# The Policy and Procedures for Dealing with Bereavement

Responding to a death within the school community

Our school helps us to walk with Jesus, to be the best that we can be. Through God's love and guidance, we create an ethos of shared endeavour, friendship, and co-operation to help us flourish academically, emotionally and spiritually.

**"I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me."**
**Philippians 4:13**

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| **Policy Author** | Mrs Julie Green |
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**Equality Statement**

At Baxenden St John's School, equality is a key principle for treating all people fairly and creating a society in which everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their potential - irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, age or any other recognised area of discrimination.

We acknowledge that death, while being the inevitable end of life, is often unexpected and traumatic. Its unpredictability can cause severe distress and can shock and disturb the whole school community. Every bereavement is different, and every child or family will be affected in different ways. The following is some guidance which aims to ensure families are both supported and treated equally. *This policy is tailored to our school, but should also be used in conjunction with the BDBed Bereavement Pack, which is 55 pages of template letters and further guidance.*

We acknowledge that should our school community be informed of a death, our response should be a planned, tested and considered one, and handled with sensitivity. An unplanned response could make the situation worse for all concerned; we need to ensure we are able to react sensitively and professionally.

While recognising the need to act speedily, we will ensure that the immediate family of the deceased have been consulted prior to any wider communication through the school website, text, telephone, email, or social media sites.

The head teacher will ensure that all staff and governors are aware of our policy and procedures. This policy and the accompanying procedures will be reviewed annually or in the event of a death within the school community.

**PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED IN THE EVENT OF A DEATH WITHIN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY:**

We will ensure that school office staff are prepared to receive the news of a death within the community and respond in an appropriate manner.

Should we receive the news of a death, in **ALL** cases the person receiving the news will:

- Confirm the information, check it, record it and check it again. (*It is essential to have the facts confirmed)*
- Share the news as soon as possible with the head teacher and/or an appropriate senior member of staff.

Senior members of staff will:

- Consider the action required, follow the agreed procedures, take notice of the guidance and examples and be aware of the impact of shock on each other and on the wider community.
- Adhere to the *'Bereavement Procedures'* detailed in this policy.

**THE SUDDEN DEATH OF A PARENT OR CLOSE RELATIVE**

The news of the death will be given to all relevant staff as soon as possible.

**THE DEATH OF A PUPIL**

Should we receive the news of a pupil's death, we will call appropriate colleagues together *having consulted with the family of the pupil to ascertain their wishes.*

We will:

- Encourage staff to voice their concerns they have about telling the rest of the pupils/students.
- Consider the most appropriate way of communicating the news within school; be that a full school assembly, year groups, or a class/form group?
- Give pupils opportunities to express their feelings at the time they are informed and over the following days and weeks.
- Avoid rumours, exaggerations and embellishment of the event, by agreeing the facts which will be stated openly and honestly without assumptions or judgements.
- Remember that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotions and feelings. Some may deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some may show feelings of anger. There may well be tears and distress. Planned support will be available.
- Inform parents the same day or the following day in the most appropriate way via text, website, email, phone or newsletter depending on the circumstances
- Ensure time for corporate grieving amongst the staff and enable them to share how they feel about what has happened.

**THE DEATH OF A MEMBER OF STAFF**

We acknowledge that if such a death occurs it is doubly traumatic for the staff; supporting the pupils but also grieving on a personal level for a colleague.

Should we receive the news of the death of a member of staff; the SLT and members of the governing body will use the following guidance notes below:-

a. Gather together the staff and inform them of the news.
b. Allow time for corporate grieving amongst the staff.
c. Allow the staff to share how they feel about what has happened.
d. Inform the teachers that they may need to address what has happened in their classes.
e. Impress on the staff what facts are to be announced to the pupils/students. To avoid rumours, exaggerations and development of the event, the agreed facts should be stated simply.
f. Communicate to the staff how the announcement will be made. Should it be a full school assembly, year groups, or a class/form group?
g. It must be remembered that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotional feelings. Some will deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some may show feelings of anger. There may be tears and distress; everyone will react in their own way.
h. Under such circumstances some staff may have difficulty coping with the loss themselves. Colleagues will need to be aware of those staff who seem particularly affected by the death.

