

BEREAVEMENT POLICY



Date of Review: July 2024

Date of Next Review: July 2026

BEREAVEMENT POLICY STATEMENT

Many children find that going back to school after the death of someone special is quite a hard thing to do, even though a part of them just wants to get back to the usual routines of daily life and see friends.

Children's sense of personal worth may be damaged through bereavement; indeed, numerous studies have indicated that they experience a loss of self-esteem therefore a broad framework that allows children to grieve and grow through their grief, has to be provided by the adults who have responsibility for their care. This not only included their wider family, but also the school and this aspect is recognised at St Angela's.

It is vital that arrangements are in place in school to support the young person, not only in their time of mourning, but thereafter. Indeed, children and teenagers may need to look again at the details surrounding the death of the person in their lives as they grow older. Feelings they had when they were eleven will be very different years on. This is not necessarily unresolved grief but the experience of different feelings at a later stage of life.

The school's response to a student's bereavement first requires communication with, and from, family members or relatives /carers, procedures are in place here in St Angelas to give the utmost support and consideration to the needs of the young person.

- **In the case of bereavement we ask that the family notify the school as soon as possible and before your daughter returns to school.**
- **Absence for bereavement is coded as 'C' other authorised circumstances.**

It is recognised that grief is a very personal experience and not all young people will welcome standardised responses. School accepts that there are many different ways of grieving; students may develop their own support structures and choose not to share these with an adult. However, there is a routine channel of communication to ensure a supportive return to school.

- Once news of bereavement is received, the relevant staff will be notified. This includes Head of Year, Form Tutor, teaching staff, and the Ursula Suite staff.
- On returning to school, the young person is seen by the Head of Year or the Inclusion Manager (or the SENCO if they are on the Code of Practice) to discuss **how they would like to be supported**. This may include spending some time working in the Learning Support Unit or the Curriculum Support Centre until the young person feels ready to return to lessons; returning to lessons straight away but

with the option to leave any class if in need of support or perhaps a secure setting to express feelings, or a mixture of both.

- The individual in question may do this alone or in the company of a trusted friend/s
- The young person is also asked to determine what information should be given to classmates and in what form. Some students may prefer to be absent while this information is given, others may want to participate. It is helpful if classmates are informed about how the young person wants to talk about what has happened, for example, speak openly and take the initiative or let the bereaved student decide when they want to talk.
- It is important to recognise sharing information on one bereaved student with the class may 'open' feelings and emotions of others who have suffered a loss in the past, or have a relative with an illness, and as such should be addressed sympathetically
- One-to-one sessions are offered at the time, but are also available later if and when the young person might wish to have them, as it is recognised that intense and difficult feelings may arise at the most unexpected times and it is helpful to have someone outside the family to talk to. These sessions are usually facilitated by the Ursula Staff, but not of necessity. We have a dedicated counsellor for years 7-13 and a visiting counselling service. It is the input of a 'significant adult' with whom the young person has a trusting relationship that is most important.
- The offer is made to have a school mass in the Chapel specially for the person who has died and their family. Whether this is held soon after the event or at a later time can be decided by the student. Other family members are also welcome to attend if the student so wishes.
- Teaching staff are encouraged to monitor the young person closely as teenagers may withdraw into themselves which may affect schoolwork and friendships. Grief reactions may include insecurity, depression, and lack of concentration, eating problems, aggression or even self-abuse. Any staff concerns are discussed with the Head of Year and inclusion team.
- It is recognised that every family will have their own views and make their own decisions about any loss, but communication between the home and school is encouraged, particularly with regard to family occasions and anniversaries, not only of the death but also birthdays.
- The school also recognises the role that grandparents may have played in a young person's life. It is logical to appreciate that the loss and separation will be much

greater, if they have been the main carer/s; but, sometimes we do not appreciate the place the child has found for them in their inner world!

- The impact of death upon students and staff should not be underestimated. The school staff and students will often want to share their emotions with others. All members of the school will be given the opportunity to mourn and to access emotional support.
- Rise Up Days and assemblies throughout the academic year explore both loss and school support systems
- Newly launched posters designed by students actively signpost support

Other Crises

There are other crises which can have an effect on students. Bereavement is often associated with a permanent deprivation of a loved one through their death. However, it is recognised that for many students there are other losses which may be experienced as though it was bereavement. The emotional and behavioural outcomes can be similar to those in the bereavement process. For example:

- Separation
- Divorce
- Relative in prison
- Death of a pet
- Hospitalisation of parent/relative
- Life changing injury/health issue

These situations may not affect the whole class but may have a negative impact on individual academic performance, and in general the contingency plan would mirror the support offered to a bereaved student, with the added assistance of any external agencies deemed appropriate.