

Kirkwall Grammar School



Policy on Bereavement

(September 2017)

Introduction

The death of a student, a close relative of a student, a member of staff or a close relative of a member of staff can be traumatic for staff and students alike.

For some students this can be their first real contact with the death of someone known to them. For teachers, it can be the first time they have needed to respond professionally to the shock and sadness experienced by those in their care.

Within our school community there will almost always be some children who are struggling with bereavement – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil. We would hope to not encounter such circumstances, but the statistical inevitability of such an occurrence implies the necessity of having a Bereavement Policy in place in order that we might be proactive, rather than reactive, when responding to these challenging situations. Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children – or staff – require, though referral to more specialist support should be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex. Additional information and resources can be accessed at www.childbereavement.org.uk

Kirkwall Grammar School believes in adopting a holistic approach to the care of both its students and staff. When bereavement occurs, it can affect a variety of people, not just the family concerned. We aim to ensure that the appropriate members of the school community are given sufficient support and advice at such times. The management of a bereavement situation will be a central role for an appointed member of staff who may be supported by members of the Guidance Team. Throughout the process the Head Teacher and/or the D.H.T. Pupil Support will oversee and offer advice and provide resources if required.

Aim

This policy is intended to reflect Kirkwall Grammar School's positive ethos and should contribute to the caring community we endeavour to nurture.

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 appropriate to 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.

We also recognize that grieving and funeral practices can differ depending on religious and cultural background, and this should be handled with the utmost sensitivity.

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.

Death of a Close Relative of a Student

Depending on the closeness of the relationship between the student and the deceased the degree of support required might vary. In general the guidelines below should be followed:

- Student's Guidance teacher to discuss proposed approach by school with appropriate family member.
- Student's Guidance teacher to inform Pupil Support Team (PST)¹ and discuss action to be taken.
- Student's Guidance teacher 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 student's Guidance teacher, on how to support student on his/her return to school.
- 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.
- Student's Guidance teacher and PST should carefully consider involvement of partner agencies, if appropriate.
- Student's Guidance teacher and PST should also consider whether or not the school should be represented at the funeral.
- Student's Guidance teacher to meet with student on his/her return to school and offer appropriate support where required (see Appendix 1)
- Student's Guidance teacher to regularly monitor student over the following months and consider involving partner agencies who may be able to offer support (see appendix 2)
- Where the pupil is in S4 or above it may be appropriate to liaise with SQA, UCAS etc. Such actions will be determined jointly by the Student's Guidance teacher and other relevant members of staff.

¹ DHT Pupil Support/Head of Guidance/PT Curriculum Support

Bullet Point 3 and 4 may be done face to face, or via school's established communication systems.

Death of a Student

- On hearing of the death of a student the Head Teacher should meet immediately with the Guidance Team to plan the school's response. Decisions as to which group(s) of pupils should be informed will need to be made. e.g. classmates, close friends, year group, friends of brothers and sisters of the deceased.
- With great sensitivity, the Head Teacher will ascertain the circumstances of the death. Where possible he/she should discuss with a close family member how the school will be dealing with the bereavement.
- As soon as possible the DHT Pupil Support 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 normal school routine will be maintained as much as possible.** Obviously, if the death occurs near the end of term then consideration should be given as to whether certain extra -curricular activities should be suspended (e.g. Merit Award activities, School Show etc.)
- Staff should also be asked to be vigilant and provide immediate information to Guidance staff about students who may be showing signs of distress and who may need support. Guidance staff should be made available to offer support. Other specialists may also be asked to assist (see Appendix 2)
- The Head Teacher, and a member of the Guidance team, to visit the family of the deceased, if felt to be appropriate.
- The Head Teacher will also need to consider a selection process as to which members of staff and which pupils should attend the funeral. In this matter the wishes of the family must be taken fully into account. The school 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 school have 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 Head Teacher must formulate any response in conjunction with the Authority Press Office. 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 DHT Pupil Support should work with relevant members of staff to inform external groups such as UCAS, SQA 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.

Death of a Member of Staff

- On hearing of the death of a member of staff the Head Teacher should meet with members of the SLT to plan the school's response. At this meeting the method of informing other staff will be decided.
Decisions as to how and when pupils will be informed will also need to be made.
- Adequate support for staff and pupils must be available. The expertise of Guidance staff, in-school counsellors, school nurse and educational psychologist should be more than adequate to provide support for pupils. In general staff members will be able to support each other but it may be appropriate to consult the education authority to provide more specialist resources.
- Attendance of staff and pupils at the funeral should, where possible, be discussed with the deceased's family.
The Head Teacher, in conjunction with education authority, should ensure that as many staff as possible are able to attend the funeral. This may involve the school having to put special timetabling arrangements in place.

Death of a Close Relative of a Member of Staff

The death of a close relative 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.

- The Head Teacher should be informed, as soon as possible, of the death and can then meet with other members of the SLT to decide how other members of staff are informed, if appropriate.
- If e-mail is to be used to give any details, e.g. time of funeral, then it is essential that the staff member does not receive the e-mail.
- The Head Teacher (or whoever is deemed most appropriate) should contact the staff member as soon as possible and convey their condolences and offer whatever support is appropriate
- It is unlikely that many of the pupils will have to be informed but if so the Head Teacher, in conjunction with the SLT will decide on the appropriate method(s) to be used.
- Attendance of Staff (and any pupils where appropriate) at the funeral should, where possible, be discussed with the staff member. Pupils should be offered appropriate support by experienced staff (see Appendix 3)
- The Head Teacher 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 their line manager, SLT 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.

Monitoring and Evaluating the Policy

After a bereavement, the school will review what was done at each stage and will evaluate the actions taken to see what was effective and what might have been done better. This will enable the school to plan for the future.

Appendix 1 – Examples of support that can be offered to a young person on their return to school

Nurture Group – dependant on age of student
In-school counselling
Time out card
Peer mentoring
Curriculum Support to assist with catching up on work missed
Access to guidance staff

Appendix 2 – Partners who may be able to provide support

Chaplains
In-school counsellors
Educational Psychologist
School Nurse
Y-People
Cruze Bereavement
Samaritans

Appendix 3 – Child Bereavement Training

Child Bereavement UK offer various forms of training, both at online and conference level. It is recommended that as many staff as possible are given the opportunity to undertake the online training.

KGS has an unlimited user licence for online training.