

Policy on Bereavement

Our Motto: Aim High, Learn Together, Feel Proud

‘Every 22 minutes a parent of a child dies, that’s around 23,600 bereaved children each year. Almost one in every class. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend, teacher or other significant person in their life’. (Child Bereavement UK, 2017 statistics)

Bereavement and loss are an inevitable part of living and growing. It is important that within our whole school setting we provide learning opportunities for children to develop their own appropriate range of emotional, spiritual and intellectual responses to manage these experiences. Our school provides a transparent framework in which these experiences can be realised in a supportive manner. Bereavement impacts everyone in different ways and for different periods of time. Whatever the level of understanding about bereavement, we have a duty to help support anyone when they could be feeling their most vulnerable, in the way that best meets their needs. By adopting a planned, open and considered approach in the environment and through our curriculum Westbrook Primary School can support the emotional well-being of the child, family and staff.

Aims of a Bereavement Policy

- To identify key staff within the school and LA, resources and further support services to help the whole school community work together.
- To provide a framework for all staff, teaching and non-teaching, to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with difficult and upsetting circumstances.
- To have clear expectations about the way school will respond to the death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.
- To support pupils and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement.
- To meet the needs of all its children and staff and to be a place that both child and family can rely on, and gain much needed support.
- For children to have the opportunity to tell their story, express their feelings, share their memories and develop coping strategies through support by sensitive staff.

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The purpose of this bereavement policy is to help everyone within our school community realise bereavement is an inevitable, natural part of life which needs to be discussed openly.

It will outline explicitly ways; to respond in caring for the wellbeing of our children and staff at a time when they may be in shock, upset and confused, to ensure effective communication takes place, to provide support for each member of the school community, ensuring there is minimal disruption to the daily school routine.

The policy will highlight strategies and procedures to be followed when responding to a death in the school community, including a member of staff or a pupil.

It is important to note that empathic understanding in the familiar and secure environment of the school may be sufficient in supporting some children and staff through their grieving. However, we also need to be prepared to call on more specialist support where there is a sudden and unexpected death, or where the impact of a bereavement is complex.

Safeguarding, confidentiality and recording

We follow our school's safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure that the welfare of the child remains paramount throughout, and that all children are protected from harm.
(See policy on Safeguarding)

It is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure. However, pupils will need to be made aware that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

To retain the trust of pupils and parents and carers, we will ensure that the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. Sensitive information will only be disclosed internally or externally with careful attention to the rights and needs of individuals and in line with general data protection regulation.

If a child is suffering from trauma, we will share this, as appropriate, with staff, but not necessarily the details of their experience.

We will discuss with the bereaved child and their family which adults in the school community they would like made aware of the experiences impacting on the child.

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We will use our usual school systems MyConcern to record when a child has experienced a close bereavement.

Guidelines for staff and governors

A death can affect the school community in different ways and often depends on:

- The role the deceased person had within school
- How well known they were in the local community
- Circumstances surrounding the death, particularly suicide or violent deaths

In accordance with the family of the deceased person, we recognise the importance of keeping staff, children and families informed of the circumstances to ensure that discussion is facilitated and questions may be asked in a safe and secure environment. This will help support the normal grieving process.

Guidelines to be considered when informing staff and governors:

- Where possible, discussion should take place with the bereaved family and their wishes taken into account before any decisions are made in relation to how and what to tell the staff and wider school community.
- It is important to consider any cultural or religious implications and seek advice if necessary.
- ALL staff (including support staff, admin staff, catering staff) should be informed as soon as possible through a staff meeting or team meetings where practical. Measures will be taken to inform, by telephone, those members of staff not onsite at this time including: absent staff, part-time staff, governors and those working off-site
- A factual explanation of how the death occurred will be given including, if applicable, the circumstances of what happened leading up to the death.
- Ensure the Senior Leadership Team are prepared for reactions to this news including visible upset and feelings of anger/guilt. People may connect the incident to their own personal experience of bereavement, so feelings about past bereavements may need to be discussed. This is perfectly natural.
- Ensure a member of Senior Leadership is available to members of staff, parents or children if they are finding the situation particularly hard. Where necessary, those experiencing a bereavement may need to receive support from our trained Mental Health Lead or external support services as appropriate.
- Supply cover may be necessary (internal or external)

