



The Bishop Konstant Catholic Academy Trust

Learning Communities, Inspired by Faith

Trust Bereavement Policy 2022

Responding to a death within the school community

Related guidance

CHILD DEATH REVIEW Statutory and Operational Guidance (England) October 2018

WHEN A CHILD DIES NHS Guidance for Parents December 2018



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POLICY DOCUMENT	Trust Bereavement Policy 2022
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Approved by:	Trust Policy Committee
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Review Frequency:	Annually

All policies are written in line with our Trust Mission statement:

With Jesus Christ at the centre of the life of the Trust, we seek to provide learning communities offering the highest possible standards of education. We are committed to working in partnership and trust for the common good. We strive to encourage and empower children and young people to recognise and realise their God-given potential and to discern their vocation in life. As learning communities inspired by faith, we celebrate achievement, offering each other challenge and support, as together we follow Christ in self-giving love and service.



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POLICY STATEMENT

Bereavement is a devastating loss that profoundly affects parents/carers, siblings, grandparents, extended family, friends and professionals. Families and colleagues experiencing such a tragedy should be met with empathy and compassion. The unpredictability of bereavement can cause severe distress and can shock and disturb the whole academy community.

Should our Trust and academy community be informed of a death, our response should be a planned, tested and considered one. An unplanned response could make the situation worse for all concerned; we need to ensure we are able to react sensitively and professionally.

We acknowledge that the communication of any death within our community must be planned and handled with great sensitivity. While recognising the need to act speedily, we will ensure that the immediate family of the deceased have been consulted prior to any wider appropriate communication through the Trust and academy.

On being made aware of an incident, each Academy will establish a Trust Bereavement Team to be chaired if and when necessary by a Trust Bereavement Team Leader. Members of the Team will be and not limited to CEO, Headteacher, Chair of Governors (or their nominee), Pastoral Lead/ Learning Mentor, HR and Trust Business & Compliance Manager (should the press be involved) and the Parish Priest.

It is advantageous that each Academy form their own Bereavement Team as applicable to the situation, and a Bereavement Team Leader should be appointed depending on the level of the situation i.e. it will not always be appropriate for the CEO to be, or to appoint the Team Leader.

In planning for such an event, it may be fitting that it be linked to the Academy's emergency/contingency plan. Any such plans must be flexible and may change depending on the incident.

We acknowledge our responsibility to all those who grieve as a result of a life changing significant loss in their lives. We will provide opportunities for pupils to share their feelings in the academy environment supported by Catholic Care, trained staff and when appropriate, through the use of age related structured programmes provided by Rainbows Bereavement Support GB. Appropriate support will also be offered to staff through and with Catholic Care. Academy based trained staff who engage in support programmes will be provided with appropriate supervision.



The Trust Bereavement Team will ensure all staff, governors and trustees 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 academy community.

PROCEDURES IN THE EVENT OF A DEATH WITHIN THE TRUST COMMUNITY

We will ensure that academy 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:

- 1) Confirm the information, check it, **record it** and check it again. (*It is essential to have the facts confirmed*).
- 2) Share the news as soon as possible with an appropriate senior member of staff and a member of the Trust Bereavement Team.

The senior member of staff and the members of the Trust Bereavement Team will:

- 1) Consider the action required, follow the agreed procedures, take notice of the guidance (Police, Local Authority, Social Services etc. if applicable) and be aware of the impact of shock on each other and on the wider community.
- 2) Inform the Catholic Care Crisis Team (0113 388 5400).
- 3) Inform the Diocesan Education Officer (Angela Cox 0113 261 8034).
- 4) Inform the Wakefield Local Authority Crisis Emergency Number (0345 8 503 503).
- 5) Inform the Chair of the BKCAT Board Charles Gillott – Admin Office 01924 802285.

