

Bereavement Policy

Sept 2021

Version 2

1. Scope

All employees of Expanse Learning.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to fulfil the aims of Expanse Learnings Post 16 College Provision through a consistent approach to managing bereavement.

3. Statement of Aims

We aim:

- to ensure that everyone within the Expanse community understands the issues and procedures for managing bereavement
- to provide equilibrium between an individual's environment and their perception of the world as a safe and predictable place
- to be a provider/service where the issues of death and loss are not taboo. Where opportunities to talk naturally about aspects of death in centres are embraced. Where responses to news stories touching on death e.g.: terrorist attacks etc. and more personal situations are handled with sensitivity.

4. Statement of Principles

We believe:

- no matter how prepared we think we are, death is often traumatic and unexpected
- a considered, planned and organised response to bereavement is much more effective than acting on impulse
- intervention is essential in managing and minimising any disruption

5. Implementation

The Board of Directors and Governors, together with the Director of Post 16 have overall responsibility for the implementation of this *Bereavement Policy - Post 16 and Adult*.

The unpredictability of a sudden death can severely unbalance an organisation whose normal working environment is one based on routine. Death, therefore, is regarded as a potentially dis-unifying force that exists in an unpredictable world. Conversely, however, it can also be unifying, bringing people together in their grief.

We consider it vital that our provision maintains a shared course of action. To achieve this, Expanse Learning has Pastoral **and Teaching Teams** who work collaboratively in any situation that threatens to disrupt the college or ASC normal working environment. In all bereavement instances a **Response Team** is assembled.

The **Response Team** consists of

- Director of Post 16 – the first point of contact and responsible for liaising with all parties concerned and affected. The *Director of Post 16* gathers facts and details and determines the likely impact of the event on the college.
- *Head of Care*
- *College Manager*
- *Pastoral Officer*; to keep parents informed
- *Board of Directors / CEO*
- *A Bereavement Counsellor (External)* offering support, consultation and guidance to the team and the bereaved.

Details are below and will be coordinated by the Head of Care:

- Beyond
- Child bereavement UK,
- Compassionate friends,
- CIB
- Winstons wish.
- Local Authority Adult and Social Care Service where individual is known to social services/social worker
- **ADULTS ONLY** – Compassion in Action

The **Response Team** will notify the Local Authority commissioners where appropriate and draw on their significant

resources and expertise.

Expanse Learning are committed to training for key staff members and Governors in handling bereavement situations, especially tragic incidents involving the college community, utilising EduCare online CPD module - dealing with bereavement and loss.

6. Managing the First Day

We understand that whilst every situation that surrounds a death is unique, there are similar implications and outcomes to most.

- Upon hearing news of a death, in the first instance the Director of Post 16 is informed. If a parent, relative, or close friend of a student has died, the Director of Post 16 (after speaking to the student next-of-kin) will decide who should approach the individual.
- A parent or relative coming into centre to break the news, with support from a member of staff, is the best and usual approach. If no parents, relatives or guardians are able to attend, then the Director of Post 16 will talk to the student/client.

The Director of Post 16 gathers details surrounding any death. *It is vital to have all the facts.* If the death(s) have been particularly traumatic, the media and/or police may be involved. The correct information is disseminated to all staff.

7. Death of a Member of Staff

Students generally believe that teachers, support staff and ancillary staff leave their positions for other posts or simply retire. For many, it is quite inconceivable that they might die while still being employed by the organisation. 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 the student. In our opinion such an event warrants an occasion when the cohort/group or provision should become involved in the grieving process.

It is important to plan such an event. To avoid rumours the news should be broken as soon as possible. The staff are told before the rest of the provision.

Such news is best broken in a special gathering or meeting, in a place where everyone can be told simultaneously. Everyone is individual and may display a range of behaviours in a way of coping with such events. It is sometimes observed in emotional outbursts. Some may express feelings of anger, panic or relief. It is important to remember that this is a time when everyone is hurting.

Points to consider;

- to keep cohorts/groups informed of changes in daily routine
- the Director of Post 16 will decide how long the provision/service may need for a settling down period. This is flexible, as it may need to be revised
- to have support available for staff, students and clients
- to be aware of student who react strongly

In College, life has to continue and appear to be normal, to keep it the safe haven it should be. Momentarily this may be shaken but bringing things gently back to normality will increase the feeling of safety within the organisation for everyone.

8. Death of a student

The death of a fellow student is probably the most demanding situation a student could be forced to face while attending college. Comprehending and coming to terms with such an event is going to be equally difficult and requires great emotional support from staff.

If faced with a sudden death, the Director of Post 16 will inform the deceased's next-of-kin as soon as possible thus enabling compliance with any of their wishes. The deceased's immediate friends and siblings should be gathered and the news, if not already known, be broken before an announcement is made to the rest of the organisation, thus allowing private grief.

