



Joseph Leckie Academy

Bereavement Policy

Approved by JLA Trust Board: 06/2020

Last reviewed on: 06/2022

Next review due by: 06/2023

1. Aims and Ethos

1.1 This policy is intended to reflect Joseph Leckie Academy's positive ethos and should contribute to the caring community we endeavour to nurture.

1.2 The main aim of the policy is to ensure that all students and staff faced with bereavement are provided with a level of quality support, which is commensurate with their needs and wishes. This support includes the opportunity for them to express their feelings in a safe environment, to be given space and time to come to terms with their loss and to access specialist support if necessary. Furthermore, the situation for the individual and the school community will be monitored over a period of time.

1.3 It is our hope that anyone faced with bereavement will regard our community as an environment where individuals can grow and face the challenges that lie ahead.

2. Rationale

2.1 Every year 20,000 children under the age of 16 will be bereaved of a parent and many more will experience the death of someone else special in their life. We understand that bereavement is an experience which will be faced by all members of our Academy at some point. It will be a more difficult experience when the loss is of a member of the Academy - a student or staff member.

2.2 It is almost inevitable that at some time all schools will have to deal with a death that affects the Academy community.

2.3 Bereaved students/staff will often see the Academy as a safe haven away from the turmoil of emotions at home as they spend the majority of their time in school. Staff members will be a primary source of care and support for students and each other.

2.4 Many people choose not to think about death and are often ill prepared when faced with it.

2.5 We believe that it is an issue to be addressed openly and guiding principles need to be outlined and developed in an objective manner. This policy will deal with bereavement following the death of a student or staff member or relatives of either and will also address the procedures which will be followed should a student die whilst at school or on a school trip or extra-curricular activity. It also sets out procedures and guidance for staff when the need arises.

3. Objectives

- To set out a framework for all give staff to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with bereavement.
- To support students and/or members of staff before (where applicable), during and after the bereavement.
- To enhance effective communication and clarify support systems between members of staff, students, family and community.
- To identify key staff within the school and Trust body.
- To outline clear expectations about the way the Academy will respond to a death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.

4. Death of a Student

- On hearing of the death of a student the Principal should meet immediately with the Year Pastoral Team(s) to plan the Academy's response. Decisions as to which group(s) of students should be informed will need to be made, e.g. classmates, close friends, year group, friends of brothers and sisters of the deceased and how to communicate will be decided by the Pastoral team with the agreement of the Principal.

- With great sensitivity, one of the above staff should be assigned to ascertain the circumstances of the death. Where possible he/she should discuss with a close family member how the Academy will be dealing with the bereavement.
- Subject to the circumstances of the death, it may be necessary to come up with a plan for the media. In this case the Principal/Vice Principal or Chair of Trustees will contact the critical incident response unit at Walsall Council.
- As soon as possible the Principal or Vice Principal should inform all staff about the student's death. Staff should also be given details as to which groups of students will be informed, and when and how this is to occur. They should be advised of the details that the students will be told. It should be strongly emphasised that the normal Academy routine will be maintained as much as possible.
- Staff should also be asked to be vigilant and provide immediate information to the relevant Year Pastoral team(s) about students who may be showing signs of distress and who may need support.
- Pastoral Team(s) should be made available to offer support. Other specialists such as the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), Learning Mentor, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator (SENDCO), other year mentors or specific staff may also be asked to assist. At this stage they may well recommend external agencies for further support (see Appendix 1).
- The Principal, in discussion with the relevant Pastoral Team, should decide as to whether appropriate members of staff (2 persons) should visit the family of the deceased or who and how to liaise with the family. They will need to find out whether the family, a collection and/or if there will be a book of condolence and discuss any arrangements for a memorial, assembly, or other tributes.
- The Principal will also need to consider a selection process as to which members of staff and which students should attend the funeral. In this matter the wishes of the family must be taken fully into account. The Academy should give due consideration to accompanying a small number of close friends and classmates to the funeral. Staff accompanying these students must be prepared to offer comfort and support as required. Obviously it is essential that the Academy has adequate staff to supervise the students not attending the funeral. This may limit the number of staff who can attend.
- Should the death be of interest to the media then the Principal must formulate any response in conjunction with the Trustees and Local Authority. It may be necessary to advise staff and students not to speak to the media and to avoid making innocent comments that might be misconstrued.
- Where appropriate the Link Leader or Examinations Officer should inform relevant external groups such as
- UCAS, QCA and examining boards of the death. It may be less traumatic for parents if results etc. were sent to the school, in the first instance. If time permits this should be discussed with the deceased's family.
- Where a student dies on an Academy trip or Extra-curricular activity, the members of staff will follow the Emergency Procedures Form 8 in the first instance to alert the Principal/Vice Principal and so appropriate procedures are followed.

