

St Martin-in-the-Fields High School for Girls

A CHURCH OF ENGLAND ACADEMY
Service Compassion Justice Perseverance



BEREAVEMENT AND LOSS POLICY

APPROVED: September 2020
REVIEW: September 2023

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“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” Matthew 5:4

Christ is at the centre of our Church of England school community where we live, love and learn together within an inclusive and equalities framework, and where students of all faiths and none are welcomed into our Anglican Christian community. In all that we do, we seek to show God’s care for our students. We value, respect and celebrate all faiths and cultures because we are inspired by a welcoming, inclusive and loving God, seen in Jesus Christ and lived out through the Holy Spirit alive in every person.

Our vision is to create a safe, caring, happy and inclusive community underpinned by our Christian values of service, compassion, justice and perseverance and our motto CARITATE ET DISCIPLINA - WITH LOVE AND LEARNING which come from the story of St Martin of Tours. Central to this is our school Bible verse from St Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

INTRODUCTION

Within our school community there will almost always be some recently bereaved children who are struggling with their loss, or sometimes the death of a member of staff or a student may have an impact on the whole school community. Whilst we would hope to not encounter such circumstances, we have this Bereavement Policy in place so we can be proactive, rather than reactive, in these very sensitive situations.

Usually, support and understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of our school, along with that provided by their family and friends, may be all the bereavement support most children or staff require. However, we recognise that referral to more specialist support may be necessary where the impact of grief is more complex.

AIMS

In the event of a death of a staff member or student, St Martin’s strives to ensure all students, parents/carers and staff, are informed, feel supported and are given space and time to grieve. The school endeavours to allow people to grieve normally and in their own way by providing all staff and students with the necessary facts and information. St Martin’s will provide support to students and staff during their grief, ensuring that students encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement. St Martin’s would provide support to students from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate, and if possible, of their own choice.

This policy will provide guidelines to be followed after bereavement. The aim is to be supportive to both students and adults, and for staff to have greater confidence and be better equipped to cope when bereavement happens. Every death and the circumstances in which it occurs is different and this policy has been constructed to guide us on how to deal professionally, sensitively and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances.

OBJECTIVES

The core intentions of this policy are to:

- provide appropriate support to students and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after a bereavement
- to provide a safe and calm environment for students and staff

- to ensure there is effective communication between home and school and to provide parents carers with information on how to access other support (if it is required)
- to work with the local authority and other partners as appropriate

THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNING BOARD

To approve policy and ensure its implementation as an active document. To be reviewed every three years.

This includes:

- Undertake regular monitoring of how the school is supporting the bereaved, and the staff who support them
- Monitor the headteacher's emotional wellbeing, for example through regular meetings between the headteacher and chair
- Assist the headteacher, where required, in responding to media requests for information in the case of a publicised death
- Where necessary, arrange for another staff member to take the lead if the headteacher is not available to respond to a death immediately

THE ROLE OF THE HEADTEACHER

The Headteacher has overall responsibility for the policy and its implementation, for liaison with the governing body, parents/carers, the Local Authority and other relevant outside agencies.

The Headteacher will:

- ensure staff are appropriately trained around bereavement
- be the first point of contact for the family/ young person concerned
- liaise with the family of the deceased
- respond to media requests for information in the case of a publicised death
- keep the governing board fully informed
- where appropriate, communicate details of a death to students and staff as set out in this policy, or activate communication teams
- participate in any multi-agency reviews as requested
- lead reintegration meetings for students or staff returning to school after a bereavement
- arrange for monitoring and support of the pastoral support team or any individual staff members who are supporting bereaved students or staff
- delegate any of the above as appropriate to the School Chaplain

THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY/SDBE

To advise and support staff, consult on referral pathways and help with the identification of more complex grief.

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL CHAPLAIN

To have bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff. NB: It is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for students, supporting each other and implementing this policy. To this end it is desirable that the whole school staff have some awareness of bereavement through a whole school training if possible.