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- Establish one person as a point of contact for the family to ensure free-flow of accurate information to and from the school and maintain a familiar, reliable source or support for the bereaved.
- Bereavement support or counselling should be available to all as necessary, requesting external bereavement support if needed (see the Hounslow Educational Psychology Service).
- Arrange staff/pupil condolences with collaborative agreement if felt appropriate.
- Agree a set time for teachers to inform their class what has happened, how this is to be done and exactly what is going to be said. Identify any absent pupils and discuss how they will be informed and by whom
- Consideration of how to mark / celebrate the person's life e.g. a special assembly, memorial service or memorial tree/garden
- Arrange for the Mental Health Lead or Senior Leadership Team to be on hand at the end of the working day for staff to debrief and reflect upon the day's events and to agree upon any further action or support that may need to be put in place. Staff who will be alone that night could be identified and arrangements made for colleagues to contact them by phone if necessary.
- Where possible staff, who have requested to attend the funeral or memorial, should be released.

GUIDELINES FOR INFORMING STUDENTS

Even very young children will want to know what happened, how it happened, why it happened and perhaps most importantly of all, what happens next?

The following guidelines will help you to inform children of the death:

- Identify children who are most likely to be impacted by the news because they had a close relationship with the deceased or are already bereaved to be told together as a separate group. Where possible inform pupils in the smallest group, preferably class groups. This should be done by adults they know well, preferably the class teacher.
- It is always a shock when a death occurs in a school even if it may have been anticipated. Children expect to live forever, and so a fellow student dying can feel quite shocking. Experience has shown that it is more beneficial if all pupils are informed.

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- Provide staff with guidelines on how to inform children; be honest, it is ok to say if you don't have the answers but remember to revisit the question at a later date when you do have the answer (See Appendix 1).
- Be prepared for children to say or do the unexpected, experience has shown some responses or apparent lack of response may be upsetting for adults. No apparent response does not mean that a child does not care.
- Try to identify any key answers that you may need to prepare, e.g. the facts about an illness, or dates which may be relevant to the death such as end of school year and changing class or schools.
- End discussions on a positive note - not all people who are ill or have accidents die - many get better. Consider a prayer or poem to remember the deceased and their family. Perhaps coordinate an assembly to end discussion.
- Do pupils want to do an activity to express their thoughts and feelings? Do they want to arrange for representatives to attend the funeral? How will this be managed? These thoughts could be articulated through a School Council meeting to ensure that ideas and feelings from all classes are considered.

Grief will last a lifetime and can surface throughout with new questions and many reflections.

In the days after the death

- It is important to consider any cultural or religious implications and seek advice if necessary.
- Ensure nominated staff with responsibilities for supporting staff and children are available to do so.
- It may be necessary temporarily to provide staff cover for their normal activities.

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- Identify an allocated quiet place where children, young people and staff can go if necessary e.g. PSA's office or WonderWorld.
- It is preferable for there to be minimum disruption to the timetable but some flexibility may be required.
- Through the nominated staff member who has responsibilities for liaising with the individual's family, ascertain their wishes about the school's involvement in the funeral, if any.

In line with the families' wishes consider practical issues such as:

- Sending flowers to the home or to the funeral, making a collection etc...
- Who will attend the funeral?
- Cover for any staff who may be going to the funeral.
- Informing the parents of those pupils who will be involved.
- Possible closure of the school. If this is the case remember to inform all staff in advance, including caterers, site manager, external visitors

