

ST JAMES' BEREAVEMENT POLICY

This policy has the School's Motto at its heart.

**Faith in action,
Growing together,
Walking in the footsteps of Christ**

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.

Aims

The aims of the policy are to:

- To provide a framework for all staff to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with the bereavement.
- To support pupil 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 have clear expectations about the way the school will respond to death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.

Roles and Responsibilities

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, 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. The Headteacher, responsible for dealing with the media, will prepare all necessary statements and have them agreed by the Chair of Governors. Contact should be made with the Director of the Education Commission and the Diocese, to provide an agreed "news statement" as a way of dealing with media intrusion. Such statements should deal only with facts in as sympathetic a way as possible. Liaison with the individuals' families is essential, prior to reporting information to the media, in order to respect their privacy and wishes.

The Role of the Governing Body

- To approve the policy and ensure it is implemented.
- To review the policy every three years.
- To support the Head Teacher in statements used to the media.

The Role of the Head Teacher

- To monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.
- To respond to media enquiries.
- To be the first point of contact for the family/child concerned.
- To keep the Governing Body and all staff fully informed.

Responding to a Death

Breaking the News to Staff, Pupils and Families

News of the death of a close member of a child's family or the death of a pupil or member of staff must be passed to the Head or Deputy Head in their absence. They will immediately try to obtain factual information, avoiding unnecessary rumour or assumption, which could only lead to further distress.

Where possible, the Head will liaise directly with the family and agree exactly what information should be passed on to staff and pupils.

The Parish Priest will be contacted to enable them to give support to the family, pupils and staff where applicable.

The Headteacher will arrange a staff meeting as soon as it is practically possible. All staff will be informed, ideally before the pupils, remembering part time, midday supervisors and peripatetic staff that may not be in school that day. The staff team needs to be united, and space should be given to anyone who is badly affected by the news.

Discussions must take place with the family first, and their wishes considered, before any information is given to the pupils. If the family agrees, a letter home to all parents on the same day, may be appropriate. (Appendix 1)

A letter of condolence to the bereaved family should also be sent from the Headteacher. (Appendix 1)

Parents can be sent the "Dealing with Loss" guidance Leaflet from the Education Commission:
<https://www.rcaoseducation.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2020/03/6.Dealing-with-loss-Primary.pdf>

Organisations can be signposted to support pupil, parents and staff. (Appendix 2)

Pupils should be told as soon as possible to avoid rumour and uncertainty. This is best done in familiar groups by someone they know, probably their class teacher. A large assembly is not usually ideal, particularly for young children. Opportunity should be given for pupils to ask questions and respond to the news. Staff will need to be prepared to share information in age-appropriate ways. Guidance may need to be given on words to use and the approach to take. (Appendix 3)

An allocated member of staff will be in place to listen to the concerns of staff and pupils and guide them through the next steps of grief.

Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Head teacher and shared with the Chair of Governors. The Director of the Education Commission and the Diocese will be informed of this statement.

If it is appropriate, discussions will take place with the family regarding attendance at the funeral, flowers and donations, being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations. Members of staff and/or pupils will be identified who may wish to attend and the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport will be planned. (Appendix 4)

The First Few Days

As far as is possible, it is best to have as little disruption as possible. The school timetables may need a degree of flexibility to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of children affected by the situation. However, minimal disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security and familiarity. If it is a teacher who has died, the class should be covered by another teacher from the school whom the children know well and feel comfortable talking to.

Support for Pupils

In supporting both the bereaved child and the other pupils, staff should act sensitively at all times, seeking advice when necessary, from both the Head and the families involved.

The class teacher will be the first line of support for the child but, should the child need extra support away from the classroom, the Listening Ear Service will be offered for the child to share their feelings. Also, if a child finds it difficult to stay in the classroom when they are upset, it may be necessary to identify with them a suitable place, where they can go for some quiet time with an adult they trust.

Grief is a normal and natural response to loss. Both school and families need to work together to note changes in behaviour and if necessary counselling from outside agencies may be sought. Where appropriate this will involve the agreement of the families. It should be noted that not everyone needs outside counselling; grief is a natural process that can be aided by the family and school working in partnership.

Pupils who are bereaved through suicide, violent death or may have witnessed a death, will be particularly vulnerable. These pupils may experience PTSD (Post -Traumatic Stress Disorder) and are likely to need skilled

help and support, however, the informal support of familiar adults is still vital. Once identified, the Listening Ear Service and/or a referral to supporting agencies will be made to offer counselling to these pupils.

