



# **WOODBIDGE HIGH SCHOOL**

## **Bereavement Policy**

September 2024

## **1 Rationale:**

Bereavement is an experience we cannot protect our Woodbridge community from; all members will be affected by it at some point. It will be a more difficult for the school as a whole when the loss is of a student or staff member at Woodbridge; this policy will in the main focus on bereavement of this kind but will also touch on our response to students who have lost a loved one of their own.

The purpose of this policy is to give our leaders and wider staff confidence in adopting a carefully considered procedure in the event of bereavement. It should be noted that it is unlikely any common procedure can cater for all needs; death affects us so personally and is coloured by many factors including overall resilience and prior experience of loss, often reactivated when bereaved.

This policy seeks to provide a framework for when the school faces loss; it is valuable that pre-emptive measures are in place for when we might be acting from a place of shock and bereavement ourselves, at which time our capacity to be thorough and procedural might be challenged.

A leading concern must inevitably be the immediate family of the deceased and as a school, we state our commitment to any such family in offering practical, emotional and on-going support as far as is possible.

## **2 Following a bereavement:**

Young people and adults alike have the right to:

- 2.1 Be given space and time to grieve
- 2.2 Be given support from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate – if possible, taking into account the voice of the affected community themselves.
- 2.3 Encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement.

## **3 We recognise:**

- 3.1 That grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker.
- 3.2 That differing backgrounds, faiths and cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and that all viewpoints should be valued and respected in our community.
- 3.3 That the death of a young person has substantial repercussions beyond their immediate teaching/care team and that every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far-reaching impact.

## **4 Guidelines for supporting a bereaved staff member:**

- 4.1 As outlined in the policy rationale, bereavement is a prospect we cannot deny; it is possible that a staff member will experience the loss of a loved one while working at Woodbridge.
- 4.2 Any arrangements in terms of bereavement leave will differ on a case by case basis and would likely involve dialogue between the staff member and the Headteacher or their line manager/close colleague who might act as an intermediary.

- 4.3 Staff will likely differ in the extent to which they wish to share their bereavement with colleagues or the wider school. It would be best practice for the bereaved individual themselves to set limits that they are comfortable with regarding what details and to whom this information will be shared.
- 4.4 Colleagues would be expected to act with discretion and if accidental discovery does occur such as by students, managing the situation with sensitivity and care.
- 4.5 The relevant line manager alongside their LG link will lead in ensuring the staff member's duties are covered for the duration of any leave and may arrange a phased return. In some cases where there has been a prolonged period of leave, it will be important to set realistic expectations about what the staff member can offer on their return. This might best be discussed in an in-person meeting.
- 4.6 The staff member may also need support at different times during the year that signify landmarks associated with their lost loved one. It is important that the channels of communication remain open so information such as this can be shared and appropriate adjustments made.
- 4.7 There may also be topics that are more difficult for that staff member to work with, for example their capacity to support students with loss or learning centred around potential bereavement triggers. Again, these issues can be discussed on an as needed basis and an outcome reached that reflects sensitivity towards that staff member and their bereavement process.
- 4.8 Experiencing a close bereavement may impinge on the staff member's own resilience and capacity to work within the demanding context of a school. It is important that they stay vigilant to this, exercising self-care and self-awareness when it comes to their limits.
- 4.9 In some cases, it may be appropriate for the Wellbeing team (WBT) to be involved with supporting the staff member or signposting them to relevant resources and organisation who provide support. It is important that all involved stay mindful of professional boundaries.; being alongside anyone experiencing a loss can be emotionally draining it's important for colleagues to recognise if they begin to feel depleted.
- 4.10 In some cases, the school may wish to extend condolences more formally, such as by sending cards, flowers or close colleagues attending the funeral. It is possible that close social relationships outside of school might mean that a wider group of staff are affected by this loss and other colleagues would benefit from being identified as requiring support.

## **5 Guidelines for supporting a bereaved student**

When a bereaved young person returns to Woodbridge they may want to get straight back into friends, learning and routine which offer stability and familiarity. Conversely, it is not unusual for bereaved students to take time off school during the early stages of a bereavement. For these students, the need to be with their family may be strong and they might not wish to separate. Time away from school will vary from student to student.

## **6 When they do return:**

- 6.1 Identify who will be the main contact point for them and their family (e.g. their Year Coordinator (YC) or a member of the Wellbeing or Inclusion teams).

