Supporting Bereaved Pupils: A School Guide Following the Sudden Death of a Parent, Sibling or Close Family Member

Content warning: The content of this needs assessment may be emotionally challenging as it discusses suicidality and self-harm.

Support is available:

- Samaritans – a listening service which is open 24/7 for anyone who needs to talk. Call 116 123 for free.
- Shout – a free confidential 24/7 text service offering support if you're in crisis and need immediate help. Text the word 'Shout' to 85258.

Scope, Purpose and Aims

This document provides a coordinated bereavement (including postvention) framework following the death of a parent, sibling or close family member of a pupil. It applies to:

- sudden unexpected natural deaths (e.g., infectious disease).
- accidental deaths.
- suspected suicide.
- unexplained deaths pending investigation.

Postvention: *support provided for anyone affected by a death by suicide*

The aims of the multi-agency response are to:

- provide timely, compassionate support to the bereaved pupil.
- ensure sensitive and consistent communication.
- identify and safeguard vulnerable pupils.
- reduce risk of contagion, where death is by suspected suicide.
- support staff responding to the bereavement by providing consistent and evidence-informed advice.
- capture learning where appropriate.

Where the death is as a result of a suspected suicide and concerns arise about wider peer impact, please liaise directly with Havering Public Health team: publichealth@havering.gov.uk
If there is immediate danger to a person, contact emergency services by calling 999.

Date of publication: 28/04/2026
For queries relating to this document, please email publichealth@havering.gov.uk.

Four-Point Bereavement and Postvention Guide: Supporting a Bereaved Pupil following the Sudden Death of a Parent, Sibling or Close Family Member

1. Within 24 hours of receiving notification of death

2. In the first 2-3 days post-notification

3. In the weeks and months following

4. Closing the Response

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1. Within 24 hours of receiving notification of death

Checklist	Action	Key Sub-Actions
☐	Headteacher to confirm key information	• Confirm facts with family or relevant agency before sharing information. • Clarify what can be shared and with whom before any communication with staff, pupils or parents. • Appoint School Bereavement Support and/or Postvention Lead (if not headteacher).
☐	School Bereavement Support/Postvention Lead to contact family	• Offer condolences. • Clarify what the family believes that the child knows. • Agree what information may be shared. • Identify immediate practical needs (attendance, academic adjustments).
☐	Pastoral Lead to identify immediate support needs	• Identify siblings (including those in other schools). • Identify close friends and vulnerable pupils. • Begin brief internal risk assessment. • If suspected suicide, use factual, non-sensational, sensitive language[1] and avoid references to method of death.

[1] Examples of appropriate language: "died suddenly" or "died unexpectedly" rather than describing how the death occurred. Avoid words such as "committed suicide," instead use "died by suicide" or "took their own life." Do not include any details about the method or location of the death.

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2. In the first 2-3 days post-notification

Checklist	Action	Key Sub-Actions
☐	School Bereavement Support/Postvention Lead to hold briefing with relevant staff	• Share confirmed facts (as agreed with family). • Provide age-appropriate language guidance. • If death by suicide, review existing suicide prevention and self-harm guidance.
☐	Pastoral Lead to provide direct support to bereaved pupil and signpost where relevant	• Daily check-ins initially. • Provide safe space access. • Continue offer of flexible attendance and academic adjustments. • Signpost to local mental health services (e.g., HBBS Counselling).
☐	Pastoral Lead to review safeguarding concerns	• Update safeguarding records and escalate concerns appropriately. • Ensure safeguarding information is included in transition planning if vulnerable pupils are moving schools.

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3. In the weeks and months following

Checklist	Action	Key Sub-Actions
☐	Pastoral Staff to lead ongoing monitoring	• Monitor attendance, behaviour and wellbeing. • Watch for withdrawal, anger, risk-taking or self-harm indicators. • Maintain regular communication with home. • Escalate safeguarding concerns, when relevant.
☐	Headteacher to ensure support for staff	• Signpost to Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). • Encourage GP support if needed. • Provide reflective space for staff supporting the pupil.

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4. Closing the response

Checklist	Action	Key Sub-Actions
☐	Pastoral Lead and School Bereavement Support/Postvention Lead to plan for significant dates (anniversary, birthdays, inquest - if relevant)	• Prepare staff and monitor pupil wellbeing. • Increase check-ins around key dates.
☐	All to ensure gradual step-down of targeted support	• Ensure pupil is stable and engaged. • Conduct brief internal review, including what worked well and any lessons learned. • Recognise that there is no timeline to bereavement with everyone experiencing it on an individual level. Therefore, be open to pupils needing further support relating to the bereavement in the future.

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