

Bereavement policy for Presentation College School



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| Date policy agreed: | |
| Date of next review: | May 2023 |
| Guidance Counsellor signature: | PCO |
| Chair of BOM signature | |

Introduction

Background and rationale

Presentation College Athenry is an inclusive school that strives to ensure that all children feel safe when with us. Our values focus on openness, honesty and trust alongside working with the strengths of each individual child to ensure that they achieve to the best of their abilities.

Experiencing a bereavement can make children more vulnerable. Bereavement, whether it is an expected death because of illness or a sudden and unexpected death or suicide, is something that can impact on members of our school community at any time.

Our school is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and pupils. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that prepares pupils for coping with bereavement.

This policy is for all staff, pupils, parents and carers, governors, visitors and partner agencies working within the school. It provides guidelines and procedures as to how our school can best prepare for, and respond to, bereavement in the school community.

We recognise that members of the school community will be affected by a range of losses including separation and divorce. Some aspects of this policy may also be helpful in these cases.

This policy was based on an exemplar developed by the national charity Winston's Wish.

Purpose of the policy

This bereavement policy supports us to provide effective support to pupils and staff before and after bereavement. It covers both expected and unexpected deaths.

Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children and staff require. However, we also need to be prepared to call on more specialist support where there is a sudden and unexpected death, or where the impact of a bereavement is complex.

The objectives of this policy are to:

- enhance effective communication at a difficult time
- clarify the pathway of support between school, family, community and services
- make best use of the support available in school.

Safeguarding, confidentiality and recording

We follow our school's safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure that the welfare of the child remains paramount throughout, and that all children are protected from harm.

It is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure. However, pupils will need to be made aware that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

To retain the trust of pupils and parents and carers, we will ensure that the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. Sensitive information will only be disclosed internally or externally with careful attention to the rights and needs of individuals and in line with general data protection regulation.

If a child is suffering from trauma, we will share this as appropriate with staff, but not necessarily the details of their experience.

We will discuss with the bereaved child and their family which adults in the school community they would like made aware of the experiences impacting on the child.

Roles and responsibilities in dealing with bereavement

The role of the governing body is to:

- approve the bereavement policy and ensure its implementation

- ensure the policy is reviewed as required or when national or local policy directs a change
- ensure that approaches to bereavement are respectful of religious and cultural values and beliefs
- ensure that staff are given appropriate opportunities for training, reflection and access to support if they need it.

The role of senior leadership team is to:

- contact NEPS in the case of a sudden and unexpected death or suicide.
- be the first point of contact for family/child/staff directly affected by a bereavement
- record bereavements affecting children
- monitor progress in supporting those impacted by a bereavement via care team meetings and liaise with external agencies

The role of all staff in our school is to:

- know how to access support for themselves, for other staff and for the family, if advice or information is needed
- know how to report a concern if the bereavement or sudden and unexpected death has placed a child at significant risk of harm – i.e. DLP
- teach about loss and bereavement as part of the planned SPHE curriculum
- inform the Year Head at the earliest possibility if they hear about a death of someone in the school community

Procedures

Pre-bereavement

In some situations, it is known in advance that a death is going to occur. This is usually because of a long illness.

In cases where this is an adult within the school community, individual conversations will be held with the Year Head and Guidance Team in terms of support, information exchange and practical considerations.

When the expected death is of a child or a member of a child's family we will:

- contact the family to confirm factual information and explore what support could be provided to them
- identify a key point of contact in school in terms of information exchange and to update when things change
- ensure that all relevant adults are clear about what information has and needs to be shared with the pupil
- keep lines of communication open to ensure that all information is received in a timely fashion
- explore the possibility of signposting to other organisations such as <https://www.rainbowsireland.ie/>
- look to involve faith or community leaders when appropriate and with the agreement of the family
- explore what support for the pupils affected might look like in practice
- if appropriate, consider and reflect on how to communicate with the wider school community for example the pupil's class mates
- if appropriate, begin conversations around practical considerations in the events leading up to the death and following the death

Following a bereavement

We will consider each individual situation carefully to ensure that the response from the school is sensitive, accurately reflects the gravity of the situation, and involves those affected as appropriate.