Following the death of a member of the school community a special assembly or remembrance service may be held as a way of saying 'Goodbye' and as a celebration of their life. This may take many forms, but will always be in accordance with the wishes of the bereaved family.

St James' should be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life so information should be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points.

Returning to School

Many bereaved children find returning to school as soon as possible a welcome refuge of normality after the chaos of emotion at home, and their return should be as fuss free as possible. A bereaved child will require enormous support but as far as possible, school life should go on as normally as possible. Most grieving pupils need the support of familiar and trusted adults in school. School, with its familiar environment and routines, can be a place of comfort for a bereaved young person.

Before the child returns to school, it is important to ensure that the appropriate staff are aware and prepared and that they have an opportunity to discuss with the class how to support their class colleague on their return to school.

It can be helpful to meet with the pupil and their family to establish what has happened and to discuss their return to school. This could be a familiar adult, such as the class teacher or the Headteacher.

The purpose of this meeting should be to:

- Acknowledge the death.
- Organise a safe space for the bereaved pupil to go if they feel overwhelmed 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.
- Where the bereaved is a child, a key adult will be designated to support them.

Rainbows Bereavement Support

The Rainbows Bereavement Support Group have provided high quality training to members of St James' staff in bereavement and loss so they can deliver support groups for children who have experienced a significant loss in their lives. Losses include bereavement through the death of a loved one, family breakdown or separation. The programme helps children cope with their grief and feel less alone. It helps foster emotional healing among pupils. The Rainbows Programme will be, if required, offered to children using resources developed for specific Key Stages. Foundation Stage uses Sunbeams and Key Stage 1 & 2 use Rainbows. The Rainbows Co-ordinator from The Catholic Children's Society is available to offer ongoing support and assistance to the Rainbow Facilitators at St James' School who will deliver the programme to the pupils. The programme is clearly structured and takes place once a week for 12 weeks. It gives children the opportunity to talk about their feelings in a safe and nurturing environment.

Points to Remember When Talking to the Bereaved Child

It is really important that we are honest with ourselves and recognise that someone else may be in a better position to support a child facing loss. When talking to a bereaved child we need to:

- Understand the age and level of comprehension of the child.
- Listen and consider the child's needs.
- Make sure the child's voice is heard.
- Use the given name of the deceased when speaking about them. (Nanny B, Gramps etc).
- If you don't know the answer to a child's question be honest with them and say so.
- Talk about the funeral if this is appropriate.
- Give the child the opportunity to remember even if this is very sad.

- Children grieve as adults do, but sometimes need more help in recognising and expressing their emotions.
- It is important to know what the family's beliefs are around death and dying and work with that even if very different from your own.
- Be aware of Cultural and Religious differences within the family.

Support for Staff

Supporting a bereaved child is very upsetting and emotionally demanding for staff and therefore, informal support between colleagues is vital. Opportunities to discuss feelings and reactions with colleagues, in the staffroom, are necessary and important. Support and counselling are available to any member of staff and can be arranged through the Headteacher. All staff should be aware of colleagues and offer support on an individual basis where necessary and alert a member of the LMT if they become concerned about a colleague's well-being. Staff affected by the death will be offered on-going support as appropriate. Staff will be informed of available resources to access bereavement support outside of school, e.g.: Child Bereavement & CRUSE. (Appendix 2)

Support for Parents

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support.
- Send a letter of condolence from the school.
- Depending on the wishes of the family, give out information to appropriate people.
- Give the parents and/or family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who died.
- Send a representative to the funeral.
- Hold a collection or send flowers, as appropriate.
- Invite parents/family to any commemorative events held by the school, both at the time and in subsequent years.
- If memorial work has been completed, for example a remembrance book, this should be returned to the parents at an appropriate time and the pupils informed where it has gone.
- If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed.

Parents will be told that they are welcome in the school and will be encouraged to come and visit. Past experience has shown that this can be helpful in their grieving. The first visit to the school is often difficult and will be arranged sensitively in accordance with the parents' wishes. It will then be for the parents to decide if they wish to maintain ongoing links. Each family will be different, with differing needs. Therefore, the school will always be there to act as a source of support and information.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Headteacher will ensure all staff and governors are aware of our policy and procedures. This policy and the accompanying procedures will be reviewed every three years or in the event of a death within the school community. This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Educational Visit Policy
- PSHE Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy

It was last reviewed in: Spring 2022.

It will next be reviewed in: Spring 2025

This statement of policy was approved by the Governing Body at their meeting on: -

Date: _____ 1st March 2022 _____

Signed: Mary Hutchinson (Chairperson)

 L Weedy (Head teacher)