Engineering UTC Northern Lincolnshire

POLICY FOR BEREAVEMENT AND LOSS

June 2026

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Approved by the ENLUTC Governing Body June 2026

Document control table

Document title:	Bereavement and Loss
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Acknowledgement	
Version number:	V1 March 2020
Date approved:	Approved June 2026
Approved by:	ENLUTC Board
Date of review:	May 2027

Document History

Version	Date	Author	Note of revisions
V2	17.05.2023		No Change

Rationale

The governing body believes that bereavement and loss are an inevitable part of learning and growing. No matter how prepared we think we are, death is often traumatic and unexpected. Its unpredictability can severely unsettle a college whose normal working environment is one based on routine.

Policy

The governors feel strongly about the way death is handled and discussed in college and as such believe that the college should endeavour to provide:

- an environment that is sensitive and compassionate to the needs of those wishing to grieve, whatever their cultural or religious beliefs
- a commitment to an education about death and the associated rituals and traditions of mourning
- opportunities for discussion that help lessen the stigma attached to death, reducing its status as a taboo subject.

Guidelines

1 The UTC will respond in a planned and agreed manner, so that all staff know what is expected and can contribute their part in a way that is consistent with the ethos of the college.

2 The Principal will co-ordinate the college's response and be vital in creating an appropriate atmosphere. They will be the first point of contact and will liaise with all parties concerned and affected. The Principal will allocate a specific person (usually the young person's Learning Mentor) to support the bereaved. This person would, in the later stages of bereavement, offer support and check on the progress of any students involved.

3 In addition, a small group of staff will be identified to keep in touch with the family so contact from the family's point of view is manageable but also does not come to an abrupt end after all the initial attention. This group would probably consist of the student's Learning Mentor or their representative, the student's form tutor, and or a member of staff particularly with a strong relationship to the student.

4 The Principal or their representative will inform all staff.

5 Students and parents or carers will be informed at the same time and as promptly as circumstances will allow. Students in college will be informed face to face, parents or carers by letter on the same day. Absentees from college will be noted to ensure that they are also informed on their return by their form tutor. Staff who are absent will be informed by their line manager.

6 In living in a multi-ethnic and multi-faith society it is necessary to be aware of the differing cultural and religious traditions of grieving and mourning. The college will ensure that it does not deny young people the opportunity to grieve and mourn within the traditions of their own culture and religious beliefs.

7 The Principal will liaise with the media and where necessary the police.

8 **Managing the First Day**

- Upon hearing news of a death during college hours, members of staff should contact the Principal. If a parent, relative or close friend of a student has died, the Principal will decide (after speaking to the student's next-of-kin) who should speak with the student.

- A parent or relative coming into college to break the news, possibly with support from a member of staff, would normally be the best and usual approach. If no parents, relatives or carers are able to attend, the Principal will need to decide who is best suited/qualified to deal with the situation.

- The Principal, supported by the Senior Leadership Team and the student's Learning Mentor, should gather all details surrounding any death. It is vital to have all the facts. If the death/s have been particularly traumatic the media may be involved. It is essential that correct information is disseminated to all staff and students.

9 **Multiple Deaths, Death in College**

In the event of multiple deaths, additional support and resources will probably be required. The senior leadership team should meet to agree a planned course of action.

It is likely that there will be considerable (if unwanted) media interest. The Principal will decide what information should be released. Clearly information that might upset, confuse or exacerbate the situation should be withheld.

It is important that *one* individual, pre-selected and briefed by the team, acts as spokesperson, relaying consistent information. Another consideration might be the setting up and running of an emergency college hotline.

It may be necessary to retrieve the personal belongings of the deceased for their return to the next-of-kin. Information on the college's database, including references and addresses will probably need to be amended and updated. This also applies to notice boards etc. The college may decide to write to parents to allow them to explain to their children the meaning and implications of an event.

10 Funerals, Memorial Services/Student Participation

Before the bereaved student or member of staff returns to college there is likely to be a funeral. It is probable that students and staff will express a wish to attend, or take part in the service, but they should only do so with the agreement of the deceased's family or relatives' prior agreement, as well as the agreement of their own parents/carers. The Principal, or their representatives, should be the only person/people representing the college and in contact with the family/relatives, and they will need to be made aware of the funeral arrangements.

If the bereaved family wish students and staff to attend, the team should be available to offer support *before* and *after* the service. If they do not wish the college to attend, their wishes should be respected and the college will consider arranging an alternative memorial service for students if it is deemed necessary.

Planning a memorial service, reading lessons, poems, or choosing music may all assist in the grieving process.

The students most affected might be invited to write down their thoughts and feelings; these may be given to the bereaved family. It should be the role of the Learning Mentor to ensure that all remarks made are appropriate and in keeping with the circumstances. After either service, staff and students should be encouraged to meet and express their thoughts and feelings. Refreshments would normally be provided. Such services are important in initiating the mourning process.

11 Death of a Member of Staff

When such an event occurs it is usually extremely traumatic, especially for members of staff forced to deal with their own grief as well as comforting students. Planning how a college manages such an event is important. To avoid unwarranted comments and hearsay remarks it is advisable that the news is broken as soon as possible. A gathering together of staff to allow them to grieve in private before announcing the news to the rest of the college is something that should be considered.