The Chaplain will:

- establish and coordinate links with external agencies.
- support individual students as a trusted adult
- support adults parents/carers/staff members
- plan opportunities for prayer response and spiritual guidance as appropriate

Bereavement Policy approved 29 September 2020

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" Matthew 5:4

- organise safe spaces for bereaved members of the school community to take time out
- organise memorials, e.g. temporary tributes, books of condolences, memorial web pages
- maintain a calendar of dates and holidays that may be particularly difficult for bereaved students or staff and ensure they are supported on those days
- provide additional support during significant transitions e.g. when moving up to the next year group or transitioning to a new school
- contact the Chaplain - Mrs Esther Moorey by email emoorey@stmartins.academy

THE ROLE OF STAFF

Participate in whole school bereavement training and utilise resources from bereavement support agencies.

Staff will:

- liaise with the School Chaplain for guidance and support
- provide a safe and calm environment for all
- act as a 'trusted adult' to support students and proactively enable them to have the time and space to talk
- monitor the wellbeing of their students, identify concerns and escalate where additional support may be required
- ensure any safeguarding concerns are shared with the Designated Safeguarding Lead
- Include teaching on the subject of bereavement in the curriculum in Wellbeing and Religious Studies lessons as appropriate.

DEATH OF A STUDENT

The school may be notified in a number of ways. Upon notification of the death of a student: Past experience has shown that if death occurs, parents usually let the school know directly and the person answering the phone will put them through to the most senior member of staff on site.

Where death occurs in the holidays or at weekends the parents will contact whoever they can. In that instance the member of staff who takes the call will immediately contact the most senior member of the school team possible and that person will then assume responsibility for the dissemination of the information.

PROCEDURES FOR THE DEATH OF A CHILD FROM THE SCHOOL

Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the Headteacher and the family's wishes respected in communicating with others. Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion, whilst being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations. NB: We need to be mindful of the use of social media sites and their impact throughout this time as rumour and gossip spread quickly.

Staff should be informed before students and be prepared (through prior training to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance).

Students should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them. A decision should be made as to whether this information should be given as part of a whole school approach or if only certain groups of students need to be informed.

A letter to all school families affected should be composed at the earliest opportunity and a decision made as to whom, and how, it should be distributed.

The school should be aware that the school timetable may need a degree of flexibility to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of students affected by the situation. However, minimal

disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security and familiarity.

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

In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance may be clarified, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances (see extra guidance below).

Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Headteacher.

As a school we are aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life so information should be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points. The school should be aware of any ongoing bereavement issues for new pupils. To this end it is important to have effective communication with 'feeder' schools.

THE FUNERAL OF A CHILD AT THE SCHOOL

It is essential to sound out the family's wishes. The family may well welcome involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to keep things private.

The Headteacher and/or Chaplain and/or the Deputy Headteacher will make arrangements for the school to be represented at the funeral and identify which staff and students may want to attend, together with the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport.

For some schools it is appropriate to close, for others it is not, consequently difficult decisions will sometimes have to be made concerning attendance.

Involve staff and students in the decision if flowers will be sent, and/or a collection made.

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS CONSIDERATION

As a culturally diverse and inclusive school, St Martin's acknowledge the cultural attitudes and behaviours relating to a death and will make sure needs are taken into consideration when putting support in place for those affected.

IF A STUDENT DIES ON A SCHOOL TRIP

If a crisis situation occurs whilst a child is out on an educational trip, then the adult with the child - or the teacher in charge - should telephone for an ambulance first and then contact the school or Senior Leadership Team emergency contact to inform the Headteacher. The school will then take the responsibility of contacting the parents. Once the ambulance team reaches the child, the child becomes the responsibility of the ambulance team and they will direct any subsequent actions.

The off site visit protocol gives guidance for such situations and should be followed. The school will notify the LA, at the earliest opportunity, if there is a death out of school. The above procedures and protocols will then apply.

Some deaths, particularly those in sudden or traumatic circumstances, attract media attention. All members of staff are advised not to respond to journalists and to refer all enquiries to the Headteacher, who will make a considered response after seeking assistance from the Local Authority Press Office.

RESPONDING TO THE MEDIA

As per school policy, no contact can be made with the media except from the Headteacher or Chair of Governing Board. The Headteacher will involve communication staff, the Local Authority Press office and any other appropriate legal advisor before making any press statement.

