



**ST MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC COLLEGE**  
**BEREAVEMENT POLICY 2023-26**  
**Supporting students, families and colleagues who are bereaved**

### **Ethos**

Our bereavement policy recognises each individual as a unique part of God's creation and respects the human dignity of all members of the community. We acknowledge that, although bereavement is a universal experience, all deaths are unique, as is the grieving process, and therefore a personalised response is required that is flexible and sensitive. At St Michael's we seek to embrace Gospel and Salesian values and in so doing support our students, their families and our colleagues during times of grief and loss.

### **Introduction**

Death, although an inevitable part of life, can be unexpected and traumatic; it is a significant life challenge that can test resilience and trigger underlying vulnerabilities. Different causes of death can create their own difficulties. Bereavement impacts on individuals, families, friends, communities, schools and the workplace. Any response to death needs to be handled with great sensitivity and with consistent sources of support available in the short, medium and long term; as such it needs to ensure equality and constancy of support and time.

Bereavement affects everybody at some time. Within our school community there will be children who are struggling with bereavement and sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a student.

Around 46,300 children are bereaved of a parent every year in the UK. 1 in 20 children and young people have experienced the death of a parent by the age of 16. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person. There were approximately 5,583 suicide deaths in England and Wales in 2021 – many of these will be parents or siblings leaving behind bereaved children. [1].

[1] Winston's Wish <https://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/facts-and-figures/>

Young people who experience bereavement can be more generally vulnerable as a result of this loss and families may encounter new practical challenges that exacerbate the impact of the bereavement on a number of levels. Grief can be cumulative, so previously bereaved children and staff may be particularly vulnerable.

The effects of the COVID 19 pandemic resulted in increased deaths locally, nationally and globally. There is ongoing trauma for some students due to the unique circumstances associated with the pandemic including limited/no time spent with dying relative, restricted attendance at funeral services and reduced access to community support.

Various studies have identified universally common emotions associated with grief: denial, anger, depression, bargaining and acceptance. Ultimately, acceptance can involve acknowledging the implications of the loss, the changed circumstances, and the potential to move forward.

A responsive bereavement policy will acknowledge that feelings do not always appear in the same order for everybody, and some people experience some emotions and not others. It is common to move forwards and backwards through emotions associated with grief. Bereavement affects everyone in different ways and for different periods of time. There is no 'right way' to grieve, but as a college we acknowledge that there can be helpful ways to respond to grief.

Students, families & colleagues will differ in the extent that they want help - although that may change over time - and in the extent to which they want members of staff and the school community to know about their loss.

### **Aims**

St Michael's is fully committed to the emotional health and well-being of our students and staff. We are passionate about providing an environment, pastoral framework and curriculum that can provide support during difficult times, including a time of bereavement.

The aim of this policy is to provide guidelines and procedures as to how our school can best prepare for - and respond to - bereavement in the school community and to enhance effective communication at a difficult time, clarify the pathway of support between school, family, community and services and make best use of the support and resources available. By adopting a planned and considered approach, the school can support the emotional well-being of the child, family and staff.

We aim to have suitably trained staff in school who understand the complexities surrounding bereavement, and can strive to ensure that the school does what it can to best meet the needs of the bereaved, so that young people are helped to understand bereavement in clear and unambiguous ways, and are given opportunities to process any emotions and manage any behaviours that may accompany bereavement within a safe and supportive atmosphere.

We recognise that every bereavement is unique, and that any guidelines we have will need to take account of individual circumstances and the wishes of those most closely involved.

Factual communication is crucial in the event of the death of a student or member of staff, with the recognition that such news may be greeted with a mixture of emotional feelings.

