Diocesan Education Service

**Guidelines for Writing a Bereavement Policy**

**What is the purpose of a Bereavement Policy?**

The Bereavement Policy will provide clear information and procedural direction so that in the event of a death and bereavement a school is able to respond calmly and efficiently. It will give the necessary guidance and support to those who are grieving in a sensitive and compassionate manner. The policy will also signpost to resources and organisations which may be relevant as part of the response needed according to the given circumstances.

When a death occurs, whether it is anticipated or unexpected, it is an emotional and sometimes traumatic time. A well-structured Bereavement Policy will enable all members of staff to know the expectations of themselves and others and the various roles and responsibilities. It will give them confidence in dealing with the given situation.

The Bereavement Policy will need to be applicable to different situations: whether it is supporting a bereaved pupil or member of staff; or following the death of a pupil or adult member of the wider school community or responding to critical incidents. The level and extent of support in all of these situations will differ accordingly.

Whilst there are a range of resources readily available to help schools in writing a Bereavement, for a Catholic school, it is imperative that such a policy is founded upon the beliefs and teachings of the Church.

**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.’ 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’. 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.’

*‘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*

*This statement should be inserted into your Bereavement Policy*

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**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
* provide signposts towards prepared templates for letters, resources and organisations to support the bereaved
* provide responses in the immediacy of a situation as well as support for the weeks and months to follow
* honour the memory of those who have died and those who mourn within the traditions of the Church

whilst being sensitive to the faith and cultural backgrounds of the bereaved

In addition to the aims listed above there may be other aims you wish to include. You may also want to indicate how this policy links to other policies such as a Critical Incident Policy or Safeguarding Policy.

**The Structure of a Bereavement Policy**

The suggested structure outlined below follows that which is offered to schools by *Managing Bereavement: A guide for Schools[[1]](#footnote-1)* from Child Bereavement UK. You will also find it useful to make use of Rainbows *Sample School Bereavement Policy and Procedures*.[[2]](#footnote-2) The notes and references contained within these table are additions made by the DES with the purpose of being used in conjunction with the guidance. These additions are to ensure that the policy, at all times, is founded on our Catholic Mission.

*Please note: Items within the table in italics are resources which can be found on the DES webpage and resource list*

**Section 1: The death of a pupil or member of staff**

* Roles and responsibilities
* Procedures
* The first few days
* The funeral
* Support for pupils
* Support for staff
* Remembering

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| **Section of policy** | **Questions/Points to address** | **Points to consider/useful information** |
| Roles and responsibilities | Ensure the role of the Parish Priest/Chaplain is included and that they are in the list of people to be contacted.  Ensure contact with CESL/Chair of Governors is included.  Ensure contact with DES is included particularly where there may be press interest.  Named person should release a press statement ***only after taking advice****.*  When sharing the news with both staff and pupils ensure that it is a time rooted in prayer and reflection.  Communications with all parents should also include prayer.  Identify those able to offer additional pastoral care to the school community e.g. Lay Chaplains, Family Workers, Deacon, Parish Sisters etc. | Advice should be taken from the DES and Press and Communications Officers of the Archdiocese:  DES: 01675 464755 Director or one of the Deputy Directors  Press and Communications: Caroline Blesto or Faye Fawcett  Tel: 0121 230 6286  [caroline.blesto@rc-birmingham.org](mailto:caroline.blesto@rc-birmingham.org)  [faye.fawcett@rc-birmingham.org](mailto:faye.fawcett@rc-birmingham.org)  For urgent communication matters out of office hours the team can be contacted on the following mobile numbers:  Caroline Blesto - 074 6467 4630  Faye Fawcett - 078 2378 94 57  *When Somebody Dies: Sample letters*  *Sudden Bereavement Flow Chart*  *Scripture Quotations and Prayers for those who have died*  *Art of Dying Well (prayers for those who have died)* |
| Procedures | Ensure the ‘script’ is rooted in the Catholic Mission. | *When Somebody Dies: Sample Policy and Procedures* |
| The first few days | Identify how Church, Chapel, Prayer Room, Prayer Garden or other such space will be utilised.  Ensure pastoral care by named people above is available.  Consider creating and upkeeping a permanent Book of Remembrance | *Children’s Understanding of Death* |
| The funeral | The funeral may be a Requiem Mass or funeral service in the parish church or a funeral service elsewhere.  The wishes of the family remain paramount at this time. Any arrangements which include the involvement of the school must be in consultation with the family.  In some circumstances it may be appropriate for the school to be closed for some or all of a day. | Decisions over whether pupils from the school should attend a funeral need to be carefully considered on a case by case basis and always in conjunction with their own parents or carers. |
| Support for pupils | Identify resources and support materials  Consider becoming a Rainbows school/academy | *Children’s Understanding of Death*  Rainbows Bereavement UK offers support to children and young people experiencing bereavement due to loss and separation. For more information on staff training and resources please contact Rebecca Brolly (Primary) [r.brolly@bdes.org.uk](mailto:r.brolly@bdes.org.uk) or Richard Smith (Secondary) [r.smith@bdes.org.uk](mailto:r.smith@bdes.org.uk) |
| Support for staff | Pastoral care from the Parish Priest, Chaplain, Deacon or Parish Sisters  Support from the DES | If you require any additional support from the DES contact the Deputy Director for Catholic Education Maggie Duggan [m.duggan@bdes.org.uk](mailto:m.duggan@bdes.org.uk) Tel: 01675 464755 Ext:115 |
| Remembering | Ensure there is a system for recording dates of anniversaries E.g. Book of Remembrance. This can be kept in the Chapel/prayer room and left open on the current month.  Ensure that the Month of the Holy Souls is used as a time to remember and pray for deceased pupils, staff and family members. | Anniversaries can be commemorated at a Mass said for the person who has died and by including their names in the Prayer of the Faithful. Liturgies can also be used to commemorate the deceased and to pray for those who mourn.  Spaces such as a Memorial Garden within school can include specific items of furniture or trees, plaques, pieces of art etc, dedicated to those who have died.  *Scripture Quotations and Prayers for those who have died*  *Art of Dying Well (prayers for those who have died)*  *Activities for allowing children to express grief* |

