



Will Adams Academy BEREAVEMENT POLICY

School Name:	Will Adams Academy
Date of Review:	November 2022
Next Review Date:	November 2024
Review Period:	Biennially

Contents

Section 1

Section 2

Section 3

Section 4

Section 5

Section 6

Section 7

Appendices

1. Introduction

Our school values provide us with the ambition that all young people in our care are equipped with a bespoke learning experience that will prepare them for their future life, whilst providing them with positive and fundamental British values, in accordance with the school's [SMSC & Promoting British Values Policy](#).

It is our vision to develop a school community that work and move forward together. We believe that the key to developing well-adjusted young people is to ensure that all students are happy and feel safe in our school environment. To achieve this, we aim to nurture a partnership with our students and their families that is based upon honesty, mutual respect and high expectations of and from all parties.

We are fully committed to the emotional health and well-being of our students, staff and their families. We are committed to the continual development of a healthy and thriving school environment as an IQM Academy of Inclusion and UNICEF Rights Respecting School. We strive to work towards this in all aspects of school life. We are passionate about providing an ethos, environment and curriculum that supports our young people at all times, particularly during periods of difficulty, including that of the death of a friend, family member, peer or teacher.

2. Rationale

Every 22 minutes in the United Kingdom a parent of a dependent child dies, leaving approximately 41,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, and, tragically 12,000 children die each year in the United Kingdom.

Within our school community there will almost always be a child who is struggling with bereavement in some form, and tragically, as in the past in our school, there are occasions when the entire school community is affected by the death of a staff member or pupil. Empathic support and understanding in familiar and comforting surroundings by people who care for, and support their best interests, may be all that some individuals need in terms of bereavement support. However, some may need more and as a school we are determined to provide this support to our staff and pupils if and when needed.

3. Objectives

The core intentions of this policy are:

- to support pupils and/ or staff before (where applicable), during and after a bereavement;
- to enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and community;
- to identify key staff within school and the Local Authority to clarify the pathway of support;

- to endorse the aim of *The Children Act*, 1989, which made the welfare of the child paramount. As per that Act working in partnership with parents to protect the child from harm, our aim is to counter any adverse effects of bereavement and maintain students' well-being.

4. The role of the Management Committee

The role of the Management Committee is:

- to review this policy and ensure its effectiveness as a tool to assist the school in helping and guiding staff and students through what, for some, will be difficult and challenging times;
- to ensure the policy is reviewed biennially;
- to support the Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team in the implementation of this policy.

5. The role of the Headteacher

The Headteacher has overall responsibility for the policy and its implementation, for liaison with the Senior Leadership Team, Management Committee, parents and/or carers, the Local Authority and other relevant external agencies.

The Headteacher will

- monitor the introduction and implementation of this policy;
- respond to media enquiries as and when necessary;
- keep the Management Committee fully updated should the death of a member of our school community occur;
- be the first point of contact for the family concerned;
- advise and support staff- seeking professional support and guidance if required, consult on referral pathways and help to identify and support individuals who are experiencing complex grief.

6. The role of Pastoral Staff

The pastoral team should be trained in bereavement support and should then cascade this knowledge to the rest of the staff team. The school recognise that it is important that staff feel confident in delivering support for students, supporting each other and implementing this policy. To this end it is the school's intention that the whole school staff have an awareness of bereavement and have been suitably trained to support students and each other in times of grief.

This team should also

- establish and co-ordinate links with relevant external agencies;
- cross- phase liaison with local primary and/or secondary schools when supporting a family experiencing bereavement.

7. Procedures- Whole School Community Bereaved

All staff should be made aware of the procedures within this policy and directed that they should be followed at all times. If staff are unsure of what action, if any, to take they should consult their line manager before any action is taken. Staff should not respond to any enquiries from the media and should make the Headteacher aware of the enquiry. In the event of the death of a member of our school community the following steps will occur:

