which is a frightening concept.

At this age whilst children often see themselves as the centre of the universe their ability to comprehend the perspective of others is increased.

Magical components are still part of their thinking, and they may assume that the dead can see or hear the living.

“Dyregrov (1990) suggests that children cope best when they are given detailed information about different aspects of the event.

Children are often fearful that they will forget the dead person - pictures and keepsakes can help, and they may need help in creating these if they have none.

They are able to show compassion. As they grow older they develop a better understanding of cause and effect and they become more occupied with the justice and injustice of things that happen. (Bad things can happen to good people).

Parents may experience their child keeping their grief to themselves and being unwilling to talk to them about what has happened.

Adolescents

Adolescents grieve more as adults, with appropriate crying, feelings of sadness, anger and depression, but have powerful emotions which may have a considerable effect on them.

In understanding death as universal and inevitable, it also becomes personal, with the need that this may create for keeping this thought at a distance.

Peers who have no experience of loss may make the grieving individual feel emotionally isolated.

Appendix 6

The Five Stages of Grief (Kübler-Ross model)

Stage 1: Denial and Isolation

- Deny the reality of the situation.
- A normal reaction to rationalise overwhelming emotions.
- A defence mechanism that buffers the immediate shock. Temporary response that carries the individual through the first wave of pain.

Stage 2: Anger

- As the masking effects of denial and isolation begin to wear off, reality and its pain re-emerge.
- This intense emotion is deflected from our vulnerable core, redirected and expressed instead as anger.
- Anger may be aimed at inanimate objects, complete strangers, friends or family. Anger may be directed at our dying or deceased loved one.
- Rationally, we know the person is not to be blamed. Emotionally, however, we may resent the person for causing us pain or for leaving us.
- May feel guilty for being angry, and this makes us more angry.

Stage 3: Bargaining

- This involves the hope that the individual can somehow undo or avoid a cause of grief.
- "I'll do anything for a few more years"; "I will give my life savings if..."

Stage 4: Depression

- The grieving person begins to understand the certainty of death.
- Individual may become silent and spend much of the time crying and sullen.
- Depression is a kind of acceptance with emotional attachment. It is natural to feel sadness, regret, fear, and uncertainty when going through this stage. Feeling those emotions shows that the person has begun to accept the situation.

Stage 5: Acceptance

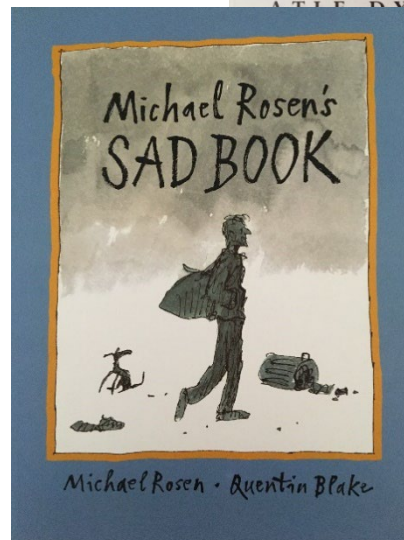
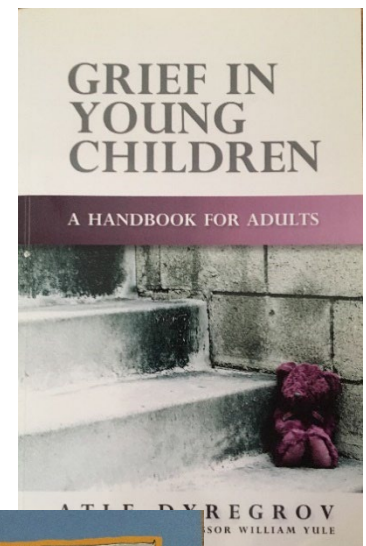
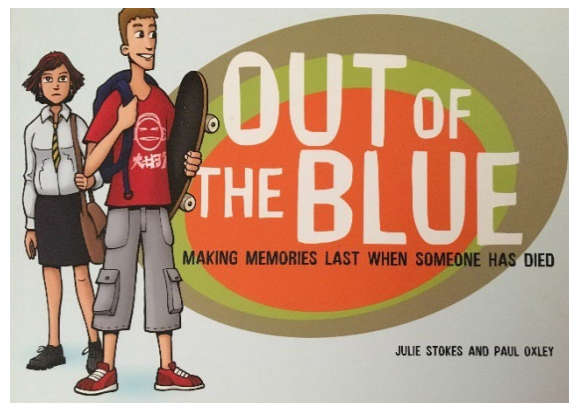
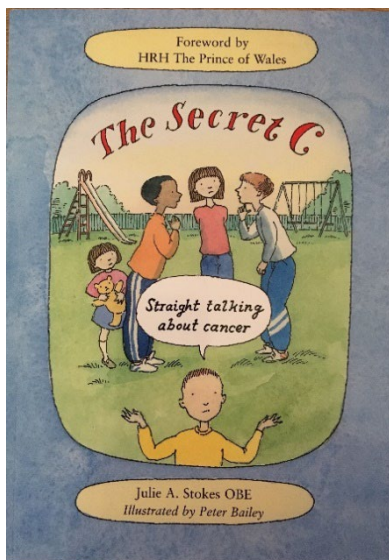
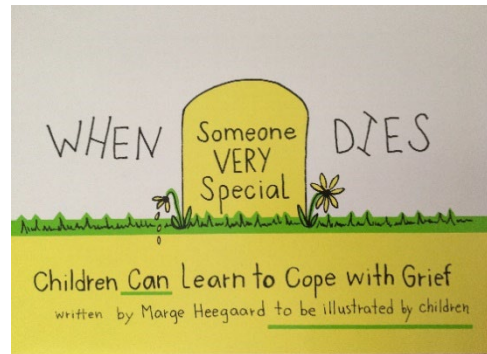
- The individual begins to come to terms with loss.
- Comes with a calm, retrospective view for the individual, and a stable mindset.

