

Policy for Bereavement

Introduction

Death is a subject that nobody ever wants to address. No matter how prepared we think we are, death is often traumatic and at times, unexpected. Every year, more than 20,000 children under the age of 16 will be bereaved of a parent and many more will experience the death of someone else who is special in their life.

In addition to these individual pupils, our school may also experience the death of a child or a staff member. It is almost inevitable therefore that at some time, our school will have to deal with a death that affects the entire school community.

As our pupils spend the vast majority of their time at school, teachers and staff members at Holy Trinity would be the primary source of care and support. Bereaved children will see our school as a safe haven away from the turmoil of emotions at home and will look to trusted staff members for help.

Death is something that most people choose not to think about, so when faced with it, we often find ourselves ill prepared. The purpose of this bereavement policy is to help everyone involved at a time when there may be shock, upset and confusion, ensuring that there is as little disruption as possible, effective communication and each member of the school community is supported to help them through a very difficult time.

Undoubtedly, the spirit and character of a school is severely tested when bereavement occurs. At Holy Trinity we pride ourselves on being a harmonious and caring school; one which is clear about its Christian values and its respect for all its members - pupils, teachers, managers, support staff and parents - tragedy can strengthen the quality and sense of belonging to a community and a school and this policy is designed to ensure that should we be ever faced with bereavement, we can deal with this in the best possible way.

Aims

Our main aim is to adopt a planned and considered approach which has our Christian values at the very heart. In addition to this, we aim:

- To offer support, care and nurture for those affected by loss and death in a caring, Christian environment in which everyone can respond appropriately to individual circumstances.
- To offer an understanding of the impact of loss and grief on children, staff and young people's physical and emotional health and well-being.

- To gain an insight into children/young people/staff reactions to loss and grief and how we respond as a school in order to meet the needs of grieving pupils, parents and staff.
- To provide pastoral support for pupils, parents and staff.
- To develop our pupils' understanding of death, through discussing and teaching aspects of this through the curriculum.
- To provide effective support for all members of the school community and to provide access to all relevant support materials.
- To have in place clear protocols and guidelines in the event of a child in school dying, a parent/carer/special person dying or a member of staff dying.
- To give children and staff the correct 'tools' in order to process grief.
- To encourage everyone to openly talk about any situation and know that it is OK.
- To recognise that each situation and that each individual is different.
- To consider the language that we use when dealing with death and grief.
- To consider that grief is not always about losing a human being.
- To consider how a person has actually died and how as staff we deal with this.
- To consider any cultural or religious implications and to seek advice if necessary.

Teaching and Learning

In the event of a bereavement or significant loss, we have established clear guidelines for action (found at the end of this policy). We will also prepare our pupils for such an experience by ensuring that it is dealt with within the school's curriculum. For example:

- RE - The spiritual dimension relating to loss and bereavement is explored within themes dealing with Rites of Passage, Journeys, Worship and key beliefs and values within the major world's religions.
- PSHCE - The emotional element and the nature of on-going relationships with those who suffer bereavement or loss can be explored within PSHCE and circle time.
- Science - The reality of death is included in schemes of work dealing with 'Ourselves' and 'Life Processes'.
- In other areas of the curriculum, children will be given the opportunity to reflect and express their emotions and thoughts.

In the event of a death of a child or member of staff the school's Emergency Action Plan will be used. This contains information about critical incidents and has useful telephone numbers.

Equal Opportunities

This policy has been reviewed for equality impact on 21-1-2013 and has been graded as low.

Roles and Responsibilities

The management of a bereavement situation is a whole school issue but there needs to be clear lines of accountability to ensure our aims are fulfilled. The main areas of responsibility are outlined below:

- To monitor progress and deal with external agencies
- To co-ordinate the media's enquiries
- To be the first point of contact for the individual concerned and their family or nominate a member of staff to be first point of contact
- To identify appropriate support within the school community for the individual concerned
- To offer support as appropriate to pupils/staff/governors/parents and people in the wider school community.

