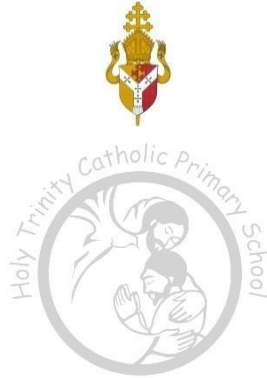


BEREAVEMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Responding to a death within our school community

Holy Trinity Catholic Primary School
Aspire not to have more but to be more



Holy Trinity is a Catholic Primary School where Core Values, underpin every aspect of school life.
Our Mission Statement is:

*Inspired by Christ and His teaching,
Holy Trinity Catholic Primary School educates, nurtures
and celebrates the unique nature and worth of every
member of its diverse family.*

The Mission Statement is summed up in our school motto: **'Aspire not to have more, but to be more'**

The aims for all of our school family are:

- to promote excellence in all aspects of school life, developing each person's ability to recognise and strive for this;
- place Christ at the centre of our daily lives, so that our school family may be the leaven of the Gospel values promoted in our mission
- to recognise that all members of the community are life-long learners, prepared to accept challenges with confidence and determination
- to promote self-discipline and respect, never accepting bullying of any kind and to communicate this belief in a positive and proactive manner.

These aims are revisited regularly to ensure their relevance and we work to ensure our statement on equality of opportunity and values are understood by all.

Bereavement Policy

Aims and Ethos

This document outlines the basic principles and procedures that underpin the school's approach to supporting members of the school community affected by bereavement.

Bereavement affects everyone at some time, and as a close community, our school aims to provide the best support for those experiencing bereavement.

1 in 29 pupils aged five to sixteen-years olds has been bereaved of a parent or sibling – that is one in every class. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, relative, friend or other significant person.

Within a school community there will almost always be some pupils who are struggling with bereavement – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil.

We recognise that every bereavement is unique, and that any guidelines we have will need to take account of individual circumstances and the wishes of those most involved.

Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support that some pupils, or members of staff, require. Where the impact of the grief is more complex, referral to more specialist support may need to be considered.

We aim to have suitably trained staff in school who understand the complexities surrounding bereavement and can help support families during these difficult times, to ensure that the school does what it can to best meet the needs of the bereaved.

It is important that children are helped to understand bereavement in clear and unambiguous ways and given opportunities to experience the full range of emotions that may accompany bereavement within a safe and supportive atmosphere.

The school recognises the importance of long-term support for those who are bereaved and will endeavour to provide opportunities for memorials and remembrance, where appropriate.

Objectives

- a framework for all staff to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with the bereavement
- to support pupils and/or members of staff before, where applicable, during and after bereavement
- to enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between members of staff, pupils, the family/carers and the community
- to identify key staff within school and the governing body/ Local Authority/diocese
- to have clear expectations about the way school will respond to a death and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all

Rationale

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 individuals manage and cope differently with grief and that our approach to supporting the wellbeing of our school community will depend on the individual. We are also aware that individuals may be triggered by the news of a death if they have experienced a bereavement themselves, and as a school we will be mindful of this, monitoring behaviours, moods and reactions.

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 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 programmes provided by Rainbows Bereavement Support GB or alternative external agencies. Appropriate support will also be offered and signposted to staff.

The death of a pupil or member of staff

Roles and responsibilities

The **Head Teacher** has ultimate responsibility during this time but may delegate actions to other staff as appropriate. The best person to liaise with the family may depend on the specific situation, relationship with the pupil/family and experience of the member of staff. Such as: Deputy Head/Phase Leader/Class Teacher/SENCO/Pastoral Lead.

The indiscriminate spread of news via social media may mean that some members of the school community hear the news before others.

The Head Teacher, in liaison, with the appropriate people e.g. family, SLT, Diocese, will determine how staff are contacted regarding the death of a pupil or member of staff. This will be based on individual circumstances, including the time and nature of the bereavement and the most appropriate manner available. This could include staff meeting, phone call, email or text message.