FOR THE FAMILY

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support. Send a letter of condolence from the school.
- Communicate with staff in the most appropriate manner, taking into consideration staff who were particularly close friends/colleagues.
- Communicate with students and their families in the most appropriate manner with support offered.
- Give parents and family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died.
- Send a representative to the funeral.
- Hold a collection /flowers to be sent as appropriate.
- If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed. Past experience has shown that this can be helpful in their grieving.
- Parents will be told that they are welcome in the school and will be encouraged to come and visit. The first visit to the school is often difficult and will be arranged sensitively in accordance with the parents' wishes. It will then be for the parents to decide if they wish to maintain ongoing links. Each family will be different, with differing needs.

THE DEATH OF A MEMBER OF STAFF

Following bereavement of a member of staff, it is only to be expected that some members of staff will be very emotionally affected and would benefit from the provision of some time for reflection. The following support may be helpful:

- A specific room could be allocated- e.g. the Meeting Room - for the duration of a lunchtime to enable staff to meet and share their thoughts over a coffee or tea. It should be emphasised that anything shared on such occasions should be held as confidential and not for public airing.
- Access to one to one time with a member of staff who is trained in bereavement support.
- The Educational Psychology team offers counselling support and staff will be reminded about this service.
- Availability of information about accessing bereavement support outside of school, e.g. CRUSE for students: Experience in many schools has shown that most students can be supported by the school staff.
- In most cases, each child will have a favoured member of staff to approach.
- The Chaplain will collaborate with the leader for Wellbeing to ensure that we have suitable books and other materials/resources to help students discuss death and come to terms with loss.
- Social Stories may be one way to help students to understand loss.
- The Educational Psychology team can offer support to students who may need more help.
- Where appropriate to the wishes of the staff member's family, the Headteacher will seek permission from the Chair of Governors to close the school so that all members of staff are able to attend the funeral.

INFORMING STAFF AND GOVERNORS

The following people should be considered especially those who may have had a close relationship with the deceased:

- current school staff not in school that day

- previous school staff who worked closely with the student
- social work team if applicable
- SEND team
- medical/first aid team
- chair of governors
- respite centres if applicable
- other professionals who work with the student – Educational Psychologist, counsellors
- some parents may need to be telephoned if their relationship is closer but who may not have been informed by the family.

Headteacher to arrange a staff meeting as soon as practicable. Identify absent staff. Tell the story of what happened leading up to the death. Give a factual explanation of how the death occurred. Be prepared for obvious upset and feelings of anger/guilt. People may connect the incident to their own personal experience of bereavement, so feelings about past bereavements may need to be discussed.

To enable absent staff to feel part of a caring team, arrangements should be made to inform them over the telephone if a personal visit is impractical. Consider the relationship between the absent colleague and deceased.

For a death that may attract media coverage (e.g. if the member of staff was a well known personality or died tragically), identify a nominated spokesperson (e.g. Chair of Governors, LA/SDBE etc.) to provide a 'news statement' at an agreed time, as a way of dealing with media intrusion. Liaison with the individual's family is essential.

Establish a 'protected' telephone line to ensure free flow of accurate information to and from the school/hospital if this is appropriate. (Use a school mobile telephone).

With death in traumatic circumstances such as suicide or murder, bereavement support services - will be requested from one or more of the following: Winston's Wish, Cruse, Compassionate Friends and the Educational Psychology Service (if psychological de-briefing is thought necessary).

Arrange staff condolences with collaborative agreement if felt appropriate.

The School Chaplain to be available to talk things through with a member of staff, parent or student if they are finding the situation particularly hard. The Chaplain/Headteacher could advise the family of support services available if required.

Arrange a staff meeting for the end of the working day to give support prior to leaving the school.

Identify staff members who will be alone that night and make arrangements for colleagues to contact them by phone if appropriate.

Trained and experienced practitioners are always available on the Winston's Wish helpline and can be contacted for support and ideas throughout the day.

The Chapel is allocated for the duration of a lunchtime to enable staff to meet and share their thoughts. It will be available throughout the day for staff and students.

It should be emphasised that anything shared on such occasions should be held as confidential and not for public airing.

Identify members of staff who have had bereavement training and who will be willing to give additional support to a student or member of staff at one to one time.

INFORMING STUDENTS

Identify those students who had a long-term and/or close relationship with the deceased to be told together as a separate group. Where possible inform all the students in the smallest group practicable. Class or tutor groups are ideal.

