

# Sacred Heart Catholic Voluntary Academy

St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Multi-Academy Trust



## BEREAVEMENT AND LOSS POLICY

Policy Date:	24/03/2020		Kate Hayles Head Teacher	
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# Bereavement and Loss Policy

## **RATIONALE**

We understand that bereavement is an experience which will be faced by all members of our school community at some point. It will be a more difficult experience when the loss is of a member of that school community – a child or staff member.

We believe that it is an issue to be addressed openly and guiding principles need to be outlined and developed in an objective manner. This policy will deal with bereavement following the death of a school pupil or staff member and will also address the procedures which will be followed should a child become terminally ill or die whilst at school.

## **FOLLOWING A BEREAVEMENT:**

We believe that children and adults alike have the right to:

- Be given space and time to grieve
- Be given support from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate – if possible, of their own choice.
- Encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement.

We recognise:

- That grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real.
- That differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment.
- That the death of a child has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/care team of that child and every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far reaching contacts.

## **THE MANAGEMENT OF BEREAVEMENT IN SCHOOL**

The purpose of this policy is to give all staff a confidence in recognising and adopting a particular procedure. It should be noted that a universally accepted procedure outline will, in itself, not enable everyone to feel comfortable in dealing with the practicalities of death and bereavement. To this end, the school will maintain a list of staff who have indicated a willingness to offer support in this way.

One of our main concerns must inevitably be the immediate family of the deceased and as a school we state our commitment to any such family as may need practical, emotional and ongoing support.

### **Upon notification of the death of a pupil:**

The school may be notified in an infinite number of ways. Past experience has shown that if death occurs during school hours parents usually let the school know directly and the person answering the phone will put them through to the most senior member of staff on site.

Where death occurs in the holidays or at weekends the parents will contact whoever they can – they may have the phone number of a member of staff who cares for the child at home for example.

In that instance the member of staff who takes the call will immediately contact the most senior member of the school team possible and that person will then assume responsibility for the dissemination of the information.

### **Dissemination.**

It is important to agree, if possible, with the parent that the school will take on the role of informing concerned parties. Past experience has shown that parents are happy to have this burden taken away from them as they have many people unconnected with the school to contact.

There can be no exact list of people to contact. It will be different for each child. The school should ensure that all people who are close to the child are told in a sensitive and supportive manner rather than risk them hearing it 'on the grapevine'. Bereavement is very difficult and the school needs to ensure it does not add to the sorrow by leaving people feeling marginalised.

If school is in session the headteacher will inform the SLT and admin staff as they need to help in the next part of the process. She will then immediately inform the child's class staff. Where possible the SLT will move into the class to allow the staff to come out and be told together.

These staff then need to be given as much time as they need to process the news and start to grieve. Some may need to be allowed to go home. A space will be dedicated (probably the Chapel) to these people and to anyone else in the school who had a close relationship with the child.

The deputy head will arrange cover for the class and the head will begin the process of informing other classes – those with staff closest to the child first. This is never easy in a busy school. It is easy to see where these two functions will overlap as staff may need to be taken from one class to manage the 'bereaved class'.

It may be practical to call a teacher out of a class and ask her to let her staff know. Where the child is less known to the class this may be appropriate.

The next step will be informing people not at school. Again there can be no definitive list but these should include:

- ⌘ Current school staff not in school that day
- ⌘ Previous school staff who worked closely with the child
- ⌘ Social Work team
- ⌘ SEND team
- ⌘ Medical team
- ⌘ Chair of governors
- ⌘ The CEO
- ⌘ Respite centres
- ⌘ Other professionals who work with the child – Ed Psych
- ⌘ Parents – if children have been informed it is appropriate to put out a note to parents informing them of the loss they may need to support or comfort their children. Some parents may need to be telephoned if their relationship is closer but may not have been informed by the family

Telling the other pupils will be a decision for the head and the class teachers. With different aged pupils there will be different decisions made. The class teacher of the class with the loss may be the best person to tell the rest of the children in that class.

Where it is felt that the children will understand the head will visit the classes, usually with a photo of the child, and let the pupils know what has happened. The finality of death cannot be diminished, however if there are mitigating circumstances that may help, such as that the child was in pain and now is free of pain, this can be used to help alleviate sorrow. The head must try to avoid adding worry – if the child died in hospital we do not want to give children a fear of

hospitals for example. Children must be told that while they may feel sad they do not have to feel guilty if they go on to have fun and pleasure in their day ahead. They must not feel obliged to assume a burden of grief.

Children must be allowed to ask questions at this time or at any point in the following days or weeks. Staff must answer honestly and to the best of their knowledge. This is not a time to propound one's own religious beliefs but it has always been seen as acceptable to tell the children that their friend is now in heaven. This is acceptable across cultures and whilst not a concept that can be fully grasped by the students it does seem, from past experience, to have had benefit in helping the children understand that the child has moved on to a new and happy place.

### **Memory Table**

Once sure that all relevant people have been informed the head will set up a memory table in the front entrance. This will have a photo of the child, and may also have a candle, flowers, a helium balloon – whatever is relevant and appropriate for that child, depending on age gender etc.

There will be a memory book for *anyone* to come and write their favourite memories of the child. The book is open to anyone – staff, students, parents, taxi staff etc. Parents who do not live near are given the opportunity to send a message to be pasted in the book. People who have written in these books appreciate this chance to 'say goodbye'. Parents who have received the books have been delighted by it and have spoken of how it has helped over time to read the comments. Photographs will also be added.

Traditionally the book is passed on at the funeral and this is the natural time for the table to be taken down.

It should be ensured, as far as possible, that seeing this table on entry to the school, is not the first way people close to the child are informed of the death.

