

# St. Monica's Catholic Primary School Bereavement Policy



‘Let Trust, Respect and Love live here.’

## **1. Philosophy**

Every child is a unique gift from God, with his or her own unique gifts.

At St. Monica's, we strive to ensure that all children are offered the opportunity to develop to their full potential in individual, educational, moral, intellectual and spiritual needs.

Our school aims to be a living community of work and prayer.

We believe in supporting all staff, teaching and non-teaching, in meeting their individual needs and developing the staff as a team.

### **Aims**

At St Monica's we aim to meet the needs of all children and staff. When home circumstances are changed because of a death in the family and all around is 'different', our school aims to be a place that both child and family can rely on and gain some much needed support. If the death is of a child or member of staff, the whole school community will work together; with outside agencies as appropriate, to support each other.

### **Procedures**

Within school, we work in partnership with parents. When children join the school, we find out as much as possible about every child, to tailor the academic, social and emotional teaching in school to match their needs. Parents are encouraged to make teachers aware of any previous changes that might have profoundly affected their child (divorce, bereavement, moving, new babies' etc). If there has been bereavement, information on what the child was told (in terms of religious beliefs etc.) should be sought, in order that the school does not say anything that could confuse or upset the child or family.

### **Family Bereavement**

When school is informed of bereavement or loss, the following actions should be considered:

- The family should be contacted for appropriate support. (See Appendix 1 for addresses and relevant telephone help lines)
- The family should be asked how much and what the child already knows and how they have been involved.
- It should be explained to the family how the school can be involved to support the child and family.
- The importance of working together and liaison will be explained – both parties assessing any changes in behaviour. (Eating and sleeping patterns may change or behaviour in school may deteriorate or the child becomes withdrawn.)
- Involve outside agencies as appropriate e.g. the school nurse, Psychological Service, (CAHMS)
- For a member of staff experiencing close family bereavement, absence will be arranged for attendance at a funeral and appropriate time off in line with the Leave of Absence Policy. Additional time may be given through sick leave as appropriate.

### **Death of a child or member of staff**

When the school is informed of the death of a child or member of staff, the following action should be considered;

- Discussion should take place with the family and their wishes taken into account before decisions are taken on how and what to tell the children in school.
- Counselling should be available if necessary e.g. in cases of sudden or violent death.
- The school may be closed or as many people as possible released to attend a funeral or memorial services should it be appropriate and they wish to do so.
- Staff and children should be supported throughout the grieving period; anyone displaying signs of stress should be offered appropriate support.
- Pupils and staff may express a wish to attend or take part in the service but they should only do so with the agreement of the deceased's family or relatives' prior agreement, as well as the agreement of their own parents/carers.
- The class most affected might like to write down their thoughts and feelings; these could then be given to the bereaved family to assist in the planning of the service.
- After the service, staff and pupils should be encouraged to meet and express their thoughts and feelings as such services are important in the grieving process.

### **Terminally ill Pupils/Staff**

- In the event of a child or member of staff becoming terminally ill, their wishes and those of their parents/guardians/next-of-kin should always be respected.
- Should the child wish to attend school, the class teacher may need to inform the class of the child's condition.
- Occasionally, the child may wish to talk to their fellow classmates about their predicament themselves. Honesty about death and dying may be the best line of approach. Sometimes there is just no other way.

### **Return to School (see Appendix 3)**

- For the bereaved child or member of staff, returning to school may be traumatic.
- Where there has been a close family bereavement, in most cases everyone (teaching, ancillary staff and pupils) should be made aware of the situation before the pupil returns (providing the parents/guardians of the bereaved pupil agree).
- Staff should show appropriate compassion and allow expression to those suffering grief.
- Teachers should try to foster an environment that is compassionate, yet disciplined.
- Family life at this traumatic time; can be particularly distressing, routines upset, relationships strained, the future uncertain. For this reason, school routines should be kept as normal as possible in order to provide a respite.
- Staff should be aware of anniversaries as this can spark a revival of feelings of bereavement.
- Staff might keep an eye on those particularly affected by the death of a close associate.

### **Talking to the Bereaved Pupil**

- Try and be available to listen and support if possible, arrange a one-to-one session as soon as possible after the pupil returns to school
- Be calm and show them that you are listening and understanding by occasionally repeating what they have said and by acknowledging their emotions.
- If people feel like crying, they should cry – crying is not a sign of weakness, but often a sign of deep feeling.
- Beware of using platitudes eg “I know how you feel”, (young people may feel offended that you presume how they feel).

### **Do**

- Let the child know that you genuinely care
- Make time to be available and listen
- Accept all that the child is saying
- Allow them to express their feelings their way
- Let them know their feelings are normal
- Let them know that it is OK to cry
- Talk honestly and share your feelings
- Be honest
- Have eye contact
- Have appropriate physical contact
- Let them know that it is not their fault
- Be aware of the home situation

### **Don't**

- Stop the child talking
- Tell them how they should or should not feel
- Avoid contact
- Change the subject
- Deny your pain and feelings
- Point out things for which they should be grateful
- Be frightened of sharing your own feelings

### **Resources**

It often helps to raise difficult concepts with the children through stories. Suitable books are listed in the Appendix 2.

At St Monica's Catholic Primary School we place value on:

## **B Bereavement support**

Bereaved children are entitled to receive the support they need.