In the case of sudden or traumatic death of a pupil, the school may be called upon to be a part of a multi-agency review. The school would usually be represented by the Head Teacher, but this role may be delegated as appropriate.

(If a pupil dies by suicide, Samaritans provide a Step-by-Step programme to support schools. They can be contacted on 0808 168 2528.)

For the death of a pupil or member of staff that may attract media coverage e.g. member of staff was a well-known personality or the person died tragically, suicide or murder, the Governing Body, in liaison with the Head Teacher, will provide a 'news statement' at an agreed time, as a way of dealing with media intrusion. Liaison with the individual's family is essential.

Procedures

Some families may want to share information with the school community while others may not. A simple confirmation of the death may be required until more details are available, and/or the family consulted. The school can help to prevent speculation and rumours, as well as be a source of support for the family and the school community.

To best support staff and pupils during times of bereavement, it will be necessary to ascertain sensitive and potentially distressing information regarding the nature of an illness or cause of death. We will always ensure that any meetings with families are conducted in a comfortable, private space, in an unhurried manner. If this information must be shared, we will always be clear with parents beforehand about how we will respect confidentiality and share information sensitively, only where it is in the interests of the bereaved and the school community.

In the case of terminal illness, the school will liaise with the family to arrange for a member of staff to be the main point of contact throughout the illness. This member of staff will support the family regarding school procedures to support them during the illness and will help keep the pupil informed about events at school during any prolonged periods of absence.

A member of staff will support the pupil during their time in school, and be available to the family before, during, and after the death. Staff members will also co-ordinate attendance at the funeral, and any memorials the family may wish the school to facilitate. Where possible this may be a staff member who has an existing relationship with the family.

In turn, this staff member will be given close support by the Head Teacher and will be supported in developing their professional practice in this regard.

The first few days

Although school can provide stability and normality for staff and pupils, some flexibility may be necessary. This is at the discretion of the Head Teacher.

Bereaved young people may need time to grieve and manage overwhelming feelings, being able to leave a classroom and take time out in a safe space can be very welcome.

With family's agreement, a temporary tribute/book of condolence can be kept in a safe location where it is accessible and ideally where pupils can be supervised. The family will be offered the opportunity to visit, if they wish to, or to have photographs taken to share with them later.

Staff and pupils, will be consulted before removing any temporary tribute, giving notice to prepare them beforehand.

The funeral

The family will be consulted to:

- find out whether members of staff and/or pupils are welcome to attend any funeral.
- Identify if flowers and a collection from school are appropriate

The Head Teacher will:

- Identify the practicalities of issues such as: staff cover to allow funeral attendance
- Consider whether it is appropriate to close the school on an individual basis for funeral attendance
- Gain permission from parents, if pupils are selected, to attend a funeral e.g. choir

Support for pupils

When delivering news to pupils, our school would prefer to do this in smaller groups with a familiar adult, rather than a whole school assembly.

If a pupil/teacher has died, it will be more appropriate to share the news with their class group first. This will be discussed, and information shared by the Head Teacher BEFORE pupils are spoken to in school.

A template letter to parents/carers is provided (in the appendices).

School Staff will be directly available to pupils to offer support:

It helps to feel prepared when delivering sad news, so a script will be particularly useful. Do not be afraid or surprised to show emotion, this is a human reaction.

Script ideas:

- Start by acknowledging you have some sad news to give.
- Be honest. Give the news stating simple facts, use the words dead/died.
- If known, and with the family's permission, explain briefly where and when the death occurred.
- If not known, say so, and that you will endeavour to find out. If rumours are rife, say which of these are not correct, if known. Where appropriate, remind pupils of their responsibilities and the impact when posting on social media.
- Talk briefly and positively about the person who died without eulogising them.
- Mention any arrangements already in place, including for those needing support.
- Acknowledge that not everyone will be feeling sad and that is OK.
- Allow a break in the timetable for pupils to process the news and take a little time-out.