5. Death of a Close Relative of a Student

5.1 Depending on the closeness of the relationship between the student and the deceased the degree of support required may vary. In general, the following guidelines should be followed:

- The relevant Head of Year (HOY) will discuss the proposed approach by the Academy with appropriate family member.
- HOY will inform Link Leader or another member of the Leadership Team (LT) and discuss action to be taken.
- HOY to advise appropriate staff of the situation and give an indication of the length of absence (if appropriate) of the student.
- Advice may be given to staff, by HOY and/or mentor, on how to support student on his/her return to the Academy.
- It may also be appropriate to speak to classmates and/or school friends on how best they might

help in supporting the student on his/her return to school.

- HOY and Link Leader should carefully consider whether appropriate members of staff should visit or contact the family during their period of mourning.
- They should also consider whether or not the Academy should be represented at the funeral.
- HOY to meet with student on his/her return to school and offer appropriate support where required.
- HOY/Year Mentor /tutor or other key staff such as SENDCO, to regularly monitor student over the next few months and note on SIMS so that anniversaries can be monitored. Regular contact with family/carers to review how the student is coping.

6. Death of a Member of Staff

- On hearing of the death of a member of staff the Principal (or in the case of the Principal, the Chair of Trustees) should meet with members of the LT to plan the Academy's response. At this meeting the method of informing other staff will be decided (this will be subject to time of day and whether the Academy is on holiday). Decisions as to how and when students will be informed will also need to be made. The Chair of Trustees and where appropriate the Local Authority may also have to be informed and consulted as to how the Academy will deal with the bereavement.
- Subject to the circumstances, it may be necessary to come up with a plan for the media. In this case the Principal/Vice Principal or Chair of Trustees will contact the critical incident response unit at Walsall Council.
- Adequate support for staff and students must be available. The expertise of Pastoral Team mentors and DSL should be more than adequate to provide support for students. In general staff members will be able to support each other. At this stage they may well recommend external agencies for further support (see External Agencies section).
- Attendance of staff and students at the funeral should, where possible, be discussed with the deceased's family. The Principal or member of the Leadership Team or other designated liaison person will need to find out whether the family wishes a collection and/or if there will be a book of condolence. In addition, the Principal, Chair of Trustees and Leadership Team will discuss plans for a memorial and or other tributes.
- The Principal, in conjunction, with the Chair of Trustees, will try to ensure that as many staff as possible are able to attend the funeral. This may involve the Academy having to put special timetabling arrangements in place. Obviously it is essential that the Academy has adequate staff to supervise the students not attending the funeral. Therefore, this may limit the number of staff who can attend.

7. Death of a Close Relative of a Member of Staff

- The death of a partner, child or parent of a member of staff needs to be dealt with sensitively. It is essential that the member of staff is supported throughout the immediate period of mourning and on his/her return to school.
- On hearing of the death the Principal must meet with other members of the LT to decide how other members of staff are to be informed and done sensitively so as not to upset the member of staff.
- The Principal should contact the staff member as soon as possible and convey his/her condolences and offer whatever support is appropriate.
- It is unlikely that many of the students will have to be informed but if so the Principal, in conjunction with the LT will decide on the appropriate method(s) to be used.
- Attendance of Staff (and any students where appropriate) at the funeral should, where possible, be discussed with the staff member. If students are attending the funeral they should be closely supervised and supported by experienced staff such as HOY/mentors.
- The Principal should ensure that as many staff as possible who wish to attend the funeral are allowed to attend. This may involve putting special timetable arrangements into place. It is important however that the school should operate as normally as is possible.

- On his/her return to work the Principal and LT and other close colleagues must ensure that the member of staff is given appropriate support. The nature and degree of this support will vary depending on the circumstances.

8. Self-Care for Those Working with the Bereaved

8.1 The Academy recognises the stress and anxieties placed on those dealing with the bereaved. In many instances these can be quite exacting and yet because our sympathy and attention naturally rests with those grieving we can easily forget the emotional weight resting on the shoulders of those offering support. To assist, the following points we think are worth bearing in mind:

- Anticipate possible reactions you may experience with grief and loss. Each one of us is likely to react differently depending on our age, personality, cultural and religious background. If you are ever unsure about how you should react to others' grief, honesty is always the best line of approach.
- Try to accept that you may experience emotional reactions yourself. Such an event might trigger thoughts of your own past grief experiences. You may even find yourself doubting your own abilities. It is not unusual to experience existential thoughts and find yourself querying life's injustices, questioning perhaps your own beliefs.
- Panic attacks and worries about death – your own, or perhaps that of your family – may also become a preoccupation.
- Try to accept that giving such support can affect you in perhaps ways you had not considered. Normally these reactions will subside after a few days or weeks but if they persist do not be afraid to ask for professional support.
- Never take on too much. If you find that you are having difficulty in managing to cope, look to others to offer support – a partner, friend, or colleague.
- It is important to remember that you alone cannot carry other peoples' grief. It is important to work alongside others in the Pastoral team.