Monitoring & Evaluation

Governors are responsible for ensuring that the policy is implemented and to provide support in terms of media enquiries. The Head Teacher, with the support of the governors as necessary, will have overall responsibility for support and liaison in event of a death or traumatic loss. In the event that the Head teacher is absent, then the Deputy Head Teacher will take responsibility.

Policy Written: March 2013

Policy reviewed: October 2017

Policy to be reviewed: October 2019

Procedures & Guidelines on the death of a child or member of staff

Following the death of a child or member of staff at Holy Trinity the following steps will be taken immediately:

- The Head teacher will contact the family of the child or staff member to identify the facts and offer support.
- The Head teacher will contact the local authority (Education dept and Education Psychologist and Diocese to inform them of the situation.)
- The Head teacher will arrange a staff meeting which should take place as soon as possible before the start of the school day. *In the event that a death occurs out of term time, the HT or DHT in their absence will ensure that all members of staff are informed. On the first day back of term, a staff meeting will be held.*
- If the Media need to be informed, the HT with the help of the DHT and Chair of Governors will prepare a statement.
 - Calderdale PR / Media office will be contacted by the HT for advise and support.
- At the staff meeting, the HT will impart factual information. Never make assumptions or repeat what has been said by rumour.
- As a school, we would give news sensitively and empathetically, being aware that people may react in different ways.
- Be cognisant of the relationships staff may have had with the person who has died.
- To ensure that all staff are made aware of a bereavement, at the meeting, a person will be designated to have responsibility for telling people who are unable to attend the staff meeting i.e. part time staff, peripatetic staff, lunch time supervisors. *If this is out of term time, the Head teacher will take responsibility and the Deputy Head teacher will deputise in their absence.*
- We will consider carefully the best way of imparting the information to those absent e.g. by doing a home visit, by telephone, text or e-mail etc.
- At the meeting, individual staff members will be allocated roles who feel able to:
 - Support members of staff
 - Support groups of children (the most appropriate person to support the children should be well known to them and trusted)
- A decision will be made in the meeting of how the children will be informed of the death**
- The Head teacher will liaise with the individual's family, to deal with staff condolences and any funeral arrangements.
 - Flowers will always be sent to the family of the child or staff member.
 - The family will be asked if they want funeral flowers or a donation to the charity of their choosing.

- An appropriate member of staff will be identified as having the responsibility of taking phone calls and/or directing them as appropriate.
- The Head teacher will draft a letter for parents which should be sent home the same day by the school office. *If this is out of term time, the Head teacher or Deputy Head teacher in their absence, will ensure that every parent is sent a letter that is posted to their home address.*
- A staff meeting will be offered at the end of the day to ensure staff are coping with the situation and will also identify any unresolved problems or on-going issues.

- At this meeting, as a staff, the following roles and responsibilities will be discussed and allocated:
 - The HT will write an obituary - staff members will have the opportunity to be involved with this
 - The school's Housekeeper will be responsible for managing a collection for the family
 - If flowers are requested by the family, the school's Housekeeper will ensure that these are ordered.
 - The Head teacher (or whoever has been nominated as the staff member who has responsibilities for liaising with the individual's family at the initial meeting), will ascertain their wishes about the school's involvement in the funeral, if any.
 - A decision as to who will be attending the funeral will be made (staff and pupils). From this, the School's Business Manager will organise supply cover and will also inform the parents of any pupils' who may be involved.
 - A decision will be made in this meeting about the possible closure of school.
- We will ensure that staff who live alone have contact numbers of friends in case of need.
- Sources of advice, resources and support will be accessed for help in coming to terms with the bereavement. *Winston's Wish* (an online resource) will be used as a scheme of work for helping the children deal with their grief.
- We will consider any cultural/religious implications at this meeting.

A short assembly/time for reflection will be held to pray for and remember the deceased. The vicar will be invited to attend and support. This assembly will be Key stage or whole school based depending on the connection with the deceased and any school community member who have had close links with the child/staff or school community member will be invited. If appropriate the child's parents and close family/ the member of staff's family and close friends should be invited to this.

