



Longsands Academy Bereavement Policy

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1. Aims and Ethos

Longsands Academy prides itself on the support it provides for students 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 students 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 students aged between 5 and 16 has been bereaved of a parent or sibling, that equates to one in every class. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, relative, friend or other significant person. Within a large school community like Longsands, it is likely that at any one time there will be a number of students 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 student.

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 students 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 local education committee, 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 student 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 student and family and the experience of the member of staff.

Where possible, students will be gathered together to share news of a bereavement. Where a bereavement relates to a close relationship between a small group of students, 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 SENDCo 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 endeavor to find out);
- dispel any rumours if you are able to;
- where appropriate, remind colleagues and students 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 students 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 students 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 students can be supervised. Students 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 students

In the first instance, support for students will be provided by the student services team. Where it becomes apparent that this level of support will not be sufficient, the Vice Principal will contact the District Team 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.

f) Support for staff

Supporting bereaved students 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 students. SLT and Line Managers will be instrumental in reviewing staff well-being.

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 student or member of staff will be remembered by the Longsands 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 student

a) Returning to school after a bereavement

Most grieving students 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 students would like to share this news, if indeed they want to;
- identify a safe space for the student 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 student and student's family;
- consider the friendship group around the student 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 student has returned to school. It will be their role to communicate with the student regularly (at least once per half term if the student 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 student is coping.

The impact of grief may impact on the progress of the student in school, there may also be changes in behaviour as a result of the bereavement. The nominated member of staff will work with the student to support them and will keep the Head of Year updated. Students 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 students particularly carefully.

c) Death, grief and bereavement in the curriculum

Our Personal Development 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 to be covered in PD are sent home twice per year 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. COVID-19

The death of a colleague, student or when a member of our Academy community experiences the death of a family member, is always difficult but will probably be more impactful in the event of further restrictions on social contact and gatherings which includes attendance at funerals.

If a colleague experiences a bereavement, their line managers and fellow colleagues will naturally want to support them through a very difficult time, but workplace restrictions will clearly make this more difficult and the guidance on social distancing and contact will still have to be adhered to in order to protect everyone. Leaders and managers will need to be mindful of the impact these restrictions will have on supporting colleagues through the loss of a loved one. In cases of bereavement, colleagues will be able to request leave of absence on compassionate grounds and may also need to take further time off as a result, in which case annual leave or sickness absence procedures may apply.

7. Sources of Support

Support is available from a variety of sources including:

- www.childbereavementuk.org (from where much of this policy was sourced) or their helpline 0800 02 888 40
- If a child dies by suicide – Samaritans 0808 168 2528
- www.nhs.uk
- www.cruse.org.uk or helpline 0808 808 1677