



Independent School for Girls Aged 2 to 18  
and Boys Aged 2 to 11

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# BEREAVEMENT POLICY

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Harrogate Ladies' College family of Schools:

Highfield Pre School, Highfield and College

SLT Responsibility: Joanna Fox

Governor Committee Review: Pupil Welfare

Next Review Date: March 2022

**PRINCIPAL:** Sylvia F. Brett BA (Dunelm), MA (London). **COLLEGE VISITOR:** Baroness Harris of Richmond.  
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Since 1893



### Rationale

Our school is fully committed to the emotional health and well-being of our young people and staff. We are dedicated to the continual development of a healthy and thriving school community and strive to work towards this in all aspects of school life. We are passionate about providing an ethos, environment and curriculum that can provide support during difficult times, including a time of death or dying.

Every 22 minutes in the UK a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 41,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, particularly during this pandemic year and, sadly, around 12,000 children die in the UK each year.

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.

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](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)

### Objectives

The core intentions of the policy are:

- To support pupils and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and community.
- To identify key staff within school and clarify the pathway of support.

### The role of the Principal

The Principal has overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation, for liaison with the governing body, parents/carers and other relevant outside agencies.

The Principal, or a senior member of staff delegated by her, will:

- Monitor pupil and staff welfare and liaise with external agencies.
- Respond to media enquiries.
- Keep the governing body fully informed.
- Be first point of contact for family/child concerned.

*This policy applies to all members of our school community, including boarders and those in our EYFS setting.*



## Bereavement Policy

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- To have bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff.
- Cascade relevant learning to all staff so that all feel confident in delivering support for pupils, supporting each other and implementing this policy
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary schools.

### Death of a pupil or staff member:

On hearing the news of the death of a pupil or staff member:

- The Principal, or senior member of staff delegated by her, will make contact with the deceased's family to ensure that their wishes can be respected in the School's communication with others. Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion, whilst being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations.
- The School will at all times be mindful of the use of social media sites and their impact throughout this time as rumour and gossip spread quickly.
- Staff will be informed before pupils, so that they can be prepared to share the information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.
- A decision will be made as to whether this information should be given as part of a whole school approach, or if only certain groups of pupils need to be informed of the news
- Pupils will be informed in small groups by someone known to them.
- A letter to all school families affected should be composed at the earliest opportunity and a decision made as to whom, and how, it should be distributed (see sample letters in Appendix 1). Permission will always be sought from the deceased's family before this letter is sent, and the content of the letter agreed by the family prior to sending.
- If appropriate, an adjustment to the school timetable may be made to accommodate the needs and well-being of children affected by the situation, bearing in mind that minimal disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security and familiarity.
- Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate.
- In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance may be clarified, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances.
- Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Principal.
- The School will remain mindful of the fact that bereavement can follow a child throughout their school life, so information should be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points. The school should be aware of any ongoing bereavement

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issues for new pupils. The date of the bereavement should be recorded in iSAMS so staff are aware of anniversaries and can provide appropriate support.

### Death of a parent

It is recognised that a more common experience for staff is that of a pupil experiencing the death of a parent. Whole school or class activities will not normally be appropriate in this situation, but the needs of that individual pupil will still be given careful consideration.

If a child has been bereaved, the School, through a member of staff trusted by the child, will involve them in decisions about how the school manages the issues relating to their loss, including their preferred way of informing their peers about what has happened and about the support they need.

### Supporting bereaved children

Young children mature at different rates and their understanding and responses to bereavement are likely to be based on as much as their experience of life as on their chronological age.

- By secondary school age, most pupils will understand the inevitability and permanence of death. They may have difficulty in coming to terms with their own mortality as well of those close to them. They may possibly refuse to contemplate the possibility of death by becoming involved in risk-taking behaviour. A young person may challenge expectations of others about how they 'should' be behaving or feeling. Death can also increase anxiety about the future and they may question the meaning of life.
- Adults naturally want to protect, but young people have a greater capacity to deal with death than we realise, as long as they are told in an age-appropriate way. Even a very sad truth will be easier to manage than uncertainty. A young person will search for the truth and may find it very difficult if they hear details from outside their own family.
- It may feel harsh, but avoid using euphemisms such as 'lost' or 'gone to sleep' as this can cause confusion and misunderstanding.
- Young people will grieve in different ways and their responses to a bereavement will depend upon their age, understanding and relationship with the person who has died. It is important to avoid making assumptions about how a young person is feeling.
- Be aware of changing relationships and friendships: a bereaved pupil may find their peers do not know what to say or how to act and this can, inadvertently, lead to isolation and loneliness.
- Ask a bereaved pupil to think about what they need and want from their friends, teachers and other adults in the school. This will offer them an element of control and give some clarity to those wanting to help and support the bereaved pupil. Provide the opportunity to leave a lesson if they unexpectedly become overwhelmed by their grief as well as a space they would like to use.
- Signpost bereaved pupils to support from within school, external agencies and online support, such as the Child Bereavement UK app.

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## Appendix 1: Suggested templates for letter to parents following the death of a pupil:

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher/form tutor/Housemistress has today had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>.

<Name> died from cancer. As you may be aware, many children who have cancer get better but sadly <Name> had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday.

He/She was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try to answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office. We would be more than happy to help you.

We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating <Name's> life.

Yours sincerely



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## Appendix 2: Sample letter to bereaved parents:

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear of *Toby's* death. There are no words to express the sadness of losing a child and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through.

Clearly, as a school community, we will miss *him* very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to *his* friends and classmates. *He* was a much loved member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help as you plan *Toby's* funeral service or other memorial opportunities, please let us know. In time, we will also ensure that anything of *Toby's* that remains in school is returned to you, including photographs we may have on the school system.

Be assured that you are in our thoughts at this very sad time and do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of support in any way.

With sympathy,

Headteacher



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## Appendix 3: Sample letter to parents on death of a staff member:

Dear parents

I am sorry to have to tell you that a much-loved member of our staff, [name] has died. The children were told today and many were understandably distressed at the news. No-one wants to see children sad, but we are very aware that factual information and emotional support are the best means of helping children deal with bereavement. I am sure there will be many parents who are also saddened by the news.

Children respond in different ways so may dip in and out of sadness, and questions, whilst alternately playing or participating in their usual activities. This is normal and healthy. You may find your child has questions to ask which we will answer in an age-appropriate way in school, but if you feel you would like more support and advice yourself, please do not hesitate to contact the school office. You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at:

[www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)

We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Children who wish to attend will be welcome to do so, though it will not be compulsory. It is likely that school will be closed on the morning or afternoon of the funeral as staff will, of course, wish to pay their respects to a very popular colleague.

I am sorry to be the bearer of sad news, but I appreciate an occurrence like this impacts the whole school community. I am so grateful for the thriving partnership we have with parents and trust that we, together, will be able to guide and support the children through what may be, for many, a very new experience in their lives.

Yours sincerely,