In the event of a student becoming terminally ill their wishes and those of their parents / guardians are always respected. Should the student wish to attend provision, the teacher and or support staff may need to inform the other students of their condition. Occasionally the student may wish to talk to their fellows about their predicament themselves. We feel that honesty about death and dying is the best approach. Sometimes there is just no other way.

9. Multiple Deaths / Death in College

In the case of multiple deaths, additional support and resources may well be required. Additional teaching and supports staff may also be needed.

In the case of the death of a student, the Director for Post 16, after first consulting with the deceased's family or relatives, will then inform close friends and acquaintances. A general staff meeting is then called to allow private grief *before* announcing the news to the rest of the organisation.

Confidentiality is paramount. To avoid rumours, we will be open and honest and not make any assumptions about the cause of death unless:

- the deceased's next-of-kin has given consent
- there has been an official determination.

All staff and student who are acquainted with the deceased are informed as soon as possible. An announcement that is clear, to the point and which cannot be misinterpreted is then made to the organisation in a special cohort gathering/meeting.

Such devastating news is often greeted with disbelief, panic and fear. Anger is not an unusual reaction among staff and older students. Statements such as *"Who is going to help me now?"* are not uncommon. Some student, surprisingly, may even express relief; relief that perhaps some difficult situation has now been averted (*i.e.; the student might be behind with a targeted activity, personal success target (PST) or outcome or had an ongoing problem with the deceased*). Teachers and Support staff are prepared, therefore, for different emotions, feelings and outbursts.

After the gathering/meeting, in the confines of the allocated room within college and in small groups, teachers and support staff allow student to express their emotions, allowing them to show their feelings and thoughts in a safe environment with a member of staff with whom they feel at ease.

A Bereavement Counsellor / service may be required to attend and support staff. However, it is important to note that those students and client who are over the age of 18 years old and have capacity to make an informed decision may which to contact their own GP and /or explore services that can support with Bereavement independently.

We believe it to be essential for students to articulate their thoughts and feelings, to support them and to not let them feel in any way inhibited. Sharing grief in a supportive environment can help facilitate the grieving process. We understand that students react to such news in very different ways, some may not want to share their feelings straight away. Sensitivity is always shown, respecting their choice as to when they are ready to explore their feelings about what has happened.

10. Other Considerations

The advent of a death brings with its unforeseeable situations and circumstances that the team will consider and address. Once identified, a specified member of staff will assume responsibility and will deal with them.

In the event of multiple deaths, it is likely that there will be considerable (if unwanted) media interest. The Board of Directors along with the CEO will decide what information should be released. Information that might upset, confuse or exacerbate the situation will be withheld.

It may be necessary to retrieve the personal belongings of the deceased for their return to the next-of-kin. Information on databridge MIS, including references and addresses will be amended and updated. The College Response Team may write letters to parents allowing them to explain the meaning and implications of an event. It is important for the Expanse Learning and parents to maintain a consistency in account and to deal with the effects of the situation similarly.

The Response Team must tread a difficult path between achieving the desired objective of returning the provision/service to a state of normality but, in so doing, make decisions that to some, might appear insensitive.

11. Funerals, Memorial Services / Student Participation

Before the bereaved student or member of staff returns to the college provision 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, as well as the agreement of their own family / carers. The Director of Post 16, who is in contact with the family / relatives, will discuss funeral arrangements.

If the bereaved family wishes students and staff to attend, the team will be available to offer support before and after the service. If they do not wish the college or service to attend, their wishes will be respected, and the college may consider arranging an alternative.

This is a period when the bereaved, both family and close friends, try to come to terms with the situation. They may feel helpless yet wish in some way to express their sorrow. Planning a Memorial Service, readings and messages, poems, or choosing music/songs can all assist in the grieving process.

The cohort most affected may like to write down their thoughts and feelings; these may then be given to the bereaved family. After either service, staff and student will be encouraged to meet and express their thoughts and feelings. This is important in initiating the grieving process.

12. Grief, Mourning and Cultural Differences

When discussing differing cultural and religious beliefs, it is helpful to distinguish the terms as grief and mourning, as they are often used interchangeably and can cause confusion. **Grief** describes the emotional and psychological response to loss and is experienced by people of all cultures, whereas **mourning** denotes the actions and manner of portraying such grief and its expression is found to vary between cultures and religions.

Mourning practices reinforce societal norms by assisting the bereaved person to assign meaning to their loss, realign their role within society and to gain support from the family and community. Such mourning practices are denoted by the person's culture and are typically related to religious or political beliefs. We believe mourning practices are essential in enabling the bereaved to accept and come to terms with the loss – emotionally, cognitively and physically. These include accepting the reality of the loss, to express grief, to adjust to the environment in which the deceased is no longer present and to re-invest in new relationships.