### **E Expressing feelings and thoughts**

Bereaved children should feel comfortable expressing all feelings and thoughts associated with grief, such as anger, sadness, guilt and anxiety and to be helped to find appropriate ways to do this.

### **R Remembering the person who has died**

Bereaved children have a right to remember the person who has died for the rest of their lives if they wish to do so. This may involve re-living memories (both the good and the difficult) so that the person becomes a comfortable part of the child's continuing life story.

### **E Education and information**

Bereaved children are entitled to receive answers to their questions and information that clearly explains what has happened, why it has happened and what will happen next.

### **A Appropriate and positive response from our school**

Bereaved children can benefit from receiving help and understanding from their teachers and peers.

### **V Voicing important decisions**

Bereaved children should be asked if they wish to be involved in important decisions that have an impact on their lives (such as planning the funeral and remembering anniversaries).

### **E Everyone being involved**

Bereaved children should receive support which includes their parent(s) or carers and siblings and which respects each child's confidentiality.

### **M Meeting others**

Bereaved children can benefit from the opportunity to meet other children who have had similar experiences.

### **E Established routines**

Bereaved children should be able to choose to continue previously enjoyed activities and interests.

### **N No to blame**

Bereaved children should be helped to understand they are not responsible and not to blame for the death.

### **T Telling their story**

Bereaved children have a right to tell their story in a variety of ways and for those stories to be heard, read or seen by those important to them.

## **Review**

This policy provides a framework within which to carry out carefully planned and considered bereavement support. Effectively implemented the policy will underpin our values and ethos.

## **Appendices**

## **Appendix 1**

*Useful Websites for dealing with loss and bereavement in the school community:*

[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)

[www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

<https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/bereaved-family-friends/supporting-grieving-child>

<http://www.bereavementservicemk.org.uk/>

<https://www.harrysrainbow.co.uk/>

<http://childbereavementuk.org/for-families/support/milton-keynes/>

*Useful Websites about the developmental stages of understanding death:*

<http://www.cruse.org.uk/Children/children-understanding-death>

<https://www.vitas.com/resources/grief-and-bereavement/child-development-stages>

<http://www.griefspeaks.com/id28.html>

*Useful telephone numbers and addresses:*

Winston's Wish Family Line - 0845 2030405 – national helpline offering guidance, information and support to anyone caring for a bereaved child, including professionals and family members

Childhood Bereavement Network - 020 7843 6309 – a network of child bereavement services

CRUSE Bereavement Care (0870) 167 1677 [www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk)

## **Appendix 2**

*Books dealing with death and loss*

- Beyond the Rough Rock - Supporting a Child who has been Bereaved through Suicide - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley
- As Big As It Gets - Supporting a Child when Someone in their Family is Seriously Ill - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley
- The Secret C - Straight Talking about Cancer - Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley
- I Miss You - First Look at Death - Pat Thomson

*Storybooks available in school*

- Granpa- John Burningham
- Always and Forever – Alan Durant
- The Huge Bag of Worries – Virginia Ironside
- What on Earth Do you Do When Someone Dies? – Trevor Romain
- Badger’s Parting Gifts- Susan Varley
- Saying Goodbye to Daddy – Judith Vigna
- Waterbugs and Dragonflies – Explaining Death to Young Children
- Missing mummy - Rebecca Cobb
- When someone very special dies.
- The worry monster.
- Michael Rosen's Sad book.
- When people die - Teresa Dcaccia

**Appendix 3**

### ***Support and Further Suggestions for Teachers***

Parents and carers often feel that teachers are experts on their children. They may turn to the school for advice and information, especially on matters of bereavement. It is important to remember that the family, friends and the immediate community often best support those suffering from bereavement as is the case with other stressful life events. Teachers need not be experts on the subject but they do need to use sensitivity and their skills in understanding children's development and emotional needs.

#### ***The following are some points that may be helpful to bear in mind when talking to parents and carers:***

- A death will disrupt the family for many months; in fact the family will never be the same again. Family members are grieving, relationships alter, and members may take on new roles. Sometimes there is a change of carer, house or school, all of which add to the disruption and distress experienced by the child. To support the child it is helpful to minimise, if possible, changes and disruptions in their normal daily routine and life in school.
- Bereaved family members may emotionally and physically withdraw from the child to protect themselves from more distress. Some adults will deny the bereaved child is grieving, as it will be too distressing for them to acknowledge the child's pain. This may cause distress and confusion, causing grief reactions of anger, withdrawal or psychosomatic behaviours such as headaches, stomach-ache or sickness.
- The bereaved child may regress in behaviour, becoming clingy, difficult or withdrawn. His/her schoolwork may suffer. These changes will be partly due to grief but also to the disruption and changes within the family, causing the child to feel confused and unsafe.
- The child may feel resentment, jealousy or guilt towards the dead person or child. The expression of this verbally can cause the remaining family members distress and shock. Parents and carers need to know this is normal and will decrease as the child and the family become more stable and settled.
- Parents and carers need to be informed of the benefits that a child gains in being involved in the ceremonies and rituals that follow death. An explanation as to how mourning practices help children to express their feelings and come to terms with and accept the reality of their loss can be very beneficial.
- Teachers should remember that parents and carers will often use them as role models, counsellors or extended family; looking to them for support for themselves as well as finding appropriate ways of supporting and talking with their children.
- Teachers may require their own support structures. Supporting bereaved families, whilst rewarding, can also be emotionally draining.