THE SUDDEN DEATH / SUICIDE OF A PARENT OR CLOSE RELATIVE

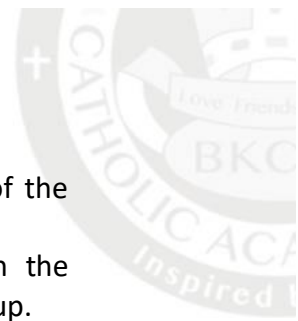
We acknowledge that in the case of the death of a pupil's parent or close relative, it is best that a family member break the news with the support of an appropriate member of staff, if required. If this is not possible the Trust Bereavement Team Leader will ensure someone suitable to break the news to the pupil or member of staff concerned.

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 use the guidance below:



- 1) Encourage staff to voice their concerns they have about telling the rest of the pupils/students.
- 2) Consider the most appropriate way of communicating the news within the academy; be that a full academy assembly, year groups, or a class/form group.
- 3) Give pupils opportunities to express their feelings at the time they are informed and over the following days and weeks.
- 4) Avoid rumours, exaggerations and embellishment of the event, by agreeing the facts which will be stated openly and honestly without assumptions or judgements.
- 5) 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 such as the Catholic Care Support Crisis Team.
- 6) Inform parents/carers the same day in the most appropriate way via text, website, email, phone or newsletter depending on the circumstances.
- 7) Ensure time for corporate grieving amongst the staff and enable them to share how they feel about what has happened.
- 8) An invitation will be made to the Parish Priest to liaise with the academy and provide support at a level he feels comfortable and confident with.

THE DEATH OF MORE THAN ONE PUPIL

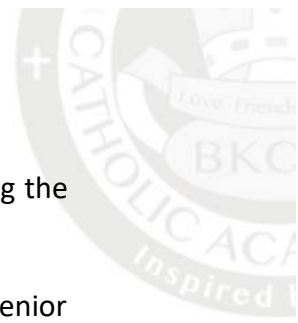
Should we receive such news, members of the Trust Bereavement Team will be called together to be briefed with the salient facts and to decide what steps are to be taken. Information may already have been 'sent' from the incident.

We will consider:

- 1) Who will contact parents/carers, if necessary?
- 2) Who will meet with parents/carers who arrive at the academy? Where?
- 3) Who will inform the staff? When? Where?
- 4) Who will inform the pupils/students? When? Where?

It is imperative that rumours and interpretations of the truth be avoided. In a case of multiple deaths there is bound to be some media interest. Members of the Trust Bereavement Team responsible for dealing with the media will prepare all necessary statements, advice will be taken from the Diocesan Education Officer and a statement will be released by either the academy or the Diocese. Such statements should deal only with facts in as sympathetic a way as possible.

THE DEATH OF A MEMBER OF STAFF



We acknowledge that if such a death occurs it is 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 appropriate senior member of staff will call together colleagues from the Trust Bereavement Team.

We will use the guidance notes below:

- 1) Gather together the staff and inform them of the news.
- 2) Allow time for corporate grieving amongst the staff.
- 3) Allow the staff to share how they feel about what has happened.
- 4) Inform the teachers that they may need to address what has happened in their classes.
- 5) 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.
- 6) Communicate to the staff how the announcement will be made. Should it be a full academy assembly, year groups, or a class/form group?
- 7) 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.
- 8) 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.

IN THE EVENT OF A GLOBAL CRISIS OR PANDEMIC

The academy will adhere strictly to guidance from the DfE, the Local Authority and the Trust in managing such a situation on a day to day basis. In the event of a global crisis or pandemic, the academy will issue an emergency mobile phone number via the academy website and other forms of communication (including newsletters, email, text messaging and other forms of social media) so that parents/carers can access a senior member of staff at all times to report illness or death.

RETURN TO THE ACADEMY

We acknowledge our responsibility to keep a special watch on pupils who have been bereaved, especially on their return to the academy. We will maintain this for as long as needed, and in particular at times of transition. We further acknowledge our responsibility to prepare staff and pupils appropriately before a bereaved member of our community returns. Members of our Trust Bereavement Team will advise an appropriate response, depending on the individual's 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 use the guidance below:

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

MANAGING ANTICIPATED DEATH THAT OCCURS DURING OUTSIDE OF TERM TIME

We recognise that we have a responsibility to support the family both inside and outside of term time. There could be occasions that anticipated death will occur outside of term time and we aim to provide the family with the appropriate support on request.

