



Bereavement Policy

Date: October 2023
Adopted: 24 October 2023
Review: July 2025

Responding to a death within the school community

STATEMENT:

We acknowledge that death, while being the inevitable end of life, is often unexpected and traumatic. Its unpredictability can cause severe distress and can shock and disturb the whole school community.

We acknowledge that should our school community be informed of a death, our response should be a planned, tested and considered one. An unplanned response could make the situation worse for all concerned; we need to ensure we are able to react sensitively and professionally.

We acknowledge that the communication of any death within our community must be planned and handled with great sensitivity. While recognising the need to act speedily, we will ensure that the immediate family of the deceased have been consulted prior to any wider communication through the school website, text, telephone, email, or social media sites.

We will establish a "*School Bereavement Team*" to be chaired if and when necessary by a '*Bereavement Team Leader*' who will be the most senior appropriate member of staff in school. Members of the Team may be the Chair of Governors, the Headteacher, the Deputy Headteacher, the Priest Chaplain(s), the Lay Chaplain (where applicable), the Safeguarding Coordinator and the Office Manager.

At St John Fisher Catholic College, the School Bereavement Team will also include the AHT Pastoral, the Pastoral and Behaviour for Learning (BFL) Leaders, the 6th Form Student Support Assistant and the Progress Leaders.

At St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School, the School Bereavement Team will also include the RE Leader and the PSHCE Leader.

At St Mary's Catholic Primary School, the School Bereavement Team will also include a member of the teaching staff and a Learning Support Assistant.

At St Wulstan's Catholic Primary School, the School Bereavement Team will also include the Deputy Headteacher, a school office representative and a Learning Support Assistant.

At St Teresa's Catholic Primary School, the School Bereavement Team will also include the Home School Link and the Learning Mentor.

At Our Lady & St Werburgh's Catholic Primary School the School Bereavement Team will be the Wellbeing Leader and an additional member of the Senior Leadership.

We acknowledge our responsibility to all those who grieve as a result of a life changing significant loss in their lives. We will provide opportunities for learners to share their feelings in the school environment supported by trained staff and when appropriate, through the use of age related structured programmes provided by Rainbows Bereavement Support GB. Appropriate support will also be offered to staff.

The Bereavement Team in each school will ensure all staff and governors are aware of our policy and procedures. This policy and the accompanying procedures will be reviewed annually or in the event of a death within the school community.

PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED IN THE EVENT OF A DEATH IN A SCHOOL WITHIN THE MULTI ACADEMY COMPANY

We will ensure that school office staff are prepared to receive the news of a death within the community and respond in an appropriate manner.

Should we receive the news of a death, in **ALL** cases the person receiving the news will:

- Confirm the information, check it, record it and check it again. (*It is essential to have the facts confirmed*)
- Share the news as soon as possible with an appropriate senior member of staff and a member of the Bereavement Team.

The senior member of staff and the members of the Bereavement Team will:

- Consider the action required, follow the agreed procedures, take notice of the guidance and examples and be aware of the impact of shock on each other and on the wider community.

THE SUDDEN DEATH OF A PARENT OR CLOSE RELATIVE

We acknowledge that in the case of the death of a learner's parent or close relative, it is best that a family member breaks the news with the support of an appropriate member of staff in that school. If

this is not possible the Bereavement Team Leader will ensure someone suitable breaks the news to the learner or member of staff concerned.

The news of the death will be given to all relevant staff as soon as possible.

THE DEATH OF A LEARNER

Should we receive the news of a learner's death, we will call appropriate colleagues together having consulted with the family of the learner to ascertain their wishes.

We will:

- Encourage staff to voice their concerns they have about telling the rest of the learners.
- Consider the most appropriate way of communicating the news within school; be that a full school assembly, year groups, or a class/form group
- Give learners opportunities to express their feelings at the time they are informed and over the following days and weeks.
- Avoid rumours, exaggerations and embellishment of the event, by agreeing the facts which will be stated openly and honestly without assumptions or judgements.
- Remember that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotions and feelings. Some may deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some may show feelings of anger. There may well be tears and distress. Planned support will be available.
- Inform parents the same day in the most appropriate way via text, website, email, phone or newsletter depending on the circumstances
- Ensure time for corporate grieving amongst the staff and enable them to share how they feel about what has happened.