Examples from Winston's Wish (see appendix)

"I've got some really sad news to tell you today that might upset you. I know most of you will have heard of cancer, and know that sometimes people with cancer get better, but other times people die from it. Mrs Smith, the Geography teacher and Year 11 tutor, has been ill with cancer for a long time. I have to tell you that Mrs Smith died yesterday in hospital."

"Sometimes people have accidents at work, at home, at school or on the road. People may be hurt or injured in the accident and they may have to go to hospital for treatment. Sadly, there are some accidents that cause people to die. I have some really sad news to tell you that might upset you. Yesterday Stephen, who is in Year 4, was in an accident and he was so badly injured that he died".

Support available at school for pupils includes: all school staff (teachers and teaching assistants), LMT, SENCO and Pastoral Lead.

Outside agencies such as: School Nurse, Rainbows, Dr G Lavan Educational Psychologist, CAMHS, Winston's Wish, Barnardo's etc.

Support for staff

Supporting bereaved pupils can be stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions. At certain points in time, some members of staff may be more vulnerable due to circumstances in their own lives.

Staff can access support from school: SLT and colleagues, such as the Pastoral Lead (Rainbows) or the SENCO who has received Bereavement Training through Mary Stevens Hospice, as well as: Parish Priest, School Nurse, Educational Psychologist, Counselling and can be given support to access other outside agencies.

Remembering

The family of the person who has died will be consulted about any plans for a memorial, assembly or other tribute.

If a more permanent memorial (a tree, a special garden, a piece of artwork, a bench) may be appropriate, the future removal, relocation or replacement will need to be managed sensitively.

Supporting a bereaved pupil

Returning to school after a bereavement

Most grieving pupils do not need a 'bereavement expert', they need the support of familiar and trusted adults. School, with its familiar environment and routines, can be a place of comfort for a bereaved young person. It can be helpful to meet with the pupil and their family/carers to establish what has happened and to discuss their return to school. This could be a familiar adult, such as the class teacher, Phase Leader, SENCO, Pastoral Lead, Assistant Head, Deputy or Headteacher or the Parish Priest.

The purpose of this meeting should be to:

- Acknowledge the death.
- Find out how the pupil would like to share their news.
- Organise a safe space for the bereaved pupil to go if they feel over-whelmed by their grief and need a 'time-out'. How will they inform staff of this? For example, a 'time-out' card, a non-verbal signal or message. How will this be communicated to all staff?
- Consider whether to provide 'time-out' activities – journals, art and craft, books, screen time, memory boxes etc.
- Set guidelines for communication – with the pupil, between members of staff and between home and school.
- Consider providing support for peers when they have a bereaved friend.

A short film is available on the Child Bereavement UK website:

childbereavementuk.org/for-teachers-when-a-pupil-returns-to-school-afterbeing-bereaved

Longer term support

It should be remembered and considered that the pupil will continue to grieve for the rest of their life and may require ongoing support. Significant dates or anniversaries, Mother's/Father's Day, etc. may be particularly difficult.

Regular contact with the family/carers and reviews with the pupil will help to build up an overall picture of how the pupil is coping throughout their time at school.

Pupil Progress

Consideration must be made, concerning the fact, that the grief may impact the pupil's academic progress. Some pupils work hard and may put themselves under extra pressure to succeed, while others may find it difficult to focus in class and on their work. There may also be significant changes in their behaviour both inside and outside of school. Any concerns should be raised as soon as possible with the SENCO, SLT and/or Pastoral Lead.

Transition

Bereaved young people can find change difficult, so preparing them in advance (where possible) may help them to voice their worries and ease the process.

Each new class teacher or school should be made aware of any bereavement issues during transition whether within school or between schools. If the pupil is already vulnerable (CLA, SEND) then transition should be discussed with all relevant parties well in advance (where possible) of any transitions.

Death, grief and bereavement in the curriculum

Teaching the topic of death, grief and bereavement will help pupils to understand feelings of grief and prepare them for the future. Informing parents and carers in advance will help to gather information about previous bereavements so that vulnerable pupils can be prepared for the lesson. This will be part of the PSHE/RE policies and curriculum.