This policy is consistent with all other policies adopted by the Governors and should in particular be read in conjunction with the following policies relevant to the safety and welfare of young people:

Health and Safety

Safeguarding and Child Protection

Special Education Needs and Disabilities

Disaster Emergency Policy

### **Procedures**

1. Contact with the deceased's family will be established by the Principal - who will be the first point of contact for the family/student concerned. The Principal will clarify the circumstances surrounding the bereavement and establish the family's wishes in respect of communicating with others. If information must be shared, there will be clarity with parents beforehand about how we will respect confidentiality and share information sensitively, only where it is in the interests of the bereaved and the school community. In the event of a student being bereaved, the Principal will discuss what the student has already been told in order to provide consistency.
2. If a member of the college community becomes aware of a death affecting a student, family or colleague they will inform the Principal, in confidence, as soon as possible. The Principal will clarify key details; factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion and to ensure that those staff involved can adopt a consistent approach to the news.
3. The Principal will outline sources of support in college for the bereaved, including key staff as points of contact. A regular check-in with families every one to two weeks from the initial death will help the college to determine the best way to respond. Creating the opportunity to talk, if desired, with the staff they feel comfortable talking to, is important.
4. The process for telling staff will be decided by the Principal. Wherever possible, staff will be informed before students and, where appropriate, key staff are prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance. Whole-school staff will have some awareness of bereavement through whole school training, if possible. Staff who are absent on the day, or previous college staff who worked closely with the deceased, should be informed when practicable. Future new staff will be informed of a previous bereavement if deemed necessary.
5. The process for telling the other students will be decided by the Principal. Students should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them. A decision will be made as to whether this information should be given as part of a whole school approach or to only certain groups.
6. The Principal will liaise with the media and possibly the police, as appropriate.
7. A letter to all school families affected will be composed at the earliest opportunity and a decision made as to whom, and how, it should be distributed.
8. In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance will be clarified, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in some rare circumstances.
9. The college timetable may be temporarily adjusted to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of children affected by the situation. However, minimal disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security and familiarity. We will build in opportunities for community

reflection/grieving, while maintaining a consistent teaching and learning routine.

10. Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate.

11. We will be aware that the impact of bereavement can follow a young person throughout their college life, so information will be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points, and additional support offered if required. The college should be aware of any ongoing bereavement issues for new students. To this end, it is important to maintain effective communication with 'feeder' schools.

12. We will use college systems such as SIMS to record when a student has experienced a family bereavement. Information recorded about bereavement via an inclusion/pastoral calendar will help to be aware of significant anniversaries and to plan for important days (such as Mother's/Father's Day) in addition to the Catholic November focus on the dead.

13. In the event of the death of a student or member of staff, it may be necessary to retrieve the personal belongings of the deceased for their return to the next-of-kin. Information on the college's database, including references and addresses, will need to be amended and updated.

14. Managing anticipated death, and responding to the needs surrounding terminal illness, will require adapted and ongoing support which recognises that the ill person is still very much alive, although gravely ill. In the case of terminal illness of a student, the college will liaise with the family to arrange for a member of staff to be the main point of contact throughout the illness. This member of staff will support the family regarding college procedures to support them during the illness and will help keep the student informed about events at college, as appropriate, during any prolonged periods of absence. A member of staff will support the student during their time in college and be available to the family after the death, if required.

In cases where an adult within the school community is terminally ill, individual conversations will be held with the Principal in terms of support, information exchange and practical considerations.

### **Good Practice**

A support plan will be created for bereaved students who are directly bereaved (or those friends struggling to cope). The plan will take special account of any pre-existing SEND and safeguarding issues. This may entail the completion of a Special Circumstances Examination form if the loss is close to an examination period. This will include a preparation plan to support the college community in advance of a bereaved student's return after absence.

A support plan will be created for bereaved colleagues who are directly bereaved (or those struggling to cope). This will include a preparation plan to support the colleague in advance of a bereaved colleague's return to college after compassionate leave.

Key bereavement staff will update their training as required, in line with best identified practice. Pastoral Staff will have bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff where appropriate. It is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for pupils, supporting each other and implementing this policy.

When appropriate, opportunities to create a memorial to commemorate/celebrate the person who has died can offer a very meaningful way to grieve as a community, in addition to a memorial Mass. It may be that members of the bereaved family would be able to attend a memorial event of this kind, and draw some comfort from attending and meeting members of their son's or daughter's college community.

