



St. Joseph's Camberwell Catholic Schools' Federation



Bereavement Support for Staff

Approved by:	Full Governing Body
Last reviewed on:	November 2025
Next review due by:	November 2027

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Chairperson of the Governing Body.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Executive Headteacher



Please note: this document is intended as initial guidance and consideration should be given to the context in discussion with Southwark Schools' HR and Education Psychology.

Links to other documents

Document
Flexible Working Policy
Employee Wellbeing / EAP Policy
Health & Safety / Duty of Care Policy

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDANCE

1.1. This guidance is designed to support schools in managing the difficult circumstances following the death of a member of the school community. It applies to the death of:

- A pupil.
- A current member of staff.
- A former member of staff.
- A family member of someone within the school community.

1.2. The aims of this guidance are to:

- Provide practical steps for schools in managing the loss of someone connected to the school.
- Offer advice on the support that can be put in place for colleagues, pupils, and families who are mourning.
- Outline ways in which the school can support an employee who has experienced the loss of a loved one.

DEALING WITH BEREAVEMENT

2.1. Bereavement is a deeply personal experience and can affect every aspect of a person's wellbeing, including their emotional, physical, spiritual, and psychological health. Everyone responds to grief differently, and there is no "right" or "wrong" way to grieve.

2.2. The loss of someone close can have devastating consequences, leading to emotional distress, physical exhaustion, and practical challenges. For staff, this can significantly affect attendance, concentration, and performance at work. For pupils, it may impact attendance, behaviour, learning, and relationships with others.

2.3. As bereavement touches most people at some stage in life, schools need to be prepared to respond sensitively and effectively to support both staff and pupils when loss occurs.

THE IMPACT OF GRIEF

3.1. Grief is often a long and unpredictable process. Several models have been developed to describe how grief may be experienced, the most widely known being the Kübler-Ross Grief Cycle (Figure 1). This describes five common phases:

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Depression
4. Bargaining
5. Acceptance

3.2. It is important to note that:

- There is no standard timescale for each phase.
- People may move back and forth between phases or experience them in a different order.
- Grief is not a linear process and will vary greatly between individuals.

3.3. While the model can help in understanding some of the emotions experienced, in practice reactions to grief are often more complex. In the early stages, an employee or pupil may experience shock, which can later develop into symptoms such as fatigue, difficulty concentrating, poor decision-making, heightened anxiety, irritability, or feelings of insecurity. Over time, depression, apathy, or a loss of confidence and identity may emerge.

3.4. Due to this complexity, people often need external support to help them process grief, work through its different stages, and eventually reach a place of acceptance where they can begin to re-engage with work, learning, and everyday life.



Figure 1: Kübler-Ross Grief Cycle

LEAVE PROVISIONS

4.1. Requests for leave should be managed in accordance with the school's adopted policies and procedures. The guidance below is based on the Southwark Schools HR Model Leave of Absence Policy. If the school has adopted a different policy, provisions may vary.

4.2. Where leave is granted to support employees during significant life events such as the death of a loved one, the process of grief and adjustment is personal and may take varying amounts of time.

Type of Leave	Who it Applies To	Duration / Entitlement	Pay / Notes
Serious illness of a close family member	Partner, parent, child, or person for whom the employee has care responsibility	Reasonably necessary, normally not more than 3 days	Paid at normal rate. Not for minor illnesses (e.g., colds, infections).
Parental bereavement leave	Employees who have lost a child under 18 or a stillborn child after 24 weeks	2 weeks statutory leave; can be taken as 1 or 2 separate weeks within 56 weeks of child's death	Statutory parental bereavement pay: £151.97/week (or 90% of average weekly earnings if lower). Employer may pay enhanced leave under school policy.
Neonatal / Stillbirth leave	Birth mother after stillbirth (≥24 weeks)	Up to 52 weeks statutory maternity leave/pay	Standard statutory maternity pay applies.
Paternity leave after stillbirth	Father or partner	Up to 2 weeks statutory paternity leave	Standard statutory paternity pay applies. Can be taken alongside 2 weeks parental bereavement leave.
Death of close family member where employee arranges funeral	Partner, parent, child, or person for whom the employee has care responsibility	Reasonably necessary, normally not more than 3 days	Paid at normal rate.
Funeral attendance	Partner, parent, child, or person for whom the employee has care responsibility	Reasonably necessary, allowing for journey time	

