

St Mary's CE Primary School

Bereavement Policy

All the activities in St Mary's School are carried out in the Christian spirit and should promote the school values of Faith, Family and Future – Building a positive future for all as part of God's loving family.

St Mary's is a UNICEF Rights Respecting School which prides itself in providing equal opportunities for all members of its family regardless of SEND, religion, sexual orientation, culture, gender, ethnic origin, colour or age. All pupils have access to the curriculum, and the right to a learning environment which dispels ignorance, prejudice or stereotyping.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Teaching, Learning, Curriculum and Assessment Policy, Behaviour and Relationships Policy, Marking and Feedback Policy and Early Reading and Phonics Policy.

Statement of Intent

At St Mary's CE Primary School, we understand that bereavement is faced by members of our school community at different times, whether this is the death of a family member, a friend or a member of the school community. We understand the importance of providing support to pupils, staff, governors and the wider school community during and after bereavement. This policy provides a framework whereby this support is provided within the ethos of our school values, and outlines how the school will respond to these sensitive situations.

1. Aims

The core intentions of the policy are:

- To support pupils and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and community.
- To identify key staff within school and the Local Authority and clarify the pathway of support.

2. Legislation and guidance

The Children Act 1989 aimed to ensure that the welfare of the child was paramount, working in partnership with parents to protect the child from harm. All intentions of this policy endorse that aim, as we endeavour to counter any adverse effects of bereavement and maintain pupils' emotional well-being.

3. Rationale

Every 22 minutes in the UK a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 41,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, and, sadly, around 12,000 children die in the UK each year (Statistics from child bereavement uk).

Within our school community there will almost always be some children who are struggling with bereavement – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil. We would hope to not encounter such circumstances, but the statistical inevitability of such an occurrence implies the necessity of having a Bereavement Policy in place in order that we might be proactive, rather than reactive, when responding to these challenging situations. Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children – or staff – require, though referral to more specialist support should be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex. Additional information and resources can be accessed at www.childbereavement.org.uk.

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 The role of the Governing Body

- To approve this policy and ensure its implementation as an active document, to be reviewed every three years.

4.2 The role of the Headteacher

The Headteacher has overall responsibility for the policy and its implementation, for liaison with the governing body, parents/carers, the Local Authority and other relevant outside agencies. The Headteacher will:

- Monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.
- Respond to media enquiries.

- Keep the governing body fully informed.
- Be the first point of contact for the family/child concerned.
- Advise and support staff, consult on referral pathways and help with the identification of more complex grief.

4.3 The role of pastoral staff

- To have bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff.
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies.
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary schools. NB: It is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for pupils, supporting each other and implementing this policy. To this end, it is desirable that the whole school staff have some awareness of bereavement through a whole school training if possible.

5. Procedures

5.1 Terminal illness

In the case of terminal illness, the school will liaise with the family to arrange for a member of staff to be the main point of contact throughout the illness. This member of staff will support the family regarding school procedures to support them during the illness and will help keep the pupil informed about events at school during any prolonged periods of absence. A member of staff will support the pupil during their time in school, and be available to the family before, during, and after the death. Staff members will also co-ordinate attendance at the funeral, and any memorials the family may wish the school to facilitate. Where possible, this may be a staff member who has an existing relationship with the family. In turn, this staff member will be given close support by the Head Teacher, and will be supported in developing their professional practice in this regard.

5.2 The first few days following a death

Confidentiality: To best support staff and pupils during times of bereavement it will be necessary to ascertain sensitive and potentially distressing information regarding the nature of an illness or cause of death. We will always ensure that any meetings with families are conducted in a comfortable, private space, in an unhurried manner. If this information must be shared, we will always be clear with parents beforehand about how we will respect confidentiality and share information sensitively, only where it is in the interests of the bereaved and the school community.

Sharing information: At times of bereavement it is important that rumour and speculation are avoided. We will take time to talk to the affected family or staff member about the circumstances surrounding the bereavement. Knowing the background will help us provide the best support for those affected by bereavement. We will discuss with the family the extent to which the circumstances should be shared with other staff members and pupils, in order to provide the best support for the grieving child.

Informing pupils: To help pupils understand bereavement we will typically aim to inform groups of children of the death of a pupil or staff member in small groups, supported by staff with whom they are familiar. We will allow children to ask questions, and will endeavour to answer sensitively, factually and using unambiguous language to help all children understand what has happened. Staff will follow the guidance set out in appendix 4, a guide on how to deliver sad news written by childbereavement.uk. We will seek to involve the bereaved family in these decisions, and will offer to draft a letter to parents explaining the situation (see appendix 1).

Details on how, when and with whom to share information can be found on appendix 11.

5.3 Support for pupils

In the event of the pupil being bereaved of a loved one or close friend, we will discuss what the pupil has already been told in order to provide clarity and consistency for the pupils. Where there are religious considerations we will also seek the views of family, and endeavour to respect those beliefs. We will allocate a member of staff to whom the pupil relates well to be a mentor in school and encourage the pupil to feel free to express themselves when and how they choose, by providing time-out space and a range of activities and channels through which the pupil may wish to express their feelings. Staff may refer to appendix 6 – supporting a bereaved pupil and appendix 7 – managing grief, for further guidance.

