

## DEATH OF A CHILD POLICY

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## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 The death of a child is always a sad and distressing event for all concerned and London South East Trust recognises that the impact may be more widely felt when the circumstances of the child's death are the result of violence and/or the death is reported via social or national media. The information and actions in this document will help ensure that the School provides an effective and compassionate response to a child death and handle the situation in a sensitive and appropriate manner.

## **2.0 Aims**

- 2.1 The aims of this policy are to:
- Provide support to staff and children at the School affected by the death of a current or ex-child
  - Prevent further distress to children and staff of the School and the immediate family;
  - Provide guidance on administrative procedures to be adopted on the death of a child
- 2.2 Please note that in the case of a death resulting from accidents relating to School business, the Accident Management Policy (Health and Safety Policy), should also be consulted.

## **3.0 Scope**

- 3.1 This document sets out how to manage such a situation, in order that the incident can be handled in the best possible way by the School, and takes as its starting point the following principles of approach:
- Respect and dignity for the memory of the child should be observed at all times and through all actions undertaken relating to the death
  - The utmost discretion should be used when receiving and passing on any information about the incident, with rumour and speculation avoided as much as possible
  - The wishes of the child's family and/or their formal representative should be considered wherever possible;
  - All relevant authorities – for example the police and the coroner's office – must be fully supported and cooperated with where necessary

## **4.0 Factors to Be Considered**

- 4.1 The exact circumstances of a child death can vary widely in each case:
- The death may be sudden and unexpected and happen in a very public place, such as an accident on or near school site;
  - There may be more than one death involved, for example a serious car accident involving multiple occupants;
  - The death may be largely expected, and may have already involved some preparation, for example if a child with a pre-existing severe illness dies while in hospital;

- The death may be the result of a completed suicide. In such circumstances, a suicide will only be formally confirmed as such by a coroner but it is sometimes the case that the family or representatives will characterise the death as suicide and will expect the School to proceed on that basis.

4.2 The death may be associated with suspected criminal activity, and will therefore involve the police and other authorities, and severely constrain what information can be shared;

- Not all deaths will require an inquest, while in other cases the exact cause may be in dispute, and may not be resolved even after an inquest
- The death may happen abroad, in which case relevant embassies and the Foreign Office are likely to need to be involved with any investigation;
- The death may have been recorded in some way on security or social media devices, either deliberately or accidentally;
- There may be particular cultural or religious factors involved in the death, and in the way that the family wishes the death to be dealt with.

## **5.0 Death of a Current Child off School Premises**

5.1 The member of staff who is first informed of the death of a current child off School premises should immediately inform the Headteacher or Group Executive Director Safeguarding and DCEO. Whenever possible this should be done verbally.

5.2 The Headteacher, should immediately convene a meeting to be attended by relevant staff such as Group Executive Director Safeguarding, DSC, Safeguarding, Therapy Team (if applicable in School) and DCEO. This meeting will make arrangements to:

- inform when the funeral details are known, arrange for flowers or a charitable donation to be sent on behalf of the School
- inform any staff who taught the child, including their tutor, subject teachers, learning support staff and staff from previous years, where appropriate
- provide support and guidance to staff on how to pass on the news of the death to other children where appropriate
- provide support, as required, to children who know the child who has died. This may include children who are not in the same class
- contact the family to express the condolences of the School and, when appropriate, determine the family's wishes regarding how the child's life should be commemorated
- direct any media enquiries to the Group Director of Marketing/PR Lead for Trust who will deal with responses in liaison with the Headteacher & DCEO.
- inform Reception and let them know where to transfer any relevant calls
- inform Human Resources of the circumstances of the death so they can offer support to staff as required;
- send a letter of sympathy to the parent/carer
- file any of the child's records in a suitable place away from other records of the School.

- 5.3 The person it is agreed who should lead on advising other children should:
- inform the child's class/relevant peer group as soon as possible about their fellow child's death. Children should be given factual information about the death and told what support is available
  - advise children that they should think carefully before communicating through social media about the child's death and that they are respectful and think about the impact of any comments on the child's family and friends
  - be prepared that the School are likely to want to talk about the death and may have heard rumours
  - inform any staff/children who might wish to attend the funeral of the arrangements, when known, including dress code and flower/donation arrangements;
  - if appropriate, encourage the school pupils to come up with ideas about how they may want to commemorate the child e.g. a fund-raising event for a favoured charity, planting a tree, etc. Children and staff in the School may wish to send a letter containing thoughts and memories of the child, photographs or memorabilia to the bereaved family;
  - check whether any of the children's personal belongings have been left in School and ensure the belongings are returned to the family. If they left any course related work which you think the family may appreciate, pass that on too;
  - consider child's/family's religious beliefs, or lack of any such beliefs.