### **Monitoring/Evaluation**

Where appropriate, bereaved students will be asked about the bereavement support they receive from us, to provide us with feedback to inform best practice.

Sensitive monitoring of bereaved students will ensure that, wherever possible, any difficulties that arise over time will be quickly identified and strategies to support the student put in place, for example issues around attendance or financial hardship.

### **Resources**

#### **Community:**

- **Priest/Church**
- **Family G.P. and health services**

#### **Within College:**

- **Staff: Chaplain, Counsellor, Inclusion team, Pastoral teams, Parent Partnership and Mentors**
- **Students: Mental Health Ambassadors, Friends and peers**
- **Curriculum: Assemblies, tutor time, PSHE, RE**
- **One to one sessions: For bereaved students, bereaved parents and staff**
- **Group sessions: For bereaved students and bereaved parents**
- **Building: Chapel, Prayer Garden, Inclusion area, medical room, Library, Reception meeting room and pastoral offices.**

Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support required, though referral to more specialist support should be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex. Such referrals for students will be made following agreed safeguarding/inclusion procedures. Staff will be advised re. external sources of personal support if appropriate.

### **Additional information and resources from external sources**

#### **Bereavement Resources for Young People, Parents and Families**

##### **Children and Young People**

<http://childline.org.uk/>

<https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/> -Youth-to-youth bereavement site

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

##### **All Ages/Parents/Families/Friends**

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>  
<https://www.thegoodgrieftrust.org/> - Run for the bereaved by the bereaved

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

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/about-bereavement/>

### **Bereaved Parents**

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

### **Bereavement Counselling**

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/grieffalk/> - Free counselling for young people and caregivers

<https://www.stchristophers.org.uk/candle> - Free counselling for any child or young person in South-East London

<https://slam-iapt.nhs.uk/southwark/sw-therapy-options/foundation-options/groups-and-courses/bereavement/>

<https://www.southwarkcarers.org.uk/enabling/counselling-service/bereavement-counselling/>  
-Counselling for carers

### **General Advice and Guidance for Bereaved Adults**

<https://www.bereavementadvice.org/> - Practical advice on what to do after a death  
<https://www.southwark.gov.uk/births-deaths-marriage-and-citizenship/deaths-funerals-and-cremations/bereavement-support-service>

### **Books**

'Healing a Teen's Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas for Families, Friends and Caregivers'  
by Alan Wolfelt

'Still Here with Me: Teenagers and Children on Losing a Parent' by Suzanne Sjoqvist

### **Bereavement Resources for Schools (These resources are in addition to the Bereavement Resources for Young People, Parents and Families)**

#### **For Schools**

<https://www.annafreud.org/schools-and-colleges/resources/>

<https://bereavementcommission.org.uk/>

<https://www.cathchild.org.uk/rainbows-bereavment-support-programme/> - Catholic Children's Society

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/training.aspx>

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-schools>

<https://www.educare.co.uk/courses/dealing-with-bereavement-and-loss>

<https://grief.com/the-five-stages-of-grief/> - Includes a strategy for the workplace

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

<https://www.winstonswish.org/> - Includes a strategy for schools and a charter for bereaved children

### **Books**

‘Healing a Teen’s Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas for Families, Friends and Caregivers’ by Alan Wolfelt

‘The Little Book of Bereavement for Schools’ (Independent Thinking Series) by Ian Gilbert

### **Articles/Reports**

Bereavement Commission - Bereavement is everybody’s business – summary report 2022

[https://bereavementcommission.org.uk/media/xube5elb/ukbc\\_summary\\_report\\_low-res.pdf](https://bereavementcommission.org.uk/media/xube5elb/ukbc_summary_report_low-res.pdf)-

