

# The Rydal Academy Response Plan to Sudden Death or Suicide within the School Community

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**Leadership Team Lead Reviewer:** Headteacher

**Review cycle:** Annual

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This document is designed as a guide to protocols agreed by the Senior Leadership Team at The Rydal Academy should any member of staff or pupil (or wider member of the school community) die suddenly including suspected suicide. This response plan is a recommended document from the DfE working in partnership with the Samaritans.

It is particularly important that the school responds to a sudden death or suspected suicide within 48 hours. This is necessary to maintain the structure and order of the school routine, while facilitating the expression of grief, and reducing the risk of imitative suicide or self-harm.

Schools with crisis plans in place are best equipped to deal with a death when it happens.

Good planning for the aftermath of death makes it easier for people to respond effectively at a time when resilience may be low.

This document does not constitute a policy, rather a plan. It is to be used in conjunction with Trust policies, such as the **Bereavement Policy**.

## **Postvention Team**

“Postvention” is the term given to activities and programmes that are intended to assist those who have been bereaved by sudden death or suicide to cope with what has happened.

**The Rydal Academy Academy Postvention Team will constitute:**

**John Armitage (Headteacher) – Chair**

**Katie Turnbull (Deputy Headteacher) – Vice Chair**

**Angela Galey (Assistant Headteacher – Personal Development and Wellbeing Lead)**

**Lily Peoples (Assistant Headteacher – Teaching, Learning and Assessment Lead)**

**Jo Thurland (Designated Safeguarding Lead - DSL)**

**Libby Truby (Special Educational Needs Coordinator - SENCO)**

**Dean Judson (CEO) is an auxiliary member.**

For logistical purposes it is also recommended to invite a **sub-group** as the management of this type of event will require a working party of no less than ten staff members. The sub-group representatives will be invited into discussions or instructed accordingly and at the discretion of the Chair are:

**Sam Alexander (Personal Development and Family Wellbeing Advisor)**

**Joanna Laverick (School Administration Manager)**

**Tracy McGuire (Attendance Officer)**

**Natalie Jeffries (EY Phase Lead)**

**Kathy Elvy (KS1 Phase Lead)**

**Sarah Woodthorpe (LKS2 Phase Lead)**

**Charlotte Mawson (UKS2 Phase Lead)**

*\*In the absence of the Headteacher or if it is not suitable for him to reasonably continue the duties of Chair, the Deputy Headteacher will conduct these duties, unless the fatality is the Headteacher in which case the Chief Executive Officer will Chair. All other roles within this plan will also be conducted by another member of staff from the Postvention Team if it is not suitable for the named member of staff to carry out those duties.*

**If the Sudden Death or Suicide occurs within term time**

This group will meet at 7.00 a.m. if news has broken overnight of a sudden death or suicide. If news breaks during the working day the group will meet at the earliest possible convenience.

**First Day Planned Procedure**

1. It is highly probable that school will be contacted by parents and other outlets before it has been possible to establish factual information. In this instance the phones are to be manned only by the School Administration Manager who will direct all callers that school is open and that this is the only information that is available at this time.
2. The Headteacher will contact Police Safeguarding (01325 742027) to establish the nature of the death and whether it is a sudden death or suspected suicide. They will bring official guidance to the initial Postvention Team meeting where at all possible. In the event that this cannot be established before 8.00 a.m. an initial meeting will still be held and a subsequent meeting will occur as a soon as possible afterwards
3. The Headteacher will inform the Chair of Governors and Directors as well as Heads of other SWIFT schools of the news
4. It is highly probable that news will already have been spread, possibly been embellished and many tributes and/or possible conclusions may well have been drawn by members of the general public through social media. This is when an event is termed to have become 'viral.' The Designated Safeguarding Lead and Police Safeguarding to review the extent to which this has happened and direct the Postvention Team accordingly
5. Many pupils will be arriving on site from 7.30 a.m. onwards possibly highly distressed. The Pastoral Team (Personal Development and Wellbeing Lead, Personal Development and Family Wellbeing Advisor and Attendance Officer) will direct these pupils to the Sub Group who will be using the Pastoral Hub (or another room if the Pastoral Hub is unavailable) as a relief bay. The Designated Safeguarding Lead will be based in the Main Reception to support the School Administration Manager with parent liaison.
6. All other staff members will be directed to attend an urgent staff meeting at 8.30 a.m. in the KS1 Hall where the Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher will break the news and give instructions for the day in a prepared statement, while the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Lead and SENCO are on hand to support. Any questions will be answered accordingly. This is to be completed on the first day and all subsequent days as is appropriate and necessary.
7. At 9.00 a.m. the first bell will ring and pupils will be directed to assemblies informing them, at an appropriate level, of the factual detail to hand and instructing them of the planned activities of the day.

These assemblies will take place simultaneously as grief and shock as well as rumour will spread across all year groups instantaneously.

