



CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOOL OF  
VISUAL &  
PERFORMING  
ARTS

# DEATH AND BEREAVEMENT POLICY

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Key Staff	Principal, Assistant Principal Pastoral Care, Student Support and Welfare Advisor, Deputy Head of Welfare
Lead Staff for Review	Student Support and Welfare Advisor

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## Aim

Grief and mourning are expressed very openly in some cultures; death is public, often involving whole communities grieving in public spaces together. In Western societies it is still generally a very private affair but we should be aware of the different cultural and religious traditions of grieving and mourning in order to assist students.

It is important to introduce students to feelings of loss and separation whenever an appropriate opportunity arises. Students might be encouraged to express their feelings. We need to foster an environment where they feel they can ask questions and share experiences.

### **Definition of terms:**

- Grief describes the emotional and psychological response to loss and is experienced by people of all cultures;
- Mourning denotes the act of portraying such grief and can be varied in its expression depending on culture and religion;

The death of a student or member of staff is fortunately a rare occurrence in College but at CATS Cambridge/CSVPA we will:

- Deal with first day issues, including class meetings
- Provide support after the first week and beyond, including memorials
- Give on-going support to students and staff if necessary
- De-brief staff if necessary

The death of someone known to a student is more common. Procedures for how to deal with this are contained in this policy.

### **Involvement of students**

- Differing cultures will determine to a large extent the involvement or otherwise of children in the traditions and rituals which surround death
- However, it is clear that students involved in such ceremonies tend to deal with later life events with much less stress

### **Being Prepared**

No matter how prepared we think we are, death is often traumatic and unexpected. Its unpredictability can severely unbalance a College whose normal working environment is one based on routine. Intervention is essential in managing and minimising any disruption.

The Emergency Planning Policy is on Shackleton.

## Death of relative or friend of student

If you are contacted by a family member disclosing the death of a family member or of a close friend of the student they may ask you to inform the student for them. Experience shows that this information is always best coming from family. Staff should not inform students if asked to do so by family.

This information should be documented using the Welfare Concern note on Shackleton. You should not approach the student until you have spoken to a member of the Welfare Team. A member of the Welfare Team will decide who should approach student. This may be you, with support from the Welfare Team, if you are happy to have the conversation. If the College is asked to help facilitate a phone call so the family can inform the student this should take place in a confidential space (like an office), not in the student's room in College.

If a student discloses to you that they have suffered a death in the family or of a close friend, this should be documented using the Welfare Concern note on Shackleton. Inform the student of the College's support and the availability of companionate leave whether they are planning on returning home to be with their family or will be staying at College.

Discuss the benefits of documenting, in public, the fact that they are dealing with a bereavement. This is to make those who work with the student aware of the fact so that they can modify their behaviour if needed. Document any specific details about the individual who has died or the circumstances surrounding their death in private notes. Some students may not want to discuss the matter with wider staff and may fear special treatment, pity, or that they will have to have multiple conversations about what may be a very disturbing time for them. In this instance, the addition of a phrase similar to, *"Please do not approach the student about this matter, they are aware of support available"* is appropriate.

### **After the student has been informed:**

- Give grieving students the opportunity to tell you what happened and how they feel
- Encourage them to work with you to make modifications and accommodations to their College work. This will help them voice what they need and how they are feeling. Grieving is a process. Make sure you are patient and give them adequate time to resume a normal workflow. Putting too much pressure on them too quickly may result in an emotional breakdown or College avoidance.
- Refrain from using terms like "moved on" or "passed away". Be honest and use the words dead/died.
- Encourage students to ask questions about death. Often if things are not discussed, children will create their own, inaccurate interpretations of events. For example if a child's parent commits suicide, the child may falsely decide that they caused it somehow. Helping children understand the event will ensure that their interpretations are accurate, as painful as the truth may be.
- Understand that we all grieve differently. There is no right or wrong way to do it. There may be a great deal of anger, the need for vengeance, and an ongoing sense of worry for your student. Always remember that it is hard work for your student to grieve. You are only able to be helpful in supporting them in their process.
- Avoid remarks like *"Time will heal"* or *"They are now in a better place"* or *"with god"*.
- Encourage "active coping" techniques, which refer to taking action to seek out help when one is hurting. Be straightforward with the student, explaining that you really want to understand what

they need and how they are feeling. Give them time and encouragement since they often may not be able to express themselves or let you know what they need right away.

- Connect them with a place to go outside the classroom if they become upset. This may be the College Nurse, Welfare advisor, PT or whoever seems like they will be most helpful. Let the student know they are free to leave lessons whenever they feel like they need space.

## Death of a staff member or student

### **Assemble the Emergency Team (ET)**

The team would include:

- The Principal or Head of CSVPA, who would be the Key Member. He/she would be responsible for liaising with all parties concerned and would be first point of contact

### **Deputy, who would deputise for Key Member (Vice Principal or appointed member of Senior Management Team)**

- Media spokesperson who may if need arises liaise with media and possibly police. Communicate to staff all media contact through designated spokesperson.
- Welfare Team to organise support for staff and students
- If death has been traumatic media may be involved. Essential that correct information given to all staff (assemble team if necessary)

### **First Day**

Upon hearing news of a death the members of staff should contact the Key Member.

