



Ashfield Girls' High School



“Each different. Each talented. All valued.”

Bereavement Policy

Author(s)	Mrs C Hoey Vice-Principal (Pastoral)
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Bereavement Policy



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Executive Summary

Ashfield Girls' High School is committed to providing a safe and supportive environment for pupils, staff, and families experiencing bereavement. Recognising the profound impact of loss, the school aims to respond with sensitivity, inclusivity, and appropriate support. Key objectives include prioritising emotional wellbeing, establishing clear response procedures, offering resources and external support, and fostering an ethos of empathy and understanding. The policy also acknowledges a wide range of losses, including family separation, ensuring all affected individuals receive the necessary care.

The policy aligns with key legislative frameworks, including the Children (NI) Order 1995, the Human Rights Act 1998, and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (2005). It is also supported by guidance from the Department of Education NI (DENI) and other bereavement resources from sources such as Winston's Wish and Marie Curie. Linked policies include the Critical Incident Policy, Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, and Pupil Wellbeing Policy, ensuring a comprehensive approach to bereavement support.

Procedures for responding to bereavement are based on the Winston's Wish Charter for Bereaved Children, emphasising emotional support, remembrance, appropriate education, and structured responses. The school provides immediate and long-term support, including pre-bereavement planning, staff training, and accommodations for grieving pupils. A structured communication approach ensures that bereavement is handled with care, confidentiality, and respect for cultural and religious differences.



Section A (Aims of the Policy)

Ashfield Girls' High School is committed to providing a safe, supportive, and compassionate environment for all members of our school community in the event of a bereavement. We recognise the impact that grief and loss can have on pupils, staff, and families and aim to respond in a way that is sensitive, inclusive, and appropriate.

Each year, around 41,000 children in the UK experience the loss of a parent, with many more facing the bereavement of a grandparent, sibling, friend, or other significant person. The effects of bereavement can be profound, and as a school, we are dedicated to providing appropriate support to help our pupils navigate their grief in a compassionate and understanding setting.

- To support pupils and staff during times of bereavement, ensuring their emotional well-being is prioritised.
- To establish clear procedures for responding to bereavement, ensuring consistency and sensitivity in our approach.
- To offer appropriate resources and guidance to those affected by loss.
- To provide a safe and supportive environment where pupils feel comfortable discussing and expressing their grief.
- To offer guidance and signposting to external bereavement support services.
- To foster an ethos of empathy and understanding within the school community.
- To implement clear procedures for responding to bereavement that ensure consistency and sensitivity.
- To acknowledge the wide range of losses that may affect pupils, including separation and divorce, and offer appropriate support.



Section B (Legislative Context and Linked Policies)

Children (NI) Order 1995
Education (NI) Order 1998 (Part II Article 4(1))
Human Rights Act 1998
Children's Services Co-operation Act
Articles 3 and 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights
Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (2005)
Equality Act 1995
Health and Safety at Work Act (NI) Order 1978 • Education (NI) Order 2003
DENI: Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour
DENI: Every School a Good School (2009)
DENI: Every Child (2023)
ETI: Empowering Improvement (2024)
Children and Young Peoples' Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework (2021)
Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030
Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools (Updated September 2023).
DENI: A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in School
CCEA: Guidance on Identifying and Supporting Learners with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (2014)
NAHT: Bereavement Guidance
Marie Curie: Schools Bereavement Programme
Winston's Wish: Bereavement

Linked Policies

Critical Incident Policy
Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
Health and Safety Policy
Pupil Wellbeing Policy
Relationship and Sexuality Education Policy
Educational Visits Policy
Addressing Bullying Type Behaviour in School Policy
Equality and Inclusion Policy
Pupil Voice Policy



Section C (Policy and Procedures)

To help us meet the objectives of this policy we have adopted the Winston's Wish Charter for Bereaved Children.

B	Bereavement support	Bereaved children need to receive support from their family, from their school and from important people around them. We will signpost them to specialist support if needed.
E	Express feelings and thoughts	We will help bereaved children to find appropriate ways to express all their feelings and thoughts associated with grief, such as sadness, anxiety, confusion, anger and guilt.
R	Remember the person who has died	We understand that bereaved children have the right to remember the person who has died for the rest of their lives. We will support them to share special and difficult memories.
E	Education and information	All children, particularly bereaved children, are entitled to receive answers to their questions. They also need information that clearly explains what has happened, why it has happened and what will be happening. We will strive to enable children to have their questions answered, through the Personal Development curriculum, on an individual basis, working with parents and carers or through support services.
A	Appropriate response from school	Bereaved children need understanding and support from their teachers and fellow students without having to ask for it. We will provide training to ensure this happens.
V	Voice in important decisions	We will work with families to encourage them to involve bereaved children in important decisions that have an impact on their lives such as planning the funeral and remembering anniversaries.
E	Enjoyment	We will support the bereaved child's right to enjoy their lives even though someone important has died.
M	Meet others	We will try where possible to enable bereaved children to benefit from the opportunity to meet other children who have had similar experiences.
E	Established routines	We will endeavour, whenever possible, to enable bereaved children to continue activities and interests so that parts of their lives can still feel 'normal'.
N	Not to blame	We will help bereaved children to understand that they are not responsible, and not to blame, for the death.
T	Tell the story	We will encourage bereaved children to tell an accurate and coherent story of what has happened. We know this is helpful to them particularly if these stories are heard by those important people in their lives.



