

St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Bereavement Policy

Mission statement

To follow in Jesus' footsteps, caring for each other when we work, play and pray.

At St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School, we recognise that all children have rights as outlined in the UN Convention. As duty bearers, we have the responsibility to respect these rights and are committed to supporting our children through their education and to ensure that they are rights-holders.

St Joseph's Catholic School ensures that the Jesuit Virtues underpin every aspect of school life.

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 product 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.

The rationale of Bereavement in our school is:

The death of a child, a close relative of a child, or a member of staff can be traumatic for staff and children alike. For some children this can be their first real contact with the death of someone known to them. For teachers, it can be the first time they have needed to respond professionally to the shock and sadness experienced by those in their care. St Joseph's Catholic Primary School believes in adopting a holistic approach to the care of both its children and staff. When bereavement occurs, it can affect a variety of people, in addition to the family concerned. We aim to ensure that the appropriate members of the school community are given sufficient support and advice at such times. The management of a bereavement situation will be a central role for the Principal /Vice Principal who will be supported by other members of the Senior Leadership team.

Aims of the Bereavement Policy

- To provide a response to death and bereavement which is enshrined in our faith and hope of the resurrection and in our duty of care to provide a ministry of consolation to those who mourn.

To provide clear procedures which are to be followed in the event of:

- a bereavement suffered by pupil or member of staff
- the death of a pupil or member of staff or member of the wider school community e.g. governor, former pupils and members of staff etc.
- a critical incident involving one or more pupils or members of staff

These procedures will

- identify the roles and responsibilities of key members of staff within the school and/or academy including members of the governing body/Local Academy Board/Board of Directors
- identify the lines of communication and dissemination within the school community and, where relevant, to those outside of the school community e.g. DES, Diocesan Communications Team or LA

Death and Bereavement: The Mission of a Catholic School

'I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die.' John 11:25

For the Catholic community our faith in Christ Jesus is rooted in the firm belief that it is through death that we may receive eternal life: death is not a final end but heralds the promise of eternal life whereby we may enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

The liturgy and prayers of the Church that are used when someone has died, 'offer worship, praise, and thanksgiving to God for the gift of a life which has now returned to God, the author of life and the hope of the just.'¹ Through prayer we can express our grief and sorrow for those who have died and our hope that our separation from them is only temporary: that 'one day we will be reunited in the joy of God's kingdom'.¹ Our prayer 'commends the deceased to God. In this way it recognises the spiritual bond

that still exists between the living and the dead and proclaims its belief that all the faithful will be raised up and reunited in the new heavens and a new earth, where death will be no more.’¹

‘He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more’ Revelation 21:4

Whilst we celebrate the hope of the resurrection, we are also called by the Church to be part of the ministry of consolation and to comfort those who mourn both in the immediacy of a death and through the weeks and months to come.

It is for these very reasons that every time Mass is celebrated, we pray for the eternal rest of those who have died and that the month of November is dedicated to a special time of prayer for the Holy Souls.

‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted’ Matthew 5:4

Introduction

This policy is intended to reflect St Joseph’s positive Catholic faith and ethos and should contribute to the caring community we endeavour to nurture. The main aim of the policy is to ensure that all children and staff faced with bereavement are provided with a level of quality support, which is commensurate with their needs and wishes. This support includes the opportunity for them to express their feelings in a safe environment, to be given space and time to come to terms with their loss and to access specialist support if necessary. Furthermore, the situation for the individual and the school community will be monitored over a period of time. It is our hope that anyone faced with bereavement will regard our community as an environment where individuals can grow and face the challenges that lie ahead.

This school is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff to share this commitment.

1 Death of a Close Relative of a Child

1.1 Depending on the closeness of the relationship between the child and the deceased the degree of support required may vary. In general, the following guidelines will be followed:

Principal / Vice Principal to discuss proposed approach by school with appropriate family member.

- Principal / Vice Principal to inform SLT and discuss action to be taken.
- Principal / Vice Principal to advise appropriate staff of the situation and give an indication of the length of absence (if appropriate) of the child.
- Advice may be given to staff on how to support child on his/her return to school.
- It may also be appropriate to speak to classmates and/or school friends in on how best they might help in supporting the child on his/her return to school.
- The Parish Priest will be informed of the death

1.2 The Principal / Vice Principal will carefully consider whether appropriate members of staff should visit or contact the family during their period of mourning. They will also consider whether or not the school should be represented at the funeral.

