

Informing the School Community of a Death

When there is a death in the school community it can be difficult for Senior Leadership to respond efficiently and proactively when coping with their own shock and emotions. However, news travels fast in schools and it is important to manage the information in a timely manner so that it can be communicated in a sensitive and accurate way.

Staff

Where possible the staff team should be informed first, ideally in a group meeting where questions can be asked and all staff have the same information. Even if staff are already aware of the death it is advisable to hold a meeting to clarify information and ensure staff are aware of the school position to help avoid rumour and conjecture.

Some staff members may need some time to process the information and perhaps seek external advice and support. The Grief Encounter helpline, grieftalk, can be contacted from 9am-9pm Monday-Friday. The grieftalk number is 0808 802 0111.

Parents

Where children are to be informed of a death during school time it is advisable to send an email to parents during the day letting them know what their child has been told. Ideally permission for this email will have been given by the bereaved family and where possible the wording approved by them. If it has not been possible to contact the family then the email should be kept to a brief announcement of the death and that further information will be shared when appropriate. This email should begin with acknowledging that there is sad news and should NOT be sent with any other school information or announcements.

Students

Often the year group or class most affected will be informed before the whole school. It is advisable for form teachers to be supported by other appropriate staff members. Staff can be fearful of showing emotion but as long as this can be managed for themselves and the students then it can be helpful to model sadness and shock. Try to be honest and direct, sticking to the facts and using words such as died and dead.

When a death affects the entire school then informing everyone in an assembly is advisable so that all students have the same information and gossip and rumours can be avoided within the school community. Once again, be honest and direct, sticking to the facts and using words such as 'died' and

'dead'. It is sensitive to speak briefly about the person but be mindful that at this point it is about information sharing rather than a remembrance service.