

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19): INFORMATION FOR GOVERNING BOARDS

SUPPORTING SCHOOLS TO DEAL WITH BEREAVEMENT

Introduction

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our daily lives will continue to be felt for some time after the virus has been contained and lockdown has been lifted. Sadly, it may have resulted in the loss of someone at the school, someone known to the school, or a bereavement being suffered by a pupil, member of staff or governor/trustee.

As well as taking care of themselves and those closest to them, those governing will want to demonstrate their school's caring ethos by recognising how bereavement has affected pupils and staff, and by providing the support needed to cope. Whilst bereavement is not an easy subject to cover, it's important to recognise that the school simply having an idea of what to do can make a difference to a grieving child or member of staff and therefore to their families.

Encourage your school to develop its approach

Whilst there is no definitive approach that equips schools to deal with bereavement, there are important steps towards putting support and care in place. School leaders may take the initiative to raise this issue with their governing boards but, if not, governing boards should encourage their headteacher/CEO to give thought to it.

Discuss how the following steps are taken in your context:

The sensitive investigation of what has happened – begins when the school communicates to the wider community that it wants to know about any bereavement that has taken place. This includes non COVID-19 related deaths as it is likely that all deaths during this period will have been more poignant given that the usual funeral arrangements and mourning rituals are not taking place. The governing board will want to be assured that the school has in place systems that will ensure that the right person makes personal contact with those affected, asking them to let them know about the bereavement, and how it has affected them. The information collected will inform the initial response, for example sending an appropriate message of condolence, and the beginning of the journey of support and care. It should also act as the trigger for support to others, particularly peer and friendship groups.

Equipping staff to give the support and care that is needed – governing boards and school leaders will want to discuss how their school's pastoral policies cover bereavement support, and promote and prioritise relevant CPD throughout the school. It is likely that there will be time and resource implications which should be taken into consideration.

A list of additional resources to support bereavement in schools provided by [Starfish mental health training in education](#) is included as an appendix to this briefing.

Moving on as a school and a community – it's important to recognise that grief does not take a specific form, neither is there a timescale for grieving. Governing boards should feel assured by their headteacher/CEO that the school is sensitive to issues such as delayed grief, how different people, different cultures and different communities deal with bereavement, and especially the impact COVID-19 has had on funeral arrangements. Governing boards should ask their headteacher/CEO about the way the school intends to reach out to its community, plan commemorative events or

gestures as appropriate and demonstrate its commitment to providing pastoral support for as long as it is needed.

A curriculum that brings resilience – the school's curriculum is shaped by first principles, its values and ethos: what we want our children to know and be. Governing boards should seek assurance from their headteacher/CEO that the COVID-19 pandemic will be incorporated appropriately into the school's curriculum, building pupils' understanding of all its implications. The experience of COVID-19 will almost certainly cause school leaders and governing boards to think about the ways in which their school's curriculum helps children to cope with, and support others to cope, with bereavement.

Recognising the importance of faith, prayer and worship – the school's approach to dealing with bereavement should recognise the importance of faith to many and the role of faith, prayer and worship in the life of the school and the community it serves. Governing boards should encourage their schools to collaborate with faith-based community networks and pastoral contacts and utilise their support.

Consider the wellbeing of staff, especially school leaders

Whilst it is our role as governors and trustees to support and challenge our school leaders and their staff to do the right thing, we should never underestimate the huge amount of work they do on behalf of others and, with this pandemic, the difficult decisions they are having to make almost on a daily basis, for which there have been no rehearsals. It is important that governing boards enquire regularly after staff health and wellbeing, and in particular that of their headteacher(s) and chief executives, and if necessary, ensure that the right support is provided.

NGA wishes to thank Pat Sowa for her advice and help in compiling this information briefing.

COVID-19: Previous information briefings for governing boards

The following information briefings along with guidance on business continuity and holding virtual meetings are available on the [COVID-19 resources page](#) of the NGA website.

- Information briefing 1: 12.3.2020 – Your school's response to COVID-19
- Information briefing 2: 18.3.2020 – School closures due to COVID-19
- Information briefing 3: 19.3.2020 – Immediate priorities for governing boards
- Information briefing 4: 2.4.2020 – Safeguarding information for governing boards

NGA has made its [GOLDline advice service](#), provided to GOLD governing board members, available to all governing boards that have questions relating to governing during the COVID-19 period. You can contact GOLDline by emailing gold@nga.org.uk or by calling 0121 237 3782. NGA GOLD members are asked to make a request through the usual route.