

**St Michael's PS
Dunnamanagh**



Bereavement Policy

Signature of Chairperson of Board of Governors: _____

Signature of Principal: _____

Date approved: _____

Completed on: 22nd June 2020

Review Due: March 2022

RATIONALE:

In current unprecedented times with COVID 19, all of the children are acutely aware of death and loss.

However, in normal circumstances, many of the children in our care at school are likely to encounter the death of a grandparent, other relative or family friend or pet during their time in primary school. For some the loss will be more immediate and traumatic, involving the loss of a parent, sibling or personal friend and here at St Michael's we want to be as supportive and caring as we can.

AIMS:

1. To foster a caring attitude to those suffering a bereavement.
2. To encourage a consistent, yet flexible approach to the situation.
3. To inform all those concerned, including teaching staff, ancillary staff, general assistants and parents of possible approaches.

GUIDELINES:

These guidelines are particularly relevant and appropriate in cases where the loss concerned, is of a close relative or friend, but can and should be adapted according to individual circumstances.

1. Children should be allowed time to grieve. We should acknowledge their grief, reassuring them that feelings whilst frightening are normal.
2. It should be made known that staff will find the time to listen and talk and will do their best to comfort when necessary.
3. Children should be aware that staff will help them to come to terms with their feelings.
4. A distressed child should be allowed time and access to materials (Bereavement related story books and workbooks) in order that he/she may express their feelings in their own way.
5. Within the school there is a resource bank containing reference materials for staff, parents and pupils. This bank should be developed and maintained.
6. All staff and classroom assistants involved in the care of a bereaved child should be aware of the situation.
7. The possible fears, insecurities and emotions of other children which may arise from this situation should be recognised and addressed sympathetically.
8. Religious, Cultural and Social backgrounds, as well as parental wishes, should be taken into account when considering appropriate responses.
9. Answer questions as they arise -be honest and straight forward -be thoughtful about your responses -give bite size information pieces of information - be pro-active - have information ready for possible questions. These factors should be considered when giving appropriate responses.
10. Ensure all staff are mindful that although the child(ren) have experienced loss, the person is still part of their lives and should continue to be included in class discussions/activities in a sensitive way.
11. Seek outside support from agencies that have expertise and can offer counselling facilities to assist children through their grief.

CONCLUSION:

A bereaved child, especially if the death concerned is of a close relative, parent, sibling or friend, is likely to be feeling confused, anxious and insecure. A school should aim to provide a stable and supportive environment in which he/she is able to gradually come to terms with the loss. It is recognised that this process is lengthy and support is likely to be required for a long time.

Appendix 1:

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH

INFORMATION FOR STAFF

Children and young people's understanding of death will depend on their cognitive and developmental stage. They will revisit the loss as they mature, reach significant milestones and become more able to talk about their experiences and questions in relation to death. Children and young people with learning difficulties will progress through the developmental stages at a slower pace or indeed may remain at an early stage in their understanding of death.

Children and young people do experience similar feelings to adults following a death but often express their feelings differently depending on their development age.

Age	Concept of Death	Possible Reactions
2 to 5 years	Death seen as reversible May feel they have caused the death Magical thinking - make up fantasies to fill gaps in knowledge	Fears abandonment and separation Loud protest Despair Indignant at changes in patterns or routine Sleep problems May revert to "baby" behaviours
5 to 11 years	More exposure to death and understanding of death as permanent	Withdrawal, sadness, loneliness, depression Anger, guilt, temper tantrums, nightmares Behaviour, learning or school problems Perfect child, brave and in control May become preoccupied with death
Over 11 years	Death permanent Denial - it can't happen	Withdrawal, sadness, depression, loneliness Anger, rejection, guilt Joking, sarcasm Dependence or regressing to younger age Insecurity, low self-esteem

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. It is important to allow children and young people to grieve in their own way and their own time. They may seesaw in and out of grief, needing time to play and have fun as well as to cry.