Pre-bereavement

In some situations, it is known in advance that a death is going to occur. This is usually because of a long illness.

In cases where this is an adult within the school community, individual conversations will be held with the head teacher in terms of support, information exchange and practical considerations.

When the expected death is of a child or a member of a child's family we will:

- contact the family to confirm factual information and explore what support could be provided to them
- identify a key point of contact in school (within the pastoral team) terms of information exchange and to update when things change
- ensure that all relevant adults are clear about what information has and needs to be shared with the pupil
- keep lines of communication open to ensure that all information is received in a timely fashion
- explore the possibility of signposting to other organisations such as Winston's Wish or a local hospice
- explore what support for the pupils affected might look like in practice
- arrange training for specific members of staff to ensure all involved are confident in their ability to support the pupil
- if appropriate, consider and reflect on how to communicate with the wider school community for example the pupil's class mates
- if appropriate, begin conversations around practical considerations in the events leading up to the death and following the death

Following a bereavement

We will consider each individual situation carefully to ensure that the response from the school is sensitive, accurately reflects the gravity of the situation, and involves those affected as appropriate.

As an immediate response we will:

- contact the deceased's family to establish the facts and avoid rumours (Principal / VP)
- consider any religious beliefs that may affect the timing of the funeral or impact on other aspects of the bereavement process
- find out, if possible, how the family would like the information to be managed by the school
- allocate member(s) of staff to be the key point(s) of support for the affected child / young person or children / young people and ensure there is support in place for the staff members, if required
- send letters or cards of condolence to families or individuals directly affected
- At times, support from the EA Critical Incident Team may be obtained, depending on the circumstances.
- inform staff of the death before pupils are informed, recognising that some pupils may have found out through other means. Where possible, staff will be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways to make sure all staff have the same version of the event. Where this has not been possible, staff will be supported to share the information.
- inform pupils who are most directly affected (such as a friendship group), preferably in small groups, by someone known to them and in keeping with the wishes of the family and expertise of the school



For the funeral of a parent/carer/pupil/staff member we will:

- find out the family's wishes and follow these in terms of the involvement of members of the school community.
- identify which staff and pupils may want to attend if invited by the family and the practicalities of issues such as risk assessment, staff cover and transport. In some rare circumstances it may be appropriate to close the school
- be sensitive to religious and cultural issues.

After the funeral we will:

- consider whether it is appropriate to visit the child and family affected at home and plan a return to school
- ensure friendships are secure – peer support can be particularly important for a bereaved child or young person
- continue regular contact with the family and show we still care about them and their child over time
- monitor the emotional needs of staff and pupils and provide listening time and ongoing appropriate support
- consider practical issues and make thoughtful and sensitive updates to parental and other contact details when needed
- continue to assess the needs of children most affected, and record and plan for support accordingly. Support for a pupil returning to school It is important to plan for a pupil's return to school following the death of a family member:
- A member of the pastoral team will make contact with the pupil and their family/carers to discuss their return to school or upon their return to school following a bereavement
- Most grieving pupils do not need a 'bereavement expert', they need the support of familiar and trusted adults. School, with its familiar environment and routines, can be a place of comfort for a bereaved young person.
- A trusted adult will be identified and find out how the pupil would like to share their news.
- A safe space for the bereaved pupil to go if they feel overwhelmed by their grief and need a 'time-out'. For example, a 'time-out' card, a non-verbal signal or message. This be communicated to all staff by email.
- Consideration will be given to whether to provide 'time-out' activities – journals, art and craft, books, screen time, memory boxes etc.
- Communication – with the pupil, between members of staff and between home and school.
- Consideration will be given to providing support for peers when they have a bereaved friend.
- Allowances for incomplete homework, uniform compliance, forgotten lunches/dinner money etc. will be made.
- Recently bereaved pupils may find it helpful if they are given the option to work elsewhere or step outside, if they think it would be too painful to attend topics associated with death.



