

**Oxfordshire Hospital School
OHS Pupil Bereavement Policy
November 2017**

Introduction

Every death and the circumstances in which it occurs is different and this policy has been constructed to guide colleagues on how to deal professionally, sensitively and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances. The OHS is committed to the emotional health and well-being of the whole school community. The policy is based on practice that has grown over time across the OHS and offers all bereaved pupils and their families the school's compassion and respect.

Following a bereavement

The OHS believes that all members of the school community have the right to:

- be given space and time to grieve
- be given support from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate – if possible, of their own choice.
- encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement.

The OHS recognises that:

- grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real.
- differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment.
- the death of a child has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/care team of that child and every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far reaching contacts.

The Management of Bereavement at the OHS

The OHS accepts that a universally accepted procedure outline will, in itself, not enable everyone to feel comfortable in dealing with the practicalities of death and bereavement. Each bereavement is unique and comes with its own specific challenges; however, it is helpful to have a framework on which to build. One of our main concerns must be the immediate family of the deceased and as a school we state our commitment to any such family as may need practical, emotional and ongoing support.

The OHS may be notified of the death of a pupil in a number of ways. Past experience has shown that clinical partners from the NHS or home schools usually let the school know directly. In these instances the member of staff who is first notified should immediately contact the most senior member of the school team available, usually the

Leader of Learning. The Leader of Learning will then inform the Headteacher who will manage the most appropriate sharing of the information across the OHS colleagues. The Headteacher recognises that there can be no definitive list of people to contact and, therefore, it will be different for each child. The OHS will ensure that all people who are close to the child are told in a sensitive and supportive manner rather than risk them hearing it 'on the grapevine'. The OHS needs to ensure it does not add to the sorrow by leaving people feeling marginalised. The following people will be considered:

- Current school staff not in school that day
- Previous school staff who worked closely with the child
- Chair of Governors
- Other professionals who work with the child, including the Local Authority

The process for telling the other pupils will be decided by the Headteacher following consultation with the teaching staff and medical teams. Although the finality of death cannot be diminished, if there are mitigating circumstances that may help - such as that the child was in pain and now is free of pain - this can be used to help alleviate sorrow. Children must be assured that, while they may feel sad, they do not have to feel guilty if they go on to have fun and pleasure in their day ahead. They must not feel obliged to assume a burden of grief. Children must 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.

The Funeral, Remembrance, and Memorial Ceremonies

It is essential that the OHS is aware of the family's wishes in the ways it demonstrates its respect for the death of a pupil. The family may well welcome involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to keep things private.

The Headteacher and the respective Leader of Learning will make arrangements for the OHS to send flowers to the bereaved family with a letter of condolences in accordance with a family's wishes. If the parents wish to meet teachers from the OHS at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed and the Leader of Learning will make the necessary arrangements. Past experience has shown that this can be helpful in their grieving.

Whilst this policy does not make provision for the OHS to attend the funeral of a young person, colleagues are able to request attendance to a funeral for a pupil whose family have asked for that staff member to be actively engaged in the service. Active engagement would mean, for example, where a colleague has been asked to do a reading. In such cases, the colleagues should make their request in writing to the head teacher, who will consider the request from a range of viewpoints.

Memory Ceremony

All OHS colleagues will be invited to attend an annual memorial ceremony, held at the end of the school year, remembering those pupils who have died. The purpose of this is to provide a whole school mark of respect and will take place in a suitable location.

On-Going Support For Staff

Following bereavement, it is only to be expected that some members of staff will be emotionally affected and could benefit from the provision of some time for reflection. The OHS provides the following supporting routes:

- Access to one to one time with a counsellor who is trained in bereavement support
- Availability of information about accessing bereavement support outside of school