**BREAKING SAD NEWS**

Should we need to break sad news to children or young people we will first refer to the *"Guidelines for Breaking Sad News of a Death to a class or assembly" in* ***Appendix 1***

**MEMORIALS and FUNERAL SERVICES**

Should we need to consider our involvement with any funeral services or memorial services or memorials, we will first refer to the *"Guidelines for Memorials and Funeral Services" in* ***Appendix 2***

**RETURN TO SCHOOL**

We acknowledge our responsibility to 'keep a special watch' on pupils who have been bereaved, especially on their return to school and for at least a two-year period and at times of transition. We further acknowledge our responsibility to prepare staff and pupils appropriately before a bereaved

member of our community returns. Should they feel it necessary, the HT will seek advice from the local authority/diocese, who will advise an appropriate response, depending on the individual circumstances.

**MANAGING ANTICIPATED DEATH AND THE TERMINALLY ILL**

We acknowledge that the anticipated death of a member of our community, whilst very difficult to manage, enables us to establish appropriate communication with the family to support those likely to be most affected before and after the death.

We acknowledge our responsibility to support adults, children and young people within our community who have to face the painful reality that a parent or someone close to them is terminally ill. When supporting children and young people who are experiencing anticipatory grief, we will:

- Confirm the facts concerning the pupil's sick relative or friend
- Communicate the information as appropriate (in line with school procedures and the family's wishes)
- Never give false hope to the child or young person
- Discover what the pupil has been told of the illness
- Allow the pupil to talk freely about the sick person in an appropriate setting
- Enable the pupil to talk freely about how he/she is feeling
- Be honest. If we do not know the answer to a question we will say so
- Not inform the pupil about any progression concerning the illness unless the family have given permission and requested us to do so

**CURRICULUM**

- Children and young people explore the concept of loss, bereavement, and grief as part of the statutory elements of our PSHE curriculum (Coram SCARF). 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 – such as Remembrance Day, Holocaust Memorial Day or commemorative occasions. We also observe national minutes of silence and explain the purpose of this.
- When appropriate, we respond to a tragedy or serious incident by discussing this in class having discussed as a staff team the language we will use to respond to the incident.
- Teachers are provided with training on how to deliver this sensitive area of the curriculum within a safe, learning environment. We also point parents and carers towards appropriate advice on how to talk to their children about these events when necessary.
- We will answer any questions relating to loss or death in a sensitive, age-appropriate, honest and factual way. Children and young people will not be expected to disclose any personal experiences but will be signposted to support if they want it.
- We give children opportunities to learn about and discuss cultural and religious issues around death and encourage them to express their own responses and feelings.

**LONG TERM SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO GRIEVE**

We will offer pupils access to a range of age-related peer support programmes available. Our ELSA teaching assistant is trained through Rainbows Bereavement Support GB. Rainbows Northwest *(from Greater Manchester to the Scottish Border)* rainbowsnorthwest@hotmail.co.uk

Rainbows GB National Resource Centre

Rainbows Bereavement Support GB
Hall Lane
Maghull
Liverpool
L31 3DZ

0161 624 2269

rainbowsgb.dc@btconnect.com

**BEREAVEMENT PROCEEDURES**

1. In the first instance the school becomes aware of the bereavement, the Headteacher will contact the family by telephone as soon as possible to offer condolences and support for the children. It may be natural or appropriate for the class teacher / other close members of staff to subsequently offer their condolences using their usual means of communication (e.g. email.)

2. The HT will inform the family that if they would like pastoral care, the church & vicar is available to support. The vicar can be contacted by the HT or the family.

3. **If a close family member has died**, the HT will send a card signed on behalf of everyone at the school to the child / family, as appropriate. The HT will follow up with a phone call a week or so later, checking how everyone is doing and re-offering any support e.g. counsellor support or referring to other agencies.

4. **If a member of the child's household (e.g. a parent or sibling) has died**, the HT will organise for flowers to be sent to the family, and a copy of The Invisible String by Patrice Karst to be sent to the child, with an inscription from the school. Parents / carers should also be made aware of the support available through Winston's Wish and children offered counselling support in school. The HT or other senior member of staff will check in with the family regularly (as agreed with the family - every 1-2 weeks) to see how children are or whether any further support would be welcome.

5. **If a member of the school community has died**, the HT will follow the 'Strategy for Schools' as recommended by Winston's Wish Charity.