In order to support the family in this instance we will use the guidance below:

- 1) Ensure a communication link between an appropriate member of staff and the family is established prior to the academy holidays. In the first instance this would be the Headteacher, unless otherwise directed by the family.
- 2) First contact to ensure that information given is confirmed and taken from a member of the family.
- 3) Members of the team to be contacted and to determine the most appropriate way of disseminating the information to staff and pupils.
- 4) Determine how the news will be shared with the children on return to academy.



- 5) Have in place a plan to support the family member/staff/pupils on return to the academy.

MANAGING SUDDEN DEATH

In this instance the family will in all likely hood contact the Headteacher or Parish Priest first. The Headteacher will then contact the appropriate members of the team.

In order support the family in this instance we will use the guidance below:

- 1) Ensure that all information has been clarified and confirmed before any action is taken.
- 2) Ascertain permission from the family to disseminate information to staff/pupils and determine how this information will be communicated. In the instance that this is not possible, agree with the Trust Bereavement Team an appropriate response.
- 3) The team will determine how the news will be shared with the children on return to the academy.
- 4) Have a plan to support the staff/children/child on return to the academy.

RESPONDING TO DEATH ANNOUNCED ON SOCIAL MEDIA

We recognise the growing place of social media in the modern day world and that it is way in which people choose to spread information about themselves, members of their family and other people known to them. Where information relating to sudden death of a child/adult/member of staff is first communicated by social media, the Trust Bereavement Team will ensure that the information has been clarified before we respond publically. In instances where this is not possible, the team will refer to the Trust and the Diocesan Education Officer for guidance. In the instance where the death is anticipated, the information should be clarified before a response is issued.

As a Trust and academy we recognise and respect the fact that staff choose to use social media themselves. We also recognise that commenting directly on social media sites on matters relating to the death of a child/parent or member of staff could place them in a position where comments could be misinterpreted by other contributors. Therefore, we would respectfully encourage staff to avoid commenting on any event where a death has occurred. It is also a requirement that all staff read the Trust and academy policy on internet safety.



THE PLACE OF DEATH AND BEREAVEMENT WITHIN THE CURRICULUM

We acknowledge the importance of remembering anniversaries of death. At suitable times throughout the year, November to mark Remembrance and Easter to celebrate the Resurrection, we will hold a series of special assembly/liturgy/act of remembrance, as appropriate, to celebrate the life of those members of our community who have died.

We will explore and establish a memorial space to remember and celebrate the life of those in our community who have died. This will be undertaken so that both children and staff have a long lasting way to remember and the approval of the deceased's family will be sought.

We also acknowledge our responsibility to explore issues surrounding death and bereavement within the curriculum. This will take place within the RE/PSHCE area of the curriculum in Years 2 – 6.

LONG TERM SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO GRIEVE

We will offer pupils access to a range of age related peer support programmes available through our trained staff provided by Rainbows Bereavement Support GB (0161 624 2269 rainbows.gb.dc@btconnect.com) and access to Catholic Care support for one to one or family counselling sessions.

SUPPORT FOR STAFF WHO SUPPORT BEREAVED PUPILS AND COLLEAGUES

We will ensure that all staff are familiar with this policy and these procedures for responding to bereavement and will offer training as part of our staff induction programme. Whenever necessary we will request additional support from colleagues or from external support agencies.

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THIS POLICY

The Trust shall be responsible for reviewing this policy from time to time to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.

The Bishop Konstant Catholic Academy Trust is an exempt charity regulated by the Secretary of State for Education. It is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales, company number 08253770, whose registered office is at St Wilfrid's Catholic Secondary School & 6th Form College, Cutsyke Road, Featherstone, WF7 6BD.



Appendix 1: Template letter to parents and carers

Dear.....

We are so very sorry to hear the sad news of <Name's> death. There are no words to express our sadness and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through.