Bereavement Flowchart

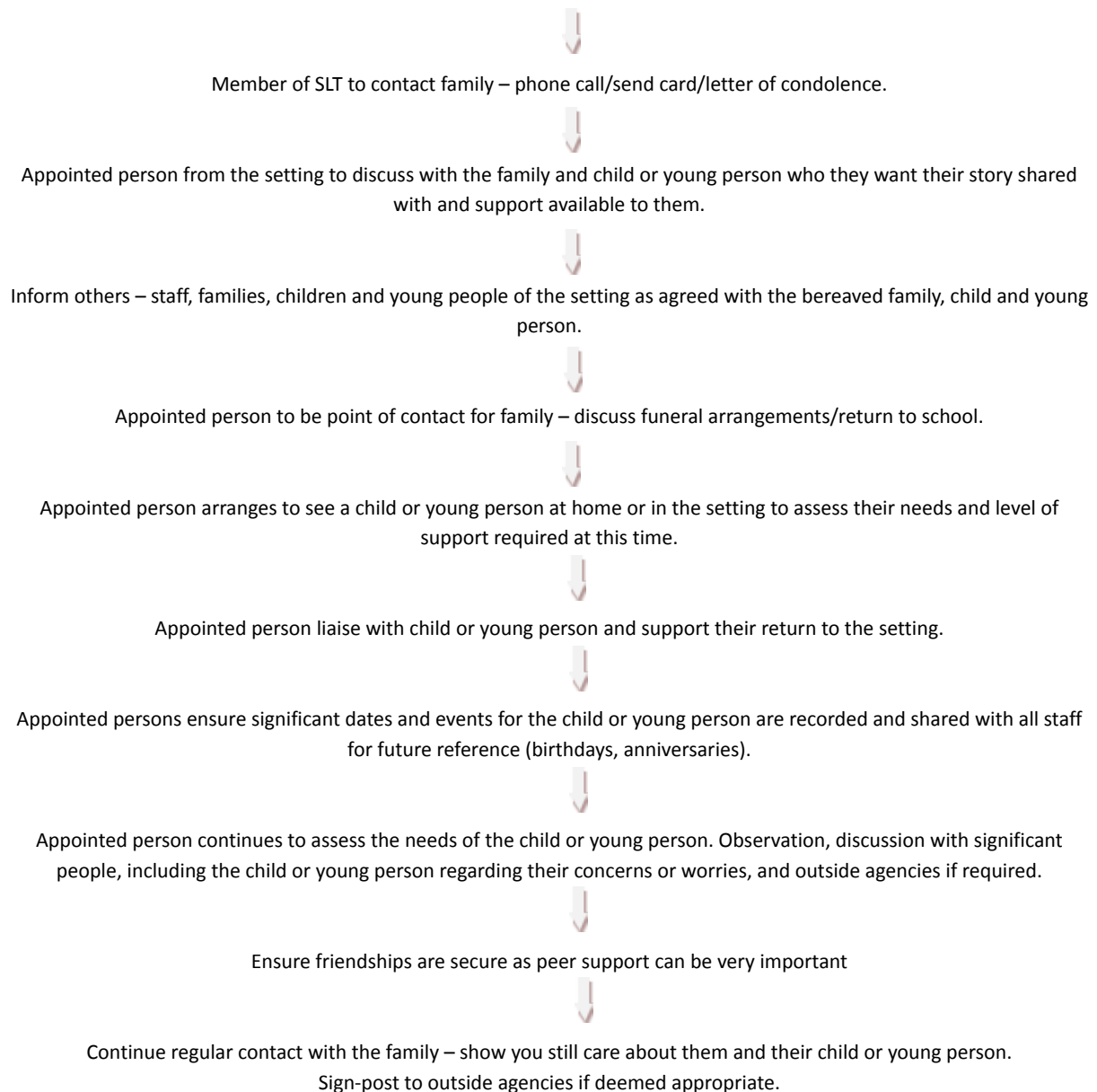
This flowchart will be referred when developing our school plan to respond to a bereavement:

You are informed of a bereavement



Identify the relevant communication pathway (see Appendix 2) and as a team the tasks required and who is best to complete them.

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Guidelines for supporting a bereaved pupil to return to Westbrook Primary School

When the child returns to the setting they may want to get straight back into friends, learning and routine. They will have been surrounded by grieving family members and often a chaotic household of visitors. School may be their respite from that.

