

Ernulf Academy

Part of the Astrea Academy Trust Family

Bereavement Policy

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1. Aims and Ethos

Ernulf Academy prides itself on the support it provides for scholars and staff and also the wider school community. We understand that at times of extreme sadness where a family or the school have lost a loved one, the secure surroundings of school may be all that some scholars or staff require. However, where the impact of grief is more complex, referral to more specialist support may be necessary.

2. Rationale

Statistically, 1 in 29 scholars aged between 5 and 16 has been bereaved of a parent/carer or sibling, that equates to one in every class. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, relative, friend or other significant person. Within a school community like Ernulf, it is likely that at any one time there will be a number of scholars and/or staff who are struggling with bereavement. It is possible that the whole school community could be impacted by the death of a member of staff or scholar.

3. Objectives

The aim of this policy is to:

- Provide a framework for staff to give guidance on how to support a bereaved student or colleague;
- support scholars and/or members of staff before (where applicable) during and after bereavement;
- enhance effective communication and clarify pathways of support between different members of the school community;
- identify key staff within school, the Transition Management Board, local authority and academy trust;
- provide clear expectations about the way school will respond to a death and provide a suitable environment for all.

4. The death of a scholar or member of staff

a) Roles and Responsibilities

The Principal will lead the Senior Team (Vice Principal if the Principal is unavailable) in the initial response to the news of a bereavement and will communicate directly with the family/families initially and also with the press. The Principal will then nominate a member of staff to remain in touch with the family. The best person to take on this role may depend on the situation, the relationship with the scholar and family and the experience of the member of staff.

Where possible, scholars will be gathered together to share news of a bereavement. Where a bereavement relates to a close relationship between a small group of scholars, the Academy will consider whether it would be more appropriate to speak to this group separately, prior to a larger gathering. When communicating with staff, ideally, they would be gathered together, again with the consideration of speaking to a small group of staff separately. Out of hours communication will occur from SLT via HoDs to teaching staff, from the SENCO to TAs and from support staff line managers to their teams. Follow up information will be sent out via email, the website and, where deemed appropriate, social media.

The Academy will then consider what support may need to be put in place in response to a bereavement. This will very much be guided by continued monitoring of the situation and through open communication with those involved.

b) Procedures

Wherever possible the Academy will be guided by the bereaved family when considering the sharing of information. A simple confirmation of the death may be required until more details are available, and/or the family consulted. The Academy will do all it can to prevent speculation and rumours, in addition to providing support to those in need.

It is helpful to feel prepared when delivering sad news. Colleagues should not be afraid to show emotion as this is a genuine human reaction. A suggested script may include:

- Acknowledgement of the sad news;
- giving the news stating simple facts, don't be afraid to use the words dead/died.
- (with permission) explain briefly where and when the death occurred (if this information is not known, say so and that you will endeavour to find out);
- dispel any rumours if you are able to;
- where appropriate, remind colleagues and scholars about their responsibilities and the impact when posting on social media;
- talk briefly and positively about the person who died;
- mention any arrangements already in place, including for those needing support; acknowledge that it is ok to feel sad or not.

Where possible and appropriate, staff and scholars will be given some time to process the news.

c) The first few days

The Principal, with support from SLT and the Trust will consider if it is appropriate for the school day structure and timetable to remain the same. Although school can provide stability and normality, some flexibility may be necessary. Bereaved young people may need time to grieve and to try to come to terms with their initial feelings, therefore time out cards to allow scholars to go to a safe space will be considered.

The Principal will also consider the location for a temporary tribute / book of condolence. This needs to be safe, accessible and where scholars can be supervised. Scholars and colleagues will be informed before any temporary tribute or book of condolence is removed.