Winstons Wish
Strategy-for-schools.p

6. **Class teachers of children affected** by any of the above will be provided with further support. If necessary, depending on the scale of bereavement, the HTs will organise whole school CPD on this topic beginning with the resources on the Winston's Wish website: https://winstonswish.org/bereavement-training-courses-schools

**Appendix 1**

**BREAKING SAD NEWS: GUIDELINES FOR BREAKING NEWS OF A DEATH TO A CLASS, OR SCHOOL ASSEMBLY**

On receiving news of the death of a student or a member of staff please follow the agreed procedures which will include the following points:

- Consult with the bereaved family concerned to ascertain their wishes.
- Those to be informed of a death should be gathered together in an appropriate place. This is best done in familiar groupings by someone they know.
- Whoever is giving the news should prepare themselves with what to say.
- Try to be as composed as possible as this helps to reduce the possible over emotional reaction of some students. Remember, however, it is perfectly human and understandable if you are moved by the events.
- Start by acknowledging that you have some sad news to give them.
- Be honest; give the news stating simple facts which have been checked for accuracy.
- Talk briefly about the person who has died.
- Let the students know of any arrangements already in place or of any arrangements agreed by the family.
- Underline how important their support is at this most difficult time and that it may be appropriate to involve them in a school response e.g. letters, flowers, cards, funeral attendance, memorial etc.
- Keep a watching brief throughout the assembly/meeting and for a period of time afterwards to pick up and support students and staff showing signs of distress.
- Keep in contact with the family suffering the loss. Make a note to remember the anniversary.
- Confirm any agreed arrangements by email or letter to parents and ensure details are posted on the school's website but not before all members of the bereaved family have been informed.

*(These words below and within the 'Strategy for Schools' guidance by Winston's Wish, are a small example. In the event of having to break the news of a death within the community the HT / SLT will take a little while to consider what they will say; how they will say it and how they and colleagues will manage the situation)*

There is no easy way to say this/You may already have heard that……..has died

The event that has happened will affect us all in one way or another but I have to tell you…….

The information that we have and therefore can tell you about is that……. …….

While we are all deeply shocked at this awful, sad news, before we do anything else and while we are all together to support and help each other, may I suggest that we be still now for one or two minutes to honour and remember …… Thank you……

…….. was a gift to our community here and we are so deeply grateful for the privilege of knowing him/her. In some way we are all better people because of …… I ask you to close your eyes for a moment and to remember the unique part that ……. played in our lives. We think of good times together, training, travelling on school trips, etc. We reflect on her/his many talents and blessings. (Examples: think of her/his delight on the occasion that she sang, that he scored that goal…, that he/she represented the school at…)

We all feel the loss of ……. Place a circle of light around …….'s face now and think lots of love and thanks and hope for…….

There will be many opportunities for us to show our feelings during the next few days. As more details come to us, we will let you know what is happening and how the family would like us to be involved.

There will be a variety of ways of honoring …….'s life and their life amongst us. Your ideas will be most welcome. Talk to …….but talk to any of the staff with your thoughts and feelings. We are all here to help each other; that is what our community is about.

A poet has written these lines to help us at a time like this; you may like it: ……., may you continue to inspire us: to enter each day with a generous heart; to serve the call of courage and love, until we see your face again in that land where there is no more separation, where all tears will be wiped from our mind, and where we will never lose you again.

***SOME PRAYERS / WORDS TO CONSIDER****……. In addition to the suggested prayers below, the HT will seek advice from the diocese and the school vicar. Websites offering prayers and words at times of bereavement may be helpful by searching "School assemblies at times of bereavement"*

Heavenly Father we are stunned and shocked at the death of ……. and as a community we have gathered together to share our sorrow, our bewilderment and our pain.
We are all asking the question 'Why?' but there seems to be no easy answer.
We pray especially today for her/his friends, her/his classmates, her/his teachers and all who knew her/him.
We remember …….. for ……. (List some characteristics or traits of the deceased)
We just don't understand this Lord, but help us to let go of any anger or any desire for revenge. May our tears be replaced by smiles when we think of ……, giving thanks for her/his life and all that she/he was to us and our school.
Help us now pick up the pieces once again and to carry on in life as we believe…….. would wish us to.

