

SACRED HEART
CATHOLIC VOLUNTARY ACADEMY



LIVE LEARN LOVE

BEREAVEMENT
POLICY

APPROVED BY
THE GOVERNING BODY
JUNE 2018 – JUNE 2020

RESPONDING TO A DEATH WITHIN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

POLICY 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 Act of Worship, assembly, newsletter, website, text, telephone, email, or social media sites.

We have established 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 will be: school secretary, a class teacher, a TA and a governor.

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 pupils to share their feelings in the school environment supported by trained staff and when appropriate, through the use of age related structured programs provided by Rainbows Bereavement Support GB. Appropriate support will also be offered to staff.

The Bereavement Team 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 WITHIN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

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 pupil's parent or close relative, it is best that a family member breaks the news with the support of an appropriate member of staff. If this is not possible the Bereavement Team Leader will ensure someone suitable to break the news to the pupil 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 PUPIL

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

We will:

- Encourage staff to voice their concerns they have, about telling the rest of the pupils/students.
- Consider the most appropriate way of communicating the news within school; be that a full school assembly, year groups, or a class.
- Give pupils 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 PUPIL

Should we receive such news, members of the *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.

We 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 pupils/students? 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 pupils but also grieving on a personal level for a colleague.

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

We 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 pupils/students. 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 themselves with the loss.
- i. 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 the *“Guidelines for Breaking Sad News of a Death to a class or assembly.”* (See Appendix 1)

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 Service.”* (See Appendix 2)

RETURN TO SCHOOL

We acknowledge our responsibility to ‘keep a special watch’ on pupils 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 pupils 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 have to 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 pupil's sick relative;
- Communicate the information as appropriate (in line with school procedures and the family's wishes);
- Never give false hope to the child or young person;
- Discover what the pupil has been told of the illness;
- Allow the pupil to talk freely about the sick person in an appropriate setting;
- Enable the pupil 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 pupil 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 or December 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 we have approval from the family of the deceased to record the deceased name in our school memorial book. We also acknowledge our responsibility to explore issues surrounding death and bereavement within the curriculum. This will take place within the RE area of the curriculum.

LONG TERM SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO GRIEVE

We will offer pupils 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 PUPILS 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.

Appendix 1

BREAKING SAD NEWS:

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 of any arrangements already in place or of any 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 and ensure details are posted on the school's website but not before all members of the bereaved family have been informed.

(We offer these words below purely as an example. You may like to cut and paste phrases that you find helpful. We recommend that in the event of having to break the

news of a death within the community that you 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.....

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

You may have heard already

That 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...

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.....

In addition to the suggested prayers below, please seek advice from local faith leaders and religious ministers. Websites offering prayers and words at times of bereavement may be helpful by searching “*School assemblies at times of bereavement*”

Some Christian Words and Prayers:

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. 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.

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 hope within;
Keep fear without.

Circle us Lord,
Keep peace within,
Keep darkness out.

Circle us Lord,
Keep calm within
Keep turmoil out.

Circle us Lord,
Keep love within
Keep anger away.



MEMORIAL 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.

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 pupil 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 pupil or member of staff then the numbers of pupils 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 pupils, it would be good if the pupils 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.

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 pupils who could be upset when sharing in this part of the grieving process.

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For further guidance and for specific examples of memorial services please see 'Attitudes to Death'; the case studies provided and the list of books and websites.

THE NEEDS OF BEREAVED CHILDREN

The following notes draw heavily on the work of **William Worden** as well as our own experience of working with bereaved children. In "*Children and Grief*", (Guilford Press, New York, 1996) Worden summarises the findings of the two year long Harvard bereavement study, which charted the impact of the death of a parent on children.

Worden states that children have ten needs:

1. Adequate information.

Children need clear information, given in age-appropriate language, for instance, "He's died" - rather than phrases such as "We've lost him". It is important to give enough information without overwhelming a child. Sometimes the honest answer to a child's question may be "I don't know", or "I can't tell you just now".

Sometimes with traumatic death (suicide or murder) it may help to provide information in stages over weeks, months or even years. Giving simple facts at first (e.g. "Daddy died last night"), can be followed with more information later, perhaps prompted by the child's questions.

Some key aspects of death may need to be repeatedly explained to younger children, in particular the finality of death, the fact that it is irreversible, and that people who are dead feel no cold, hunger or pain.

Some families have spiritual or religious beliefs about death. If talking about these matters, it is helpful to separate out what happens to someone's body and their soul or spirit. It is important to respect the child and family's views.

If at all possible, it is helpful for children to be given some preparation if someone close to them has a terminal illness.

2. Fears and anxieties addressed.

It is a natural reaction to feel frightened following a death. Children may particularly fear that a surviving parent (or carer) will die or that they may die themselves. Sometimes lack of understanding about a particular death, or death in general, may exacerbate fears. Fears are often worst at night, especially at bedtime or at other times of separation (e.g. going to school, staying at someone else's house). Giving the child something to look after, or something to look forward to, helps them to understand that the separation will be short.

It is important to reassure wherever possible, but equally it is important to be truthful. For example, a bereaved child who asks a surviving parent, "Will you die?", will not easily accept a statement which offers false certainty, such as, "No, of course not." This child already knows that parents can die, maybe in sudden and shocking ways. However, a suggestion that the surviving parent will probably live a long time ("Look at Grandma, she is 87!") and sharing plans about who would care for them in the unlikely event of early death can be reassuring.

