



Bereavement Policy

April 2024

Responding to a death within the school community

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. Should we 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 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 children to share their feelings in the school environment supported by staff and when appropriate, through the use of age related structured programmes provided by for example, Rainbows Bereavement Support GB. Appropriate support will also be offered to staff through the same or a similar company.

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 in the event of notification 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:

1. Confirm the information, check it, record it and check it again. It is essential to have the facts confirmed.
2. Share the news as soon as possible with an appropriate senior member of staff.
3. The senior member of staff will convene a Bereavement Team who 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 child's parent or close relative, it is best that a family member break the news with the support of an appropriate member of staff. We will consider:

1. Who will meet with family when they arrive at school? Where?
2. Who will inform the staff? When? Where?
3. Who will inform the children/students? When? Where?

The death of a child

Should we receive the news of a child's death, we will consult with the family of the child to ascertain their wishes, we will:

1. Communicate the news with SNMAT .
2. Discuss any concerns about telling the rest of the children/staff.
3. Consider the most appropriate way of communicating the news within school; be that a full school assembly, year groups, or a class group?
4. Give children opportunities to express their feelings at the time they are informed and over the following days and weeks.
5. Avoid rumours, exaggerations and embellishment of the event, by agreeing the facts which will be stated openly and honestly without assumptions or judgements.
6. 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.
7. Plan carefully the support that will be available and tailor this, as far as possible, to the needs of the school community.
8. Inform parents the same day in the most appropriate way via text, website, email, phone or newsletter depending on the circumstances
9. Ensure time for grieving amongst the staff and enable them to share how they feel about what has happened.

The death of more than one child

Should we receive such news, SLT will be called together to be briefed with the salient facts and to decide what steps are to be taken. We will consider:

1. Who will contact parents, if necessary?
2. Who will meet with parents who arrive at school? Where?
3. Who will inform the staff? When? Where?
4. Who will inform the children/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. Louise Brimble, SNMAT PR Officer will be informed by the HT and advice taken. Members of the Bereavement Team will be responsible for supporting the preparation of 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 children 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. Having consulted with the family to ascertain their wishes, we will:

1. Communicate the news with SNMAT.
2. Gather together the staff and inform them of the news.
3. Allow time for grieving amongst the staff.
4. Allow the staff to share how they feel about what has happened.
5. Inform the teachers that they may need to address what has happened in their classes.
6. Impress on the staff what facts are to be announced to the children/students. To avoid rumours, exaggerations and development of the event, the agreed facts should be stated simply.
7. Communicate to the staff how the announcement will be made.
8. Communicate with staff how parents and the wider school community will be informed.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. Ensure that all staff are aware of any counselling/bereavement guidance that is available to them.
12. Communicate the news with St Mary's Parish Priest, SNMAT and Louise Brimble, SNMAT PR.

Notification of a death during school closure period

Should we receive the news of a **child's** death, we will consult with the family of the child to ascertain their wishes, we will:

1. Communicate the news with SNMAT.
2. Discuss any concerns about telling the rest of the children/staff.

3. Consider the most appropriate time and way of communicating the news during the closure period. It may be appropriate to wait until school reopens.
4. Avoid rumours, exaggerations and embellishment of the event, by agreeing the facts which will be stated openly and honestly without assumptions or judgements.
5. Plan carefully the support that could be available during closure. This may include inviting children affected by this into the wellbeing group already set up. It may be appropriate to arrange regular phone calls to siblings and close friends.
6. Inform parents and the wider staff in the most appropriate way via text, website, email, phone or newsletter depending on the circumstances
7. Provide support for grieving amongst the staff and enable them to share how they feel about what has happened via appropriate methods i.e. staff teams account.

Should we receive the news of a staff member's death, the appropriate senior member of staff will consult with the family to ascertain their wishes, we will:

1. Inform the staff of the news, Communicate the news with SNMAT
2. Allow time for grieving amongst the staff and enable them to share how they feel about what has happened via an appropriate format, i.e. staff teams account.
2. Decide how parents and the wider school community will be informed.
3. 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.
4. Ensure that all staff are aware of any counselling/bereavement guidance that is available to them.
5. Communicate the news with SNMAT and Louise Brimble, SNMAT PR.

Attending Funerals

A member of the SLT will make contact with the family to establish if a school presence is welcome at the funeral. Wherever possible, a senior member of staff will attend to show support for the family. It is important to recognise that, in the event of a death of someone in the school community, other members of staff and children may wish also to attend the funeral. Senior staff at the school will support this and make every reasonable effort to enable both staff and children to attend.

Return to school

We acknowledge our responsibility to 'keep a special watch' on children who have been bereaved, especially on their return to school, for an extended period and at times of transition. We further acknowledge our responsibility to prepare staff and children 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. Provision might include:

- KIT time with Wellbeing Lead
- Taking part in structured bereavement programmes
- Access to the CASY counselling service

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:

1. Confirm the facts concerning the child's sick relative or friend
2. Communicate the information as appropriate (in line with school procedures and the family's wishes)
3. Never give false hope to the child or young person
4. Discover what the child has been told of the illness
5. Allow the child to talk freely about the sick person in an appropriate setting
6. Enable the child to talk freely about how he/she is feeling
7. Be honest! If we do not know the answer to a question we will say so
8. Not inform the child 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. At appropriate times, we will hold memorials/assemblies to remember those that have died.

We will ensure we have approval from the family of the deceased to set up and subsequently record the deceased name in our school memorial book / memorial garden / memory tree. We also acknowledge our responsibility to explore issues surrounding death and bereavement within the curriculum. This will take place within the PHSE/P4C/SMSC Curriculum

Long-term support for those who grieve

We will offer children access to a range of age related peer support programmes available through our trained staff provided by for example, Rainbows Bereavement Support GB. Provision may also include:

- Taking part in structured bereavement programmes

- Access to the CASY counselling service

Support for staff who support bereaved children and colleagues

We will ensure that all staff are familiar with this policy and these procedures for responding to bereavement. Whenever necessary we will request additional support from colleagues or from external support agencies.

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed bi-annually by the Headteacher.

Next Review: April 2026