9. Guidelines for Breaking News of the Death to Students

1. Inform the students as soon as possible about the death.
2. Where possible inform in small groups i.e. class or tutor groups.
3. Identify those students who have had long-term or close relationships so they can be told separately.
4. Group and/or one to one sharing should be available.
5. Allow students to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms they will understand.
6. Allow feelings to be verbalised.
7. Allow the situation to be discussed and experiences of death to be shared.
8. Be honest about your own feelings and talk about your relationship with the person.
9. Avoid euphemisms.
10. Ensure students understand that death is nothing to do with anything they have said or done. It is **not** their fault.
11. Reassure that not all people who are ill or have accidents will die and that many people get better.
12. Put a time limit on discussion. It is preferable to resume normal activities as soon as possible to ensure minimal disruption.
13. Conclude the discussion with a prayer or special poem to remember the person who has died and their family.
14. Be available to any student who needs additional help and support.

10. Script for Principal/LT for staff meeting or HOY for or assembly

1. Start by acknowledging you have some sad news to give.
2. Be honest. Give the news stating simple facts, use the words dead/died.
3. If known, and with the family's permission, explain briefly where and when the death occurred.

4. If not known, say so, and that you will endeavour to find out. If rumours are rife, say which of these are definitely not correct, if known. Where appropriate, remind students/staff of their responsibilities and the impact when posting on social media.
5. Talk briefly and positively about the person who died without eulogising them.
6. Mention any arrangements already in place, including for those needing support.
7. Acknowledge that not everyone will be feeling sad and that is OK.
8. Allow a break in the timetable for students/staff to process the news and take a little time out.

11. Returning to the Academy after a bereavement for staff and/or students

11.1 The purpose of this meeting should be to:

- Acknowledge the death.
- Find out how the staff/student would like to share their news.
- Organise a safe space for the bereaved person to go if they feel overwhelmed by their grief and need a 'time-out'. How will they inform other staff of this? For example, a 'time-out' card, a non-verbal signal or message, cover manager, HOF/HOD. How will this be communicated to others?
- Consider whether to provide 'time-out' activities – journals, art and craft, books, screen time, memory boxes etc.
- Set guidelines for communication – with the student/staff, between members of staff and between home, family and the Academy.
- Consider providing support for peers when they have a bereaved friend/colleague.

Appendix 1: External Support Agencies

Child Bereavement UK

Website: childbereavementuk.org

UK Helpline: 0800 02 888 40 or Live Chat on the website

If a student dies by suicide: Samaritans Step by Step Guide 0808 1682528

Walsall Educational Psychology Service offers a 'critical incident response' offer across Walsall Council.

This is to provide responsive support to school staff, other professionals and communities following a critical incident such as the death of a child or member of staff. The offer is responsive to the needs of the situation but can include support for senior leaders and groups or individual members of staff. They can get in touch

at EPSCoreRequests@walsall.gov.uk and let us know the day and time that would suit them for a call back on a given number.

Kooth

<https://www.kooth.com/> (XenZone is a provider of online mental health services for children, young people and adults. Kooth, from XenZone, is an online counselling and emotional well-being platform for children

and young people, accessible through mobile, tablet and desktop and free at the point of use)

Walsall School Nurses Chat Health line

07480 635 363 (Age 11-19) (You can chat to the school nurses about: keeping healthy, Emotional Health, Sexual health, puberty, drugs & alcohol, smoking, weight management, medical conditions in school, bullying, healthy relationships, body image and more!)

THE SWING Bereaved children & young people

Helpline: 01922 645035

Email: children@wbss.org.uk

Let's Talk -Adult bereavement support service

Helpline: 01922 724841

Email: admin@wbss.org.uk

Adults bereaved by suicide

Helpline: 01922 724841

Email: admin@wbss.org.uk

National Freephone Helpline*: [08088 020 021](tel:08088020021) (open 9am – 5pm, Monday – Friday)

*In order to protect our staff, our helpline is currently operating a remote service. Please leave a message on our voicemail with your first name and a contact number (with area code) and a Helpline Practitioner will call you back from a withheld number as soon as possible.

Crisis Messenger: Text WW to 85258 (available 24/7)

ASK email support: ask@winstonswish.org

Online chat: <https://www.winstonswish.org/online-chat/> (available 12-4pm, Wednesdays and Fridays)