Recommended Resources

These and many more are available from:

Child Bereavement Trust: <https://childbereavementuk.org/>

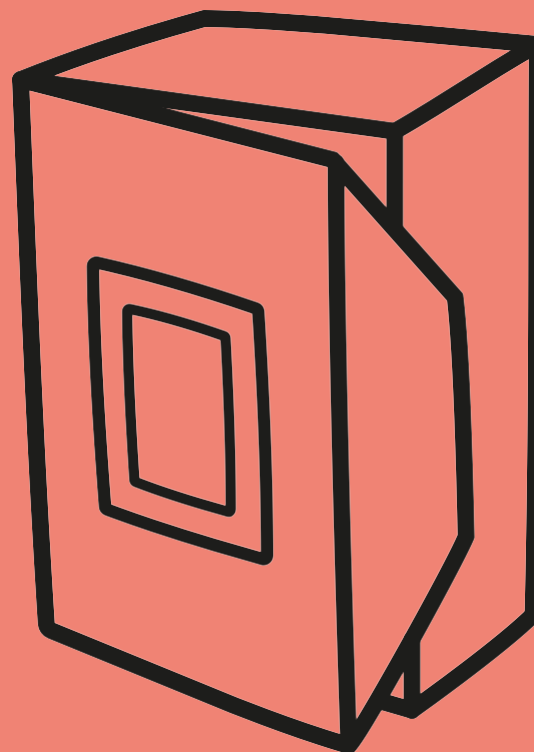
Winston's Wish: <https://www.winstonswish.org/>



Appendix 7 – Memory Box to follow

MEMORY BOX

In a memory box you can keep and treasure all kinds of things that remind you of the person who has died. You can customise it to make it more personal, and fill it with photos, letters and objects that remind you of your experiences together.



"Mum used to always wear the same perfume - it was her smell. Now I keep a bottle of it in my memory box. When I miss her I spray it into the air and the smell brings back memories of her"

**WINSTON'S
WISH** *WW*

Giving hope to grieving children

MEMORY BOX

After someone important in your life dies, there will be lots of things that you want to remember about them. As time passes though, you may find it harder to recall some of these different memories.

step 1 Fill your memory box with items that remind you of them, and times you spent together. It could be their watch, or tie, maybe a scarf or their purse. You could include photographs and letters, or what about the lipstick they wore, a postcard from a holiday you went on together or a favourite CD they always listened to. How about their passport or a pair of glasses they wore? Then, when you want to remember...you can simply look through the wonderful collection of memories in the box!

step 2 Try not to simply fill your memory box with random bits and bobs... instead, make sure that each object has a story or memory attached to it.

step 3 It can really help to write a note for each object to explain the memory it gives you.

step 4 Some people like to keep their memory boxes private, others like to show them to friends and family, it's totally up to you.

Helpline: 08088 020 021
winstonswish.org

Winston's Wish is a Registered Charity (England and Wales) 1061359, (Scotland) SC041140 | 0114.v1.11-17

toolkit

- A box (You could buy one from Winston's Wish, or you could make your own out of something like a shoe box).
- Some things that remind you of the person who died, for example: a piece of jewellery, an item of clothing, a CD, favourite book or a card they sent you.
- Tape
- Glue
- Pens and things to personalise your box

"Me and my dad once went to watch England play football. The ticket and programme from the game, as well as a photo of us by the pitch, remind me of what a great day that was"

**WINSTON'S
WISH** **WW**

Giving hope to grieving children