Generally such news is broken in assembly, in a space where everyone may be told simultaneously. Later in class students should be allowed the opportunity to express their grief individually with the support of the form tutor or class teacher. Some students may have already experienced death and their way of coping with such events is sometimes observed in emotional outbursts. Some may express feelings of anger, panic or relief. It is important to try to remember that this is a time when everyone is emotional though this is not always in relation to the deceased. For some it provokes and reawakens personal experiences.

For a community as close knit as the college, a memorial service in keeping with the ethos and ethnic beliefs of the college is normally a good idea. The coming together of

the whole college collectively for one purpose helps each individual come to terms with his/her own grief in a shared experience – i.e. helping to initiate the grieving process. Such services also offer the opportunity for those who may have been unable to attend the funeral to express themselves through drama, poems and letters.

It is at times like these when members of the staff often feel insecure of their own abilities, finding it difficult to cope. Without encroaching on their privacy staff might keep an eye on those teachers particularly affected by the death of a close colleague.

12 Death of a Student

The death of a fellow student is probably the most demanding situation a young person might be forced to face whilst in college. Comprehending and coming to terms with such an event is going to be equally difficult and will require great emotional support from the college staff.

If faced with a sudden death the Principal should contact the deceased parents/carers/next of kin as soon as possible thus enabling compliance with any of their wishes. The immediate class friends and siblings of the deceased should be gathered and the news, if not already known, be broken before an announcement is made to the rest of the college, thus allowing private grief. To avoid unwarranted remarks an announcement should be made to the whole of the college as soon as practically possible. Additional support from fellow teaching colleagues may well be required as well as the assistance of the college's bereavement counsellors.

In event of a young person becoming terminally ill their wishes and those of their parents or carers should always be respected. Should the young person wish to attend college the Principal or their representative may need to inform students of the young person's condition. Occasionally the student may wish to talk to their fellow classmates about their predicament themselves. Honesty about death and dying we feel is the best line of approach.

13 Supporting the Family

Parents and carers often feel that teachers are experts on their children. They may invariably therefore turn to the college for advice and information, especially on matters of bereavement. It is important to remember that the family, friends and the immediate community often best support those suffering from bereavement, as is the case with other stressful life events.

The following are some points that may be helpful to bear in mind when talking to parents and carers:

- A death in the family will disrupt the family for many months; in fact the family will never be the same again. Family members are grieving,

relationships alter, and members may take on new roles. Sometimes there is a change of carer, house or college, all of which add to the disruption and distress experienced by the young person. To support the young person it is helpful to minimise, if possible, changes and disruptions in their normal daily routine and life in college

- The bereaved family members may emotionally and physically withdraw from the young person, to protect themselves from more distress. Some adults will deny the bereaved person is grieving, at it will be distressing for them to acknowledge the young person's pain. This may cause distress and confusion, causing grief reactions of anger, withdrawal or psychosomatic behaviours such as, headaches, stomach ache or sickness

- The bereaved young person may regress in behaviour, becoming clingy, difficult or withdrawn. Their work may suffer. These changes will be partly due to grief but also to the disruption and changes within the family, causing the young person to feel confused and unsafe. Even the simple withdrawal of attention from the young person can lead to problems; the young person may feel resentment, jealous or guilt towards the dead person. The expression of this verbally can cause the remaining family members distress and shock. Parents and carers need to know this is normal and will decrease as the young person and the family become more stable and settled

- Parents and carers need to be informed of the benefits that a young person gains in being involved in the ceremonies and rituals that follow the death. An explanation as to how mourning practices help young people to express their feelings and come to terms with and accept the reality of their loss can be very beneficial

- Finally, teachers need to remember that parents and carers will often use them as role models, counsellors or extended family; looking to them for support for themselves as well as finding appropriate ways of supporting and talking with their children. Teachers therefore may require their own support structures, so they too can turn to others for emotional support, advice and information if needed. Supporting bereaved families, whilst rewarding, can also be emotionally draining.

14 **Working with the bereaved**

It's easy to overlook the stresses and anxieties placed on those dealing with the bereaved. In many instances these can be quite exacting and yet because our sympathy and attention naturally rests with those grieving we can easily forget the emotional weight resting on the shoulders of those offering support. To assist, the following points we think are worth bearing in mind:

- Anticipate possible reactions you may experience with grief and loss. Each one of us is likely to react differently depending on our age, personality, cultural and religious background. If you are ever unsure about how you should react to others' grief, honesty is always the best line of approach

- Try to accept that you may experience emotional reactions yourself. Such an event might trigger thoughts of your own past grief experiences. You may even find yourself doubting your own abilities. It is not unusual to experience existential thoughts and find yourself querying life's injustices, questioning perhaps your own beliefs

- Panic attacks and worries about death – your own, or perhaps that of your family – may also become a preoccupation

- Try to accept that giving such support can affect you in perhaps ways you had not considered. Normally these reactions will subside after a few days or weeks but if they persist do not be afraid to ask for professional support

- Never take on too much. If you find that you are having difficulty in managing to cope, look to others to offer support – a partner, friend, or colleague

- It is important to remember that you alone cannot carry other peoples' grief.