An action plan to help the child reintegrate will involve:

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- Identifying a member of the team who will be the main contact point for them and their family.
- Ensure regular contact, this may be daily or weekly depending on needs and wishes of the family. This helps you understand how they are coping, what support they may need now and in the future, to discuss concerns and worries and plan strategies to cope.
- If they stay at home, continue contact through other means e.g. cards and messages sent to them from peers and classmates. Activities such as these will give the other children the opportunity to discuss their own concerns or experiences with the family and help them to feel they are doing something positive to support them. Other children will receive support as and when necessary.
- Before the pupil returns ensure all staff are aware of the bereavement and the possible effects on them, their behaviour and their learning, so that appropriate care and support can be given throughout the setting. Remember bereaved children and young people have ‘physical’ illness, such as headaches, tummy aches and feeling sick, as well as mental sadness including lack of concentration, feeling tired, disorganised anger and frustration. These will have an impact on work load and learning. Monitor how things are going on their return and maintain communication with all staff involved.
- Maintain normal rules and expectations of behaviour. This is important for the children and young people within the setting and the child or young person who have been bereaved. The rules and expectations are all part of the ‘typical’ routine and will help to make them feel secure. Remember the impact of bereavement on the whole family when giving sanctions and the impact the sanctions may have on the whole family
- Consider ‘time out’ strategies that suit the child and the setting. Time out cards, signals or signs can help them to exit the room quickly if they are feeling vulnerable or emotional. Make sure they have a safe place to exit to e.g. Mrs Jones, PSA Office.
- It is not unusual for bereaved pupils to take time off school during the early stages of their bereavement. For some, the need to be with their families will be strong, and indeed they may suffer from separation anxiety when the time comes for a return to school. For others the familiarity, stability and routines of school life may prompt an early return. The time away from school will vary from pupil to pupil.
- Some of the more common concerns might be:
 - **How will staff and peers react**– who has been told, what do they know, what will be said, how much will I have to say to people?

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We will help by - meeting with them to welcome them back, acknowledge the death and talk through their concerns. Saying something simple like *“I am sorry to hear that your dad died – sometimes it helps to talk about it and if so, who would you like to be there for you?”* is usually much appreciated by them. If possible we will offer them choices about how things should be handled and what support would be helpful.

- **Fear of sudden emotional outbursts** – anger, distress, panic...

We will help by - normalising grief reactions and giving the child choices about what strategies will help them to cope in the classroom e.g. able to leave lessons without fuss – “exit card” system, where they can go, who they can talk to.

- **Fear when they realise they may not remember what the deceased person looks like**

A laminated photo of the deceased person may give enormous comfort when the visual image begins to disappear. A special teddy or other memento will often give great comfort in times of distress and upset. They may also want to show this when talking about the person who died. Whatever helps the child within reason should be encouraged.

- **Fear of being behind with work and unable to catch up**

We will help by clarifying with other staff what is essential to accomplish and what can be left, and offering appropriate help to achieve what needs to be done.

- **Inability to concentrate and feel motivated or sit still**

We will help by reassuring them that this lack of motivation and concentration is normal and will pass. Offering shorter, more manageable tasks, encouragement for achievements, and minimising difficulties can often help.

- **Family grief impacting on normal family functioning**

Disrupted routines, sporadic meals, chaotic bedtimes are possible reasons why they may be inadequately prepared for school, do not have the necessary equipment, and may be tired or hungry.

We will help by - Talking with them to ascertain where areas of difficulty lie and try and work out strategies with them and their family to help keep things on an even keel in school. Identify their strengths and help them build on them.

- **Unable to meet homework/project deadlines because of altered responsibilities within the family and home**

We will help by working with the family being flexible where possible and offer additional support where needed.

