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**Bereavement Policy**

**September 2020**

**Shenfield High School Bereavement Policy June 2020**

This policy has been developed in consideration of bereavement suffered prior to coronavirus, and also in response to the crisis, and potential bereavement that students returning to school may have faced during the lockdown period. This policy draws upon experience of staff and several documents advising on the supporting of students and their families as well as staff who may be facing bereavement.

This policy has links with other relevant policies and procedures, for example our Critical Incident Policy, our Safeguarding Policy and our wellbeing procedures.

Shenfield High School endeavours to provide empathetic understanding of bereavement, knowing that it can impact on children and young people’s behaviour and outlook. Our pastoral system is set up to support students in all areas of their school lives, and bereavement in particular is seen as requiring more specialist support via our interventions well-being team. If further support is required, we will always look to our partner agencies to provide additional input.

**Objectives:**

This policy will provide a framework for all staff, giving guidance on how to deal sensitively and compassionately with bereavement.

To support pupils and members of staff before, during and after bereavement

To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between members of staff, students, the family and carers, and the community.

To identify key staff within the school, the governing body, local authority and local organisations who may help to support students, their families and staff when bereavement occurs

Guidance:

From David Kessler “on grief and grieving - finding the meaning of grief through the five stages of loss” and “finding meaning the six stage of grief“.

David Kessler refers to coping with grief and loss as a normal journey that creates a temporary lack of safety. He reminds us that grief is not a linear journey, and categorises grief into six distinct stages.

The Child Bereavement Society UK asks that those who work with children understand the stages of grief, and also understand that these are generalisations and each person’s journey through grief is different. Nevertheless, these stages are all important, and each brings with it different feelings and emotions that a child or young person may not have experienced before.

1. Denial – a refusal to accept the change in ones life that bereavement brings, with a mindset to fight the change been imposed.
2. Anger – often strong waves of emotion that can overwhelm rational thought, leading to equally strong and challenging behaviours.
3. Bargaining – trying to force our way back into normality by offering emotional swaps that cannot be done. Often this is accompanied with guilt – did I do enough? Why was I not taken instead? Why me? Should be seen as a normal way of trying to stem the pain of bereavement.
4. Sadness - reality begins to surface - the pain will not go away and the past normality is not going to come back.
5. Acceptance - working within what we can work with, and moving forward - looking to the future.
6. Having meaning in our lives - keeping connected, telling people about how we feel and allowing the feelings to come and go as is the course of emotion with bereavement.

The feeling of bereavement is hard to handle, and for many children and young people who are feeling it for the first time, understanding that feelings gradually settle as new normality happens can be extremely difficult. Also the feelings can be experienced as physical pain and anxiety.

The bereavement guide [www.nurture.uk](http://www.nurture.uk), Mitchell 198, describes grief as being physical, emotional and spiritual.

Shenfield High School sees bereavement support as part of our wellbeing package, and seeks to understand how it impacts on our students, their families and on our staff.

**Roles and responsibilities**

In the event of a bereavement been reported to the school, the pastoral team - supported by the wider interventions team - will consider the measures required to support the student in school, the family and, where necessary, the staff. For each individual, a support package will be agreed with the student and the family, and this will be shared with the staff who work with the child or young person concerned.

The senior staff in that team will consider the impact that the bereavement has on the day-to-day running of the school if the bereavement is the death of a student or of a staff member. Plans will be made to inform students and their families and staff of the bereavement and support structures that will be put in place.

The school will make every effort to provide a safe place and time for students to grieve, and support will be made available from the pastoral team, the intervention team and our partner agencies.

Some families may want to share the information about the death with the school community whilst others may not. A key member of staff will act in liaison with the family and their wishes will be taken into account along with the needs of the whole school community.

When delivering the news of a death, staff should not be afraid to show emotion. Children and young people need genuine support at times of bereavement and trying to deny our own feelings is not good role modelling.

At the current time of writing, the school is starting to come out of lockdown, and more students are starting to attend the school. Some of the students and staff attending the school have suffered bereavement since the last time we were together as a community. Staff need to be aware of this and follow the advice that has been given by the school. In particular, attention is drawn to the staff CPD video narrated by our SENCO who gives explanation and advice about what to do if a child or young person is grieving.

**Supporting every student:**

The literature quoted above suggests that not all grieving students need a bereavement expert, but they do they need the support of familiar and trusted adults, which is what school staff endeavour to be. Short term support can be provided in a variety of ways and the school will provide a designated person for the family to liaise with to decide the best support package for each individual.

Longer term support may be required in that the student will continue to grieve for the rest of their life, with significant dates or anniversaries such as Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, birthdays and the anniversary of the death being particularly difficult for years to come. The school will ensure regular contact with the family and reviews with the student to help build up an overall response to how the student is coping.

The grief may also impact on the student’s academic progress - some bereaved students will put themselves under extra pressure to succeed, but others may find it difficult to focus in class and their work, and there may be changes in their behaviour that need to be need to be managed within the School’s Behaviour for Learning Policy.

**What individual staff can do to support grieving children and young people?**

Follow the personal support plan that the School will endeavour to put in place around each student identified as needing support. Allow that support to change – as children and young people and their families move through the stages of grief, so it is likely that the support that they need will change.

We can let children know it is okay to have difficult feelings, and provide a safe place for them to express those feelings. We can be honest about what grief is. We can provide routine and support so that children feel safe and boundaried. We can refer children for specialist support when requested. We can include the topics of death and bereavement in the curriculum. Staff need to be aware of how some topics may impact on their students and plan accordingly, but the curriculum plan should not shy away from the topic. Bereavement is a part of everyone’s past and future, and teaching topics that are related to bereavement will help normalise the emotions that a student may be feeling. However, staff must be sensitive to students who cannot at a particular time cope with talking about the topic, and arrangements for the student to work in a supportive atmosphere must be in place.

**Supporting staff.**

The School recognises that staff may themselves be feeling their own bereavement. We ask staff to be mindful of their own wellbeing and seek support when needed.

In addition, we recognise that being alongside anyone experiencing loss can be emotionally draining and supporting children who are suffering from loss can be particularly so. Again, we ask staff to be mindful of how they are feeling and seek support when needed.

As a School we try to be responsive to the needs of the people within our community. However, we also know - and especially in the aftermath of lockdown - that national interest often impacts on our community, and we anticipate that in the future there will be national grieving for the victims of COVID19. We will endeavour to manage that time sensitively and acknowledge how this may impact on our community.

This Policy was written in June 2020 and will be reviewed systematically as and when our school returns to full functioning alongside the UK as a whole.