THE DEATH OF MORE THAN ONE LEARNER

Should we receive such news, members of the *School Bereavement Team* will be called together to be briefed with the salient facts and to decide what steps are to be taken. Information may already have been 'sent' from the incident.

They will consider:

- Who will contact parents, if necessary?
- Who will meet with parents who arrive at school? Where?
- Who will inform the staff? When? Where?
- Who will inform the learners? When? Where?

It is imperative that rumours and interpretations of the truth be avoided. In a case of multiple deaths there is bound to be some media interest. Members of the Bereavement Team responsible for dealing with the media will prepare all necessary statements. Such statements should deal only with

facts in as sympathetic a way as possible. We will agree a format of response to telephone inquiries, including approaches from the media.

THE DEATH OF A MEMBER OF STAFF

We acknowledge that if such a death occurs it is doubly traumatic for the staff; supporting the learners but also grieving on a personal level for a colleague.

Should we receive the news of the death of a member of staff; the appropriate senior member of staff will call together colleagues from the Bereavement Team.

They will use the guidance notes below:

- a. Gather together the staff and inform them of the news.
- b. Allow time for corporate grieving amongst the staff.
- c. Allow the staff to share how they feel about what has happened.
- d. Inform the teachers that they may need to address what has happened in their classes.
- e. Impress on the staff what facts are to be announced to the learners. To avoid rumours, exaggerations and development of the event, the agreed facts should be stated simply.
- f. Communicate to the staff how the announcement will be made. Should it be a full school assembly, year groups, or a class/form group?
- g. It must be remembered that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotional feelings. Some will deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some may show feelings of anger. There may be tears and distress; everyone will react in their own way.
- h. Under such circumstances some staff may have difficulty coping with the loss themselves. Colleagues will need to be aware of those staff who seem particularly affected by the death.

BREAKING SAD NEWS

Should we need to break sad news to children or young people we will first refer to:

“Guidelines for Breaking Sad News of a Death to a class or assembly”

MEMORIALS and FUNERAL SERVICES

Should we need to consider our involvement with any funeral services or memorial services or memorials, we will first refer to the *“Guidelines for Memorials and Funeral Services”*:

RETURN TO SCHOOL

We acknowledge our responsibility to ‘keep a special watch’ on learners who have been bereaved, especially on their return to school and for at least a two-year period and at times of transition. We further acknowledge our responsibility to prepare staff and learners appropriately before a bereaved

member of our community returns. Members of our Bereavement Team will advise an appropriate response, depending on the individual's circumstances.

MANAGING ANTICIPATED DEATH AND THE TERMINALLY ILL

We acknowledge that the anticipated death of a member of our community, whilst very difficult to manage, enables us to establish appropriate communication with the family to support those likely to be most affected before and after the death.

We acknowledge our responsibility to support adults, children and young people within our community who face the painful reality that a parent or someone close to them is terminally ill.

When supporting children and young people who are experiencing anticipatory grief, we will:

- Confirm the facts concerning the learner's sick relative or friend
- Communicate the information as appropriate (in line with the school procedures and the family's wishes)
- Never give false hope to the child or young person
- Discover what the learner has been told of the illness
- Allow the learner to talk freely about the sick person in an appropriate setting
- Enable the learner to talk freely about how he/she is feeling
- Be honest! If we do not know the answer to a question we will say so
- Not inform the learner about any progression concerning the illness unless the family have given permission and requested us to do so

THE PLACE OF DEATH AND BEREAVEMENT WITHIN THE CURRICULUM

We acknowledge the importance of remembering anniversaries of death. During November each year we will hold a special assembly/liturgy/act of remembrance as appropriate, to celebrate the life of those members of our community who have died.

