



# ST. AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

## Bereavement Policy

### **Mission Statement**

"I called you by your name, you are mine." Isaiah 43

The mission of our school is to support and further the teachings of Christ and His Church.

We welcome and embrace individuals of all abilities and cultural backgrounds.

We aim to enhance and celebrate their moral, physical, social and emotional development, so that they may reach their full potential in an atmosphere of stability, care and respect.

We believe that education is for all and in partnership with parents, carers, children and the wider Catholic community: we will strive and succeed in a wholly inclusive setting.

### **Equality Statement**

This policy has been equality impact assessed and we believe that it is in line with the Equality Act 2010 as it is fair, it does not prioritise or disadvantage any pupil or member of staff and it helps to promote equality at St Augustine of Canterbury Catholic Primary School.

We have carefully considered and analysed the impact of this policy on equality and the possible implications for pupils and staff with protected characteristics, as part of our commitment to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

This policy was adopted: March 2021

This policy is to be reviewed: March 2023

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Bereavement affects everybody at some time, and as a close community, St Augustine of Canterbury aims to provide the best support for those experiencing bereavement. We recognise that every bereavement is unique, and that we will have to take account of individual circumstances and the wishes of those most closely involved. Explanations of death are a part of the curriculum, however, these opportunities do not provide support or advice in 'bereavement care'. This policy offers an insight into this subject and will help staff to feel more confident in their knowledge of death in order to be able to appropriately support children. It is important that children are helped to understand bereavement in clear and unambiguous ways, and given opportunities to experience the full range of emotions that may accompany bereavement within a safe and supportive atmosphere.

### **The Understanding of Death**

This developmental process will begin once a child has an awareness of 'others' (i.e. not just a concept of self) and usually progresses throughout childhood but also into adulthood for those who are developmentally delayed. However, the process is likely to accelerate where a child has immediate and personal experience of bereavement.

As children develop, their concept of death changes. Children who are developmentally young (e.g. PMLD) may not understand death but may well have the concept of absence or 'loss'. A familiar adult who suddenly disappears can cause great distress through 'separation anxiety'.



Children then begin to perceive death as something that happens to objects e.g. plants and pets. The concept is similar to sleep but is perceived as temporary. (At this stage children may only ask one question at a time and should be given simple answers to their questions).



Children then begin to develop the concept that death is permanent (the deceased can no longer eat, sleep, cry etc). At this stage children may show fear and will need reassurance. From now on, children are likely to raise numerous questions and can be significantly affected by death (changes in behaviour). Patience and understanding are essential.

### **Grief (deep or violent sorrow)**

Emotional effects of bereavement are as profound for children as they are for adults. Children, however, do not have control of their circumstances, which can cause difficulty in coping with grief. Reactions to grief will vary from one child to the next but are likely to involve one or more of the following:

- Shock - withdrawal, distraught
- Denial
- Searching

- Despair
- Anger
- Anxiety - depression
- Guilt

These can be triggered by the death of a significant adult (the main carer), which can disturb the pattern of life, or by the death of a sibling that can have the added complexity of making the child aware of his or her own mortality. The loss of a schoolmate, similarly, may trigger these reactions or bring back previous painful events in a person's life.

### **Forms of Grief**

The myth still exists that coping with grief means not crying and 'being brave'. This makes things easy for those around the bereaved individual but does not do anything positive for the grieving process. Those whose grief reactions persist into adulthood are likely to have had little support and no opportunity to mourn. Therefore, we should put in place the following to support those who are bereaved.

### **Supporting Bereavement**

The following principles can help to prepare children for bereavement and to cope with it if it occurs: Bereavement education is as important as bereavement support.

- if a child wants to talk, find time to listen
- look for changes in behaviour, treating incidents patiently
- it is permissible for children to cry and laugh; allow them to express emotion
- don't argue with what a child says he / she feels and don't assume a lack of reaction means they don't care
- be aware of special occasions at home
- remember who you are (or are not) inviting to parents evening or to whom you address school correspondences
- other children can often be a source of support. Encourage peer support as and when appropriate.

### **The school has an important role to play**

Children experiencing grief need to be given:

- Time
- Normality
- Relief from grief
- An outlet for grief
- A listening ear
- Support

Any member of staff who becomes particularly worried or concerned about the behaviour or reactions of any individual child should report this to a Senior member of staff as soon as possible so that additional support can be accessed.

## **Actions following a death**

Breaking the news of the death of someone significant in a child's life is a difficult task for anyone to undertake. The person closest to the child will be the best option but it may be necessary for school staff to be involved as the situation demands. We will discuss with the family the extent to which the circumstances should be shared with other staff and children, in order to provide the best support for the grieving child.

In the event of a child being bereaved of a loved one or close friend we will discuss what the child has already been told in order to provide consistency and clarity for the children. Where there are religious considerations we will also seek the views of the family, and endeavour to respect those beliefs.

The SENCo can also provide direct support to bereaved children to allow them to express themselves when and how they choose, by providing time out and space and a range of activities through which the child may wish to express their feelings. She can also signpost to external support available to bereaved children and their families including the 'Holding on, Letting Go' Charity.

Staff will be expected to be particularly vigilant regarding the emotional well being of children close to the deceased.

We will ensure long term support for the child by keeping a log of significant days and ensuring that this information is communicated (with consent) to the child's next year group and school.

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.