## **6.0 Death of a Current Child on School Premises**

- 6.1 On the first discovery by any School employee of a death of a child on School premises or while a learner is in the care of School staff the member of staff should not leave the child unattended and should call for immediate assistance so that:
- an ambulance can be called
  - the area can be secured to ensure that no-one is allowed to enter and preserve the scene
  - a request can be made via Reception that the Headteacher should be urgently summoned.
- 6.2 The Headteacher should:
- once the death is confirmed, inform the Police;
  - ensure that the body is not touched or moved and no other action than that outlined above is taken without direction from the Police
  - notify:
    - DCEO
    - Group Executive Director Safeguarding
    - Group Director of Marketing
    - Trust Director of HR

The DCEO will inform the CEO and Chair of Trust or delegate this to another senior member of staff.

- 6.3 Interest from the media may be significant, so it is particularly important that staff

follow the guidance outlined in Appendix 2, and that:

- any media enquiries are directed to the Group Director of Marketing who will deal with the responses in liaison with the DCEO and ensure the DCEO and CEO is liaised with regarding who is communicating with the parents or carers. Staff should not liaise directly with the media.
- Group Director of Marketing will confirm any communication messages in consultation with relevant external organisations such as the police and Children's Services

## **7.0 Death of a Current Child on a School Visit/Residential**

7.1 On the first discovery by the party leader of the death of a child whilst on a School trip or residential the member of staff should:

- call for an ambulance
- secure the area and ensure that no one is allowed to enter
- once the death is confirmed inform the local Police
- ensure that the body is not touched or moved and no other action than that outlined above should be taken without direction from the Police
- plan for any other pupils to be removed to a place of safety;
- contact the Headteacher's office and plan for communicating with parents/carers and
- direct any media enquiries to the Group Director of Marketing who will deal with responses in liaison with the DCEO
- offer whatever support to other children and staff on the trip that the circumstances of the visit allow; and
- terminate the visit and return home if possible to do so.

Unless otherwise directed by relevant authorities, members of staff should not contact next of kin but should be guided by the police and/or senior members of staff.

If the name is released through social media, parents may telephone the School or even arrive on-site. Quick communication with the next of kin is, therefore, essential.

On return to the School support must be made available to any child or member of staff who requires it via HR and the School counselling service.

7.2 Staff should then follow the guidance outlined in Appendix 2.

## **10.0 Support for Children and Staff**

- 10.1 Children and staff can be deeply affected by a child death. Depending on the circumstances, the death may have been directly witnessed by those in the vicinity. This would apply to a death occurring onsite, but may also apply to deaths occurring offsite.
- 10.2 Arrangements must be made to offer support and counselling to any child who requires or might benefit from it and the School counselling service (If available) and, as required, external support services, must be involved in making suitable and timely arrangements.

10.3 Human Resources must be consulted about making support and counselling available to members of staff, volunteers and others affected by the death.

## **APPENDIX 1: Death of a Current Child Off School Premises: Guidance for those Managing the School's Response**

The member of staff who is first informed of the death of a current child off School premises should immediately inform the Headteacher, Group Executive Director Safeguarding and Safeguarding and DCEO. Whenever possible this should be done verbally.

The Headteacher, should immediately convene a meeting to be attended by relevant staff such as Group Executive Director Safeguarding and DSC, Therapy Team (If School has one) and DCEO. This meeting will plan to:

	Action	Person responsible
1	Inform the Headteacher immediately who will, when the funeral details are known, arrange for flowers or a charitable donation to be sent on behalf of the School	
2	Inform any staff who taught the child, including their tutor, subject teachers, learning support staff and staff from previous years where appropriate	
3	Support staff in passing on the news of the death to other children	
4	Provide support, as required, to children who know the child who has died. This may include children who aren't in the same class.	
5	Contact the family to express the condolences of the School and, when appropriate, determine the family's wishes regarding how the child's life should be commemorated	
6	Direct any media enquiries to the Group Marketing Director / PR Lead Team who will deal with responses in liaison with the Headteacher & DCEO	
7	Inform Reception and let them know where to transfer any relevant calls	
8	Inform Human Resources of the circumstances of the death so they can offer support to staff as required; Send a letter of sympathy to the Parent / Carer	
9	File any of the child's records in a suitable place away from other records of the School.	