1.3 A member of staff (who is trained) will meet with child on his/her return to school and offer appropriate support where required.

1.4 The Rainbows Ambassadors will regularly monitor child over the next few months.

2 Death of a Child

2.1 On hearing of the death of a child the Principal / Vice Principal will meet immediately with the SLT to plan the school’s response. Decisions as to which group(s) of pupils should be informed will need to be made. e.g. classmates, close friends, year group, friends of brothers and sisters of the deceased.

2.2 With great sensitivity, one of the above staff will be assigned to ascertain the circumstances of the death. Where possible he/she should discuss with a close family member how the school will be dealing with the bereavement.

2.3 As soon as possible, the Principal / Vice Principal will inform all staff about the child’s death. Staff will also be given details as to which groups of children will be informed, and when and how this is to occur. They will be advised of the details that the children can be told. In addition, the parish priest, Chair of Governors and CSEL will be informed in order to provide additional support.

2.4 It is strongly emphasised that normal school routine will be maintained as much as possible. If the death occurs near the end of term then consideration should be given as to whether certain extra-curricular activities should be suspended (e.g. Merit Award activities, School Show etc.)

2.5 Staff will also be asked to be especially vigilant and provide immediate information to the Principal / Vice Principal or SLT about children who may be showing signs of distress and who may need support. The Rainbows Ambassadors will be made available to offer support. Other specialists such as the school nurse or the school psychologist will also be asked to assist.

2.6 The Principal / Vice Principal will decide as to whether appropriate members of staff (2 persons) should visit the family of the deceased.

2.7 The Principal / Vice Principal will also consider a selection process as to which members of staff and which pupils will, if applicable, attend the funeral. In this matter the wishes of the family will be taken fully into account.

2.8 Staff attending the funeral must be prepared to offer comfort and support as required. It is essential that the school has adequate staff to supervise the children not attending the funeral. This may limit the number of staff who can attend.

2.9 Should the death be of interest to the media then the Principal / Vice Principal will formulate any response in conjunction with the Local Authority/ DES Press Office. It may be necessary to advise staff, children and their families not to speak to the media and to avoid making innocent comments that might be misconstrued.

3 Death of a Member of Staff

3.1 On hearing of the death of a member of staff the Principal / Vice Principal will meet with members of the SLT to plan the school's response. At this meeting, the method of informing other staff will be decided. The Principal will also immediately inform the Chair of Governors, CSEL and Parish Priest.

3.2 Decisions as to how and when pupils will be informed will also need to be made.

3.3 Adequate support for staff and pupils will be available. The expertise of the Rainbows Ambassadors, school nurse and educational psychologist should be more than adequate to provide support for pupils.

3.4 In general staff members will be able to support each other but it may be appropriate to consult HR to provide more specialist resources.

3.5 Attendance of staff and pupils at the funeral will be discussed with the deceased's family.

3.6 The Principal / Vice Principal, in conjunction, with the SLT, will ensure that as many staff as possible are able to attend the funeral. This may involve the school having to put special timetabling arrangements in place.

4 Death of a Close Relative of a Member of Staff

4.1 The death of a partner, child or parent of a member of staff needs to be dealt with sensitively. It is essential that the member of staff is supported throughout the immediate period of mourning and on his/her return to school.

4.2 On hearing of the death the Principal / Vice Principal will meet with other members of the SLT to decide how other members of staff are to be informed. The Parish Priest and Chair of Governors will also be informed in order to provide additional support.

4.3 The Principal / Vice Principal will contact the staff member as soon as possible and convey condolences and offer whatever support is appropriate.

4.4 It is unlikely that many of the pupils will have to be informed but if so the Principal / Vice Principal, in conjunction with the SLT will decide on the appropriate method(s) to be used.

4.5 Attendance of Staff at the funeral will be discussed with the staff member.

4.6 On his/her return to work the SLT and other close colleagues must ensure that the member of staff is given appropriate support. The nature and degree of this support will vary depending on the circumstances.

5 Monitoring and Evaluating the Policy

5.1 After a bereavement, the school will review what was done at each stage and will evaluate the actions taken to see what was effective and what might have been done better. This will enable the school to plan for the future. Experience can also inform other programmes of the school or can also lead to additional support being put in place.

Reviewed: Summer 2022

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