As a school community, we will miss <Name> very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to <his/her> friends, classmates and teachers. <Name> was a <valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly> member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help as you plan <Name's> funeral, please let us know.

We will continue to keep in touch and will support you in any way we can.

With sympathy



Appendix 2: Template letter to parents and carers - death of a pupil

Dear parents and carers

Your child's class teacher/form tutor/headteacher/head of year had the sad task of informing the pupils of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>.

<Name> died suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness yesterday/last week/over the weekend/during half term.

He/She was a <valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly> member of the class/school community and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some pupils may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

We have tried to answer their questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Child Bereavement UK website childbereavementuk.org

Our thoughts are with <Name's> family and friends at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember <Name's> life.

With sympathy



Appendix 3: Template letter to parents and carers - death of a member of staff

Dear parents/carers

I am sorry to inform you that a <well-respected/long-standing/well-loved/popular/ well-known> member of our staff, <Name>, died <suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness>.

The pupils were told today by their <class teacher/tutor/head of year/in assembly> and many will be reacting to this news. When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some pupils may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

We have tried to answer their questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Child Bereavement UK website childbereavementuk.org

Our thoughts are with <Name's> family at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember <Name's> life.

With sympathy



APPENDIX 4: BEREAVEMENT RESOURCES

Bereaved Parents Support Organisations Network (BPSON)

Umbrella body for organisations supporting bereaved parents

www.bpson.org.uk

enquiries@bpsn.org.uk

Bereaved Parent Support, Care for the Family

Peer support for bereaved parents including a telephone befriending service

www.careforthefamily.org.uk/bps

How can you help bereaved parents? BPS Handout resource

029 2081 0800

Bliss

Information and support for families of babies born premature or sick

www.bliss.org.uk

0808 801 0322

hello@bliss.org.uk

Care for the Family

Peer support for any parent whose son or daughter has died at any age, in any circumstance and at any stage in their journey of grieving

www.cff.org.uk/bps

029 2081 0800

bps@cff.org.uk

Child Bereavement UK

Training for professionals, support for families and a directory of local support services

www.childbereavementuk.org

0800 02 888 40

Child Death Helpline

For anyone affected by the death of a child of any age from any cause.

www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk

0800 282 986 or 0808 800 6019

The Compassionate Friends

Peer support for bereaved parents and their families

www.tcf.org.uk

0845 123 2304



The Lullaby Trust

Support for anyone affected by the sudden death of a baby or young child

www.lullabytrust.org.uk

support@lullabytrust.org.uk

Bereavement support line: 0808 802 6868

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide

Support for people over 18 who have been bereaved by suicide.

<https://uksobs.org/>

0300 111 5065

UK Trauma Council

Creates evidence-based resources to improve professionals and carers' understanding of the nature and impact of trauma. Aims to better equip all those supporting children and young people exposed to trauma.

<https://uktraumacouncil.org>

020 7794 2313

Winston's Wish

Supporting children and their families after the death of a parent or sibling

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Tel: 08088 020 021

There are also a number of useful organisations who hold information about the many smaller, specialised and local organisations available for bereaved families. One may be able to find an organisation that focusses on a situation more specifically through one of these organisations:

The Childhood Bereavement Network

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

A Child of Mine

www.achildofmine.org.uk

At A Loss.org

www.ataloss.org

The Good Grief Trust

www.thegoodgrieftrust.org



APPENDIX 5: 4 - Step Response Plan to a Bereavement During Covid-19 Coronavirus Period



Catholic Care is a Christian charity which supports people of all ages, and of all faiths or no faith, within the Leeds Diocese. Catholic Care have many years' experience of supporting children, young people and their families through challenging times and situations. They provide the highest standards of care and support.