**The person leads on advising other children should:**

	Action	Person responsible
10	Inform the child's class/relevant peer group as soon as possible about their fellow child's death. They should tell them what is known about the death, ensuring only factual information is provided. Let them know what support is available	
11	Advise children that if they are communicating through social media about the child's death that they are respectful and think about the impact of any comments on the child's family and friends	
12	Be prepared that the School are likely to want to talk about the death and may have heard all sorts of rumours.	
13	Inform any staff/children who might wish to attend the funeral of the arrangements, when known, including dress code and flower/donation wishes	
14	If appropriate, encourage the School to come up with ideas about how they may want to commemorate the child e.g. a fund-raising event for a favoured charity, planting a tree, etc. Children and staff in the learning area may wish to send a letter containing thoughts and memories of the child, photographs or memorabilia to the bereaved family	
15	Check whether any of the children's personal belongings have been left in School. Did they use a locker? Ensure the belongings are returned to the family in due course. If they left any course related work which you think the family may appreciate, pass that on too	
16	Consider child's/family's religious beliefs, or lack of any such beliefs	

## APPENDIX 2: Death of a Current Child on School Premises, on a School Trip or Residential

It is the responsibility of the Headteacher to ensure that this checklist is implemented and that all relevant staff are reminded of their roles.

Specific Responsibilities for immediate action:

Responsibility	Action to be taken
The member of staff who finds the child will:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call for:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An ambulance;</li> <li>- Headteacher</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
The Duty Manager will:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• once the death is confirmed, inform the Police;</li> <li>• maintain a secure environment;</li> <li>• ensure that the body is not touched or moved and no other action than that outlined above is taken without direction from the Police</li> <li>• notify:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ DCEO</li> <li>○ Group Executive Director Safeguarding</li> <li>○ Group Director of Marketing</li> <li>○ Trust Director of HR</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>The DCEO will inform the CEO and Chair of Trust or delegate this to another senior member of staff.</p>
The Group Director of Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liaise with the DCEO to agree a media statement.</li> </ul>
The Headteacher with support from Estates and Health and Safety will	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liaise, if relevant, with the Police to ensure the relevant access/security is provided.</li> <li>• Arrange for any reports under RIDDOR to be sent to the HSE.</li> <li>• Arrange for any remedial action, if required, e.g., cleaning once the Police provide permission for such action.</li> <li>• Lead any Health &amp; Safety investigation deemed appropriate by the DCEO.</li> </ul>

Action as soon as possible after the discovery and confirmation of death:

Action to be taken	Responsibility	Timescale
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Inform staff and fellow learners	Headteacher	As soon as death is confirmed, and Police agree information can be shared. This would normally be after the next of kin has been informed. Accept that some staff/children will talk to the press so ensure that they receive only factual information not speculation.
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<b>Action to be taken</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Send letter of condolence, if appropriate, to the family	Headteacher	As soon as is deemed appropriate.
Ascertain funeral arrangements and decide who/if the School will be represented formally.	Headteacher	Once funeral date and details are released.
Agree appropriate continuing bereavement counselling for children and staff.	Headteacher & DCEO	In liaison with counselling services.
Establish whether any ongoing support from the School is needed or wanted by the family.	Headteacher	After funeral has taken place.

### **APPENDIX 3: Guidelines to consider when writing a letter to significant others, e.g., parents on the Death of a Child**

The following guidelines are intended to be helpful when composing a letter of condolence on the death of a child. Clearly there is scope for adapting the suggestions to personal style and to fit individual circumstances, but it is hoped that they will prove useful in the shock and stress following the news of a tragic incident.

- Any letter should be written as soon as possible after official confirmation of the child's death and should be addressed to the Parent/Carer of the child. Where parents may be divorced or separated, a copy of the same letter should be sent to both parents, assuming that there was not known to be estrangement between the child and parent and that an address is available for both.
- In expressing sympathy, avoid using euphemisms for the child's death. Where appropriate a brief mention of the circumstances of the child's death could be included.

*E.g., I/We were very sorry to hear of (child's name)'s (sudden) death (yesterday, on Saturday, on 4th March, etc.).  
I am/ We are aware that it will be no consolation at such a difficult time but would like to assure you that you are in our thoughts*

- Some reference to the child's personal qualities and/or attributes as a child could be made, in terms of the loss to fellow children and staff who knew him/her and how he/she will be missed.
- Rather than have to trouble the bereaved family with a phone call, the request could be made that they or their representative might let the School know of any arrangements for funeral/memorial service etc.

*E.g. I/We would be grateful if you could let us know of any arrangements which may be made for the funeral, as I am sure there will be children and staff who would like to attend.  
Please let us know if we can be of any assistance at this difficult time.  
Yours sincerely  
(Writer's name and designation)*