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Guidelines for providing on-going support for a bereaved pupil

- Establish a peer support network with the child's permission – ensuring that those helping are given appropriate support themselves
- Make a note of significant dates which might affect the pupil, e.g. date of death, birthdays, Christmas, anniversaries. Make sure other members of staff are aware of these and the possible impact these may have. Don't be afraid to acknowledge these potentially difficult times with them e.g. *"I know Christmas is coming up and it might feel a very different and difficult time for you all this year without your Dad – so don't forget, if it helps to talk you can always come and see me"*.
- Consider possible reactions to class/assembly topics. Discuss how these difficulties might best be managed with them e.g. if making Mother's day cards do ask them if they wish to be included in the activity too, very often the answer is 'yes' as they still have a parent, they just can no longer see them, but still want to remember them.
- Look out for signs of isolation, bullying or difficulties in the playground – bereaved children/young people are often seen as vulnerable and may become a target.
- Consider using books/activities to help explore feelings and ideas about death as part of the normal school curriculum
- Be alert to changes in behaviour – these may be an indication that they are more affected by their bereavement than they are able or willing to say. Reactions may present themselves months or years after the event, and it may be difficult for staff and others to relate behaviour(s) to the bereavement.
- Follow up absences in line with school procedures – absence could indicate bereavement – associated problems at home or school. Inform allocated members of staff.
- At transition time make sure the new class teacher and/or school are aware of the bereavement and support in situ.
- Staff will listen and care.

Guidelines for supporting a pupil with Special Educational Needs experiencing bereavement

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All children benefit from being given simple, honest “bite size” pieces of information about difficult issues - often repeated many times over. Where appropriate visit www.autism.org.uk/about/family-life/bereavement.aspx .

When talking about death and bereavement with a child with learning difficulties it might be helpful to consider: -

- **WHO** should be a key worker working with the child and family - inform parents who this person will be and keep in contact, this should be someone they already have a good relationship with.
- **WHERE** is the student most receptive to new ideas? – quiet room, outside. Use this space for talking with them.
- **WHAT** should be talked about? (Agreed with parents/carers). Ensure that you use the same language and ideas as the family to avoid confusion.
- **HOW** is new information normally given? - signs, verbally, pictures. Use their normal communication methods to talk about illness and death.
- **HOW** is new information normally consolidated? – Repeat information a number of times over a long period. Do you need to make a social story? (www.speakingspace.co.uk will assist with this)
- **PROCEED** at a level, speed and language appropriate to them.
- **BUILD** on information given – small bites of the whole, given gradually will be easier to absorb.
- **REPEAT** information as often as needed.
- **WATCH** for reactions to show the child understands – modify and repeat as needed.
- **FOLLOW** the child’s lead – if indicating a need to talk or have feelings acknowledged, encourage as appropriate.
- **WATCH** for changes in behaviour to indicate the child is struggling more than they can say and offer support as needed.
- **Maintain a** normal daily routine as much as possible.
- **LIAISE** with other agencies involved with the student to ensure accuracy and continuity of information.

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Appendix 1

Guidelines on how to inform a child

Remember it is ok to show your emotions in moderation. It is important we model healthy responses to children and young people healthy responses to sad news and a natural response to hearing about a death is to shed a tear.

- Be honest and factual.
- Use clear language – use the person’s name, do not use euphemisms like ‘passed away’ or ‘lost’ use the words dead, died and death to avoid confusion.
- Allow the child to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms they will understand.
- Allow the child to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.
- Allow the child to verbalise their feelings.
- Allow the child to discuss the situation and share their experiences of death (even if that is the death of a pet).
- Ensure the child understands that the death is nothing to do with anything they have said or done. It is in no way their fault.
- Reassure them that not all people who are ill or have had an accident will die and that many people get better.
- Acknowledge some days will be harder than others
- Do not expect to go straight into maths, allow for a time of restoration preferably with a physical outlet.
- Put an appropriate time limit on the discussion. It is preferable to resume normal school activities as soon as possible thus ensuring minimal disruption within the school day which also offers a sense of security and familiarity.