SSAT - A recovery curriculum post pandemic - 3 May 2020- Carpenter & Carpenter

[https://www.ssatuk.co.uk/blog/a-recovery-curriculum-loss-and-life-for-our-children-and-schools-post-pandemic/?xc=be8dca77-b2c5-e911-a9a3-000d3ab0ca26&utm\\_source=SSAT+Member+Communications&utm\\_campaign=9d77571220-](https://www.ssatuk.co.uk/blog/a-recovery-curriculum-loss-and-life-for-our-children-and-schools-post-pandemic/?xc=be8dca77-b2c5-e911-a9a3-000d3ab0ca26&utm_source=SSAT+Member+Communications&utm_campaign=9d77571220-03%2F05%2F20+Sunday+Supplement+%28Main+list%2902%2F5%2F20+12%3A&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_a19cf44831-9d77571220-73555573)

[03%2F05%2F20+Sunday+Supplement+%28Main+list%2902%2F5%2F20+12%3A&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_a19cf44831-9d77571220-73555573](https://www.ssatuk.co.uk/blog/a-recovery-curriculum-loss-and-life-for-our-children-and-schools-post-pandemic/?xc=be8dca77-b2c5-e911-a9a3-000d3ab0ca26&utm_source=SSAT+Member+Communications&utm_campaign=9d77571220-03%2F05%2F20+Sunday+Supplement+%28Main+list%2902%2F5%2F20+12%3A&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_a19cf44831-9d77571220-73555573)

[03%2F05%2F20+Sunday+Supplement+%28Main+list%2902%2F5%2F20+12%3A&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_a19cf44831-9d77571220-73555573](https://www.ssatuk.co.uk/blog/a-recovery-curriculum-loss-and-life-for-our-children-and-schools-post-pandemic/?xc=be8dca77-b2c5-e911-a9a3-000d3ab0ca26&utm_source=SSAT+Member+Communications&utm_campaign=9d77571220-03%2F05%2F20+Sunday+Supplement+%28Main+list%2902%2F5%2F20+12%3A&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_a19cf44831-9d77571220-73555573)

TES - How to support bereaved children: a comprehensive guide-10 May 2020 By Grainne Hallahan

<https://www.tes.com/news/how-support-bereaved-children-comprehensive-guide>

The guardian - How to handle bereavement in school-12 May 2020by Joanna Moorhead

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/may/12/its-ok-for-teachers-to-cry-how-to-handle-bereavement-in-school>

### **Video Clips**

TES Vodagogy series Bereavement support during lockdown with Carole Henderson from Grief Recovery- 4 May 2020

<https://youtu.be/MkJkZZSb7C0>

**Winstons wish training video - 30 mins**

<https://www.winstonswish.org/childhood-bereavement-training-video/>

### **Roles and responsibilities in dealing with bereavement**

**The role of the governing body is to:**

- approve the bereavement policy and ensure its implementation
- ensure the policy is reviewed every three years or when national or local policy directs a change
- ensure that appropriate attention is given to how bereavement issues are addressed within the curriculum
- ensure that staff are given appropriate opportunities for training, reflection and access to support if they need it.

**The role of the Principal and senior leadership team is to:**

- lead a whole-school approach to the effective management of loss and bereavement, including ensuring appropriate training and support provided for staff
- be the first point of contact for family/student/staff directly affected by a bereavement
- record bereavements affecting students

- designate liaison and support to other trained members of staff when appropriate (providing named people to offer advice or support to affected students, families or staff)
- monitor progress in supporting those impacted by a bereavement and liaise with external agencies where appropriate
- keep the governing body appropriately informed
- deal with media enquiries

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

- access bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff if appropriate
- know how to report a concern if the bereavement or sudden and unexpected death has placed a child at significant risk of harm
- know how to access support for themselves, for other staff and for the family, if advice or information is needed
- know how to support a child when they are distressed and how to refer to a specialist service if needed
- have a basic understanding of a child's needs when facing loss and change
- provide individual support as and when needed and in consultation with the Principal and inclusion team
- teach about loss and bereavement as part of the planned curriculum or in the role of tutor
- inform the Principal at the earliest possibility if they hear about a death of someone in the school community

**June 2023**



**Signed by Chair of Governors:**

**Date: 5<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

**Review Date: June 2026**