In the event of a bereavement during Covid-19 Coronavirus period, Catholic Care's four step response plan will be followed, as outlined below:

Step 1: Initial remote contact with the child and family, responding to immediate needs

Step 2: Longer term remote support for the child and family during coronavirus restrictions

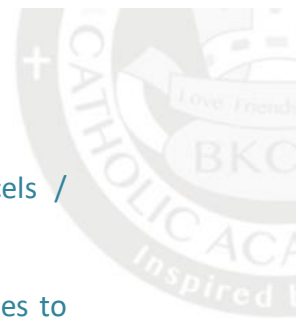
Step 3: School sharing information of the bereavement with staff, children and families

Step 4: Longer term in-school work with children affected by bereavement as result of coronavirus

In the event of a bereavement:

Step 1: Initial contact will be made with the family as a 'holding' position to explore and meet initial, immediate needs such as:

- An initial crisis counselling session by school's allocated Catholic Care Worker, with an adult caregiver within the family via phone / video call to allow them to reach out and share how they are feeling at that time
- An initial crisis session with the child(ren) via phone/video call by Catholic Care worker to allow them to reach out and share how they are feeling
- Childcare arrangements to be made by school if these can be provided to offer a different environment for the child/ren effected and to enable the family to make practical arrangements



- Catholic Care worker to provide practical support ie food parcels / shopping service to take that pressure off the family
- Catholic Care worker to assist family by offering advice on processes to follow in cases of death and funeral arrangements at this time and forms to complete etc.

Step 2: Telephone counselling

- Catholic Care worker to make a referral to Catholic Care telephone counsellors for regular, longer-term telephone counselling support for adults effected by the death
- Catholic Care worker to provide regular, longer-term telephone/video grief-based sessions for children effected. Additional Catholic Care workers may be called upon if the number of bereavements in school is high.

Step 3: School's sharing of the information

A. Family consent:

- School to ascertain what information the family would prefer to have disclosed to the school community.
- School to agree with family at what stage this information should be shared – taking into account what is in the best interests of the family and wider school community.

B. Inform staff:

- Arrange a staff meeting for the earliest opportunity for staff at school and absent staff via telephone / video conference call.
- At the staff meeting, tell the story of what happened leading up to the death.
- Give a factual explanation of how the death occurred.
- Tell staff the information that the family would prefer to have disclosed.

Be prepared for strong reactions of upset and feelings of anger/guilt from staff members, including:

- Consider the relationship between staff members and the deceased and how it will impact upon them
- Consider how staff members may connect the current incident to personal experiences of grief, loss and/or trauma.
- Consider how staff members may have fearful – and most likely irrational – thoughts of personal responsibility for the death.

Encourage everyone to consider how to meet their own support needs; this may be from friends, family, support services and/or colleagues.



- Be prepared for the need to enlist cover staff for those who are too overwhelmed to work.
- Signpost staff members to Catholic Care worker for support or provide contact details for grief support services in your local area.

C. Inform children & families:

(i) Inform children at school

Provide staff with a script about what has happened so that consistent information is given to all of the children in school. A sample script is given below.

Notes to remember for staff:

When communicating with children:

- Refer to the person's name as they had been known
- Avoid the confusion of euphemisms such as 'lost' and 'passed away'
- Use clear words such as 'dead', 'died' and 'death'.
- To prevent your staff from needing to think of appropriate answers on the spot, where possible, include answers to difficult questions that children may ask.

Sample scripts for teaching staff to use with children in school:

"I've got some really sad news to tell you today that might upset you. I know most of you will have heard of coronavirus, and you will know that a lot of the time people with coronavirus have been getting better, but other times people have died from it. *Mr/s X teacher / child / child's family member* has been ill with coronavirus, and I have to tell you that *s/he* died yesterday in hospital. Let's take some time to think/pray for them and their families at this difficult time."

(ii) Prepare a letter to parents and carers. A sample letter is given below.

Dear Parent,

As a school we have had the sad task of informing your child that (Name.....). a pupil/member of staff has recently died due to being ill with Covid-19 Coronavirus.

It is important that both parents and school work together to support our children.

When someone dies their family and friends experience lots of different feelings including sadness, upset, anger, anxiety and confusion, to name but a few. These are all a normal part of the grieving process.

The children have been told that their teachers and staff are willing to try and answer any questions at school.