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Almighty God, you know that it will be very difficult for us at our school without …….. Bring us the strength and the hope we need to carry on as ……. would have wished us to do. We thank you Lord for the special gifts …… brought to the school and shared with us.
May the Church and the wider community give thanks for the contribution…… made to the life of Baxenden and may we redouble our efforts to serve each other, in honour of her/his memory.
We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.
We hold before God all those who are sad because someone they loved has died
We hold before God each one of us that we may support each other in the days to come.
We hold before God …… who has died.
May s/he rest in peace. Amen.
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Lord, we look up to you and receive from you Your blessing, Your strength, Your most holy love.
In the darkest moments of our lives, Let us remember that you are the light You are the hope You are the courage we need.
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Lord God, help us find comfort in our sadness, Certainty in our doubt And the courage to live.
Make our faith strong Through Christ our Lord,
Amen
**********

Circle us Lord, Keep hope within; Keep fear without.
Circle us Lord, Keep peace within, Keep darkness out.
Circle us Lord, Keep calm within Keep turmoil out.
Circle us Lord, Keep love within Keep anger away.

**Bereavement Advice & Support Through School**

***CFWS (L2 support agency for anything – preventative to stop escalating)***

Must look at continuum of need for threshold of risk to see what support is needed.
New Era in Hyndburn.
Angela Buckley (senior practitioner) 01254 300110

To make a referral at L2 (must have consent and have a CAF) cfwearlyhelp@lancashire.gov.uk (request advice & support). If parent struggles financially, with mental health, work, behaviour. Will provide family support worker.

Within early help intervention service (CFWS) – early help partnership officers across Lanc – work in partnership with other early help services (L1 or L2 only).
Early help partnership officer for Hyndburn/Ribble Valley/Rossendale is Alicia Dixon 01254 220776 07971 729 453 Alicia.dixon@lancashire.gov.uk

***National support services and support resources***

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

**Winston's Wish**: www.winstonswish.org Support information and guidance for bereaved children, young people and for those caring for bereaved families.

**Cruse Bereavement Care**: www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk Support for anyone who has been bereaved.

**Childhood Bereavement Network**: http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk Find childhood bereavement support in your local area.

**Hope Again**: http://hopeagain.org.uk/ A website for young people who have been bereaved.

**Papyrus:** https://papyrus-uk.org/ Support and advice for young people struggling with thoughts of suicide, and anyone worried about a young person.

**Samaritans**: http://www.samaritans.org/your-community/supporting-schools A range of guidance and support for schools.

**Appendix 2**

**MEMORIAL AND FUNERAL SERVICES**

Funerals and memorial services are a way in which the family, friends and society can say goodbye to someone who has died. The values of funerals and memorial services are:

- They acknowledge the deceased person and provide an opportunity for the person to be remembered;
- They give the opportunity for the death to be put in a religious context, if that is appropriate for the family and/or for the school community;
- They give significance to what has happened;
- They provide a time when the bereaved try to come to terms with what has happened;
- They provide a time to express sorrow. Such an occasion helps in the grieving process and should be encouraged at every opportunity.

If the funeral is that of a parent, then the school may wish to send a representative or representatives in support of the pupil who has lost a parent.

If the funeral is that of a pupil or member of staff then the numbers of pupils and teachers wishing to attend may be considerable. The HT will seek advice from LCC as to different procedures and scenarios.

**The following should always be considered:**

- The HT should always contact the family of the deceased to discuss funeral arrangements and to ascertain the family's wishes regarding representation from the school - such wishes are paramount and should always be respected.
- Under certain circumstances a teacher/class close to the bereaved may wish to send messages of sympathy to the bereaved family. These messages may be in the form of poems, cards, flowers etc. The appropriate staff should ensure that all such presents are appropriate.
- Often a memorial service may be held in school. This could be a whole school assembly or within a class situation. The planning of such an occasion, choosing readings, poems, music, hymns, pictures, tributes etc. all assist in the grieving process. It might be appropriate to invite members of the bereaved family to share in such a service.
- On such occasions, staff members should be on hand to lend support to the pupils who could be upset when sharing in this part of the grieving process.

The above points will be carefully considered, and in discussion with SLT and governors, the appropriate course of action for our school community will be decided upon (in accordance with the wishes of the parent/staff family members)