Experience has shown that it is more beneficial if all students are informed. It is always a shock when a death occurs in a school even if it may have been anticipated. In the eyes of the students, teachers are part of the fittings and fixtures in school and are not expected to die. Young people expect to live forever, and so a fellow student dying whilst still young enough to attend school can also feel quite shocking.

Provide staff with guidelines on how to inform students, including the following:

- try to identify any key answers that you may need to prepare, e.g. the facts about an illness, or dates which may be relevant to the death and preparing for the end of the school year.
- young people will appreciate time to verbalise their feelings and fears. Allow space for “If only’s ” to be acknowledged.
- discussion - allow students to share their own experiences of death, e.g. “When my Grandmother died”, etc.
- be honest about your own feelings and experiences, and talk honestly about the relationship that you had with the person
- answer student’s questions factually.
- be prepared for students’ apparent lack of response which may be upsetting for adults. No apparent response does not mean that a young person does not care.
- end discussion on a positive note - not all people who are ill or have accidents die - many get better. Consider a prayer to remember the deceased and their family.
- will students want to arrange for representatives to attend the funeral? How will this be managed in consultation with the family?
- students should be told that, while they may feel sad, they do not have to feel guilty if they go on to have fun or pleasure in their day ahead. They must not feel obliged to assume a burden of grief.
- students must be allowed to ask questions at this time or at any point in the following days or weeks. Staff must answer honestly and to the best of their knowledge.
- suitable books and other materials to help students discuss death and come to terms with loss will be offered/discussed in wellbeing lessons and possibly during tutor time.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP/MEMORIAL

It may be appropriate to hold a collective worship/memorial for the students. Staff need to be able to show students that it is perfectly normal to feel upset at the loss of a friend and that helpful rituals, prayers, and remembering can be shared in a manageable way together.

Invite parents/family to any commemorative events held by the school, both at the time and in subsequent years.

If memorial work has been completed, for example a remembrance wall or book, then this should be returned to the parents at an appropriate time, and students informed where it has gone.

APPENDIX 1 - CORONAVIRUS COVID-19

Our school is currently closed to all children, except vulnerable children and children of critical workers, due to the outbreak of coronavirus - COVID -19. For the purpose of this guidance we will refer to the coronavirus as COVID -19.

COVID-19 is a new strain of coronavirus and can be life threatening for some people, resulting in death.

Children and young people will be hugely affected by what is going on around them at this difficult time. Their lives are changing and they will have picked up worries and fears about the virus and the possibility that they or someone they love and depend on may get ill. They may be particularly worried that grandparents, older relatives and family members with health conditions or disabilities might die. They will also pick up on other worries parents and carers may have about the situation. For children who have already been bereaved, anxiety may be worse. Feelings of isolation may intensify as visiting extended family members and spending time with close friends are restricted.

We acknowledge and empathise with the worries around the current situation and how our families and staff are feeling and coping.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

Parents/carers

Children can sense tension. Frightening events that are widely reported in the media such as the COVID -19 pandemic can cause children/young people to worry about themselves and others. Be open with them, so they learn that it is OK to share important news, and to have different feelings. Questions that parent/carers may ask:

- What can I do to help my child who is grieving?
- How to understand the concept of loss in children and young people of different ages?
- How to recognise potential complicated grief?

Additional support is available from [Cruse bereavement Care](#)

BECOMING SERIOUSLY ILL WITH COVID -19

Not being able to visit someone either in your own home, away or in hospital due to COVID-19 will add greatly to a child's/young person's and your own anxiety about the relative or friend at a time of considerable stress and uncertainty. A helpful document from child bereavement uk can be accessed [here](#)

When discussing COVID -19 with children/young people, be honest and clear, in an age appropriate way. We have included some responses that may help you when discussing a person who is admitted to hospital with the virus.

Things to say:

- "You know is ill. He is now being looked after in hospital and the nurses and doctors are trying to help him to get better from the COVID-19 virus. So we can't visit him."
- For young children, use simple words and positive ideas. You might say: "Nanny is poorly. We can't visit her today but let's send her a video. Shall we show her your picture?"
- Answer questions honestly. It is OK to say if you don't know the answer.
- Check their understanding. You might say: "That's a great question. What do you think?"
- Show your feelings. You might say: "I'm really sad about Grandad being ill.... but it's OK to be sad sometimes. I'm OK".