- I. contact with the deceased's family will be made by the Headteacher and the family's wishes respected in communicating with others. Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion, while being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations. It is essential that the Headteacher is mindful of social media sites and their impact throughout a period of bereavement as rumour and gossip can spread very quickly. If required the Headteacher should seek support from the Management Committee, Local Authority and other relevant external agencies;
- II. staff will, wherever possible, be informed before pupils and be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate and sensitive ways, as directed by the Senior Leadership Team for each individual circumstance;
- III. Students will be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone who is known to and trusted by them. A decision will be taken by the Senior Leadership Team as to whether this information should be given as part of a whole school approach or if only certain groups of pupils should be informed. Decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis;
- IV. A letter to all parents and/or carers affected will be composed and sent at the earliest opportunity. The Headteacher may feel that telephone calls are also appropriate in some cases and will direct staff accordingly;
- V. The school is aware that a degree of flexibility in terms of the school day may be necessary to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of our students, while recognising that the minimal disruption and a sense of familiarity will be comforting for some, and will act accordingly and in the best interests of our students;
- VI. Staff and students will continue to receive ongoing support as appropriate and the school's counsellor will, as usual, be available to all;
- VII. In consultation with the bereaved family, funeral arrangements will be clarified, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in such circumstances. The Headteacher will liaise with the Chair of the Management Committee and the Local Authority as and when required;
- VIII. When required a press statement will be prepared by the Headteacher, on consultation with the bereaved family and other relevant persons and/ or organisations as deemed appropriate;

- IX. School is aware that the impact of bereavement can follow a child through their school life so information should be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points. The school should be aware of any bereavement issues for new pupils, and this should be addressed at the child's integration meeting.

8. Procedures- Individual Bereavement

The procedures outline above are appropriate when the school community is experiencing bereavement.

A more common experience for individuals within the school community is bereavement experienced due to the loss of a family member or friend within their personal circle. Whole school activities will not usually be appropriate in this situation, but in the case of a student careful consideration will be given as to whether a bespoke plan is appropriate and will be made by the Pastoral Team, with the support of the Senior Leadership Team and with input from the individual student and relevant staff working with them e.g. form tutor.

In this case it will be appropriate for staff to consider the following:

- how and when to inform the whole school staff team to ensure the student is supported and comforted in a sensitive and practical way;
- consult with the individual student about how/ if they want to share their loss with their friends and/ or classmates;
- liaise with the student's family about how best to support them;

Appendix 1

Working with Grief

Understanding and supporting

Young people with grief

The grief cycle



The 5 Stages of Grief

The first stage in this theory, denial helps us minimize the overwhelming pain of loss. As we process the reality of our loss, we are also trying to survive emotional pain. It can be hard to believe we have lost an important person in our lives, especially when we may have just spoken with this person the previous week or even the previous day.

Our reality has shifted completely in this moment of loss. It can take our minds some time to adjust to this new reality. We are reflecting on the experiences we have shared with the person we lost, and we might find ourselves wondering how to move forward in life without this person.

This is a lot of information to explore and a lot of painful imagery to process. Denial attempts to slow this process down and take us through it one step at a time, rather than risk the potential of feeling overwhelmed by our emotions.

Denial is not only an attempt to pretend that the loss does not exist. We are also trying to absorb and understand what is happening.

It is common to experience anger after the loss of a loved one. We are trying to adjust to a new reality, and we are likely experiencing extreme emotional discomfort. There is so much to process that anger may feel like it allows us an emotional outlet.

Keep in mind that anger does not require us to be very vulnerable. However, it tends to be more socially acceptable than admitting we are scared. Anger allows us to express emotion with less fear of judgment or rejection.

Unfortunately, anger tends to be the first thing we feel when we start to release emotions related to loss. This can leave you feeling isolated in your experience and perceived as unapproachable by others in moments when we could benefit from comfort, connection, and reassurance.

When coping with loss, it is not unusual to feel so desperate that you are willing to do almost anything to alleviate or minimize the pain. Losing a loved one can cause us to consider any way we can avoid the current pain or the pain we are anticipating from loss. There are many ways we may try to bargain.

Bargaining can come in a variety of promises including:

- "God, if you can heal this person, I will turn my life around."
- "I promise to be better if you will let this person live."
- "I'll never get angry again if you can stop him/her from dying or leaving me."

When bargaining starts to take place, we are often directing our requests to a higher power, or something bigger than we are that may be able to influence a different outcome. There is an acute awareness of our humanness in these moments when we realize there is nothing we can do to influence change or a better end result.

This feeling of helplessness can cause us to react in protest by bargaining, which gives us a perceived sense of control over something that feels so out of control. While bargaining we also tend to focus on our personal faults or regrets. We might look back at our interactions with the person we are losing and note all of the times we felt disconnected or may have caused them pain.

It is common to recall times when we may have said things we did not mean and wish we could go back and behave differently. We also tend to make the drastic assumption that if things had played out differently, we would not be in such an emotionally painful place in our lives.

During our experience of processing grief, there comes a time when our imaginations calm down and we slowly start to look at the reality of our present situation. Bargaining no longer feels like an option and we are faced with what is happening.

We start to feel the loss of our loved one more abundantly. As our panic begins to subside, the emotional fog begins to clear, and the loss feels more present and unavoidable.

In those moments, we tend to pull inward as the sadness grows. We might find ourselves retreating, being less sociable, and reaching out less to others about what we are going through. Although this is a very natural stage of grief, dealing with depression after the loss of a loved one can be extremely isolating.

When we come to a place of acceptance, it is not that we no longer feel the pain of loss. However, we are no longer resisting the reality of our situation, and we are not struggling to make it something different.

Sadness and regret can still be present in this phase, but the emotional survival tactics of denial, bargaining, and anger are less likely to be present.

As we consider the five stages of grief, it is important to note that people grieve differently and you may or may not go through each of these stages, or experience each of them in order. The lines of these stages are often blurred—we may move from one stage to the other and possibly back again before fully moving into a new stage.

In addition, there is no specific time period suggested for any of these stages. Someone may experience the stages fairly quickly, such as in a matter of weeks, where another person may take months or even years to move through to a place of acceptance. Whatever time it takes for you to move through these stages is perfectly normal.

Your pain is unique to you, your relationship to the person you lost is unique, and the emotional processing can feel different to each person. It is acceptable

for you to take the time you need and remove any expectation of how you should be performing as you process your grief.

- **Shock and numbness:** Loss in this phase feels impossible to accept. We can be overwhelmed when trying to cope with our emotions. There is physical distress experienced in this phase as well, which can lead to somatic (physical) symptoms.
- **Yearning and searching:** As we process loss in this phase, we may begin to look for comfort to fill the void our loved one has left. We may try to do so by reliving memories through pictures and by looking for signs from the person to feel connected to them. In this phase, we become very preoccupied with the person we have lost.
- **Despair and disorganization:** We may find ourselves questioning and feeling angry in this phase. The realization that our loved one is not returning feels real, and we can have a difficult time understanding or finding hope in our future. We may feel a bit aimless in this phase and find that we retreat from others as we process our pain.
- **Reorganization and recovery:** In this phase, we feel more hopeful that our hearts and minds can be restored, sadness, or longing for our loved one does not disappear. However, we move towards healing and reconnecting with others for support, finding small ways to re-establish some normalcy in our daily lives.

It can be so difficult to know what to say or do when someone who has experienced loss. We do our best to offer comfort, but sometimes our best efforts can feel inadequate and unhelpful.

Here are a few tips to keep in mind:

- **Avoid rescuing or fixing.** Remember, the person who is grieving does not need to be fixed. In an attempt to be helpful, we may offer uplifting, hopeful comments, or even humour, to try to ease their pain. Although the intention is good, this approach can leave people feeling as if their pain is not seen, heard, or valid.
- **Do not force it.** We may want so badly to help and for the person to feel better, so we believe that nudging them to talk and process their emotions before they are truly ready will help them faster. This is not necessarily true, and it can actually be an obstacle to their healing.
- **Make yourself accessible.** Offer space for people to grieve. This lets the person know we are available when they're ready. We can invite them to talk with us but remember to provide understanding and validation if

they are not ready just yet. Remind them that you are there and not to hesitate to come to you.

If you are working with a young person who has lost someone there are some phrases that you should be cautious about using. Although your intention may be to offer them support and understanding it may be misconstrued or even considered offensive.

“I know exactly what you are going through”. You may have experienced grief you may have experienced overwhelming sadness, however, we all experience things differently. All of our situations are different, all of our reactions are different, and each emotion is experienced on an individual level. Using this statement can trigger anger and mistrust. The young person may feel that your situation was different. They may even say things that then become hurtful to you and your loss. No loss is more impactful than another, each loss is personal and experienced differently. Changing the phrase to “When I lost someone I felt like this” “I found some feelings very difficult to manage” “Some days were harder for me than others”. Remembering that your experience is personal and if you use statement about yourself and how you felt the young person will not feel that you are trying to reduce their experience of loss but you are trying to connect with their individual feelings.

Normalise what they are feeling. However, extreme you may feel their reaction is or their management of their feelings are. Be aware that some people show no emotion at the loss of a loved one. This is normal it is okay to not feel anything. Sometimes the loss is so intense it numbs individuals. Shock can also render an individual into a state of psychological paralysis.

Never say **“ You just have to move on, I know it is hard but you have to learn to get on with life”** When a loved one passes it feels that life cannot move on. They may feel stuck and the guilt many people feel they laugh after a loss is overwhelming. They may feel they don’t want to move on, they don’t want to forget the feelings they are having as the person they have lost is too important to just move on.

Encourage the young person to talk about memories of their loved one. Ask them if they can describe them. Tell them that you would like to have known that person. They may find it difficult to talk about their loved one. Do not pursue this but tell the young person, if they want to talk you are always available for them to come back to.

Teenagers often engage in risky behaviour it is part of their development. When a teenager loses someone, they may engage in more risky behaviour than before. They may feel that they have nothing to lose. Do not bring their lost loved one into this conversation. Suggesting things like “what would your nan have thought about the way you are behaving”. This will anger the young person and create a barrier between you and them as they will feel you are trying to blackmail them into behaving in a different way. They will feel that you are using their lost loved one.

Bereavement Symptoms

Bereavement is a normal reaction to loss in human beings in virtually every culture across the world. There are no set rules for how long “normal” bereavement lasts, as each person and each loss are very different. Therefore, bereavement tends not to be diagnosed unless it has gone on for a very significant period of time and significantly impacts the person’s life. Getting over or past the loss of a loved one can be challenging for nearly everyone.

But for some, the loss of a loved one is too much, causing them to enter into a clinical depression that may need further attention or treatment.

Bereavement is diagnosed when the focus of clinical attention is a reaction to the death or loss of a loved one. As part of their reaction to the loss, some grieving individuals present with symptoms characteristic of a major depressive episode (e.g., feelings of sadness and associated symptoms such as insomnia, poor appetite, and weight loss).

The bereaved individual typically regards the depressed mood as “normal,” although the person may seek professional help for relief of associated symptoms such as insomnia or anorexia. The duration and expression of “normal” bereavement vary considerably among different cultural groups.

The diagnosis of major depression disorder is generally not given unless the symptoms are still present 2 months after the loss.

However, the presence of certain symptoms that are not characteristic of a “normal” grief reaction may be helpful in differentiating bereavement from a major depressive episode.

These include:

1. Guilt about things other than actions taken or not taken by the survivor at the time of the death.

2. Thoughts of death other than the survivor feeling that he or she would be better off dead or should have died with the deceased person.
3. Morbid preoccupation with worthlessness.
4. Significant psychomotor retardation (e.g., it is hard to get moving, and what movements there are slow).
5. Prolonged and serious functional impairment; and
6. Hallucinatory experiences other than thinking that he or she hears the voice of, or transiently sees the image of, the deceased person.

Children and grief

Children often are disenfranchised in their grief. Well-meaning adults try to protect them from the enormity of loss by distracting them, telling them half-truths, even lying to them about the death of someone they loved. Some adults, perhaps to protect themselves from having to manage the full impact of a child's grief, fool themselves into believing that children are "too young" to know what is going on. As noted, children's psychologist, Alan Wolfelt (1991), has said, "Anyone old enough to love is old enough to grieve."

Children need avenues for safe expression of feelings that may include fear, sadness, guilt, and anger. Children's play is their "work." Provide a child-friendly environment where a child may choose the avenue best suited to his or her self-expression. For some children, it may be drawing or writing, for others, it may be puppetry, music, or physical activity. Keep in mind that a child's reactions to grief will not appear the same as those seen in adults; as a result, children often are misunderstood. They may appear disinterested or respond as if they don't understand the significance of what has happened.

For example, upon being told that her mother might soon die from metastatic cancer, a 10-year-old responded by asking, "When we go to dinner tonight, can I order extra pickles?" She was letting the adults know that she had heard enough for the moment. A four-year-old was told that his father died. He continued to ask, "When will he be back?" At this age, children don't understand that death is permanent, final, and irreversible. Adults need to understand what is appropriate and expectable with children at different ages and stages of development and to recognize that children grieve in their own way and in their own time. Adults who tend to these children must focus on the children's individual needs as well as their own.

Imagine this a mother calls to say that she was very concerned about her three-year-old daughter. The child's grandmother had died the previous month. The mother explained that she had consulted with the child's paediatrician who told her that three-year-olds are too young to go to a funeral service because they do not understand death. The parents had therefore not included the child in any of the family's commemorative rituals. Ever since, the little girl had been afraid to go to sleep and, when she did go to sleep, she experienced nightmares. During the day she was uncharacteristically anxious and clingy.

Fortunately, this child, like most young children, is remarkably resilient. The problem was corrected by giving her a simple, direct, child-Academyd, age-appropriate explanation. She was told what happens to the body upon death ("It stops working"). And she was also given an explanation of the type of ritual that the family chose based on their religion and culture. She responded by sleeping well, having no more nightmares, and returning to her usual outgoing behaviour.

While it is true that three-year-olds do not understand that death is permanent, final, and irreversible, they do understand that something terribly sad has happened. They will miss the presence of people who have died, and they will worry about the sadness they feel around them. Lying to children or hiding the truth increases their anxiety. They are better observers of adults than most people recognize. You cannot fool them. They are remarkably perceptive.

When children of any age are not given proper explanations, their powerful imaginations will fill in the blanks in the information they have picked up from those around them. Unfortunately, their imaginations often come up with things that are far worse than the simple truth would have been. If, for example, they do not understand the concept of "burial," they may create images of dead loved ones being buried alive, gasping for air and trying to claw out of the ground. In the case of cremation, they may imagine their loved one being burned alive and suffering horribly.

It is far better to give them a clear idea about what is going on than to leave them to the mercy of their own imaginations. Children need to know not only what happens to the body upon death, they also need an explanation of what happens to the spirit or the soul, based on the family's religious, spiritual, and cultural beliefs. It is essential to offer a detailed description of everything they likely will see and experience. At least one responsible adult should be present to support the child during the funeral and any other rituals.

Children thrive when they are told what to expect and are allowed to participate in the commemoration of loved ones. When children and adults are encouraged to develop creative, personalized rituals, it helps everyone find comfort during the sad times. Ask the young person to draw a memory of the person who died. They love to share their memories and place the pictures, stories, and other items they have made into the casket to be buried or cremated along with their loved one. These kinds of activities can help the rituals around death become a meaningful family bonding experience rather than a continuing source of fear and pain.

Children can experience the following loss:

-Loss of a parent

-Loss of an elderly relative

-Loss due to suicide

-Loss of a sibling

-Loss of a friend

-Loss of a teacher

- If you are mourning for a recent loss make sure to make time for feeling the emotions that arise, whether they are anger, sadness, or pain. There is no need to judge these emotions as good or bad and know that it is Ok to feel these and they will not last forever as all things come and go. You may even create a little ritual where you spend time with the picture or object connected to the person who has passed.
- Friends sometimes get uncomfortable around grief and if they try and make you feel better in the moment, thank them for this, and let them know it is normal and natural to feel how you feel.
- Make sure to also take care of yourself during this time, go out on a walk, make sure to eat healthy.
- Try and open your eyes to the delights around you. It could be a smile on a child's face or your own. Smelling a wonderful flower or maybe tasting your own favorite food. Even in the midst of grief we can be open to the wonders of life.
- Know your limits and allow yourself to take a break from feeling when it's becoming overwhelming, but make sure to let your grief know that you will come back. Make a time to revisit it otherwise it will occupy you all day.

- Being altruistic can be a great way to move through grief. Maybe you would like to volunteer at a homeless shelter or make some things for those you care about.
- Support has been known to be very helpful and so joining a grief or support group either online or in person can be enormously supportive.

More than anything treat yourself with love and kindness during this time. The grief will seem more acute during some times and more subtle during others. May you know deeply, “this too shall pass.”

Helpful sources that may be helpful for you to support a young person experiencing grief.

Anxiety UK Phone: 03444 775 774 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 10pm;
Saturday to Sunday, 10am to 8pm)

Website www.anxietyuk.org.uk