### **THE FUNERAL**

The deputy head will make sure that all staff are asked if they wish to attend the funeral. It may be that the school could not run safely if everyone were granted their wish and in that case difficult decisions will be made according to how close people are to the child and family.

The head, or in her unavoidable absence, the deputy, will always attend as a mark of respect.

The memory book will be taken to the funeral and passed on to the parents.

### **REFLECTION**

Following a bereavement in school, it is only to be expected that many members of staff will be emotionally affected and would benefit from the provision of a calm environment in which to meet with other colleagues and spend some time in reflective mode. One such means of accomplishing this would be to allocate a specific room e.g. the Chapel for the duration of a lunchtime to enable staff to meet and share their thoughts over a coffee or tea. It should be emphasised that anything shared on such occasions should be held as confidential and not for public airing.

### **Memory Assemblies and Memory Roll**

It may be appropriate to hold a memory assembly for the child. This can happen when staff feel strong enough to participate. Staff need to be able to show pupils that it is perfectly normal to feel upset at the loss of a friend.

### **IF A CHILD DIES IN SCHOOL**

The school has first aiders on site at all times and she will always be called if staff have concerns about a child's health at any level.

If staff have concerns they will contact the school trained first aider who will call an ambulance. This decision can be taken by the first aider. If she requires a second opinion she will talk to the head or most senior team member on site.

The first aider will assess the situation and telephone for the ambulance service. She will immediately inform the Headteacher or most senior member of staff on site. The first aider or Head Teacher as appropriate to that situation will then telephone the parents and agree that they will meet the ambulance at the hospital or come to school.

If the child stops breathing the trained school staff will administer CPR/ use the Defibrillator as per the instructions of the Ambulance Service.

**Once the ambulance has arrived at school, the child is given over to their care and it is the ambulance team's decision as to where the child is taken or which form of treatment is administered.**

**If the parents have given the school a protocol to be followed in the event of death occurring e.g. no resuscitation this protocol will be handed to the paramedics.**

Any change in circumstance following the first call to parents should be reported to them, although staff must not impart shocking or worrying news to a parent travelling in a car alone.

Even if it is obvious that a death has occurred in school, the procedures outlined above must still be followed as a first aider is unable to confirm a death – that is the responsibility of a doctor.

Once the child is placed in the ambulance a member of staff will be appointed to travel to the hospital either in the ambulance or in their own transport. The purpose of this is to be a familiar face to the child's family on their arrival at the hospital. This person will remain in regular contact with Headteacher.

The school, will notify the Trust if there is a death in school

The above procedures and protocols will then apply as for a death out of school.

#### **IF A CHILD DIES ON A SCHOOL TRIP.**

If a crisis situation occurs whilst a child is out on a trip, then the adult with the child or the trip leader should telephone for an ambulance first and then contact the school to inform the Headteacher. The school will take the responsibility of contacting the parents.

Again, once the ambulance team reaches the child, the child becomes the responsibility of the ambulance team and they will direct any subsequent actions.

The off sites visits protocols give guidance for such situations and should be followed. The Trust must be informed and the headteacher will do this.

The above procedures and protocols will then apply as for a death out of school.

#### **ON GOING SUPPORT**

**For staff:**

**Louise Toon is available 2 days every week.**

The Educational Psychology team offer support

**For Pupils:**

Experience has shown that most pupils can be supported by the school staff, and that each child will have a favoured member of staff to approach. The school social worker can help some pupils understand. The Educational Psychology team can offer support to pupils who may need more help.

Social Stories may be one way to help pupils to understand loss and the Autism team have some generic stories and will help staff produce specific stories as needed.

The PSHE co-ordinator will ensure that we have suitable books and other materials to help children discuss death and come to terms with loss.

**For the family:**

Parents will be told that they are welcome in the school and will be encouraged to come and visit. The first visit to the school is often difficult and will be arranged sensitively in accordance with the parents' wishes.

It will then be for the parents to decide if they wish to maintain on going links, each family will be different, however the school will always be there to act as a source of support and information.

Sacred Heart CVA provides a School Social Work Service 2 days a week in school, from Faith in Families.

The School Social Worker provides a support service to our most vulnerable children and families. When a family or a member of staff has experienced a bereavement, a referral can be made for support from the School Social Work Service. The School Social Worker can offer bereavement support and counselling to both children and families and/or signpost to other services as appropriate. At times this support has included financial and practical advice, where a family has experienced financial hardship for example, after a member of the family has died. The School Social Worker has access to a range of resources through her agency internet library. The following books are most commonly used in work with primary aged children

"Everybody feels sad", J Bingham, "When goodbye Is Forever", L Rock, "Ill Always Love You", H Wilhelm, "The Lonely Tree", N Halliday

**THE DEATH OF A MEMBER OF STAFF:**

All the same principles and procedures apply as they do for the death of a pupil.

In addition to the above the school will notify the Trust as employer.

## List of online resources and information

[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk) – a useful website offering practical ideas for helping those bereaved in the family and school community.

[www.keech.org.uk](http://www.keech.org.uk) – the website of Keech Hospice Care, our local Children's Hospice. Gives details of its facilities and the support it offers.

[www.chums.info](http://www.chums.info) – a bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

[www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk) -a bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

[www.juliesplace.com](http://www.juliesplace.com) – a support resource for bereaved siblings

[www.bhf.org.uk/smallcreature](http://www.bhf.org.uk/smallcreature) British Heart Foundation site to help children come to term with loss using carton creatures. An animated film and we have a printed pack to go with it.

[www.bbc.co.uk/.../bereavement/bereavement\\_helpchildren.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/.../bereavement/bereavement_helpchildren.shtml) *Information on the way bereavement affects children*

<http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk/> An organisation offering bereavement support

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/index.htm> federation of organisations