We will ensure that we have approval from the family of the deceased to record the deceased name in each school memorial book / memorial garden. We also acknowledge our responsibility to explore issues surrounding death and bereavement within the curriculum.

LONG TERM SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO GRIEVE

We will offer learners access to a range of age related peer support programmes available through our trained staff provided by Rainbows Bereavement Support GB.

SUPPORT FOR STAFF WHO SUPPORT BEREAVED LEARNERS AND COLLEAGUES

We will ensure that all staff are familiar with this policy and these procedures for responding to bereavement and will offer training as part of our staff induction programme. Whenever necessary we will request additional support from colleagues or from external support agencies.

GUIDELINES FOR BREAKING NEWS OF A DEATH TO A CLASS, OR SCHOOL ASSEMBLY

On receiving news of the death of a student or a member of staff please follow the agreed procedures which will include the following points:

- Consult with the bereaved family concerned to ascertain their wishes.
- Those to be informed of a death should be gathered together in an appropriate place. This is best done in familiar groupings by someone they know.
- Whoever is giving the news should prepare themselves with what to say.
- Try to be as composed as possible as this helps to reduce the possible over emotional reaction of some students. Remember, however, it is perfectly human and understandable if you are moved by the events.
- Start by acknowledging that you have some sad news to give them.
- Be honest; give the news stating simple facts which have been checked for accuracy.
- Talk briefly about the person who has died.
- Let the students know about arrangements already in place or arrangements agreed by the family.
- Underline how important their support is at this most difficult time and that it may be appropriate to involve them in a school response e.g. letters, flowers, cards, funeral attendance, memorial etc.
- Keep a watching brief throughout the assembly/meeting and for a period of time afterwards to pick up and support students and staff showing signs of distress.
- Keep in contact with the family suffering the loss. Make a note to remember the anniversary.
- Confirm any agreed arrangements by email or letter to parents but not before all members of the bereaved family have been informed.

BREAKING THE NEWS OF A DEATH WITH THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

(These words are offered as an example. In the event of having to break the news of a death within the community, please take a little while to consider what you will say; how you will say it and how you and colleagues will manage the situation)

Start:

There is no easy way to say this to you and the event that has happened will affect us all in one way or another but I have to tell you.....

You may have heard alreadyThat N... has died ... The information that we have and therefore can tell you about is that.....

.....While we are all deeply shocked at this awful, sad news, before we do anything else and while we are all together to support and help each other, may I suggest that we be still now for one or two minutes to honour and remember N...

Thank you.....

N... was a gift to our community here and we are so deeply grateful for the privilege of knowing him/her. In some way we are all better people because of N...

I ask you to close your eyes for a moment and to remember the unique part that N... played in our lives. We think of good times together, training, travelling on school trips, etc. We reflect on her/his many talents and blessings. (Examples: think of her/his delight on the occasion that she sang, that he scored that goal..., that he/she represented the school at...)

We all feel the loss of N... Place a circle of light around N...'s face now and think lots of love and thanks and hope for N...

We do not know much about what happens after death but it is possible that our loving thoughts and wishes and prayers this morning may help N... to a place of great happiness and peace.

There will be many opportunities for us to show our feelings during the next few days. As more details come to us, we will let you know what is happening and how the family would like us to be involved. There will be a variety of ways of honouring N's life and their life amongst us. Your ideas

will be most welcome. Talk tobut talk to any of the staff with your thoughts and feelings. We are all here to help each other; that is what our community is about.

A poet has written these lines to help us at a time like this; you may like it:

Name, may you continue to inspire us:
to enter each day with a generous heart;
to serve the call of courage and love,
until we see your face again
in that land where there is no more separation,
where all tears will be wiped from our mind,
and where we will never lose you again.

Appropriate endingperhaps the poem itself; music; a prayer; a moment of silence.....

SOME PRAYERS / WORDS TO CONSIDER.....