Things to do:

- Give your child an item that connects them to the person whom they can't visit.
- Children/young people can write the person a letter or card, write poetry or draw a picture, that you could post, or send a photo of it electronically.
- With children, create a simple 'I wonder...?' box or jar. You can all write or draw feelings, ideas or worries and put them in the box. You can then have a regular 'share time' using the box. This may help to stop worries building up, and for you to know what your children are thinking. Try to avoid bedtime as a 'share time'.

DEATH FROM COVID-19 AND SAYING GOODBYE

If someone dies of COVID-19 or complications resulting from the virus, a number of things may be particularly hard for families and friends to deal with.

Infection controls may mean that family members do not have an opportunity to spend time with someone who is dying, or to say goodbye in person.

Depending on the person, the illness may have progressed and become serious very quickly, which can lead to feelings of shock. If members of the family were not able to be present for the death and cannot view the body, it may be difficult to accept the reality of a bereavement.

FUNERALS

As of 24 March 2020 in the UK, funerals can only go ahead at a crematorium or graveside. Only 'immediate family' are able to attend (many funeral directors are limiting numbers to 10) and they must abide by social distancing rules. That means unless you are attending with the family you are isolating with, you need to stay two metres apart and sadly will not be able to physically comfort each other if you are from different households. Anyone with Covid-19 symptoms, who is self-isolating after being exposed, or who is in a high risk group, will not be able to attend.

In the sad event that someone dies during this period of social and physical distancing it is possible for a family to involve their children, perhaps by contributing to a funeral with drawings, letters, music or poetry. Maybe they could help to plan a memorial event for the future, or send pictures, messages or film clips to share with their extended family or close friends. Taking part in an event at home such as lighting a candle or sharing memories of the person who died may help them feel connected to others who are grieving, as well as to the person who died.

SCHOOL STAFF

It is important that parent/carers remind their child that they have people who care as well as their immediate family/carers. School plays an important role in children and young people's lives.

We want to offer support and guidance during this time and contact with our children/ young people and their families is vital in order that we can monitor their wellbeing and provide a little stability and normality. This will be possible through telephone conversations.

We will stay in contact with bereaved parent/carers and the children that attend the School. The parent/carer or child/young person can talk about how they are feeling and about the person who has died, if they wish to – talking can be one of the most helpful things after someone dies.

If a parent/carer says that their child is experiencing very severe symptoms or trauma or flashbacks, we will recommend they contact Child Bereavement UK or their GP for further advice and support. However, it is likely that GP services will be under additional pressures at this time.

We will continue to adhere to government guidelines and endorse the recommendations. In addition to this, we will encourage family to continue as much as possible to instil a routine that includes, where possible, exercising, eating well, regular bedtimes, time to connect with people remotely, as well as fun time and quiet time with their children.

Members of the SLT, DSLs will:

- be available every day, either at the school or remotely. Our school office will be open during normal school hours, every week day. Parents/carers can ask to speak to member of SLT, DSLs, if they require their assistance.
- make contact on a weekly basis to any of our parent/carers who are critical workers or whose children are considered vulnerable and who have not attended school.
- contact parent/carers whose children are named on a CP plan or LAC children if they do not attend school. We will contact the social worker allocated to a family via email in this event.
- continue to attend CP and CIN meetings through video conference and between these times will ask for regular updates from the social worker.

Teachers will:

- make contact with all other parent/carers. They will talk to the child/young person to see how they are. (Teachers will ask this generally when discussing their work).
- inform SLT who are also DSLs if a member of the household is admitted to hospital with COVID-19. SLT will then make the contact calls.

LOOKING AHEAD

When schools re-open there will be much to do in order that we continue to support our students, parents/carers and staff. This will include continued voice calls, therapeutic support for children/young people, and additional external practitioners' input when specialised counselling is required.

APPENDIX 2

For more information visit our Bereavement page on the [school website](#).

Additional information and resources can be accessed at

www.rainbowsgb.org

[Dealing with bereavement](#)

[Bereavement - Christianity](#)

[At a Loss](#)

[Get help with grief after bereavement or loss](#)

[Child Bereavement UK](#)

[Winston's Wish](#)

[Bereavement support](#)

The Lord is my shepherd

I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:

he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul:

he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;

thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:

thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:

and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Psalms 23

Please contact us at school if you need any help and support. Our school Chaplain is also available to speak to by phone or email: emoorey@stmartins.academy