Breaking the news of the death of a peer or colleague requires sensitivity and planning. We would typically aim to inform of the death of a child or staff member in small groups, supported by staff with whom they are familiar. We will allow questions, and will endeavour to answer sensitively, factually and using unambiguous language to help both children and staff understand what has happened.

All staff and children will be given time and opportunities to discuss their feelings as needed. Further information will be given to staff as it is forthcoming (e.g. funeral details etc) and attendance at the funeral will be in accordance with the families wishes.

## **Staff**

At St Augustine of Canterbury we work within a supportive staff team. However, additional support may be required by individual staff members from time to time. The following contacts are available to staff. It is important to advise a colleague or senior staff member if you are particularly affected by a death in order that appropriate support can be accessed.

- Support Line: 01622 605539. This is a free counselling service available to all Medway employees

- The Child Bereavement UK 0800 0288840. This is a professional support line available to education staff. (support@childbereavement.org)
- Schools Advisory Service bereavement counselling
- Staff have completed KSCB Me-Learning Loss and Bereavement training. Many other organisations also offer training for school staff including:
  - [Child Bereavement UK](#) Helpline: 0800 02 888 40
  - [Winston's Wish](#) Helpline: 08088 020 021
  - [Cruse Bereavement Care](#) Helpline: 0808 808 1677
  - [EduCare](#)
  - Mind Infoline (information and signposting to further help) 0300 123 3393

## **Supporting your child through Bereavement and Loss**

### **Guidance for Parents and Carers**

#### **Introduction**

It is a sad fact that many young people will experience the death of a member of the family, a friend or someone close to them.

As parents and carers you may find it particularly difficult to help your child, especially if the death is of someone close to you as well.

We hope to be able to provide a few suggestions to help you understand your child's responses and find ways of helping him or her through the normal stages of grief.

#### **Reactions to Bereavement and Loss**

Children of all ages will experience feelings of grief and may be said to mourn, just as adults do. However, your child's understanding of and response to death may vary depending on their age and special needs.

#### **How do Children Grieve?**

Grief is a normal response to the death of a loved one. It can last for a short while or continue over a period of months or years. Whereas adult grief tends to be ongoing, a child's grief may appear to come and go. For adults and children grief has several stages. These are:-

- Shock and belief - a feeling of numbness, apathy, possibly withdrawal
- Denial - refusal to accept a person is dead
- Growing awareness - may be accompanied by surges of Intense feeling eg, guilt, anger, depression, sadness, fear, and anxiety
- Acceptance - this may not occur until the second year or later following the death

## How feelings Affect Behaviour

You may notice some of the following responses. These are not cause for concern, providing they do not go on for too long, or cause extremes of distress:-

- Increased misbehaviour, aggression and more immature behaviour
- Silence and withdrawn behaviour - reluctance to talk
- Sleep disturbance including bad dreams, fear of being alone or in the dark
- Excessive "clinging" - wanting to sleep with parents or carers
- Changes in appetite
- Fears for their own safety or that of family and friends
- Being easily upset by everyday events
- Difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, toileting accidents
- Unwillingness to go to school or to go out



sad



love



goodbye



bury



cremate



dead



death



crying



friend



feelings



ill



photograph



funeral



remember



church



angry



quiet

## How to help

You may be grieving for that person too, but the following should help:-

- Try not to hide your own feelings from your child. It can even be helpful for your child to see you upset, rather than pretending everything is normal. Explain in simple terms that everyone gets upset by death.
- Try to allow your child opportunities to talk about feelings and about the person who died. Let them know it's OK for them to cry, however old they are.
- Be ready to listen - but don't expect your child to be ready to talk. Hugs, sharing activities and giving your child time will provide reassurance.
- Acknowledge feelings which may include anger and guilt as well as sorrow. If your child says it's his/her fault that someone died, be prepared to discuss this and resist phrases such as "you'll soon feel better"
- Try to answer questions as honestly and accurately as you can in words that your child will understand. If possible, use the words "death" and "died". Phrases such as "passed away" or "gone away" can be confusing.
- Maintain routines such as bedtimes, meals or going to normal activities such as Cubs. These all help provide a sense of security.
- Expect your child to go to school. Familiar situations and maintaining friendships are important

### **Resources for parents**

The NHS

[Children and bereavement](#) - includes lots of resources for parents and children, including helplines and tips for creating a memory box

Child Bereavement UK

- [Telling a child that someone has died](#)
- [Parenting bereaved children - a video](#)

Cruse Bereavement Care

- [Children and young people's physical responses to grief](#)
- [Children and young people's emotional responses to grief](#)

Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families

- [On My Mind](#) is a resource for children to learn how to support their own mental health and wellbeing. It stresses the importance of [self-care](#)

## Looking after yourself

There are no easy answers - talking about and coping with death are some of the most difficult things we ever have to do. Caring for a bereaved child can be especially distressing - so do remember to take time to talk to your family and friends about your own feelings.

- Ask that a few friends are told and are guided about how to help
- People young and old, often find it difficult to respond to bereaved friends
- Attending the funeral or cremation may be important part of the grieving process, especially if the rest of the family are going. You know your child best so do consider whether he or she would be helped by being there. Ask your child about this.
- If your child's responses are intense, persist over a long period of time, or prevent your child returning to a normal way of life, then you may need to seek extra help. Your GP will be a source of support.
  - Be sure to advise the school if you have any worries or concerns.