*Figures as of 2025/2026

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Checklist: Manager's Guide to Supporting Bereaved Employees
Appendix 2: Checklist: Supporting a Bereaved Employee Returning to Work
Appendix 3: Checklist: Responding to a Death in the School Community
Appendix 4: School Action Checklist

Appendix 1

Checklist: Manager's Guide to Supporting Bereaved Employees

Grief is experienced differently by everyone. Each employee's needs will vary, and support should be tailored to the individual. Showing compassion and flexibility helps employees feel valued, reduces stress, supports wellbeing, minimises absence, and maintains positive workplace relationships.

Key Principles

- **Acknowledge the loss** – offer condolences and show empathy.
- **Respect individual needs** – grief is personal; avoid assumptions.
- **Communicate sensitively** – check how they wish to stay in touch.
- **Balance compassion and clarity** – provide support while ensuring they know what leave and resources are available.
- **Model professionalism** – how you respond will influence colleagues' trust in the school's culture.

First Steps

- Offer condolences and reassure them their wellbeing comes first.
- Confirm they do not need to come into work immediately.
- Ask how they would prefer to keep in contact while away.
- Clarify if urgent work needs to be covered.
- Consider arranging a card, flowers, or another appropriate gesture.

When Speaking with the Employee

- They may be unable to talk – you may need to liaise with a family member or friend.
- Be calm, patient and empathetic.
- Follow up later if needed, by email, phone or through a nominated contact.

Topics to Cover

- How they are coping emotionally and practically.
- Their preferred method and frequency of contact.
- Whether they want colleagues informed of the bereavement.
- Whether they welcome contact from colleagues.
- What support or information they need, such as:
 - Statutory or discretionary leave entitlements
 - Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) or wellbeing resources
 - GP or occupational health advice if needed
- At the right time, ask gently about return to work – but avoid pressure. If they are not ready, sick leave may be appropriate.

Phrases to Avoid

Certain well-meant phrases can feel dismissive or cause distress. **Avoid the following:**

- *"I know how you feel"* – everyone's grief is unique.
- *"They're in a better place now"* – may not align with their beliefs.
- *"At least they lived a long life"* – minimises their loss.
- *"You'll get over it soon"* – grief has no set timetable.
- *"Be strong" or "Keep busy"* – may pressure them to hide feelings.
- *"Time heals everything"* – not always comforting in the moment.

Instead, try:

- *"I'm so sorry for your loss."*
- *"I can't imagine what you're going through, but I'm here if you'd like to talk."*
- *"Please let me know how I can support you."*
- *"Take the time you need – your wellbeing comes first."*

Additional Considerations

- **Cultural and religious needs:** Be mindful of rituals, observances, or time off required.
- **Confidentiality:** Treat all information shared as private and sensitive.
- **Follow-up support:** Arrange check-ins at appropriate intervals, not just immediately after the loss.
- **Impact on colleagues:** Manage workloads fairly and communicate openly with the team where appropriate.



Appendix 2

Checklist: Supporting a Bereaved Employee Returning to Work

Before the Return

- Agree an appropriate return date together – no pressure.
- Offer a phased return if needed (reduced hours or adjusted duties).
- Identify any reasonable adjustments (workload, location, flexible hours).
- Ensure cover is in place for any ongoing absence.

During the Return

- Hold a private, supportive return-to-work meeting.
- Reassure them their wellbeing is the priority.
- Clarify expectations and agree temporary adjustments.
- Signpost support services (EAP, counselling, Occupational Health).

After the Return

- Hold regular reviews to monitor wellbeing and workload.
- Be mindful of reduced performance or concentration – offer support, not criticism.
- Respect new or increased caring responsibilities.
- Respond sensitively to requests for additional time off (e.g. funerals, inquests, anniversaries).
- Watch for changes in team dynamics – act quickly on any bullying, exclusion, or insensitivity.
- Acknowledge significant dates (birthdays, anniversaries) where appropriate.



