

## BEREAVEMENT AND LOSS POLICY

'Death neither obeys the school timetable, nor appears on it ...it enters the classroom without knocking'. Death is not the opposite of life but a part of it, the goal is not to live forever, but to create something that will.

### INTRODUCTION

Death is a subject that nobody ever wants to address. It is almost inevitable though, that at some point the school community will be affected by a death in some way or another. This might include the death of a pupil, the death of a staff member, the death of a pupil's family member, or the death of someone connected with the school.

Through providing a curriculum that acknowledges and addresses loss, death, bereavement and grief we can improve the skills of children and young people to deal with and emerge positively from them. Our school is well-placed to help children and young people to explore and develop an awareness and understanding of death as well as to support those personally affected by it. An important part of this is the ability to support pupils, families and staff at times of loss and bereavement, as well as helping children and young people to support their peers, decreasing the sense of isolation that can be part of it.

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.

St Nicholas School is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and pupils. We are dedicated to the continual development of a 'healthy school'. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that support and prepare pupils for coping with separation or loss of a loved one, either through death or divorce.

This policy is for all staff, pupils, parents/carers, governors, visitors and partner agencies working within the school. We are a community of learners, a School for cognition and learning, we will support each other in our bereavement and with the celebration of life when it has ended.

### AIMS

- At St Nicholas school our aim is to support all those affected by loss and death in a supportive and caring environment in which everyone can respond appropriately to individual circumstances. To offer understanding of the impact of loss and grief on children and young people's physical and emotional health. This support will be person centred and will be for as long as is needed.
- To gain insight into children/ young people's/staff reactions to loss and grief and how St Nicholas School responds in order to meet the needs of grieving pupils, parents and staff;
- To give pastoral support for both primary and secondary pupils, parents and staff.
- To provide effective support for all members of the school community and access to all relevant support materials (Bereavement and Loss package available from the Well-Being Team).

This policy outlines practical measures to be taken when people are in shock, or upset, especially with sudden or multiple deaths or traumatic circumstances. The St Nicholas Community will do its best to constantly evaluate and gain knowledge to offer support to those who are grieving a loss.

### ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Head Teacher will have overall responsibility for support and liaison in event of a death or traumatic loss. In the event that this person is absent then the Deputy Head Teacher will take responsibility. As a community we will work together to treat each death with respect and aim to show dedication and respect to all the processes around this.

These responsibilities are:

- Implementation of the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice;
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities;
- Co-ordinating the planned action to manage school related incidents in and beyond the school;
- Decide who will be responsible for communicating with the family directly involved;
- Decide who gives news to the school community and if necessary who will communicate with the press;
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies;
- Cross-phase liaison within the school;
- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff.

The person responsible will take into consideration the following short term support:

- Who should break the news about a death;
- What exactly the children will be told;
- How they will be told ( e.g. whole school, class, individual);
- When they will be told;
- How the information will be communicated to parents and staff;
- What question might be asked by pupils, staff and parents;
- What links will be made with the family;
- Whether it is appropriate for staff to show their emotions to the pupils.
- Within a week of a child/staff/school community member's death hold a short assembly to remember them. These assemblies should all follow similar format – photos/videos of the person will be shown, music will be played and poem/prayer will be read out. This assembly will be department or whole school based depending on the connection with the deceased and any school community member who have had close links with the child/staff or school community member will be invited. If applicable the child's parents and close family should be invited to this. Some symbolic activity may take place, At the right time – the opportunity to lay a named pebble in the water fountain in the St Nicholas memorial garden. And to be included in the St Nicholas Memorial book. Other individual requests for remembrance will be supported by the Well-Being team or significant/trusted person.

## **STAFF SUPPORT AND TRAINING**

It is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for pupils and mutual support for each other. If they are unable to, an alternative person will be available. Bereavement awareness training will be provided for all staff. St Nicholas school will ensure members of staff are kept up to date with developments.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Our teaching will be based on an understanding of the principles stated above and that a variety of approaches should be used to meet the needs of our pupils and show sensitivity to their age and experience.

Teaching methods adopted in the classroom will include:

- A range of teaching and learning styles including individual and group discussions, role play and drama;
- Introducing supporting resources – photographs, mementoes, stories and music;
- Giving clear, truthful and accurate information, not trying to soften the blow with ambiguous language which does not tell the truth;
- Practising the collaborative social skills necessary to help cope with the feelings of loss;
- Giving relevant and appropriate advice and support;
- Providing continuity and progression by visiting and revisiting issues as pupils develop and their needs and understanding change;
- Considering the attitudes and values of pupils and a range of other significant groups in their locality.