Procedures & Guidelines on the death of a family member of a child

When a child suffers a bereavement or loss at Holy Trinity the following steps and actions will be taken immediately:

- The Head teacher will contact the family of the child to identify the facts and offer support.
- The Head teacher will inform the class teacher of the child immediately with as much detail as possible and will make SLT and SMT aware.
- The Head teacher will ensure that a notice goes out to **all staff** informing them of the child who has been bereaved with details of the bereavement.
- The Safeguarding & Nurture Officer will be responsible for updating the child's welfare chronology in school to ensure that a record of this is made.
- The Head teacher will liaise with the family and will ask about the funeral arrangements.
- A member of staff from school will be made available (if the family wish) to attend the funeral of a child who has lost an **immediate** family member, who will act as a representative from the Holy Trinity school family.
- The class teacher of the child should prepare the class for the pupil's return. If possible, talk to a few of the bereaved child's friends to help them cope and explore how to be supportive in order to avoid any awkwardness in their attempts to make contact. Advise them to act normally and not overdo expressions of sympathy.
- The class teacher of the pupil who has lost an immediate family member, should encourage a short message from each class member to be sent home to the child.
- On return to school, the School's Safeguarding & Nurture Officer will be made available to work with that child and a support programme will be put in place.
- An offer of support from outside agencies will be provided if necessary, such as Hand to Mouth Puppets/Noah's Ark.
- We would encourage the child, when ready, to create a memory box and a 'star in the sky' will be added to the school's memory display.
- Individual sessions with the school's Safeguarding & Nurture Officer using resources from 'Winston's Wish' (online resources) will provide a number of activities for us as a school to utilise with the child.
- The child would be given opportunities to reflect in the Apse should they wish for this.

****Guidelines on how to break the news of death of a child, member of staff or member of our school community to our pupils' at Holy Trinity**

- ✓ Inform the children in school as soon as possible about the death.
- ✓ Where possible, the pupils should be informed in small groups i.e. their classroom
- ✓ Identify those children who had a long term and/or close relationship with the person who has died so they can be told separately.
- ✓ Allow the children to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.

- ✓ Allow the children to verbalise their feelings.
- ✓ Allow the children to discuss the situation and share their experiences of death.
- ✓ Be honest about your own feelings and talk about your relationship with the person.
- ✓ Avoid using euphemisms.
- ✓ Those children/young people who have had more involvement with the person should be given the opportunity to share their feelings and experiences either within the group or on a one-to-one situation.
- ✓ Ensure the children/young people understand that the death is nothing to do with anything they have said or done. It is in **no** way their fault.
- ✓ Reassure them that not all people who are ill or have had an accident will die and that many people get better.
- ✓ Put an appropriate time limit on the discussion. It is preferable to resume normal school activities as soon as possible thus ensuring minimal disruption within the school.
- ✓ Conclude the discussion with a prayer or special poem to remember the person who has died and their family.
- ✓ Be available for any child/young person who needs additional help and support.
- ✓ Explain to the children that the Apse is somewhere they can go to say a prayer, have a quiet moment or reflect.

Things to consider in the days following the news of a death of a pupil/member of staff

It is important to consider that following the death of a child or staff member in school, that the days that follow the event are managed sensitively and effectively. Below are some of the considerations and on-going support that Holy Trinity will endeavour to follow:

- ✓ We must ensure that the nominated staff with responsibilities for supporting staff and children are available to do so. It may be necessary temporarily to provide staff cover for their normal activities. If this is the case, supply cover should be arranged through the School Business Manager
- ✓ Keep the Apse free and use as a quiet place where children, staff, parents and members of our local community can go if necessary.
- ✓ Create a book...somewhere the children can write down how they will remember that person.
- ✓ It is preferable for there to be minimum disruption to the timetable but some flexibility may be required - remember, for many, maintaining routine is important.
- ✓ Try to engender an awareness of when people need help and support, particularly those who worked closely with the person who has died and office staff who are taking telephone calls, dealing with parents etc.



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✓ Through the nominated staff member who has responsibilities for liaising with the individual's family, ascertain their wishes about the school's involvement in the funeral, if any. This may change as they themselves come to terms with their loss.