Advice and support is also being offered from our Catholic Care Worker. If you wish to contact her, please call the school office and they will arrange to call you.



Bereavement and loss websites can be accessed via websites including:

For children:

<https://www.winstonswish.org/>

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/>

For adults:

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/>

<https://www.bereavementuk.co.uk/>

<https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/>

Yours sincerely
Headteacher

*Include information on the 'Ages and stages of understanding of death and grief' as part of the letter or signpost to a link on the website - please see this information at the end of this document

Please remember:

Do not worry if the chaos of events does not allow you to follow plans and policies to the letter.

- Follow your intuition
- Remember that keeping people as informed as possible is always helpful
- One single individual should not feel burdened with all responsibility; this needs to be shared among senior leadership.
- Trained and experienced practitioners are available on the Winston's Wish Freephone National Helpline (08088 020 021) should you want to check out ideas throughout the day.

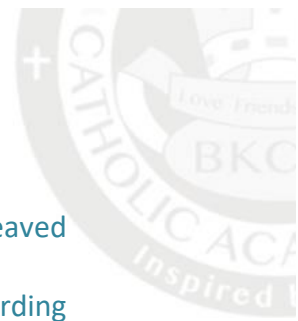
Step 4: Longer term in-school work with children who have experienced bereavement as a result of Coronavirus *

When children return back to school ...

A. Referrals to Catholic Care Worker

- Catholic Care worker to continue ongoing work with all children effected by the coronavirus within the school setting.

- New referrals for bereavements can be made to Catholic Care worker



B. All staff

All staff working with the children when they return to school can support bereaved children in their daily interactions. It is helpful for staff to remember:

- A young people's responses to the death of someone important will vary according to:
 - Their age
 - Their relationship with the person
 - Previous experience of death or trauma within the family
 - Their own resilience and the support and care they receive
 - The cause and nature of the death (e.g. whether sudden or expected, by suicide or violence)

If a death is sudden, as in the case of coronavirus:

- There may have been no chance for goodbyes and no chance for preparations or adjustment. The last conversations the child had with the deceased person may linger in their memory.

To involve children & young people in the mourning process staff can:

- **Listen** to pupils who want to share. Simply listening can be a powerful healing force.
- **Protect** pupils who are fragile from others who may ridicule or bully them for their sensitivity.
- **Model** adult behaviour that demonstrates to pupils how responsible adults react to grief and loss yet maintain calm routines in school.
- **Ages and Stages:** Staff can also consult the 'ages and stages of how children are effected by grief' table at the bottom of this document to understand how the children they are working with may be processing their grief.

C. School-based interventions

- **Hold a special assembly / remembrance service within school**

A special assembly can be useful to normalise and share grief, and to let pupils know that it is OK to be sad, and equally it is OK to not feel affected.

Pupils and staff could be involved with planning (with adult support depending on the pupil's age and understanding) as it provides a collective sense of doing something positive. Some ideas for the assembly/service:

- Light a memory candle and reflect for a minute
- Create memory box or book, and invite pupils to contribute their written memories or stories on an individual card to be stuck in the book or placed in the box.
- Pupils may wish to recite poems, songs or stories about the deceased.



Ending the assembly/service needs thoughtful planning.

Some ideas:

- Blowing out the memory candle
- Ask pupils to bring a farewell message to the event, to put into a special box as they leave.
- Reflective but uplifting music

- **The school curriculum**

Provides opportunities for teachers and pupils to explore experiences and feelings of grief, including English Literature, the Sciences, Religious Education, History and Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE).

However, staff should take care to think how bereaved children may be affected by lesson content. Families should be consulted over whether it is appropriate for their child to attend, about different religious / cultural beliefs, and if additional support may be needed.

- **Plant a special tree in the school garden**

This should be for all the people who have died as a result of coronavirus rather than just one person, as failure to respond similarly in the future to the death of another person may cause upset. Special events around the memory tree can be held to remember the bereaved throughout the year, for example decorating the tree at Christmas and Easter, singing hymns and saying prayers around the tree.