Longer term we will:

- be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life. So, we will record information and share with relevant people, particularly at transition points. This could include ensuring significant dates and events for the child are recorded and shared with appropriate staff for future reference.
- signpost families to bereavement support including that provided by Winston's Wish <https://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/> or Cruse www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk
- ensure that learning about loss and bereavement is embedded into appropriate curriculum areas.

When teaching about loss and bereavement we will give careful thought as to how to support those directly affected by loss and bereavement.

Equality and inclusion, values and beliefs

We recognise that there is a range of cultural and religious beliefs, customs and procedures concerning death. It follows that bereaved children and families may have differing expectations. Some of these may affect matters of school organisation. We will source training and guidance to develop our understanding of the range of beliefs to best support pupils. We will present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. We will make pupils aware of differing responses to bereavement, and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

Young asylum seekers and refugees Many young asylum seekers and refugees have experienced the death of family members or friends, often in traumatic circumstances. This, and further traumatic experiences and losses, can have a devastating effect on their emotional and physical health, behaviour, learning and relationships. Sudden traumatic death complicates the process of grief and mourning, as usual ways of coping may be overwhelmed. We will consult specialist mental health services where appropriate.

Supporting staff

Support for bereaved staff We are aware that staff also experience bereavement. When this happens, we will ensure they are provided with support to take care of themselves, and to know where they can go for additional help should they need it. This could include: their GP; Cruse Bereavement Care <http://www.cruse.org.uk/>; or staff counselling. We will work within our leave of absence policy and if necessary, with the occupational health team to ensure staff are provided with appropriate leave and support at a time of bereavement. Staff have access to support from Inspire.

Supporting bereaved pupils can be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions. At certain points in time, some members of staff may be more vulnerable due to circumstances in their own lives.

Teachers who are dealing with their own bereavement are encouraged to speak with their line manager about any areas of the curriculum which they feel uncomfortable to teach or want support to teach.



Staff training

We will ensure that regular training is provided to staff to support staff in meeting their roles and responsibilities as identified in this policy.

Curriculum

Children and young people explore the concept of loss, bereavement, and grief as part of the statutory elements of our Personal Development curriculum. It is also addressed through cross-curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles, as well as through Art, Literacy, and Religious Education. We also use assemblies to address aspects of death – such as Remembrance Day, Holocaust Memorial Day or commemorative occasions. We also observe national minutes of silence and explain the purpose of this.

When appropriate, we respond to a tragedy or serious incident by discussing this in class having discussed as a staff team the language we will use to respond to the incident. Teachers are provided with training on how to deliver this sensitive area of the curriculum within a safe, learning environment.

We also point parents and carers towards appropriate advice on how to talk to their children about these events when necessary. We will answer any questions relating to loss or death in a sensitive, age-appropriate, honest and factual way.

Children and young people will not be expected to disclose any personal experiences but will be signposted to support if they want it. We give children opportunities to learn about and discuss cultural and religious issues around death and encourage them to express their own responses and feelings.

Communication

- Ensure that all communication regarding a bereavement is handled with care and sensitivity.
- Only authorised members of staff will communicate bereavement-related information to the school community.

Memorials and Tributes

- The school may organise appropriate tributes, such as a memorial assembly, book of condolences, or dedicated space for reflection.
- Participation in memorial activities will be voluntary, ensuring no one feels pressured.



Procedures in the Event of a Bereavement

Death of a Pupil	Death of a Staff Member	Death in a Pupil's Family	Death in a Staff Member's Family
<p><i>Critical Incident</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Principal will contact the family and offer condolences and support. The school community will be informed sensitively and appropriately. A designated area for pupils to express their feelings (e.g., a quiet room) may be set up. Counselling services and resources will be made available to pupils and staff. 	<p><i>Critical Incident</i></p> <p>The Principal will notify staff and pupils in a supportive and controlled manner.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities will be provided for the school community to pay their respects, such as a memorial or assembly. Ongoing support will be offered to pupils and staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The pastoral team will contact the family to offer condolences and assess how the school can support the pupil. Teachers will be informed of the bereavement to provide appropriate support in the classroom. Flexible adjustments may be made to the pupil's workload and timetable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colleagues will be informed sensitively (at their wishes), and appropriate support will be offered. The staff member will be given time off, in line with the Staff Attendance Policy, and supported upon their return to work.



Safeguarding, confidentiality and recording

We follow our school's safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure that the welfare of the child remains paramount throughout, and that all children are protected from harm. It is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure.

However, pupils will need to be made aware that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

To retain the trust of pupils and parents / carers, we will ensure that the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. Sensitive information will only be disclosed internally or externally with careful attention to the rights and needs of individuals and in line with General Data Protection Regulation.