As an immediate response we will:

- contact the deceased's family with the aim to establish the facts and avoid rumours (Year Head)
- consider any religious beliefs that may affect the timing of the funeral or impact on other aspects of the bereavement process
- find out, if possible, how the family would like the information to be managed by the school
- send letters or cards of condolence to families or individuals directly affected

- inform staff of the death before pupils are informed, recognising that some pupils may have found out through other means.
- inform pupils who are most directly affected (such as a friendship group), preferably in small groups, by someone known to them and in keeping with the wishes of the family and expertise of the school
- inform the wider school community in line with the wishes of the family. We would normally do this through assemblies and / or letters to parents.
- make small changes to the school timetable to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of the child or children affected by the situation. However, we will aim for minimal disruption to the timetable as this can offer a sense of security and familiarity.

For the funeral we will:

- find out the family's wishes and follow these in terms of the involvement of members of the school community (or not)
- identify which staff and pupils may want to attend if invited by the family and the practicalities of issues such as risk assessment, staff cover and transport. In some rare circumstances it may be appropriate to close the school
- organise tributes such as flowers or a collection in line with family wishes and the wishes of staff and pupils
- be sensitive to religious and cultural issues.

After the funeral we will:

- consider whether it is appropriate to visit the child and family affected at home and plan a return to school
- ensure friendships are secure – peer support can be particularly important for a bereaved child or young person
- continue regular contact with the family and show we still care about them and their child over time
- monitor the emotional needs of staff and pupils and provide listening time and ongoing appropriate support
- consider practical issues and make thoughtful and sensitive updates to parental and other contact details when needed
- continue to assess the needs of children most affected, and record and plan for support accordingly.

Longer term we will:

- be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life. So, we will record information and share with relevant people, particularly at transition points. This could include ensuring significant dates and events for the child are recorded and shared with appropriate staff for future reference.
- signpost families to bereavement support including that provided by <https://www.rainbowsireland.ie/>
- ensure that learning about loss and bereavement is embedded into appropriate curriculum areas including SPHE education. When teaching about loss and bereavement we will give careful thought as to how to support those directly affected by loss and bereavement.

Following a sudden and unexpected death – suicide

Suicide is not just a really difficult event to deal with, it also presents the unique risk of potentially being the trigger for another suicide.

We will seek advice from **NEPS**. As a school community we will make a response to a sudden death within two school days

It is necessary to maintain the structure and order of the school routine, while facilitating the expression of grief, and reducing the risk of imitative suicide.

Information provided to the school community in the immediate aftermath of a sudden and unexpected death will depend on the age of the pupils but should be based on and reinforce:

- facts (not rumours)
- an exploration of normal and wide-ranging reactions to sudden and unexpected death – expressions of anger and guilt are entirely normal
- an understanding that, with support, people can cope
- an understanding that fleeting thoughts of suicide are not unusual
- an understanding of expectations around funerals.

Equality and inclusion, values and beliefs

We recognise that there is a range of cultural and religious beliefs, customs and procedures concerning death. It follows that bereaved children and families may have differing expectations.

Some of these may affect matters of school organisation. We will source training and guidance to develop our understanding of the range of beliefs to best support pupils.

We will present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. We will make pupils aware of differing responses to bereavement, and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

Curriculum

Children and young people explore the concept of loss, bereavement, and grief as part of the statutory elements of our SPHE curriculum. It is also addressed through cross-curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles, as well as through art, literacy, and religious education.

We also use assemblies to address aspects of death – i.e. Month of the Holy Souls in November and other commemorative occasions. We also observe national minutes of silence and explain the purpose of this.

Additional support and links

10.1 National support services and support resources

As part of SPHE and our safeguarding work we will also signpost to appropriate sources of support for pupils and adults in the school community.

The Rainbows Programme – <https://www.rainbowsireland.ie/>

Local services

Jigsaw Galway - <https://jigsaw.ie/>