- **Memory stones**

This activity can be undertaken in a group setting or 1-2-1. 3 types of stones are required:

1. A jagged, rocky pebble: Encourage description of how it feels when held tightly, i.e. “not nice”, “sharp”, “a bit painful”.

Explain that that this stone is like the difficult memories and thoughts that some pupils may have, such as struggling with the way the person died, or feelings of guilt and shame about having a difficult relationship with the person, or wishing their last words to the deceased were different.

2. A normal, rounded pebble: Encourage description of how it is, i.e. “normal”, “smooth”, “ordinary”. Explain that this stone is like the ordinary memories of the person, such as their favourite lesson or food.



3. A shiny gemstone: Encourage description i.e. “shiny”, “precious”, “nice”. Explain that this stone is like the positive memories of the deceased, such as on a school trip or a fun moment.

All three stones are valid and the memories they represent are all true. The stones can all be held together in one hand, like the memories can all be held in mind together.

Additional information:

*As per above, the following information that can be included on the letter home for parents and can be shared with staff to help them in their daily interactions with children effected by bereavement:

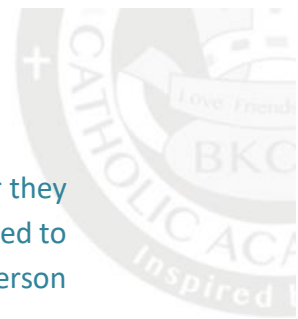
How Ages and Stages affects a Child’s understanding of Death and the Grieving Process

Children under 3 years old:

- Very young children and babies are not able to understand death but experience the loss as a separation from someone they have an attachment to.
- Children at this age have little language to express their loss and will react to it by crying inconsolably or become withdrawn.
- They will be affected by the emotional state of their care givers. They may repeatedly search for the deceased person or have an unspoken expectation that they will ‘return’.
- They also benefit from the same type of consistent and repeated explanations as detailed below for ages 3 to 5 and the maintenance of routine.

Early Years Education – aged 3 to 5 – Preschool and Reception:

- When a child this young experiences the death of someone important, it is important they are helped to know about the person as an integral part of their history.
- Young children often ask the same questions over and over again in an effort to understand their loss. They are naturally curious and they want to make sense of what is happening in their world.
- Their repeated questions are not a sign that our explanations aren’t good enough.
- Reading books on death and loss, playing, drawing and giving them opportunities to identify and talk about worries and feelings will all help them deal with the loss.
- They may worry about how the person who has died will eat breathe and keep warm. It is important to give them simple, factual information and tell them that once someone has died, their body stops working so they don’t feel pain anymore and they don’t feel hot or cold and they don’t need to eat or drink anything.
- Children’s thoughts are concrete and characterised by “magical thinking”. They may struggle to understand abstract concepts (such as heaven) or roundabout ways of explaining death (e.g. ‘gone to sleep’).



- Children may believe it was something they said or did that caused the death or they may believe their words, actions or thoughts can bring the person back. They need to be reassured that the death was not their fault and gently reminded that the person will not come back.
- It is important to maintain a routine as normal as possible for the child. It is not unusual for children of this age to revert to younger behaviours such as separation anxiety, incontinence, and use of a security blanket or thumb sucking. Being tolerant and managing the separation will be helpful for the child and the family.

Key Stage 1 – Ages 5 to 7 – Years 1 and 2:

- Children of this age are beginning to understand that death is permanent; however, some confusion may still stand. When first told of the death, younger children may be mainly concerned with the ‘when’ and ‘where’ of the death.
- They may express concerns about their own future such as: ‘What will happen to me? Who will meet me after school? Will I still go to Cubs?’ Giving reassurance about everyday activities and arrangements continuing as normal, or clear explanations about alternative arrangements, will be helpful for the child.
- Children may become clingy or more reluctant to see parents and carers leave. There may be a need to stick close to their parent to protect them from the mysterious occurrence that made their dad disappear or at least to be with them if it happens again.
- Children at this stage may complain of a sore tummy, headaches or just generally not feeling well. These are what we call ‘somatic’ complaints, where unexpressed feelings and emotions can lead to physical symptoms or discomfort. Somatic complaints are normal, but it is important that routines are maintained while gently acknowledging when someone important dies we feel things like sadness and worry in our bodies too.
- They can also feel that in some way they were responsible for the death, e.g. ‘I was angry with him and shouted at him. I refused to give him a hug. And then he never came to school again. It’s my fault.’ It can be worth saying something like: ‘You do know, don’t you, that nothing you said or did made this happen?’