SLT will communicate with line managers to check on the well-being of their teams and consider support. Tutors will follow a similar process with their tutees and inform Heads of Year if they have concerns about any of their tutees.

d) The funeral

The member of staff who is nominated to communicate with the family will consult with them to find out whether members of staff and/or students are welcome to attend the funeral. Staff will be asked to express if they wish to attend the funeral and then the practicalities of staff cover can be considered. For some circumstances, it may be appropriate to close the school, for others, it may not. The Principal will be guided by the Trust and supported by SLT in making this decision. The Academy will be guided by the family in whether flowers or a collection are appropriate and will be in line with the Trust Gifts and Hospitality policy.

e) Support for scholars

In the first instance, support for scholars will be provided by the scholars pastoral support team. Where it becomes apparent that this level of support will not be sufficient, the Vice Principal will contact the District Team Manager in the first instance to seek support from Young People's Workers out in the community and following this, to Centre 33 to enlist the support of trained counsellors. Other Academies in the Trust will also be contacted for further support as well as the Trust counsellor.

f) Support for staff

Supporting bereaved scholars can be very stressful and emotionally draining for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions. The Academy need to be aware of any members of staff who, because of their own personal circumstances, may be more vulnerable than others. Where appropriate, training will be considered for staff in order to maximise the amount of support offered to scholars. SLT and Line Managers will be instrumental in reviewing staff well-being. The Trust counsellor will also be contacted to provide any additional support where necessary.

g) Remembering

The member of staff nominated to communicate with the family will consult with them after the funeral about any plans for a memorial assembly or other tribute. The Academy will consider carefully how the scholar or member of staff will be remembered by the Ernulf community. A more permanent memorial (a tree, bench, garden, piece of artwork) may be appropriate though the Academy should bear in mind any future need to relocate or remove the memorial and how this can be managed sensitively.

5. Supporting a bereaved scholar

a) Returning to school after a bereavement

Most grieving scholars do not need someone with counselling skills or who is a bereavement expert, they are most likely to simply need the support of a trusted adult and the familiar routines of school. A member of staff who knows the students well will endeavour to meet with them and their parent / carer prior to their return to school.

The purpose of this meeting will be to:

- Acknowledge the death;
- find out how the scholar would like to share this news, if indeed they want to;
- identify a safe space for the scholar to go should they need to and the arrangements around this e.g. a time out card;
- consider whether to provide 'time-out' activities, for example a magazine or art activity;
- set guidelines for communication with the scholar and scholar's family;
- consider the friendship group around the scholar and what support they might need.

b) Longer term support

The member of staff initially assigned to communicate with the family following a bereavement will continue to do so once the scholar has returned to school. It will be their role to communicate with the scholar regularly (at least once per half term if the scholar finds this helpful) to provide support with matters such as significant dates (e.g. Mother's Day / Father's Day) and to build up an overall picture of how the scholar is coping.

The impact of grief may impact on the progress of the scholar in school, there may also be changes in behaviour as a result of the bereavement. The nominated member of staff will work with the scholar to support them and will keep the Head of Year updated. Scholars who are particularly vulnerable such as those in care, those with an EHCP and those with a social worker and therefore the Academy will consider the needs of these scholars particularly carefully.

c) Death, grief and bereavement in the curriculum

Our Personal Development (PD) curriculum and our RE curriculum both incorporate knowledge and prompt discussion around these subject areas. The curriculum for RE is available on the Academy website and the topics covered in Personal Development lessons are also available on the Academy website to enable parents / carers to contact us if they have any concerns.

d) Support for staff

Staff will be supported in the same manner as detailed in section 4f above.

6. Sources of Support

Support is available from a variety of sources including:

- Cruse Bereavement Support <https://www.cruse.org.uk/> Offers face-to-face, telephone (0808 808 1677) and email (helpline@cruse.org.uk) support.
- Ormiston Families <https://www.ormiston.org/what-we-do/mental-health-and-wellbeing/support-for-children-and-young-people/ormiston-families-stars/> Stars offers specialist bereavement support and counselling to those aged 4-19 in Cambridgeshire who may be experiencing difficulties following the loss of someone close to them, such as a friend or family member.
- Child Bereavement UK <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/supporting-bereaved-children-and-young-people>