



# BEREAVEMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURES

BEREAVEMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURES:  
Responding to a death within the school community

**COMMITTEE:** Trust Board  
**DATE APPROVED:** Awaiting Approval  
**POLICY REVIEW DATE:**

Christ's Love is Our Foundation

## **School : *Thomas Becket Catholic School***

### **Christ's Love is Our Foundation**

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. For this reason as a community we have sought to prepare with sensitivity for this eventuality.

We acknowledge that should our school community be informed of a death, our response should be a planned and considered one. This ensures that due time is given to reflect, consider and most of all to be effective in our communication.

There is a "*School Bereavement Team*" to be chaired if and when necessary by a '*Bereavement Team Leader*' who will be the most senior appropriate member of staff in school. Members of the Team will be the Deputy Headteacher and our chaplain. *These staff members will be the only person to make contact with the family at this time to ensure that privacy and space for the family is a priority.*

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 at times swiftly, we will ensure that the immediate family of the deceased have been consulted prior to any wider communication. It is of the utmost important that their wishes at such a sad time are respected. In effect the bereavement team only will make contact with the family after notification and will assure confidentiality. In this conversation the relatives will be assured that no announcement regarding the death of their loved one will be made without them phoning the school first to say that this is the right time for information regarding the death to be released. The bereavement team will await this contact.

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 students to share their feelings in the school environment supported by trained staff and, when appropriate, through the use of age-related structured programmes provided by Rainbows Bereavement Support GB. Appropriate support will also be offered to staff. As a Catholic School the Chapel will be used as a gathering point for individual and group expressions of grief in a climate of prayer and support. At an appropriate time, the Diocesan Education Service (NORES) will be informed of the death so that they can communicate their condolences.

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.

**TO BE FOLLOWED IN THE EVENT 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 by expressing their condolences to the family.

Should we receive the news of a death, in **ALL** cases the person receiving the news will:

- Contact the Headteacher who will express the condolences of the school and will follow the wishes of the family regarding confidentiality. In this conversation the relatives will be assured that no announcement regarding the death of their loved one will be made without them phoning the school first to say that this is the right time for them to let people know of the death. The Headteacher will await this contact:
- Confirm the information, check it, record it and check it again. *(It is essential to have the facts confirmed)*
- Share the news as soon as possible with the Bereavement Team **only**

The Bereavement Team 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
- Information regarding a death will only be disclosed after the express permission of the family is given to the headteacher or an assigned member of the bereavement team.

### **THE SUDDEN DEATH OF A PARENT OR CLOSE RELATIVE**

We acknowledge that in the case of the death of a student's parent or close relative, it is best that a family member break the news with the support of an appropriate member of staff. If this is not possible the Bereavement Team Leader will ensure someone suitable to break the news to the student or member of staff concerned.

The news of the death will be given to all relevant staff as soon as the permission of the family is given for this to be released.

### **THE DEATH OF A STUDENT IN SCHOOL OR OUTSIDE OF THE SCHOOL**

Should we receive the news of a student's death, we will call appropriate colleagues together **having consulted with the family of the student to ascertain their wishes,**

We will:

- Encourage staff to voice their concerns they have about telling the rest of the students.
- Consider the most appropriate way of communicating the news within school; be that small groups or a significant Form /Class
- Give students opportunities to express their feelings at the time they are informed and over the following days and weeks.
- Avoid rumours, exaggerations and embellishment of the event, by agreeing the facts which will be stated openly and honestly without assumptions or judgements.

- 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. Planned support will be available.
- Ensure time for the expression of grief amongst the staff and enable them to share how they feel about what has happened.
- Ensure that support services are signposted

**In the event of a death in school parents, medical staff and the Police need to be informed.**

**The bereavement team need to meet quickly to plan next steps in collaboration with the emergency services and the family.**

**If the death is within school then the Bereavement Team will be led by the family as to any disclosure of information to anyone else until such time as the relevant family have been informed.**

### **THE DEATH OF MORE THAN ONE STUDENT (For example on a school trip)**

Should we receive such news, members of the *Bereavement Team* will be called together to be briefed with the salient facts and to decide what steps are to be taken. Information may already have been 'sent' from the incident.

We will consider:

- Who will contact parents, if necessary?
- Who will meet with parents who arrive at school? Where?
- Who will inform the staff? When? Where?
- Who will inform the students/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. Members of the Bereavement Team responsible for dealing with the media will prepare all 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 students but also grieving on a personal level for a colleague. **Information of a death must only be released with the explicit permission of the relatives of the member of staff.**

Should we receive the news of the death of a member of staff; the Bereavement Team will be called together to seek an appropriate way forward.

If it is on the school site :

- Who will contact the next of kin?
- Who will meet with the next of kin who arrive at school? Where?

Confidentiality in this situation must be upheld until such time as the next of kin and family wish to make this situation public. The official school contact with the family will be an assigned member of the bereavement team.

We will use the guidance notes below: -

- a. Communicate to the staff how the announcement will be made at the appropriate time once the permission of the next of kin has been expressed to the appropriate member of the bereavement team.
- b. Gather together the staff and inform them of the news
- c. Allow time for staff to respond and to express grief
- d. Allow the staff to share how they feel about what has happened.
- e. Inform the teachers that they may need to address what has happened in their classes.
- f. Impress on the staff what facts are to be announced to the students. To avoid rumours, exaggerations and development of the event, the agreed facts should be stated simply by the Bereavement Team Leader
- g. 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.
- h. 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.

### **BREAKING SAD NEWS**

Should we need to break sad news to children or young people we will first refer to the *"Guidelines for Breaking Sad News of a Death to a class or assembly"*

### **MEMORIALS and FUNERAL SERVICES**

Should we need to consider our involvement with any funeral services or memorial services or memorials, we will first refer to the *"Guidelines for Memorials and Funeral Services"*

### **RETURN TO SCHOOL**

We acknowledge our responsibility to 'keep a special watch' on students and staff who have been bereaved, especially on their return to school and for at least a two-year period and at times of transition. We further acknowledge our responsibility to prepare staff and students 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.

**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. For this reason, the school will work with the support agencies surrounding the death of a child.

When supporting children and young people who are experiencing anticipatory grief, we will:

- Confirm the facts concerning the student's sick relative or friend
- Communicate the information as appropriate (in line with school procedures and the family's wishes)
- Never give false hope to the child or young person
- Discover what the student has been told of the illness
- Allow the student to talk freely about the sick person in an appropriate setting
- Enable the student to talk freely about how he/she is feeling
- Be honest! If we do not know the answer to a question we will say so
- Not inform the student 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. During November or December each year we will hold a special assembly/liturgy/act of remembrance as appropriate, to celebrate the life of those members of our community who have died. As a Catholic School there will be a rich seam of prayer and spiritual support through all of school life which will come to the fore when needed at a time of crisis

### **LONG TERM SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO GRIEVE**

We will offer students access to a range of age-related peer support programmes available through our trained staff provided by Rainbows Bereavement Support GB. Within the MAT referral systems will enable help where necessary through CHUMS or other appropriate support services.

### **SUPPORT FOR STAFF WHO SUPPORT BEREAVED STUDENTS AND COLLEAGUES**

We will ensure that all staff are familiar with this policy and these procedures for responding to bereavement and will offer training as part of our staff development programme. This is currently in place through our Chaplaincy Service in the MAT. Whenever necessary we will request additional support from colleagues or from external support agencies.