Recently bereaved pupils may find it helpful if they are given the option to work elsewhere or step outside, if they think it would be too painful to attend. The Pastoral Lead, SENCo, Parish Priest and the School Nurse can be contacted to help pupils at this time.

(See Elephant's Tea Party resource on Child Bereavement UK's website)

Support for staff

*Information about training can be found at childbereavementuk.org Or contact Child Bereavement UK's Helpline on **0800 02 888 40***

Being alongside anyone experiencing a loss can be emotionally draining and supporting a bereaved pupil particularly so. At certain points in time, some members of staff may be more vulnerable due to circumstances in their own lives.

School can support these members of staff and utilise other staff members to help share the load. Staff can be supported within school from staff such as LMT, SENCo, Pastoral Lead, Parish Priest, Educational Psychologist and School Nurse. They can also be signposted to outside agency support including Counselling.

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 or friend
- 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
- Be aware that there may be changes to the children's behaviour, emotions and mood during this time and support them with this.

Appendix 1

Example letter for parents in case of a tragic death (Winston's Wish):

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the tragic death of <Name>, who has been a teacher at this school for <number> years.

Our thoughts are with <Name>'s family at this time and in an effort to try and respond to his/her death in a positive manner, all children have been informed.

Yours sincerely

<Name> Head teacher

Dear Parents,

The children were told that <Name> died from an asthma attack on <Date>. A number of pupils have been identified as being asthmatic and <Name>, the School Nurse has today reassured them that it is unusual for a person to die from asthma.

When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of feelings - sadness, anger, and confusion - which are all normal. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school, but I have made available some information which may help you to answer your child's questions as they arise. You can obtain this from the school office.

The funeral will take place at <Named Church or Crematorium> on <Day and Date> at <Time>. Your child may wish to attend the funeral. If this is the case you may collect your child from school and accompany them to the church.

Yours sincerely

<Name> Head teacher

Appendix 2

Example letter for parents in case of a death from illness (Winston's Wish):

Dear Parents

Your child's tutor had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>

They were told that <name> died from an illness called cancer. Sometimes people who have cancer can get better, but other times people die from it. <Name> had been ill with cancer for a long time and died at home yesterday.

When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of feelings of sadness, anger, and confusion - these are all normal. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school, but I have made available some information which may help you to answer your child's questions as they arise. You can obtain this from the school office.

The funeral will take place at <Named Church or Crematorium> on <Day and Date> at <Time>.

Your child may wish to attend the funeral. If this is the case you may collect your child from school and accompany them to the church. Please inform your child's tutor if this is the case.

Yours sincerely

<Name> Head teacher

Bereavement support links

CRUSE- Bereavement charity offering support, guidance and intervention <https://www.cruse.org.uk/> helpline- 0800 808 1677

Rainbows – Bereavement charity

<https://rainbowsgb.org/>

Winston’s Wish- support for grieving children

<https://www.winstonswish.org/>

At a Loss- Bereavement signposting including coronavirus pandemic bereavement resources ataloss.org

BEAD- bereavement through alcohol and drugs
beadproject.org.uk

Child Bereavement UK- Support when a baby or child of any age is dying, or a child is facing bereavement. childbereavementuk.org help line- [0800 028 8840](tel:08000288840)

The Compassionate Friends- Provides support to bereaved families after the death of a child.

tcf.org.uk

Dying Matters- Coalition of individual and organisational members across England and Wales, aiming to help people talk more openly about dying, death and bereavement, and to make plans for the end of life. dyingmatters.org

Sands- Information and support for anyone affected by the death of a baby.
sands.org.uk

Sue Ryder- Supports people living with neurological conditions and terminal illness, and for anyone experiencing bereavement after losing somebody. sue Ryder.org

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)- Emotional and practical support and local groups for anyone bereaved or affected by suicide. uk-sobs.org.uk

Managing a Sudden Death resource: childbereavementuk.org/managinga-sudden-death