



OLD BUCKENHAM HALL

A leading co-educational preparatory school for children aged 2-13 years

Bereavement and Trauma Policy

OBHP24

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SCHOOL BEREAVEMENT AND TRAUMA POLICY

Introduction and Background

From time to time every school is touched by the death of a student, member of staff or an extended family member. Individuals and families react to bereavement in their own very unique ways. The trauma of bereavement can have a profound effect on the school community. It is, therefore, important for a school to reflect upon an appropriate response to bereavement and to develop flexible contingency plans that reflect how the School could or should respond in a tragic situation.

When a death occurs

The Headmaster, and in his absence the Senior Deputy Head, will be the primary point of contact with a family when a death has occurred. The Headmaster may consult and seek the assistance of the School Counsellor, School Nurse and other members of the pastoral staff in supporting the bereaved.

The Headmaster will gather factual information regarding the death and will consult with the family regarding their wishes in sharing the information with the School community. It is important that factual information is shared in a timely manner so that assumptions and rumour are not spread, as they can only add to the family's distress. It is essential that all staff are informed straight away, ideally before pupils. Pupils should be told as soon as possible. This is best done in familiar groups by someone they know. Staff will need to have guidance on words to use and approach to take. Staff are encouraged to seek to identify pupils who may be particularly vulnerable or likely to experience PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). For example, someone who may have witnessed the death may require special attention.

The death of a pupil

In the case of the death of a pupil appropriate pastoral support should be provided for the whole school community. The Senior Management Team (SMT), School Counsellor, Nurse and other pastoral staff should be deployed appropriately to provide counselling and comfort. This may include pastoral support being available at designated areas and times during the School day. A book of remembrance should be set up in an appropriate location where the bereaved can come to express their grief and loss. Services of remembrance may be offered at various times. Support for staff who are directly involved with grieving pupils is important and staff should have the opportunity to meet in the staff common

room at the end of the School day, to provide an opportunity to share feelings and reactions. The Headmaster will determine the appropriate period of time for these pastoral supports to continue. If the press are involved in reporting on the death, the Headmaster will release an official statement on behalf of the School.

In general it is best to have minimum disruption to the School timetable. The structure and regularity of the School day is important to maintain, but some flexibility may be required. If a pupil is too upset to attend lessons, they should be excused to go to the School Nurse.

In the case of a boarding pupil's death the Headmaster will take primary responsibility in consulting with the police and emergency personnel in determining the most appropriate and timely method of informing the parents / guardians. The Headmaster will also consult with the family regarding an appropriate Memorial Service to be held for the School community.

Funeral plans

When a funeral has been planned for the deceased, it is essential that the School is sensitive to the family's culture and abides by the family's wishes. The family may welcome involvement of members of the School community but equally, may wish to keep the funeral private.

The death of a member of staff

In the case of the death of a member of staff - support will be offered very much along the lines of above. Great sensitivity and care will need to be taken in determining how lessons will be covered immediately following the death.

The death of a family member of a pupil

In the case of the death of a family member of a student, if the death happens while the child is at School, a representative for the family, preferably a parent should come to the School to inform the child. In some circumstances it may be necessary for the Headmaster or Pastoral Head to give the death notification. Before notifying fellow pupils, the School should speak with the bereaved pupil's family to determine what information should be given to classmates. Classmates should be informed how the bereaved classmate wants to talk about what has happened (i.e. speak openly and take initiative, or let the bereaved student decide when to talk about the death).

The Headmaster or Senior Deputy Head should consult with the bereaved pupil's family to determine what is appropriate in terms of classmates attending the funeral and/or sending flowers. Following the death of a family member it can be expected that the bereaved pupil may have a reduced capacity for school work. The bereaved pupil may need extra help at a later time, when working capacity becomes normal again.

The death of a pupil or member of staff whilst at school or on a school trip

Should the death of a student or staff member occur during the school day or on a school trip the Headmaster will quickly assemble an emergency management team. The first priorities will be to offer support to students and staff who may have witnessed the death and to inform the family of the deceased. The Head and the emergency management team will deal immediately with issues at the school including contact with accident and emergency personnel, organising support and counselling for the school community and communicating information to the School community as appropriate. The Headmaster will consult with the police and emergency personnel in determining the most appropriate and timely method of informing the immediate family of the death.

See the School's Crisis Management Policy.

Useful websites: www.cruse.org.uk

www.winstonswish.org.uk

www.rd4u.org.uk

www.childbereavement.org.uk