Key Stage 2 – Ages 7 to 11 – Years 3, 4, 5 and 6:

- As children begin to understand more about death and dying, a death may make them anxious about the health and safety of themselves and members of their family. They may feel very responsible for their parent(s) and younger siblings and feel the need to keep a close eye on their safety.
- Children this age can find it difficult to talk about their bereavement and express their feelings behaviourally, such as withdrawing from others or showing increased



aggression. They may experience difficulties in their interactions with their peers, particularly as the death of someone important can make them feel different at the very time they want to be the same as everyone else. It is important to avoid clichés like “You’re being so brave” as children can interpret this as they should not share their feelings. They may need a safe space or quiet area away from peers to calm down or express their emotions with an adult.

- Children of this age also show curiosity about issues such as what a dead body looks like and what happens to a body after a person has been dead for some time. This curiosity is natural and they will benefit from clear, factual explanations.
- Children can also think of death as something spooky, like a zombie, or a spirit that comes to get you. Normalising feelings, talking about or drawing specific worries and sharing bad dreams can be reassuring, giving children skills and confidence to feel more in charge of them.
- By the age of 10, children will usually have all of the bits of the jigsaw puzzle of understanding. They will even understand that they are able to cause their own death. They will appreciate clear and detailed information – beyond ‘when’, ‘where’ and ‘how’ the death happened, they will be interested in ‘why’.

Key Stage 3 – Ages 11 to 14 – Years 7, 8, and 9:

- In this age range young people are much more aware of the finality of death and the impact the death has on them. They are able to understand death as both concrete and abstract. They begin to move away from dependence on the family and they start to form important relationships with other young people, however the death of someone important can easily destabilise them, leaving them feeling unsafe and more dependent on the family.
- Some older children and teenagers may feel internal conflict as a result of feeling a pull towards being with their peers at the same time as their own need or an expectation that they spend time with their family.
- Their ability to manage their feelings may be disrupted and lead to mood swings or more definite ups and downs in their feelings. Big emotional releases (such as anger or distress) are not uncommon but can be scary for children at this stage. They will benefit from your willingness to listen and your assurances that the feelings are normal.
- It is important to find ways to build their self-esteem. Young people at this age are beginning to think of the longer term consequences of the loss of the relationship. They are aware of the loss they feel in the present, but also of the losses they will experience in the coming months and years when they encounter certain important milestones, or occasions and realise that they won’t be able to share these with the



person who has died. Talking through these future events and exploring ways of including the person can be helpful.

Key Stage 4 and Sixth Form – Ages 14 to 18 – Years 10, 11, 12 and 13:

- Friends and peers are increasingly important as young people develop their ideas of who they are and what is important to them. They want to be accepted by other important people in their lives. Their bodies are changing; they are aware of all sorts of possibilities for themselves and their future.
- Young people may struggle to make longer term plans as the death of someone important causes them to reflect on “the meaning of life” and ponder on the question “what’s the point?” Or you may find that they are so busy with different activities they don’t stop to reflect. This can be an effective way of keeping intense feelings under wraps if they are worried about losing control of their emotions.
- It is quite common for risk-taking behaviour to increase during adolescence as young people test the boundaries. Although an adolescent’s thought process is most like an adult’s, they are still going through important emotional development at this age and are not ready to manage adult responsibilities even if at times they think they are adult.
- They need to be reassured of your care and support and to know that the limits you set are still enforced. As always, if you have any concerns about a young person’s safety it is vital you take a pro-active approach and apply your safeguarding policies and procedures.