**Section 2: Supporting a bereaved pupil**

In this section the framework rightly focuses upon the support for a child who has suffered bereavement. The Support for Staff section deals with the support offered to those who are supporting pupils who are grieving. However, you may also want to include in this section a statement about support for members of staff who have been bereaved or make reference to other policies where this is covered. Please refer to Section 4 of Holy Trinity Catholic Primary School’s Bereavement Policy for an example of this.

* Returning to school after a bereavement
* Longer term support
* Death, grief and bereavement in the curriculum
* Support for Staff

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| **Section of policy** | **Questions/Points to address** | **Points to consider/useful information** |
| Returning to school after a bereavement | Include pastoral care from the Parish Priest, Chaplain, Deacon, Parish Sisters or Lay Chaplain as appropriate.  Include Chapel, Prayer Room and Prayer Garden as safe spaces for time-out. | *Children’s understanding of death*  *Scripture Passages and Prayers for Bereavement*  *Activities for allowing children to express grief*  *Beliefs of different faith traditions regarding death and the afterlife* |
| Longer term support | Please refer to remembering section above.  Ensure awareness of other times in the year where sensitivity is needed e.g. Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Christmas etc.  Consider becoming a Rainbows school/academy | [*www.rainbowsgb.org/*](http://www.rainbowsgb.org/) |
| Death, grief and bereavement in the curriculum | Identify opportunities in the curriculum where death grief and bereavement can be included. Ensure that this focuses upon Catholic beliefs and traditions and also includes those of other faiths and religions and none. | Identify how this links in with RSE, PHSE and SMVSC.  *Children’s understanding of death*  *Beliefs of different faith traditions regarding death and the afterlife*  This will need to be age appropriate.  Source age appropriate stories which can be incorporated into school and/or class libraries.  Books and Resources p41-58 *Managing Bereavement: A guide for Schools* |
| Support for staff | Include pastoral care from the Parish Priest, Chaplain, Deacon, Parish Sisters or Lay Chaplain as appropriate.  Identify opportunities for CPD. |  |

**Section 3 Useful Phone Numbers & Resources**

**In this section you can include information of local/national support groups, charities and organisations which are able to provide advice and support. You can also refer to relevant resources.**

**Section 4: Monitoring and Evaluating the Policy**

**Following a bereavement, it is good practice to review the effectiveness of what was undertaken at each stage and identify any aspects which could have been better. Improvements, if required, should be put in place.**

**Identify when the policy will next be reviewed by Governors.**

1. Free resource: *Managing Bereavement: A guide for Schools* from Child Bereavement UK. [www.childbereavementuk.org/education-sector](http://www.childbereavementuk.org/education-sector) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Rainbows Bereavement and Loss GB *Sample School Bereavement Policy and Procedures* [www.rainbowsgb.org/corona-virus-how-rainbows-can-help/](http://www.rainbowsgb.org/corona-virus-how-rainbows-can-help/) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)