Appendix 2:

DEATH BY SUSPECTED SUICIDE

INFORMATION FOR STAFF

1. The term suicide should not be used by a school until it is determined by the Coroner's Office. Where an inquest is required it may be a considerable period of time after the death.
2. When providing support for vulnerable pupils, it would be prudent to make a working assumption of suicide, if all reasonable indicators suggest that this might be the case. Pupils and members of the community may be inclined to describe a death as a suicide before this has been established. Phrases such as 'tragic event' or 'sudden death' should be used by the school when talking to pupils.
3. In the aftermath of a sudden death within the school community pupils' vulnerability may increase. Teachers should realise that some pupils may develop suicide ideation and/or self-harm. Staff need to be proactive in identifying and monitoring these pupils. Pupils considered to be 'at risk' should be immediately referred to the Designated Teacher for Child Protection who will then notify parents and advise them of the referral pathway to obtain support for their child. This will include the child's doctor and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.
4. Schools should maintain contact with parents to ensure that appropriate action has been taken to protect and support the pupil. Careful records should be kept and securely stored as set out in the school's data protection guidelines. Action must also be taken to identify other at risk groups in the school, including close friends and relatives and to direct them to appropriate support. Information for parents can be found at Appendix 14. At any time, parents, school staff or pupils can contact the "Lifeline 24/7" crisis response helpline service (Tel: 0808 808 8000).
5. Where there appears to be an emerging cluster of perceived suicides in a school or a number of schools in close proximity, the education and library board's Critical Incident Response Teams will liaise with the relevant Health and Social Care Trusts. This coordinated response will ensure an appropriate community response to the situation while minimising sensationalism and avoiding the glamorising of suicidal behaviour.
6. As with any death, schools may wish to remember the person who has died and to pay tribute to their memory. When an apparent suicide has occurred, schools should be careful to remember the person without condoning the means of death. It is important that events are reported in a sensitive and measured way so that other vulnerable young people are not put at risk. The language used is very important.
7. Schools should remember to be vigilant around the time of the inquest, court cases and the anniversary of a death and access any support services as may be required.

Appendix 3:

RESPONDING TO PUPILS' QUESTIONS FOLLOWING A SUDDEN DEATH

INFORMATION FOR STAFF

1. It can be very difficult to respond to questions from children following a sudden death especially when the member of staff is also shocked and bereaved. Many factors will influence a pupil's idea of death - their developmental stage, their experiences, their ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, and their personal way of seeing things.
2. It is useful to agree a 'script' for all staff. The advantages of this are that staff will have a form of words to use so they are not caught unawares and that pupils get to hear a reassuring message over and over again. This is particularly reassuring and helpful to young pupils or pupils with special needs when processing the information.
3. Some questions will reveal that children feel insecure about whether the adults in their lives will be around to look after them. Reassure them that even though nobody knows the future, they can be sure that there will always be reliable adults to look after them.
4. It is not unusual for young children to ask the same question again and again. Repeating questions and getting answers helps the child understand and adjust to the loss of someone loved.
5. Sometimes children become very interested in physical details. Keep the reply very simple and factual. Repeat it as often as necessary and do not be drawn into giving further details. Be careful not to use euphemisms such as 'sleep' or 'went way' for death. Keep it simple, factual and clear. Younger children find it difficult to understand the permanence of death. Euphemisms will only make it worse.
6. When answering questions about death tell a pupil only what he or she is capable of understanding. There is no need to be evasive, but modify explanations to what the pupil can comprehend; use language the pupil can understand; and what is said is important, but the manner in which it is said has even greater significance. Be aware of voice tone. Try to answer the questions in a matter-of-fact way without too much emotion.

Suggested Answers to Certain Questions

Question: **Why did _____ die?**

Answer: "There are some things we understand and some things we don't understand. We do/don't know exactly why _____ died. The doctors have told us the reason was _____."

Question: **Why Do People Die?**

Answer: Dying is a natural part of life. All living things like plants, animals, and people are special parts of the natural world. Nature almost always gives us long, healthy lives. Like all things in nature, after many years people grow old and reach the end of life. This is called death.

Question: **Is Death Like Sleeping?**

Answer: No. Dying is not like sleeping at all. People sleep to rest and stay healthy. Sleep gives hard working parts of our body time to build up strength again. Think of how good you feel after you sleep. You feel so good because your body is rested and ready for another day. When someone dies, their body stops working. It is not resting anymore. Its job is over.