*All teaching and learning staff and pupils will be required to attend assembly.*

8. After the completion of assemblies, where at all possible, usual routines are adhered to throughout the school day.

9. Relief rooms to be established throughout the school day to be manned by the Postvention Team and Sub-group
10. At 3.45 p.m. a close of day Postvention Meeting will be held to establish a plan moving forward overnight and into Day 2
11. At this juncture – ‘risk’ individuals will be discussed and individual management plans created for pupils and staff most at risk from depression or in need of specific bereavement counselling

### **If the Sudden Death or Suicide occurs during school holidays**

It is highly probable that the Headteacher will be the first person to be aware of a sudden death or suicide occurring during the school holidays. However, if this is not the case then the member of school staff who is first aware of the death should inform the Headteacher at the earliest opportunity. As many of the members of the Postvention Team as are available should then meet/be in communication with each other to determine the most appropriate plan.

\* As with the plan for a sudden death or suicide within term time, in the absence of the Headteacher or if it is not suitable for them to reasonably continue the duties of Chair, the Deputy Headteacher will conduct these duties, unless the death is the Headteacher in which case this will be the Chief Executive Officer.

### **Support Signposting**

The School will adhere to DfE recommendations and offer the following external support groups:

#### **Adults:**

Samaritans – Darlington – 01325464465 13 Woodland Road Darlington County Durham DL3 7BJ

Cruse Bereavement Care - Darlington: 01325 288633

Durham and Stockton: 01325 288633

Guisborough: 01287 610734

Middlesbrough: 01642 210284

#### **Children:**

Child Line: 08001111

Winstons Wish: 08452 030405

Young Minds: 020 7089 5050

### **Media Relations**

The Postvention Team Chair will be the designated media spokesman and all other contact with media outlets is to be deterred in the statement at the staff meeting (during term time) / in conversation with individual staff members as they are notified of the death (during school holidays). The Postvention Team Chair may elect to enlist the support of external media liaison advisors.

They will issue a prepared statement and not deviate from this using the guidance in the Samaritans document “How to prepare schools.”

Media liaison will be concluded in partnership with the Samaritans Press team – 07943809162 or (0)20 8394 8300

This will be published on the school website.

### **Funerals and Memorials**

Memorials are an issue that need to be carefully managed to take into account the wide range of feelings that are likely to be displayed.

It is recommended that a two week memorial period is set up within a school. A designated area for floral memorials will be established in the school grounds. The School Office will forward any correspondence to the bereaved family on their request.

Details of this will be in the media statement and on the school website.

A permanent memorial may be erected for a sudden death – it is not however recommended for a suicide.

**Schools cannot control online memorials and other social networking activity following a suicide. However, students should be warned about the risks of online memorials – their comments may become public/published without their permission, online memorials can attract negative and hurtful comment and anything that romanticises suicide can be harmful to those who are vulnerable. This will happen during assembly where the Sudden Death or Suicide occurs during term time (point 7 of the plan) or at the earliest opportunity where the death occurs during the school holidays.**

If the deceased and their family are religious the School will seek to establish relations with the relevant religious designate at the earliest opportunity. If a humanist funeral is anticipated likewise the relevant body will be contacted. These bodies will be encouraged to partake in any memorial tributes with the school and the school will have full representation at funerals. This will be coordinated by the Headteacher.

Any member of staff may request to attend the funeral. The Headteacher will arrange cover where possible if during term time.

Pupils will be permitted to attend funerals of peers with their parents or carers where this occurs during term time.

In the event of the loss of a member of staff, staff may request to attend the funeral where this occurs during term time. A school memorial service may be arranged to allow attendance from the full school community.

### **Responding to suspected suicide**

In some cases, where there is an on-going investigation or where the family does not want the cause of death to be disclosed (or reported as suicide), it can be challenging for a school to decide how to proceed.

While the fact that someone has died may be disclosed immediately, information about the nature and cause of death should not be disclosed until the family, and/or the relevant authorities, have been consulted.

**In this situation, the school will state that the nature and cause of death are still being determined and that additional information will be forthcoming.**

We will acknowledge that there are rumours (which are often inaccurate), and remind students that rumours can be deeply hurtful, distressing and unfair to the deceased person, their family and their friends. The Discipline Policy will be used as with any other incident of potential name calling.

**If there is an on-going investigation, the Designated Safeguarding Lead will check with Police Safeguarding before speaking about the death with students who may need to be interviewed by the authorities.**

If the death has been declared a suicide but the family does not want this disclosed, The Designated Safeguarding Lead will contact them.

They will explain that students are already talking about the death, and that having adults in the school community talk to students about suicide and its causes can help keep students safe.

If the family refuses to permit disclosure, the school will state that the family has requested that information is not shared. The Headteacher will inform all relevant bodies that the information is strictly confidential and should be treated as any other Safeguarding issue.

### **Post Bereavement Management**

There is no finite time in which the Bereavement Process may be deemed to have been concluded. The school will continue to use internal counselling mechanisms and external mechanisms to support staff and pupils throughout the process.