Differing cultures will determine to a large extent the involvement or otherwise of young people and adults in the traditions and rituals which surround death. It is clear that children involved in such ceremonies tend to deal with later life events with much less stress than those who are excluded. It has been observed that even those who have experienced a death of a pet are more prepared and have a better understanding of the physical characteristics of a death, its permanency and the behaviours of grief and mourning than those who have not experienced such events.

Attending funerals or ceremonies of death is therefore encouraged. Allowing students/clients to attend such events gives them the opportunity to express their grief, allowing them to accept the reality of their loss, to say good-bye as well as to allow the grieving process to begin.

13. Return to College Provision

For the bereaved student or member of staff the return to college will be traumatic.

It is essential to pave the way for their return. In most cases it is advisable that everyone, staff and student, is aware of the situation before the person returns, so they can appreciate and make allowances for uncharacteristic behaviour.

While showing compassion and allowing expression to those experiencing grief, we recognise that for the bereaved, college Provision, with its routines and rituals, can provide a respite. Death brings unpredictability, fear and uncertainty. For the bereaved, family life at this traumatic time can be particularly distressing, with routines upset, relationships strained and the future uncertain.

In the interests of the bereaved, therefore, we endeavour to foster an environment that is compassionate, yet disciplined. Getting the balance right can sometimes be difficult, but we recognise that Expanse Learning might be the only safe haven available.

14. Ongoing Remembrance

It is important to remember that anniversaries often spark a revival of feelings associated with the initial bereavement. Family and close friends will remember the deceased person's birthday, as they will the anniversary of their death.

Parents and carers often feel that teachers and support staff are experts on their child or young adult. They may therefore turn to the college Provision for advice and information on matters of bereavement.

At Expanse Learning, we recognise the need to use sensitivity and our skills in understanding the student development and emotional needs.

We understand that:

- 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 provision, all of which add to the disruption and distress experienced by the student/client. To help the student it is helpful to minimise changes and disruptions in their normal daily routine.
- the bereaved family members may emotionally and physically withdraw from the student/client, to protect themselves from more distress. Some adults will deny the bereaved student is grieving, as it will be too distressing for them to acknowledge their pain. This may cause grief reactions of anger, withdrawal or psychosomatic behaviours such as headaches, stomach-ache or sickness.
- the bereaved student may regress in behaviour, becoming clingy, difficult or withdrawn. These changes are partly due to grief but also to the disruption and changes within the family, causing the student to feel confused and unsafe. Even the simple withdrawal of attention from the student can lead to problems, causing the student to express resentment, jealousy or guilt towards the dead person or student/client. 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 student and family become more stable and settled.
- parents and carers need to be informed of the benefits a student gains in being involved with the ceremonies and rituals that follow death. An explanation as to how mourning practices help students/clients to express their feelings and come to terms with and accept the reality of their loss can be very beneficial.

Supporting bereaved families, while rewarding, can be emotionally draining. Teaching and support staff may need to turn to others for emotional support, advice and information.

15. Self-Care for Those Working with the Bereaved

Coping with bereavement can be stressful and exacting. 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.

The following points may be helpful:

- anticipate possible reactions. Each one of us is likely to react differently depending on age, personality, cultural and religious backgrounds.
- accept we may have emotional reactions ourselves. We may doubt our own abilities, question beliefs, experience existential thoughts and query life's injustices.
- panic attacks about death – one's own or that of the family – may become a preoccupation.
- accept that giving such support may affect us in ways in which we had not considered. normally these reactions subside after time, but professional support is available if needed.
- never take on too much. Look to others to offer support – a partner, friend or colleague.
- *it is important to remember we alone cannot carry other peoples' grief.*

16. Contact Details: Bereavement Pastoral Team - 01942877715

Director of Post 16	Mr Karl Wane	Karl.wane@expansegroup.co.uk
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CEO	Mr Tony Brown	Tony.brown@expansegroup.co.uk
Chair of Governors	Mr Martin Budden	Martin.budden@expansegroup.co.uk

17. Monitoring

This Policy will be monitored and updated on an annual basis.

Impact of non-compliance:

Staff:	Disciplinary action
Student:	Not applicable
Legislation/organisational:	Reputational damage, litigation, statutory and non-regulated compliance
Compliance lead:	Head of Care
Policy Reference:	ELCO-POL-OPR-008
Version:	2
Agreed policy location:	DatabridgeMIS
Does the policy require Governor approval?	No

Approval

Prepared by Scott Roberts (Assoc. CIPD) 01/09/2021  Head of Corporate Services	Approved by Tony Brown 01/09/2021  CEO	Counter Signatory Karl Wane 01/09/2021  Director of Post 16 Education
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Version Control

Version	Date	Revision	Review Date
1	01/04/2020	First Issue	31/03/2021
2	01/09/2021	Updated Provisions and contact details	31/08/2022
3			
4			
5			