- 6.2 Where appropriate, it might help to meet with the student to welcome them back, acknowledging the death.
- 6.3 Agree to what details of this loss the family are comfortable being shared with the child's teaching and pastoral staff, arranging an inclusion briefing to share this information sensitively if necessary.
- 6.4 If possible, offer choices about how things should be handled and what support would be helpful. Where relevant, let staff and classmates know how the student would prefer to be received and supported.
- 6.5 Staff may need to consider any possible inflammatory themes that might arise in lessons, assemblies or guest speakers that could trigger difficult feelings around loss or death or the cause of death pertaining to their loss. It is best if the student can be forewarned of content of this nature and be given choice as to how best to manage those tasks, or in fact if they need to be withdrawn from those lessons.
- 6.6 If the student has been away from school for any significant period, they may fear being behind with their learning and unable to catch up. It might be helpful to clarify with staff what is essential to accomplish and what can be left, offering appropriate help to achieve what needs to be done.
- 6.7 Maintain normal rules and expectations of behaviour as far as possible as this helps contain the young person and keeps things predictable; however, there may be some circumstances in which exceptions can be made, for example with regards home learning or punctuality. This will need to be agreed with the student's YC.
- 6.8 Consider 'time out' strategies and ensure the student has a designated, safe place to exit to if necessary.
- 6.9 Where appropriate, a bereaved student will have the opportunity to meet with a member of the WBT following their return to school. This will provide an opportunity to establish what avenue of support might be required and the student's readiness for this. It is often advisable that any person has some time to make sense of their loss before working through it with others.
- 6.10 The WBT can help in offering the student strategies that might aid them in coping in the classroom and around school. They may also share with the family details of external agencies who specialise in bereavement support and who might offer events, groups or resources that the family can engage with.

### **Death within the Woodbridge community:**

The remainder of this policy focuses largely on the prospect of bereavement as a result of student death, however the death of a member of staff also has enormous potential to impact the school to its very core.

Overall, the same principles and procedures will apply to the death of a staff member as they do for the death of a student. The Headteacher, Associate Headteacher or Deputy Head, will need to notify the local authority as an employer in the case of a staff member. Equally, the Leadership Group (LG) will need to give additional consideration to who will adopt the classes and responsibilities that a staff member previously held. This will usually be navigated by the appropriate head of department/line manager alongside LG.

## **5 Notification of a death:**

- 5.1 If the death of a staff member occurs outside of school hours, their next of kin may inform staff known to them personally; this may not be a member of LG. Whoever receives this information will be able to pass it on to LG or the Headteacher directly.
- 5.2 In the event of student death, the school may be notified in an infinite number of ways. If death occurs during school hours, usually a parent/close relative would call the school directly and speak to the most senior member of staff on site.
- 5.3 Where a student death occurs in the holidays or on a weekend, parents will likely contact whoever they can – in that instance the member of staff who takes the call will immediately contact the most senior member of staff possible and that person will assume responsibility for the dissemination of information.

## **6 Dissemination:**

- 8.1 Where possible, discussion should take place with the bereaved family and their wishes taken into account before any decisions are made in relation to how and what to tell the staff and wider school community.
- 8.2 It is important to consider any cultural or religious implications and seek advice if necessary.
- 8.3 The school should ensure that people closest to the loss are told as soon as possible (to avoid accidental discovery, such as through social media), in a sensitive and supportive manner. We may not always be aware of the full extent of a student or staff member's impact.
- 8.4 If students are in school, this news would likely be delivered by the Headteacher or a member of LG, accompanied by the relevant YC and in some circumstances, members of the Wellbeing Team (WBT); the student's familiarity with these staff should be considered.
- 8.5 Where circumstances allow, all staff should be informed as soon as possible using the most practical method of communication, e.g. a whole staff briefing/meeting or by email; ensuring this includes part time staff and measures are taken to inform absent staff.
- 8.6 The Headteacher/senior member of staff will give a factual explanation of how the death occurred and if applicable the circumstances of what happened leading up to the death.
- 8.7 LG will need to be prepared for reactions to this news including visible upset or other strong emotional responses. People may connect the incident to their own personal experience of loss, so feelings about past bereavements may re-surface; this is perfectly natural.
- 8.8 It is helpful to establish one senior staff member as a point of contact for the family to ensure free flow of accurate information to and from the school. There will also be a clear point of contact for other parents who wish to convey information about the bereavement itself or students affected by it.
- 8.9 Bereavement support or counselling should be available as necessary through the WBT. They may need to request external bereavement support from specialist organisations

such as Grief Encounter, Winston's Wish, Cruse or the borough Educational Psychology Service (EPS).

- 8.10 It may be helpful to agree a set time for teachers to inform their classes of what has happened. The Headteacher might wish to script exactly what will be said. It is important to identify any absent students who may have missed this information sharing.
- 8.11 The school may follow this up with a special assembly, most likely for the affected year-group.
- 8.12 The WBT can be on hand at the end of the working day for staff to de-brief and reflect on the day's events and to agree any further action or support that may need to be put in place.

## **7 Allowing the community to process the news and to grieve:**

- 9.1 An appropriate private space can be dedicated to those people most affected by the bereavement.
- 9.2 Cover will be arranged as necessary.
- 9.3 Students should be allowed to ask questions at this time or at any point in the following days or weeks. Staff must answer honestly and to the best of their knowledge or ability, taking into account aspects of the circumstances that may be confidential.

