



Policy Name: Bereavement Policy

Owner: Deputy Head

Last Review Date: August 2022

Next review Date: August 2024

This policy will be revised as regulations or review demands

Introduction and Background

From time to time every school is touched by the death of a student, member of staff or family member. Individuals and families react to bereavement in their own very unique ways. The trauma of bereavement can have a profound effect on the school community, and as a Catholic Community we are called to respond to others when they are in need and to offer with sensitivity the spiritual and emotional support necessary at such a time.

Defining responsibilities

Different situations will require different responses, and normally a team will be formed which will comprise the Coordinator, Chaplain, Head of School, Tutor and Housemistress and others, as appropriate. The situation may become a Critical Incident (please see Critical Incident Emergency Plan). The coordinator will be responsible for arranging communications with the families involved. Sometimes the person theoretically designated as coordinator may wish or need to pass on that responsibility. As a general guideline:

- In the case of the death of a member of staff, the Head will assume overall responsibility;
- When a student has died, the Deputy Head will assume overall responsibility;
- If a girl's relation has died, the Head of Lower School, Middle School or Sixth Form will assume overall responsibility.

In the case of the death of a member of the school community, it is essential to maintain as calm and controlled atmosphere as possible. It is important to obtain factual information and to prevent news breaking in corridors or classrooms and so this process should move along swiftly and efficiently.

In general, it is best to have a minimum of disruption to the School timetable. The structure and regularity of the School day is important to maintain, but some flexibility may be required. If a student is too upset to attend lessons, she should be excused to go to the Chaplaincy or Health Centre. Wherever possible, the sharing of information will take place before break. Students and staff will need space to reflect before carrying on with normal school timetable.

Appropriate pastoral support should be provided for the whole school community. The SMT, Chaplain, School Counsellor, Health Centre and other pastoral staff should be deployed appropriately to provide counselling and comfort. The Chaplaincy will be designated as an area the student can go for this support. A book of remembrance should be set up in an appropriate location, where the bereaved can come to express their grief and loss. Services of remembrance may be offered at various times, and a mass offered for the deceased. Support for staff who are directly involved with grieving students is important and staff should have the opportunity to meet together at an appropriate point in the day to provide an opportunity to share feelings and reactions. The Headmistress will determine the appropriate period of time for these pastoral supports to continue. If the press are involved in reporting on the death, the Headmistress will consult with the Development Director regarding an official statement on behalf of the School.

The death of a student or a member of staff

- Should the death of a student or staff member occur during the School day or on a school trip the Headmistress will take responsibility for informing the family and will quickly assemble an emergency management team.
- The Headmistress will consult with the police and emergency personnel in determining the most appropriate and timely method of informing the immediate family of the death.

- The first priorities will be to offer support to students and staff who may have witnessed the death. They should be taken to the Chaplaincy.
- The Deputy Head and the emergency management team will deal immediately with issues at the School including contact with accident and emergency personnel, organising support and counselling for the school community and communicating information to the School community as appropriate.

Example of the order of events

- Staff will be contacted before school by Senior Management to ask them to attend an emergency briefing in the staff room before school. Ideally, staff are informed before the students. At this meeting, staff will receive an announcement to read to their forms or the forms they are covering in the case of a form tutors absence.
- Students directly affected should be taken to the Chaplaincy or their Form room if it is available where the news of the death will be given by the Head of School or Chaplain. Those same staff will then decide when the students are able to continue the school day.
- The rest of the school will then be gathered in the Concert Hall when an announcement will be made by the Headmistress or Deputy Head. Support will be provided by the Senior Management, Chaplain and relevant Heads of School and Form Tutors.

The death of a family member of a student

In the case of the death of a family member of the girls, if the death happens while the girl is at School, a representative for the family, preferably a parent should come to the School to inform the girl. In some circumstances, it may be necessary for a Senior member of staff such as the Head of School, Chaplain, or Tutor to give the death notification, this will be determined by the Headmistress. Before notifying fellow students, the School should speak with the bereaved student's family to determine what information should be given to her peers. They should be informed as to how the bereaved student wants to talk about what has happened (i.e. speak openly and take initiative, or let the bereaved student decide when to talk about the death.)

The Head of School and Tutor should consult with the bereaved student's family to determine what is appropriate in terms of classmates attending the funeral and/or sending flowers. Following the death of a family member, it can be expected that the bereaved student may have a reduced capacity for school work. The bereaved student may need extra help at a later time, when working capacity becomes normal again.

The death of a family member of a member of staff

In the case of the death of a family member of a member of staff, the staff will be notified by the Headmistress, who will consult with the bereaved staff member as to their wishes as regards to attending the funeral and/or sending flowers. (HR will contact the member of staff to discuss leave and further arrangements if necessary.)

Funeral Procedure

When a funeral has been planned for the deceased, it is essential that the School is sensitive to the family's culture and religious beliefs and abides by the family's wishes. The family may welcome involvement of members of the School community but equally, may wish to keep the funeral private. The Headmistress, in consultation with SMT, will identify which staff and students may want to attend and the practicalities of issues, such as staff cover and transport. The Headmistress will also consult with staff and students in determining what is appropriate in terms of sending flowers, a collection and/or any further more permanent remembrance.

Press and Social Media

Any Press enquiries or releases must be dealt with through the school's Director of Development. If the press are involved in reporting on the death, the Headmistress will consult with the Director of Development regarding an official statement on behalf of the School.

Students should be reminded that anything placed on the internet, such as on social websites, becomes part of the public domain and can be used (even abused) by anybody else with access to it. Facebook remembrance sites, for example, are often open to all.

Resources and training for staff who are dealing with bereaved students

Staff will receive support from the Chaplain, Health Centre and Counsellors when dealing with those who have been bereaved. There are books and leaflets available in the Chaplaincy.

www.cruise.org.uk

www.childbereavement.org.uk

www.winstonwish.org.uk

www.mind.org.uk