## PROCEDURES

St Nicholas School will:

- Speak to the family, if possible, offer them condolences and support before ascertaining what they would like to happen;
- Give them a direct telephone number for someone they can contact in school;
- Obtain factual information to avoid unnecessary speculation;
- Inform staff straight away;
- Decide where pupils will be told if this is necessary. The school will identify the most vulnerable pupils and give the support they might need;
- Tell the pupils as soon as possible in familiar groups by someone they know;
- Send a letter to families on the same day if possible;
- Give guidance to parents on supporting bereaved children.

## THE FUNERAL

St Nicholas School will:

- Find out the families wishes and how far they wish the school community to be involved;
- Identify which staff and pupils may want to attend and the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport.
- Send flowers if acceptable;
- Consider the cultural and religious implications if appropriate;
- Enable the person(s) who had the closest relationship with the child to attend the hospital and/or funeral - this would usually be the current class team but may be a staff member who had worked closely with the child in a previous class, and be able to have absence to attend

## LONG TERM ILLNESS

St Nicholas School will:

- Designate one person to make contact with the child/staff family to find out their wishes about staff visiting.
- Ensure they keep abreast of any developments without causing distress to the family;
- Advise staff of the family's wishes;
- Enable, wherever possible staff to visit with permission from the family
- Support the school community with accurate information and support.

## SUPPORT FOR BEREAVED CHILDREN

Not all children and young people will need the support of specialist practitioners; they need familiar people who care.

St Nicholas School will offer:

- A routine, providing a sense of normality;
- Some space, away from an emotional intense atmosphere;
- Neutral space and people to share their feelings without the worry of upsetting a loved one;
- Time to be themselves without feeling guilty (being with friends, time to play in a safe space outside the home environment);
- Regular correspondence with home, providing reassurance about behaviour and general well-being, will ensure the child or young person is managing their grief;

- Access to appropriate resources via Healthy Schools and Home support worker;
- Preparation time for children and young people to discuss what to say and how to behave then the bereaved child or young person returns to school;
- Time for staff to be aware of changes in behaviour that may be related to the death;
- An individual link person to support the pupils when necessary;
- A suitable place in school for pupils who need some space if too upset to stay in the classroom and people to whom they can go for support.

#### SUPPORT FOR PUPILS GENERALLY

St Nicholas School will:

- Identify pupils who may be particularly vulnerable or likely to experience symptoms associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder;
- Compile and keep updated a list of outside professionals and agencies who can come into the school in the event of a traumatic death to counsel pupils;
- Remember and commemorate the person who has passed if a member of the school community.

#### SUPPORT FOR STAFF

St Nicholas School will:

- Support bereaved staff and acknowledge they may be struggling with their own reactions and emotions while supporting pupils;
- Plan for informal mutual support to give staff an opportunity to share feelings and reactions.
- Give people time to attend the funeral if appropriate;
- Offer general training for all staff;
- Be aware of resources available and give time to staff to become familiar with what is available.

#### SUPPORT FOR PARENTS

St Nicholas School will:

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support;
- Send a letter of condolence;
- Give out information to appropriate people depending on the families wishes;
- Give parents and family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died;
- Send a representative to the funeral if appropriate;
- Hold a collection/flowers to be sent as appropriate;
- Invite parents/carers to any commemorative events held by the school, both at the time and in subsequent years

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

St Nicholas School will give the following opportunities to commemorate loss for parents/carers, staff and pupils:

- Give parents/carers/pupils/staff/stakeholders the opportunity to visit the memorial garden and leave a named pebble;
- Hold celebration assemblies;
- Add a photo, poem or written reflection in the memorial book held in the foyer;
- Offer support to individuals who wish to talk about their experiences;
- Offer counselling to pupils who need to explore and learn to understand their emotions;
- Create a memory box or similar cathartic/therapeutic/symbolic activity
- Give pupils opportunities to talk within a group about their experiences.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Although it is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure, pupils will be made aware that complete confidentiality in some circumstances cannot be totally guaranteed. This will help in retaining the trust of pupils and parents/carers and will ensure that the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. Sensitive information is only disclosed internally or externally with careful attention to the rights and needs of individuals.

When the child/young person returns to school it is important to discuss with them whether they want certain people with whom they come into contact to be informed, such as extended school club leaders.

## INCLUSION AND EQUALITY

St Nicholas School recognises that there is a range of cultural and religious customs and procedures concerning death and that there may be different expectations of the bereaved child and family. Some of these may affect matters of the school organisation.

St Nicholas School will try to present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. