



Wychwood School

BEREAVEMENT POLICY

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STAFF - MANAGING GRIEF IN THE WORKPLACE

Grief is a normal part of life and will often affect employees at work and girls. There are many different types of grief involving loss, such as death, relationship breakdowns, loss of a pet, and loss of health. Each person's experience of loss and grief is unique.

When an employee experiences any loss their ability to deal with the grieving process can become even more prolonged if the person does not feel supported by his/her manager, supervisor or employer. Girls can often feel lost and alone. Those who feel cared for and supported are more likely to recover quickly.

Managing the work place when an employee is grieving:

- Make contact with the grieving employee **as soon as possible**
- Offer support by asking about specific things that the employer might do to help: Do they need time off? Do they need adjustment to their work schedule? Do they need help with their work? Do they want information shared with others?
- Handle the situation in a sensitive, straightforward manner
- Respect confidentiality of personal and medical information unless permission is given to share it with others
- Expect the best from grieving employees; however, accept less than the best for a time
- As tasks are redistributed, thank the other employees for taking on any additional work
- If an individual is not coping well, showing signs of depression or their grieving response is beyond the range of emotions seen in others, seek consultation or refer for counselling

Ways of helping a grieving employee at work:

- Ask how the bereaved worker is doing regularly
- Listen to the grieving employee's response
- Provide flexibility in working hours. Time off and adjusted schedules can help the worker cope with the combined stress of work and grief
- Be patient, the grieving process takes a variable amount of time. This can range from weeks to months or even years
- Acknowledge a death with a note or flowers to show support

How should an employer communicate with a grieving employee?

As someone who plays an important role in your employees' lives, you are in a position where you should communicate with the grieving employee, regardless of how uncomfortable such interaction may be.

Although there is no exact formula for talking to a grieving person, there are principles you can follow that will help you be a comforting presence and avoid saying the wrong things:

- **Make contact:** Early contact should be made to ask if there are specific things you can do to help them. When you do make contact avoid generalities such as, "If there's anything we can do for you, please let us know." Most grieving people are more likely to take you up on specific offers of practical assistance.
- **Don't Minimise Loss:** Many people are unsure what to say to those who are grieving. They should avoid clichés such as, "He had a good life," or "It was probably for the best." These are the type of phrases that can be taken the wrong way because they seem to minimise the loss and most people who are grieving are incapable of being philosophical.
- **Listen:** Rather than struggling to find something comforting to say, you can be more supportive by offering a sympathetic ear. Try to be comfortable in the suffering person's presence, and leave it in their court as to whether or not they share any information. Even if you have gone through a similar situation yourself, be careful sharing stories unless you're positive the person can handle it. Your sense of grief will almost always be different from the employee's and have evolved with time.
- **Do not be Afraid to mention the Deceased by Name:** It is easy to assume that mentioning the deceased by name will exacerbate a person's grief. Many people who are grieving feel comforted if their sense of loss is recognised rather than ignored. Acknowledging the loss is beneficial to the grieving process. You should treat the grieving person as normally as possible; there is no need to be extra gentle.

GIRLS – MANAGING GRIEF IN SCHOOL

Within our school community there will almost always be someone who experiences loss. Empathetic understanding in the familiar and secure surrounding of school may be all the bereavement support some children require, though referral to more specialist support should be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex.

Ways of helping a grieving pupil at school:

- **Try not to judge** – grief is a very personal experience, every child and young person will do it their way, even if from the same family. Teenagers in particular resent assumptions being made as to how they should be feeling and what they should be doing.
- **Communicate** - Speak with the family and make sure that what you say will not conflict with the family's wishes. Different information from home and school will confuse a child and complicate their grief.
- **Acknowledge what has happened** - Do not be afraid to use the word 'death'. If you find words difficult you can discreetly give the pupil a card expressing your care and concern. A card to a bereaved child from her class is usually appreciated and helps to keep up contact with school if they are not attending.
- **Responses will vary** - Don't assume that a lack of reaction means that they do not care. Initially, the full reality may not have sunk in. Young people can

feel that they have to be seen to be coping as a sign of maturity. Allow them to express emotion and feelings and do not be afraid to share your own feelings of sadness if you have any. Children and young people need honesty and although it is sometimes difficult, it is better to answer questions truthfully. If you are faced with a difficult question. Rather than answering straight away, ask the child what they think.

- **Be prepared to listen** - Schools are busy places and your time may be limited but an offer to spend a bit of quiet time with a child who clearly wants to talk will be greatly appreciated. Some will welcome the opportunity to just sit with you but say nothing; for others it is enough to know that you are keeping a look out for them. If you are discussing something in class that will refer to the person who has died, don't be afraid to do so. Ignoring them might be perceived as a denial they ever existed. If not sure, check it out with the bereaved child first, letting them know your intention.
- **Give bereaved pupils time** - It may be many months before they can fully cope with the pressures of school work again. Remember that they will be grieving for life and the loss will always be with them. Explain to other pupils how the bereaved child may be feeling and encourage them to be openly supportive.