



# St Martin's School

## Bereavement Policy



### **Introduction**

This bereavement policy supports our school in providing 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, there is also a 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.

### **Policy Aims**

- To enhance effective communication at a difficult time.
- To clarify the pathway of support between school, family, community and services.
- To make best use of the support available in school, the council's families, children and learning department and the wider community.

### **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. We will use our usual school systems (Safeguard My School) to record when a child has experienced a close bereavement, is at risk of suicide or has made a suicide attempt.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

**The role of the Head Teacher and the Safeguarding and Welfare team (Joanna Wilson – 020 8959 1965) is to:**

- lead a whole-school approach to the effective management of loss and bereavement including ensuring appropriate training and support provided for staff (Educare/www.winstonswish.org).
- contact the Barnet Bereavement Team in (Refer to The Samaritans Step by Step Guide. <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/step-step/>)
- be the first point of contact for family/child/staff directly affected by a bereavement
- record bereavements affecting children
- designate liaison and support to other trained members of staff when appropriate
- keep the governing body appropriately informed
- deal with media enquiries in high-profile death (**Nobody other than Joanna Wilson** is to speak to the media)
- monitor progress in supporting those impacted by a bereavement and liaise with external agencies

**The role of all staff in our school is to:**

- access bereavement support training
- know how to report a concern if the bereavement or sudden and unexpected death has placed a child at significant risk of harm
- have a basic understanding of a child's needs when facing loss and change and how to support them.
- provide individual support as and when needed and in consultation with the head teacher and pastoral team
- teach about loss and bereavement as part of the planned curriculum
- inform the head teacher at the earliest possibility if they

### **Pre-bereavement**

In some situations, it is known in advance that a death is going to occur. In cases where this is an adult within the school community, individual conversations will be held with the head teacher 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
- 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
- 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
- arrange training for specific members of staff to ensure all involved are confident in their ability to support the pupil
- 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
- 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
- allocate member(s) of staff to be the key point(s) of support for the affected young person/people and ensure there is support in place for the staff members if required
- 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. Where possible, staff will be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways to make sure all staff have the same version of the event. Where this has not been possible, staff will be supported to share the information.
- 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.
- Discuss with family an appropriate memorial in line with previous memorials.
- A child's absence during a period of bereavement will be dealt on a case by case basis, taking into consideration current attendance levels.

#### **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
- ensure that learning about loss and bereavement is embedded into appropriate curriculum areas including RSHE education. When teaching about loss and bereavement we will give careful thought as to how to support those directly affected by loss and bereavement.

### **Equality and inclusion, values and beliefs**

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.

### **Support for bereaved staff**

We are aware that staff also experience bereavement. When this happens, we will ensure they are provided with support to take care of themselves, and to know where they can go for additional help should they need it.

This could include: their GP; Cruse Bereavement Care (<http://www.cruse.org.uk/>); Winston's Wish ([www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)) or staff counselling, information and advice (Marsh)

We will work within our leave of absence policy and if necessary, with the council or trust's occupational health team to ensure staff are provided with appropriate leave and support at a time of bereavement.

Teachers who are dealing with their own bereavement are encouraged to speak with their line manager about any areas of the curriculum which they feel uncomfortable to teach or want support to teach.

We will work within our **leave of absence policy** to ensure staff are provided with appropriate leave and support at a time of bereavement.

### **Curriculum**

Children and young people explore the concept of loss, bereavement, and grief as part of the statutory elements of our curriculum. In addition, it is addressed through cross-curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles, as well as through Art, English, and Religious Education. We 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.

**Written by: Mr Guyster (Deputy Head Teacher)**

**Ratified by: Governors**

**Policy date: 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024**

**To be reviewed: February 2026**