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Eternal rest grant unto *Name* O Lord and let perpetual light shine upon him/her. May s/he rest in peace. Amen.

Heavenly Father we are stunned and shocked at the death of *Name*

and as a community we have gathered together to share our sorrow, our bewilderment and our pain. We are all asking the question 'Why?' but there seems to be no easy answer.

We pray especially today for *her/his* friends, *her/his* classmates, *her/his* teachers and all who knew *her/him*.

We remember *Name* for (List some characteristics or traits of the deceased)

We just don't understand this Lord, but help us to let go of any anger or any desire for revenge.

May our tears be replaced by smiles when we think of *Name*, giving thanks for *her/his* life and all that *she/he* was to us and our school.

Help us now pick up the pieces once again and to carry on in life as we believe *Name* would wish us to.

Almighty God, you know that it will be very difficult for us at our school without *Name*.

Bring us the strength and the hope we need to carry on as *Name* would have wished us to do.

We thank you Lord for the special gifts *Name* brought to the school and shared with us.

May the Church and the wider community give thanks for the contribution *Name* made to the life of (*village/town name*) and may we redouble our efforts to serve each other, in honour of *her/his* memory. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

We hold before God all those who are sad because someone they loved has died

We hold before God all those who are sad because someone they knew has died

We hold before God each one of us that we may support each other in the days to come.

We hold before God *Name* who has died. May s/he rest in peace. Amen.

Lord, we look up to you and receive from you
Your blessing
Your strength
Your most holy love.
In the darkest moments of our lives,
Let us remember that you are the light
You are the hope
You are the courage we need.
Amen

Circle us Lord
Keep hope within;
Keep fear without.
Circle us Lord,
Keep peace within,
Keep darkness out.

Lord God, help us find comfort in our sadness,
Certainty in our doubt
And the courage to live.
Make our faith strong
Through Christ our Lord,
Amen

Circle us Lord,
Keep calm within
Keep turmoil out.
Circle us Lord,
Keep love within
Keep anger away.

Websites offering prayers and words at times of bereavement may be helpful by searching "*School assemblies at times of bereavement*"

Guidelines for Memorials and Funeral Services

Funerals and memorial services are a way in which the family, friends and society can say goodbye to someone who has died.

Often a memorial service may be held in school. This could be a whole school assembly or within a class situation. The planning of such an occasion, choosing readings, poems, music, hymns, pictures, tributes etc. all assist in the grieving process. It might be appropriate to invite members of the bereaved family to share in such a service. Again, on such an occasion, staff members should be on hand to lend support to the learners who could be upset when sharing in this part of the grieving process.

The values of funerals and memorial services are:

They acknowledge the deceased person and provide an opportunity for the person to be remembered,

They give the opportunity for the death to be put in a religious context, if that is appropriate for the family and/or for the school community,

They give significance to what has happened,

They provide a time when the bereaved try to come to terms with what has happened,

They provide a time to express sorrow. Such an occasion helps in the grieving process and should be encouraged at every opportunity.

If the funeral is that of a parent, then the school may wish to send a representative or representatives in support of the learner who has lost a parent. Should the school wish to send children then please check with the family of the bereaved and ensure permission has also been given from the parents of those attending.

If the funeral is that of a learner or member of staff, then the numbers of learners and teachers wishing to attend may be considerable. Again, please check with the family of the bereaved and with the parents of those attending.

The following should always be considered:

- An appropriate member of the School Bereavement Team should always contact the family of the deceased to discuss funeral arrangements and to ascertain the family's wishes regarding representation from the school.
- Such wishes are paramount and should always be respected.
- If the school is to be represented at the funeral by learners, it would be good if the learners received support from members of the appropriate members of staff before and after the funeral service.

- Under certain circumstances a form/class close to the bereaved may wish to send messages of sympathy to the bereaved family. These messages may be in the form of poems, cards, flowers etc. The appropriate staff should ensure that all such presents are appropriate.