



**ST JOHN'S SCHOOL**  
SIDMOUTH, UNITED KINGDOM

## **Bereavement Policy (Senior and Junior Schools)**

Updated July 2024

### **Introduction:**

Occasionally, the death of a pupil, member of staff or an extended family member occurs. The trauma of bereavement can have a profound effect on the school community. It is vital that there is a flexible contingency plan that will reflect how the School could or should respond in such a situation.

### **When a death occurs:**

The Head of School or, in their absence, the School Leads, will be the primary point of contact with a family when a death has occurred. In the case of boarders, this will be devolved to the Head of Boarding or, in their absence, one of the House Parents. The above mentioned staff may consult and seek the assistance of other members of staff in supporting the bereaved.

The Head of School will gather factual information regarding the death and will consult with the family regarding their wishes in sharing the information with the School community. It is important that factual information is shared in a timely manner so that assumptions and rumour are not spread, as they can only add to the family's distress.

It is essential that all staff are informed straight away, ideally before the pupils. Pupils should be told as soon as possible. This is best done in familiar groups by someone they know. Staff will need to have guidance on words to use and the approach to take. Guidance will come from the Head of School or any of the staff mentioned above (if delegated by the Head of School). Particular attention will need to be made to those members of the school community who have themselves recently experienced a bereavement.

### **The death of a pupil:**

In the case of the death of a pupil, appropriate pastoral support should be provided for the whole school community. The Senior Management Team and other pastoral staff should be deployed appropriately to provide counselling and comfort. This may include pastoral support being available at designated areas and times during the School day. The Head of School will determine the appropriate period of time for this pastoral support to continue.

If the press are involved in reporting on the death, the Head of School will issue an official statement on behalf of the School.

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 pupil is too upset to attend lessons or activities, they should be excused to go to Matron.

#### The death of a member of staff:

The same procedure should be followed (i.e. the death of a pupil).

Additionally, great sensitivity and care will need to be taken in determining how lessons will be covered immediately following the death.

#### 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 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 Head of School will identify which staff and pupils may want to attend and will deal with the practicalities of staff cover and transport. The Head of School will also consult with staff and pupils in determining what is appropriate in terms of sending flowers, a collection and/or any further more permanent remembrance.

#### The death of a family member of a pupil:

In the case of the death of a family member of a pupil, if the death happens while the child is at School, a representative for the family, preferably a parent should come to the School to inform the child. In some circumstances it may be necessary for the Head of School to tell the pupil. Before notifying fellow pupils, the Head of School should speak with the bereaved pupil's family to determine what information should be given to classmates. Classmates should be informed how the bereaved classmate wants to talk about what has happened (i.e. speak openly and take initiative, or let the bereaved pupil decide when to talk about the death).

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

#### The death of a pupil or member of staff while at school or on a school trip:

Should the death of a pupil or staff member occur during the School day or on a school trip the Head of School will immediately assemble the Senior Management Team. The first priorities will be to offer support to pupils and staff who may have witnessed the death and to inform the family of the deceased. The School Leads and Senior 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. The Head of School will consult with the police and emergency personnel in determining the most appropriate and timely method of informing the immediate family of the death.

#### External Support:

The school has access to the services of a private counsellor and this can be suggested to the family if appropriate or requested.

Beyond this, the following services are available:

Cruse Bereavement Support Helpline...08088 081677

Child Bereavement UK...08000 288840

Winston's Wish...08088 020021

'Balloons' (Grief Support locally)...01392 826064

#### Outward signs of Grief

Bereavement is an immensely stressful event that can take a huge toll on the body, potentially causing all sorts of physical problems, including physical exhaustion, uncontrollable crying, sleep disruption, lethargy, anxiety, palpitations, shortness of breath, headaches, recurrent infections, high blood pressure, loss of appetite, stomach upsets, hair loss, disruption of the menstrual cycle, irritability, worsening of any chronic condition such as eczema or asthma, and visual and auditory hallucinations. The stress response affects the immune system so colds and other minor infections are common.

Children are just as likely to show physical effects during bereavement, particularly complaining of stomach pains, headaches, bed-wetting and insomnia.

They may also show behavioural problems, becoming wild and unruly or withdrawn and sulky because of difficulties expressing their grief while at the same time coping with all the normal struggles of growing up.

What grieving children and adults need most of all is quiet support and understanding, a chance to share feelings and worries as well as time to work through their emotions.

#### Ongoing Support in School

Each person responds to bereavement in their own way. We also recognise that the pain of grief can be experienced by those who suffer from a sense of loss following, for example, the divorce of their parents. The following general principles apply for staff offering pastoral support in school:

- 1) Take the time to listen to the young person.
- 2) Be non-judgemental.

- 3) Reassure the young person that the feelings are normal and will eventually pass.
- 4) Continue to be available not just immediately afterwards but for as long as it takes.
- 5) Allow the pain, confusion, grief and anger.
- 6) Don't be afraid to discuss questions that have no answers or to say, 'I don't know'.

Pupils who have suffered a family bereavement will be documented and observed closely by our pastoral staff, and reviewed termly. As a school, we recognise the importance of showing sensitivity to young people as they approach the anniversary of the bereavement.