## **10 Memory banner/book**

- 10.1 Those closest to the bereavement are likely to seek togetherness with others sharing their loss and might benefit from the opportunity to outpour emotions and thoughts in some way that is concrete. In early stages it is beneficial that the 'container' for this unprocessed material is big (such as a large banner) and allows for mess and expression of feelings without words, since that is what grief often looks like early on. A memory book may be introduced at a later stage; it has a sense of permanence and is often widely read. Therefore it can be helpful for the rawest of emotions to be less restrained and for the memory book to follow. This can be for anyone to come and write their favourite memories of the student/staff member. Parents/family of the deceased may wish to receive the book and often find it comforting. It may help the over time to read the comments, photographs can also be added.
- 10.2 Any banners which may or may not be displayed to the wider school community can be taken down at an appropriate time as agreed between key staff and students who contributed to its making. The school may wish to consider a more lasting memorial to the student/staff member that will embed in the fabric of the school; such as a permanent display or plaque.

## **11 The Funeral**

- 11.1 The Headteacher will liaise with staff and family regarding funeral arrangements.
- 11.2 The Headteacher or Associate Headteacher, or in their unavoidable absence, a deputy, will typically attend as a mark of respect. Arrangements can be made on a case by case basis for other staff to attend.

## **12 Assemblies and Life Studies**

Assemblies, form time activities and Life studies lessons for the year-group/s most affected can present valuable opportunities for the community to feel a sense of togetherness in their grief and if appropriate, for memories to be shared. They also allow the school to approach the bereavement from different perspectives: such as an opportunity for guest speakers or organisations to offer insight in to a particular cause of death e.g. Fusion.

## **13 On-going support:**

Therapeutic bereavement groups may provide a valuable avenue for students (and staff) to explore grief and loss; although some individuals may benefit more from 1:1 support from the WBT or an appropriate external agency.

## **14 For staff**

- 14.1 Following a bereavement in school, it is to be expected that several members of staff might be emotionally affected. While staff will likely lean on one another informally, the WBT should endeavour to offer chance for staff to gather as a group to share/process and reflect on feelings evoked by this loss. This might be in the staffroom or as a group after school; the school might wish to involve the EPS who can often provide support and advice at these early stages. It should be emphasised that any sharing on such occasions should be confidential to the room (unless safeguarding).
- 14.2 Staff can be signposted to relevant resources to support themselves and the students they work with.
- 14.3 ELSA trained LSA's can be deployed to support lessons that the deceased previously taught or learnt in.
- 14.4 Further to this, staff should be signposted to a relevant member of the WBT who they can seek support from 1:1 if needed.

## **15 For students**

- 15.1 Experience has shown that most students can be supported by the school staff, and that each young person will likely have a favoured member of staff to approach. The YC will over time identify students most affected by the bereavement and refer these onwards to the WBT; it is likely some parents will also reach out to the school to inform of a young person who might be struggling with the bereavement. As time progresses, the team will provide 1:1 support or invite students to participate in bereavement groups. The EPS and CAMHS/EWMHS and other agencies may be able to enhance capacity to offer bereavement support, especially in the cases of students who already presented as most vulnerable.
- 15.2 The school will be prepared to support students and staff as significant dates that might affect them e.g. date of death, birthday, anniversaries, arise.

## **16 For parents**

Parents may be invited in to school as a group where members of the WBT can offer advice/guidance on helping their children cope with bereavement.

As a community we will stay alert to how endings, transitions and further losses might re-evolve grief and how these processes can best be managed for those in our school who might be especially sensitive to them.

## Bereavement resources for staff and students

### Childline

0800 1111

[childline.org.uk](https://childline.org.uk)

Free 24-hour helpline for children and young people in the UK.

### The Mix

[themix.org.uk](https://themix.org.uk)

Online guide to life for 16-25 year olds. Straight-talking emotional support is available 24 hours a day. Chat about any issue on our [moderated discussion boards](#) and [live chat room](#).

### Kooth

Kooth offers emotional and mental health support for children and young people aged between 11 – 24 years and is available up to 10pm every day.

Website: <https://www.kooth.com>

### Grief Encounter

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk>

Supporting bereaved children and young people

Their helpline, grieftalk, can be contacted from 9am-9pm Monday- Friday.

0808 802 0111.

### Winston's Wish

Freephone National Helpline (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm) on 08088 020 021.

### Cruse (Bereavement Care) Helpline

The helpline is open Monday-Friday 9.30-5pm (excluding bank holidays), with extended hours on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings (open until 8pm), 0808 808 1677.

### Child Bereavement UK

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org>

Child Bereavement UK supports families and educates professionals both when a child of any age dies and when a child is facing bereavement.

Helpline: [0800 02 888 40](tel:08000288840)

Approval: Approved by C&S Committee on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2024

Reviewers: Ms C Moore (Assistant Headteacher)

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