Appendix 4:

UNDERSTANDING YOUR REACTIONS

INFORMATION FOR PUPILS

You have experienced an incident which has been very upsetting for you. Even though this event is over, you may still be experiencing some reactions to it. This is normal. It is unlikely that you have experienced anything like this before and so you may never have been faced with such reactions.

Your reaction may last a few days, a few weeks or longer. Your parents, teachers and friends can help you cope with this and get rid of some of these feelings and reactions. Sometimes this might be a bit more difficult and you might need more help. This does not mean that anything is wrong with you. It only means that the event is just too powerful for you to deal with on your own. Here are some reactions you might experience.

THINKING	FEELINGS
Confused Nightmares/bad dreams Poor concentration Restless Not interested in what is going on Spending a lot of time thinking about what happened	Worried Guilty Angry Sad Easily upset Cross Overwhelmed
BEHAVIOURS	PHYSICAL COMPLAINTS
Loss of appetite Being very quiet Agitated Being quarrelsome/arguing	Feeling tired all the time Unable to rest or settle Feeling sick/knot in tummy Cold and shivery

REMEMBER

1. Your reactions are normal.
2. They should lessen in time, normally over the next few weeks.
3. If you have any concerns tell your parent or a teacher.
4. People love you and care about you. Let them help.
5. Dreams or other thoughts about the traumatic event will get less over time. They are normal reactions to what you experienced. They are signs that your mind is trying to understand what happened.

Appendix 5:

PUPILS RETURNING TO SCHOOL AFTER BEREAVEMENT

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Returning to school after bereavement can be difficult for a bereaved pupil. It can also be difficult for peers and staff to know how best to support the pupil. The circumstances of the bereavement and the age and developmental stage of the pupil will determine the approach used by teachers.

The following advice may be helpful in planning a positive return to school

1. Speak to the bereaved pupil. Check how he/she feels about coming back to school and what he/she may want to happen. Discuss the support that will be available. Speak to the parents to find out what they may want.
2. Discuss with class peers how they feel and how they can support the pupil. Discuss normal grief reactions. Encourage them to share their feelings and experiences of bereavement and how they coped. They may have sent cards or messages.
3. Ask a group of friends to be supportive during the first days following the return to school.
1. Consider a phased return. Plan for the day of the return of the pupil with a key member of staff taking the lead. When the pupil comes back to school it is important to acknowledge the loss. You may wish to say something like "I am/we are sorry that _____ died. I/We know you are sad and I/we want to support you at this time".
2. Consider giving the pupil age appropriate information on normal bereavement responses and grief reactions.
3. Allow for possible changes in emotions, behaviours, concentration, and work levels. All teachers need to be made aware.
4. Allow for "time out" when the pupil wants to be in a quiet place or to talk with a school counsellor, pastoral care teacher or another member of staff.
5. Carry on normal routines with normal approaches to discipline, with sensitivity.

Once a pupil returns to school following bereavement complete a record of this and place on pupil's file - see Appendix 6.

Appendix 6

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SCHOOL RECORD ON A PUPIL WHO HAS EXPERIENCED LOSS/BEREAVEMENT

This document should be treated as confidential and its content shared and stored in accordance with Data Protection and Child Protection Policies.

Name: _____ DOB: _____ Age: _____

Faith/culture: _____ Key Support Person: _____

IMPORTANT INFORMATION: (to include relationship of pupil to deceased, nature of bereavement, illness, accident, sudden death)

FAMILY DETAILS: (names, ages, relationships, school etc)

SIGNIFICANT DATES: (anniversary, birthday, child's/young person's birthday etc)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS BY STAFF:

Signed: _____ Date: _____

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Appendix 7:**CONFIDENTIAL****PASTORAL CARE TRANSFER INFORMATION**

This form should be completed and sent to the receiving school when a pupil is transferring from one school to another. It should be treated as confidential and its content shared and stored in accordance with Data Protection and Child Protection Policies regarding sensitive and confidential information.

NAME OF PUPIL:		
SCHOOL ATTENDED:		
PARENTAL CONTACT:		
Name:		
Number:		
CLASS TEACHER'S NAME:		
NATURE OF NEED:		
Medical	Educational	Personal/social/emotional
Background Information:		
Summary of action taken by school date:		

Action to be taken:

Completed by:
Designation:
Date:

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