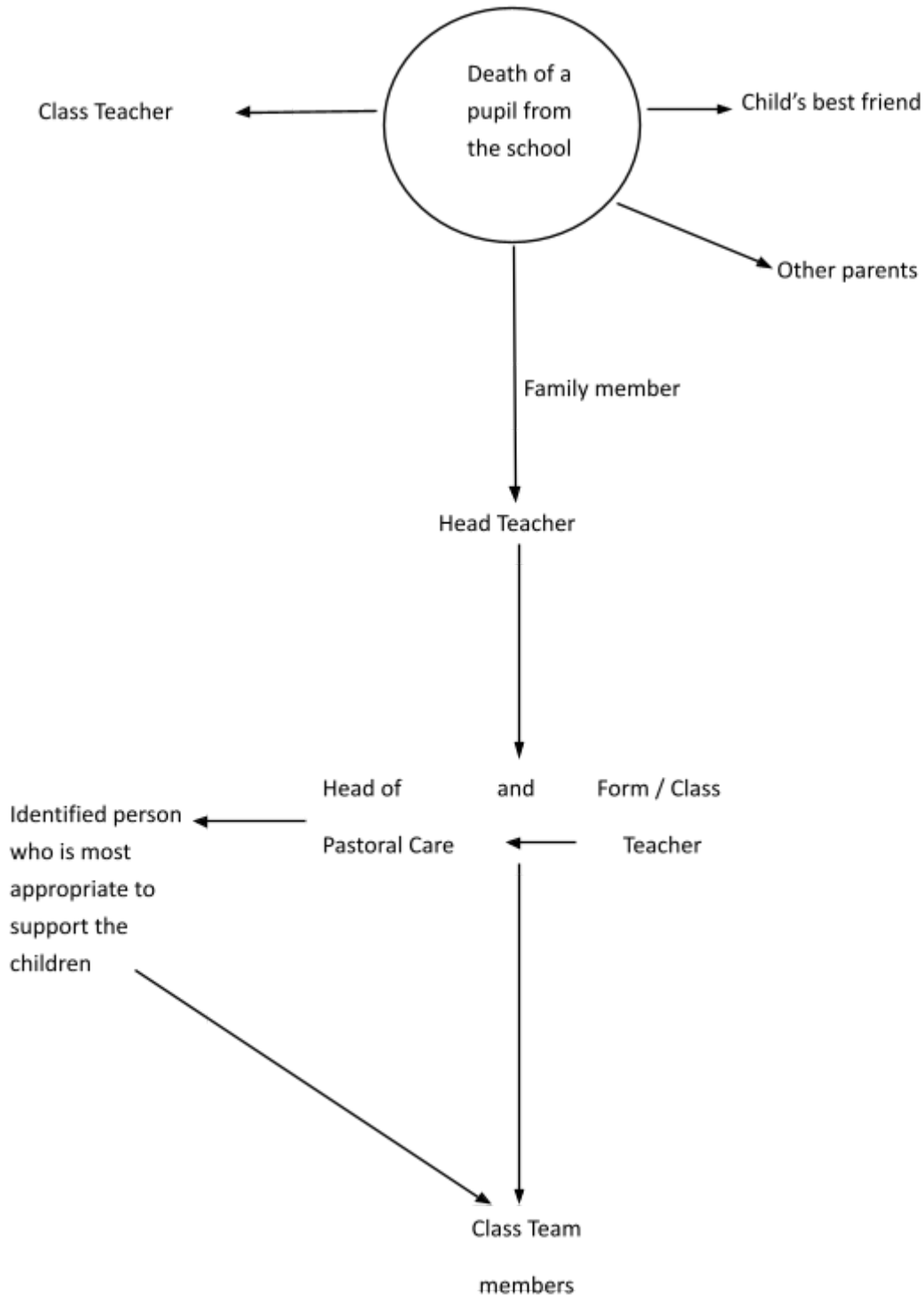
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Suggested scripts to use when someone dies:

“I’ve got some really sad news to tell you today that might upset you. I know most of you will have heard of cancer, and know that sometimes people with cancer get better, but other times people die from it. _____, the teacher of _____, has been ill with cancer for a long time. I have to tell you that _____ died yesterday in hospital”.

“Sometimes people have accidents at work, at home, at school or on the road. People may be hurt or injured in the accident and they may have to go to hospital for treatment. Sadly, there are some accidents that cause people to die. I have some really sad news to tell you that might upset you. Yesterday _____, who is in Year 4, was in an accident and he was so badly injured that he died”.

Appendix 2 – Information sharing pathway following the death of a pupil



Information sharing pathway following the death of an adult /staff member

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