Where a member of the school community has died, the school will endeavour to provide additional space and time for those staff or pupils most likely to be particularly affected. Staff will be expected to be particularly vigilant regarding the emotional wellbeing of pupils close to the deceased.

When a bereaved pupil returns to school, we recognise that the child may want to get straight back into being with friends, work and routine. They will have been surrounded by grieving family members and often a chaotic household of visitors. School may be their break from that. We will identify a key member of staff who will remain a key point of contact for the family and ensure regular contact depending on the needs and wishes of the family. Further information and guidance on supporting the return of a bereaved pupil can be found on appendix 12.

Following the return of a bereaved pupil, we will provide on-going support if the child and family agree and would find this helpful. We will endeavour to include the child in commemorative days such as mother's/father's day, by sensitively providing time for reflection and remembrance, where appropriate. We will also make a note of significant dates which might affect the pupil, e.g. date of death, birthdays and anniversaries. Further information on providing ongoing support for a bereaved pupil can be found on appendix 13.

We recognise that not all children will react to a death in a similar way, and we know some children with special educational needs or disabilities may need some extra support in understanding what has happened. When talking about death and bereavement with a child with learning difficulties, we will consider who should be the child's key worker; where the student is most receptive for quiet discussions, what language we should use, how information should be communicated, we will proceed at a level appropriate to the child and maintain normal routines as much as possible. Further information on how to support a bereaved child with SEND can be found on appendix 14.

5.4 Support for staff

Following bereavement, it is only to be expected that some members of staff will be emotionally affected and would benefit from the provision of some time for reflection. The following support may be helpful:

- A specific room could be allocated- e.g. the Staff Room - for the duration of a lunchtime to enable staff to meet and share their thoughts. It should be emphasised that anything shared on such occasions should be held as confidential and not for public airing.
- Access to one to one time with a member of staff who is trained in bereavement support.
- The Educational Psychology team offer counselling support and staff will be reminded about this service.
- Availability of information about accessing bereavement support outside of school (see appendix 15)
- Counselling through our Occupational Health provider will be offered to all.
- Support from St. Mary's clergy will be made available alongside opportunities for prayer.

Bereavement leave, sometimes called compassionate leave, is a period of paid time off work that employees receive if one of their loved ones has died. Some organisations provide a fixed period of bereavement leave - usually 3 to 10 days - while others offer different periods depending on the relationship the employee had with the person who has died.

From 2020 all employees whose child has died will be entitled to two weeks paid parental bereavement leave that can be taken at any time after the death of a child. It is against the law to dismiss employees or otherwise treat them unfairly for using their entitlements to paid or unpaid leave.

Long-term arrangements, such as a phased reintroduction, flexible hours or adjustments to their workload will be discussed when the member of staff are ready to return to the workplace.

Further information on how to support a member of staff who has lost a loved one, can be found in appendix 9.

5.5 Funeral arrangements

Subject to the wishes of the family, in the event where a pupil or staff member has died, the school may be closed if necessary in order to allow staff and pupils to attend the funeral.

Staff can support pupils who ask questions about funeral arrangements by referring to appendix 7 – explaining funerals.

5.6 Media interest

Where there is media interest, no member of staff should engage with the media. All comments should be made through the Head Teacher or Chair of Governors if the Head Teacher is unavailable.

5.7 Remembering

If a pupil or member of staff dies, the school community may welcome a collaborative project to help to remember the person who died, creating something positive for everyone to share. In this way, pupils and staff may feel more connected to each other and take comfort in working together, even though they may be physically separated. The finished project could be shared within the school and, if appropriate, with the family of the person who died. Further suggestions can be found on appendix 8 – collaborative projects.

6 Monitoring arrangements

This policy and information report will be reviewed by the Head Teacher annually. It will also be updated if any changes to the information are made during the year. It will be approved by the Governing Body.

This policy was adopted by: St Mary's C.E. Primary School, Davyhulme	Date: January 2025
To be reviewed: January 2029	Signed: A L Daniel

Appendices

1. Template letter to parents
2. Template letter to parents – death of a pupil
3. Template letter to parents – death of a member of staff
4. Delivering sad news
5. Supporting bereaved children
6. Managing grief
7. Explaining funerals
8. Collaborative Projects for Remembering
9. Guidance on how to support a member of staff who has lost a loved one
10. Further support and resources
11. Bereavement flowchart
12. Guidelines to support the return of a bereaved pupil
13. Guidelines for ongoing support for a bereaved pupil
14. Guidelines to support a bereaved pupil with SEN
15. External support agencies
17. Holding a funeral when you cannot meet – ideas for families
18. When you can't visit someone who is ill
19. Supporting someone through difficult times
20. Helping with grief