Clear accurate information helps to reduce fears - for example, talking about dad dying from a brain tumour and explaining how this is different to feeling poorly and having a headache.

3. Reassurance they are not to blame

Young children are still learning the difference between things that they caused to happen and things that had nothing to do with them. For example they naturally experience extremes of emotion and may connect an earlier angry tantrum with someone's death. It may be necessary to give them clear, repeated messages that they are not to blame.

4. Careful listening and watching

We all show our thoughts and feelings in many ways, not just by what we say. Children may express their feelings through their play, behaviour and the way they relate to others. Maybe they do not do things they always used to enjoy, or it seems very important to do something that 'daddy' did. Or they go very quiet at a particular time. Or they make a big fuss about something that might appear insignificant.

Sometimes it can be helpful to find out what is behind a question. For instance, if a child asked: "What happened to John when he died?". It might be worth saying: "I wonder what you think?" The child's answer to this question may reveal more precisely what he wanted to know as well as helping him to find his own answers. This question might be about what caused his death, the physical changes in the body following his death, a spiritual question about his soul or something else entirely.

5. Validation of Individuals' feelings

The Harvard bereavement study found that 2 years after death one quarter of the children had been admonished for not showing enough feeling, whereas another quarter were told they should have finished grieving. This latter group included children who reported high levels of crying into the second year (Worden).

Allow for individual differences both in feelings and in the expression of feelings. There is no one way to grieve, in fact there are as many ways to grieve, as there are people.

It is important to let a bereaved adult or child know that the death, however painful, is something they can talk about. However, it is not helpful to make comments like: "I know how you feel", "You've got to be brave", or "You should try and forget it", or "At least you've got another sister". These all have the effect of stopping any real conversation about what has happened, and denying the reality of the loss.

Sometimes validating a feeling, especially feelings of despair or deep pain, help us to move through those feelings, at least temporarily. When we believe it is not OK to feel something our feelings can get locked away inside us. This can make them harder to deal with and may lead to difficulties in later life.

6. Help with overwhelming feelings

We all sometimes need to protect ourselves from difficult or painful feelings. Sometimes young children want to pretend that something awful has not happened, or at least forget about it for a while. It is important to respect this need at the same time as providing an environment that encourages confidence in our natural capacity to deal with difficult emotions.

Sometimes children will feel very angry, destructive, anxious, or withdrawn. Carers need to balance children's need for consistent boundaries and expectations about their behaviour, with an acceptance that they may be less capable than you would ordinarily expect from a child of their age. For instance they may temporarily go backwards with potty training or dressing themselves.

Being alongside a child in play or other activity may provide opportunities to help them express their feelings. For example, "Teddy's feeling really cross because his mummy's died and he can't see her again."

7. Involvement and inclusion.

It is important to involve children in acknowledging and commemorating a death. This may include visiting a sick person before death, seeing the body after death, their involvement in the funeral and their opinions about memorials. Seeing how the death affects their family and friends will help them to feel less alone.

Even where families have clearly defined choices or traditions around death, a child may still be able to contribute something to a funeral or memorial.

8. Continued Routine Activities

Children benefit from being able to continue routine, previously enjoyed activities and interests. It is sometimes hard for adults to see children wanting to carry on with things so soon after a death (e.g. going to football training). It is natural for children to dip in and out of grief, and just as adults need to carry on with the normal routines of daily life (making meals, cleaning the house etc.), so children need to play.

Play may naturally include re-enactment of events surrounding the death or illness.

It is especially important following traumatic loss to provide as much stability and continuity as possible. The death of someone close is often very frightening. The child needs familiar activities and people to help them realise that, though life will never be the same, there are still many things that remain constant.

9. Modelled grief behaviours

"Children learn how to mourn by observing mourning behaviour in adults."
(Worden p. 145).

Through sharing our own experience, we can provide repeated opportunities for a child to make sense of and share their own feelings. It is important to be true to ourselves and open about our own feelings. At the same time, it is important to be sensitive to a child's needs when talking to them. There may be information that it is not appropriate for a child to know at this time.

Adults can promote an environment where it is easy to talk about the deceased and to acknowledge good and bad memories.

When talking about such things it is natural to feel sad. It is also important to acknowledge anger, guilt and fear, but to do this in a way that does not overwhelm the child.

10. Opportunities to remember.

When someone who played a significant part in a child's life dies there will be countless moments when the child is reminded of his or her absence. When a family is able to speak about the deceased naturally, it helps a child to make sense of their own reality. At the same time, it is important to respect that any individuals may need to protect themselves from pain at times, and a child may not want to talk about the deceased.

Sometimes when significant events are coming up, like anniversaries, Christmas, or other festivals, it is useful to plan in advance how the day will be spent. Families have found it helpful to do something in memory of the deceased at the beginning of special days, for example, looking at photos and talking about the person who has died. Such times can also be a good opportunity to remind children that it is OK to have fun, perhaps by saying something like: "I'm sure Mummy would want you to enjoy today as much as possible, though we are bound to feel sad when we are missing her."

Very young children who never met their deceased parent or sibling may not feel the need to ask questions about them - but older ones will. In addition, as teenagers develop their own identity, it is helpful for them to have a sense of where they come from. It is much less painful for children to grow up with this knowledge than for them suddenly to find out later on.