Appendix 3

Checklist: Responding to a Death in the School Community

Immediate Practical Steps

- Arrange cover for the deceased's duties (temporarily with colleagues or agency staff).
- Avoid rushing permanent recruitment until an appropriate period has passed.
- Inform the trade union (if relevant) to prevent unwanted correspondence to the family.

Communications

- Inform staff sensitively, ideally in person or in small groups.
- Notify pupils in an age-appropriate way with pastoral support available.
- Agree with next of kin how external partners should be informed.
- Provide clear, consistent information to avoid rumours.

Administration

- Contact HR, payroll provider, and pensions to arrange final salary, pension, and accrued holiday payments.
- Ensure all correspondence goes to the executor or next of kin – never to the deceased.
- Discuss with the family how to handle belongings.
- Redirect calls/emails and update directories when appropriate.

Supporting Pupils & Staff

- Identify vulnerable pupils and adults (e.g. with SEN, recent bereavement, or high anxiety).
- Involve Educational Psychologists, pastoral staff, or Occupational Health if needed.
- Offer counselling or wellbeing support for colleagues.
- Be mindful that seeing someone else take on the deceased's role may be upsetting for some.
- Consider remembrance activities or quiet spaces for reflection.



Appendix 4

School Action Checklist

Liaise with Employee or Family

- ☐ Offer condolences and establish family's wishes.
- ☐ Agree what information can be shared with staff, pupils, parents, and media.
- ☐ Identify a main point of contact for ongoing communication.
- ☐ Ask how they wish to stay in contact with the school.
- ☐ Confirm whether colleagues may attend the funeral.
- ☐ Consider impact on family members or children within the school.
- ☐ Check for religious or cultural practices that must be respected.
- ☐ Discuss commemorations (book of condolence, memorial, assembly).
- ☐ If school closure is considered, consult Chair of Governors and Director of Education.

Notify Key Contacts

- ☐ Chair of Governors
- ☐ School Improvement Partner
- ☐ Schools HR Business Partner
- ☐ Diocese or faith body (if applicable)

Manage Communication and Media

- ☐ Agree wording of announcements with the family.
- ☐ Decide who to tell first (senior staff, close colleagues, pupils).
- ☐ Choose best method (meeting, letter, phone call, assembly).
- ☐ Prepare consistent messaging to avoid misinformation.
- ☐ Monitor local press and social media for coverage.
- ☐ Liaise with local authority for media advice (press@southwark.gov.uk).
- ☐ Nominate one school spokesperson if media interest is high.

Notify Payroll and Pensions

- ☐ Confirm if employee was in the LGPS or Teachers' Pension Scheme.
- ☐ Identify family contact who will liaise with pensions.
- ☐ Inform pensions provider and liaise with HR.
- ☐ Contact payroll about final salary, accrued holiday, and deductions.
- ☐ Ensure correspondence goes to executor/next of kin, not the deceased.

Contact Educational Psychologists

- ☐ Contact designated Southwark link Educational Psychologist.
- ☐ Generic email: SEN-EducationalPsychologist&EHO@southwark.gov.uk
- ☐ Seek guidance on supporting pupils, staff, and vulnerable individuals.

Communicate with Staff

- ☐ Respect family wishes about information shared.
- ☐ Decide who needs to know, who to speak to first, and how.
- ☐ Hold staff briefing or meetings to share news sensitively.
- ☐ Check in regularly with staff about how they are coping.
- ☐ Consider remembrance activities (book of condolence, service, assembly).

- ☐ Signpost support services (Education Support Partnership, Cruse, EAP, Occupational Health).

Communicate with Pupils and Parents

- ☐ Seek advice from Educational Psychologists on age-appropriate communication.
- ☐ Respect family's wishes on what is shared.
- ☐ Agree who needs to know, who to tell first, and method (assemblies, letters, meetings).
- ☐ Provide pastoral support and resources.
- ☐ Offer extra support to vulnerable pupils and families.

Ongoing Support and Monitoring

- ☐ Monitor impact on pupils and staff over time.
- ☐ Recognise anniversaries, birthdays, and inquests may trigger grief.
- ☐ Support staff attendance at funerals or memorials.
- ☐ Watch for safeguarding concerns – bereavement may increase vulnerability.
- ☐ Keep confidential records of support offered and decisions made.
- ☐ Review workload and wellbeing of colleagues covering extra duties.