**A bereavement in your school community** [Senior/Pastoral leaders]

Every situation is unique. The advice below will need to be adapted according to specific circumstances.

**Before any action is taken**

* Establish the facts
* Inform key people - Chair of Governors, MAT CEO, Clergy, School Chaplain
* Communicate with family of the deceased parent or child (see below for more details)
* Identify the most appropriate person to liaise between home and school and within school – consider keeping a journal/notebook to log key information over the weeks that follow
* Agree what information is to be given to the rest of the school community (*inform parents of other pupils in school asap if this is appropriate*)
* Refer to any relevant school policies, critical incident management plans

**Who to Inform**

(*Be mindful that, on hearing about the death of someone, people are likely to feel waves of strong emotions – shock, sadness, disbelief etc. Some practicalities will need immediate attention, but others will be best done after people have had chance to process the news*.)

* Staff (Chair of Governors, MAT CEO, Clergy, School Chaplain.)
  + Ideally at a meeting. In school holidays contact key staff on a need-to-know basis. Don’t forget absent staff, non-teaching staff, governors as appropriate
* Pupils (when appropriate)
  + Small groups, tutor sessions, assemblies, consider special attention for SEN pupils, those who have a close relationship with the deceased.
  + Consider carefully the message, age-appropriateness & language used: be as factual and honest as possible
* Parents/ Carers (when appropriate)
  + Consider a letter home, liaising with family
* *Media (usually in exceptional circumstances)*
  + Head - possibly together with Chair of Governors - to provide a statement only ***if necessary***, Seek advice from HR provider.

General advice

**Contacting the family**

* You will find it helpful having a script outlining what you want to say especially in the initial conversation.
  + Give condolences
  + Don’t ask too many questions but be prepared to listen
  + Are they being supported?
  + Check what information they want to be conveyed and when – outline what you think you need to do or what you have already done:
    - Informing staff / children / parents
    - Including explaining the death isn’t Covid related.
    - Be aware there might be a request not to give specific details though

**Staff briefing**

* What has happened – factual what is known what is unknown
* Who has been informed – staff / parents / neighbouring schools etc
* Plans for the day – any special arrangements / in class support especially classes directly affected (pupil’s class / pupil’s relations)
* Answering children’s questions before official release of information
  + Ask what they have been told say you will find out
  + Something sad has happened to… but I’m not sure of the details yet or ? will be letting everyone know later
* Key contact person if concerned about specific children or staff members
* A chance for staff to ask questions

Staff supporting each other

* We all react in different ways – there’s no right way
  + Some want to talk and be with others
  + Some want to be quiet and on their own
  + Some need physical contact, others don’t
* The impact is always on our feelings (emotional and physical), thoughts and behaviours
* For some it’s immediate and for others it might be delayed
* Common emotions include:
  + Shock, feeling numb, disbelief, sad
  + Feelings may come and go or linger
  + Triggering a memory of a previous bereavement
* Look after each other – be kind to each other and to yourself – share with trusted friends

Supporting children

* Answer the children honestly including ‘I don’t know’
* If they ask a difficult question, ask them what they think
* Use the word ‘died’ rather than euphemisms (passed away / gone to sleep /)
* Keep to routines but with some allowances
* When talking to a child ask them, ’What are you thinking, what are you feeling, what do you feel like doing?
* Ask them what they’d like to do – draw, write
* Reassure them – especially if they say they are worried
* Encourage them to talk to their parents and give them opportunity to talk to you

**Supporting staff**

Things for headteachers or lead member/s of staff to consider can include:

* Share with a colleague any decision making
* Remain ‘visible’ throughout the day in an informal way
* Encourage everyone to maintain the usual routines – lessons etc
* Be especially aware of staff who knew or worked closely with the person who is ill or who died – also anyone who has recently been bereaved
* Give opportunity for staff to be together informally at the end of the day – coffee / any updates / to ask any questions
* At some point, consider having a book of condolence available for staff / pupils / parents
* Begin to think of an appropriate way of remembering the person
* It might be appropriate at some point (the end of the day/week or some appropriate time but usually at the end of the day) to gather more formally together to have a few moments for staff to remember the person
  + Read a poem / say a prayer / play a piece of music
  + Give opportunity for others to share any memories they have

**Guidelines for breaking sad news to a class or at an assembly**

* Consider the most appropriate setting for breaking the new to children
  + Small class groups
  + Larger year groups
  + Whole school
* Whoever is giving the news should prepare themself with what to say.
* Don’t be afraid to show emotion - this just shows that you are human but can throw you if you are not expecting to react in this way.
* Start by
  + acknowledging you have some sad news to give.
  + Be honest, give the news stating simple facts, use the words dead/died.
  + If known, consider explaining how, where and when the death occurred but keep to facts and avoid speculation. (It’s okay to say ‘died suddenly, yesterday morning/afternoon)
  + If not known, say so, and that you will endeavour to find out. If rumours are rife, say which of these are definitely not correct.
* Talk briefly about the person who has died without eulogising them.
* Let the children know of any arrangements already in place and the arrangements for the rest of the day – ideally keep to normal routines as far as possible.
* Close by affirming
  + Not everyone will be feeling sad and that is OK.
  + Your teachers will be with you and you can ask them any questions
  + We will be informing your parents with a letter
* Following the announcement, consider giving children some unstructured time in class where children are able to talk and interact. This can be followed by an extended playtime

Additional actions to consider

* Additional staff being around especially at playtimes
* Staff being present at the end of the day as children leave school for home

Debrief at the end of the day

* Thank staff
* Advise about self-care
* Information about next day
* Time to chat/reflect, tea and buns
* Next day arrangements