Key Member to gather all details surrounding death. It is vital to have all the facts.

For example:

- How did you find out about the death?
- Is your source accurate?
- How can you check the information is correct?
- When did the death occur?
- Where?
- What were the circumstances?
- Who was with the child/staff member when it happened?
- When is the funeral?

### **Who should you tell?**

- Members of staff who are directly involved should be told individually
- Rest of staff told altogether. Try to avoid people finding out from each other. Make sure administrative staff and absent staff are also informed
- Principal/Head of College, who may like to write a letter of condolence

There are different procedures to follow, depending on the person who has died.

## Death of Student - whether terminally ill or unexpected death

The death of a fellow student is probably the most demanding situation a student could be forced to face whilst at College.

- In the event of a student becoming terminally ill their wishes and those of the parents/guardians should always be respected. Should the student wish to attend College the Welfare team would assess the student's health and a healthcare plan be put in place
- Whether the death of a student is at home or College the Key Member, after consulting with the deceased's family or relatives, would then inform close friends and acquaintances
- Confidentiality is paramount. To avoid rumours, it is important to be open and honest and not make assumptions about cause of death unless;
  - Deceased's next of kin has given consent
  - There has been an official determination
- General staff meeting called to allow private grief before announcing news to rest of the College, if at all possible
- It is essential that all staff and students, who are acquainted with deceased, be informed as quickly as possible
- An announcement should be made in a special assembly or ET members can go around. Teachers & Boarding staff should be prepared for feelings of anger, disbelief and fear. It is better to have the assembly in the morning so that staff, have time to support students during the day
- After assembly, in confines of classroom, teachers should decide if talking about it is appropriate. A note should be raised on Shackleton for any student who appears very distressed. Staff may not feel confident in these circumstances and another member of staff may well have to attend classes as necessary or as well as a teacher
- It is essential to allow students time to articulate thoughts and feelings and to support them. Sharing their grief in a supportive environment can help facilitate the grieving process
- If necessary, the College may wish to enlist help of professional bereavement counsellor
- Media spokesperson will, after consulting team, decide which information to release. Information that might upset, confuse or exacerbate situation should be withheld

## Death of a member of staff

- This is an event when the whole College should become involved in the grieving process together
- To avoid rumours it is advisable that the news is broken as soon as possible, after a private session with all staff together
- It is best to break the news to the whole College in an assembly and then allow students to discuss and grieve together
- College life has to continue and appear to be normal, to keep it the safe haven it should be

## Multiple death or death in College

- Multiple deaths or death in College would warrant ET being formed
- Key Member to gather together facts and details quickly and determine likely impact on whole College
- Additional support staff may be needed e.g. other CATS Colleges, Local Counselling Services

## Death of a member of family of staff

There are various ways that the member of staff can be supported at this time of loss:

- Send a card or message in early stages
- Show genuine concern and care
- Keep in regular contact by phone or letter
- Ensure person knows about organisations that may help

## Follow up on welfare of students

- Consideration will be given to the long term effects on the College and will be monitored by the Welfare Team.

## Packing up of belongings

The following procedure should be followed:

- Lock the Room and restrict access
- Two personnel go into the room to pack it up. One to pack, one to write a list for the inventory (see template below) once you have listed everything, both sign it. (If more people in the room everyone signs the lists) You may type it up but do not throw out the original hand written list
- One list in the boxes, seal the boxes
- One held with the VP, together with the hand written lists
- One for the parents (they may not want it all)
- Then secure all items in restricted storage
- If there is a laptop, that is not password protected or digital camera, they should have a sticky label with two signatures on them then placed over the catches or on button to prevent opening/viewing
- Make sure the list is descriptive, do not leave anything out or sanitize anything, some parents want to see everything
- Our policy is not to launder any clothing or bedding, but record on the inventory
- If the student has lent anything out to their friends – someone will need to ask. The same as if they borrowed someone else’s clothes, CDs etc.

Package x of x		
Quantity	Item	Description
2	T-shirts	1 Black 1 Blue - unwashed

### Restricted contents

The following items are prohibited from being packed and shipped with personal items:

- Unlicensed controlled drugs; water pipes (bongs)
- Any large amount of prescription based medicines that are not accompanied with a current valid prescription and covering the quantity of medicine prescribed
- Firearms (including gas pistols, gas canisters etc.) ammunition and explosives

- Flick knives, bayonets, double sided swords, double sided knives, butterfly knives, belt buckle knives, push daggers, hand and foot claws, death stars, blowpipes, blowguns, sword sticks, knuckle dusters, telescopic truncheons and some types of martial arts equipment
- Indecent and obscene material featuring children
- Meat, poultry and most of their products (whether cooked or not), including ham, bacon, sausage, pate, eggs and milk.
- Plants and plant related produce including trees, shrubs, soil, vegetables, fruit, bulbs and seeds
- Most animals, whether alive or dead (for example stuffed animals) and certain articles from protected species including fur skins, ivory, reptile leather, stony corals and goods made from them

Consideration should be given to a deceased student's privacy when deciding which items to send to parents. This will need to take into account age and culture of the individual student.