If a child is suffering from trauma, we will share this as appropriate with staff, but not necessarily the details of their experience. We will discuss with the bereaved child and their family which adults in the school community they would like made aware of the experiences impacting on the child. We will use school systems (SIMS and CPOMS) to record when a child has experienced a close bereavement.



Section D (Roles and Responsibilities)

Board of Governors:

- Ratify the policy and ensure that it is reviewed every two years, or when guidance changes.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the policy

Principal:

- Has operational responsibility for the policy and its implementation.
- Ensure that staff are aware of the policy and its procedures.
- Provide professional learning opportunities.
- Ensure the review of this policy, updating it when there is new guidance.

Vice-Principal (Pastoral Care):

- Ensure that the procedures outlined in this policy are followed.
- Provide professional learning about bereavement, loss and their impact.
- Support staff when dealing with pupils who have suffered bereavement/loss.
- Ensure that preventative curriculum is being delivered (alongside the Vice Principal – Curriculum), to ensure pupils are equipped to respond to challenges they may face.
- Monitor, evaluate and review the policy's implementation and effectiveness.

Pastoral Support Co-ordinator:

- Offer one-to-one emotional support to bereaved pupils.
- Signpost pupils and families to external support organisations (e.g., Winston's Wish, Child Bereavement UK, Cruse Bereavement Care).
- Co-ordinate bereavement matters, such as anniversaries, to make staff aware of critical periods.

Heads of Progress:

- Monitor the emotional and academic progress of bereaved pupils and adapt support accordingly.
- Support bereaved pupils in their year group.

Staff:

- Are aware of this policy, linked policies, and apply them consistently.
- To promote and safe and caring environment
- Be vigilant for signs of distress among pupils and colleagues.
- Provide classroom support for grieving pupils, including flexibility with deadlines and workloads if needed.
- Seek advice and support from the Pastoral Team or Senior Leadership Team, when needed.
- Be understanding and respectful towards peers who are grieving.

Parents:

- Should be aware of the contents of this policy (and linked policies)
- Make school aware of a bereavement.
- Report concerns to a member of staff.



Pupils:

- Treat bereaved peers with kindness and respect.
- Seek support from a trusted adult in school if they or a friend are struggling with grief.
- Report concerns about friends to a trusted adult in the school.



Section E (Consultation, Communication, Monitoring and Evaluation of the Policy)

This policy has been developed in consultation with governors, staff, pupils and parents / carers.

The policy will be monitored via a range of methods. It is based on addressing presenting issues, established by a range of methods including following Department of Education Northern Ireland guidance, pupil discussions, those raised at Pupil Council meetings and parent / carer discussions.

The Bereavement Policy will be reviewed by all stakeholders and, if required, updated:

- following any incident which highlights the need for such a review.
- when directed to by the Department of Education Northern Ireland and considering new guidance
- Every two-years (as identified on the front cover of this policy)

To appropriately monitor the effectiveness of the policy, the Board of Governors shall:

- be updated regularly on any regulation changes, respective of bereavement.
- identify current issues, trends and priorities for action
- assess the effectiveness of strategies aimed at ensuring that pupils' needs are met in relation to bereavement.



APPENDIX 1: Bereavement Support Services

As part of our Personal Development and Preventative Curriculums, we will also signpost to appropriate sources of support for pupils and adults in the school community.

Winston's Wish: www.winstonswish.org – support information and guidance for bereaved children, young people and for those caring for bereaved families.

Cruse Bereavement Care: www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk – support for anyone who has been bereaved.

Childhood Bereavement Network: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/> – find childhood bereavement support in your local area.

Hope Again: <http://hopeagain.org.uk/> – a website for young people who have been bereaved.

Papyrus: <https://papyrus-uk.org/> – support and advice for young people struggling with thoughts of suicide, and anyone worried about a young person.

Samaritans: <http://www.samaritans.org/your-community/supporting-schools> – a range of guidance and support for schools.

Aware NI: <https://aware-ni.org/> - mental health charity

Action Mental Health: <https://www.amh.org.uk/> - mental health charity

uHub: <https://www.uhub.org.uk/> - counselling service

FamilyWorks: <https://familyworksni.com/> - counselling service

Marie Curie: <https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/bereavement> - bereavement support

Mind: <https://www.mind.org.uk/> - mental health charity

PIPS: <https://pipscharity.com/> - suicide prevention charity

Barnardos: <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/get-support/services/child-bereavement-service-general> - Child Bereavement Service





Challenging girls today; creating women of value in the future



Principal: Mrs Louise Hanvey BSc (Hons) PGCE, PQHNI, PGDH

Hollywood Road, Belfast
BT4 2LY

Tel: 028 9047 1744

www.ashfieldgirls.org
info@ashgirls.belfast.ni.sch.uk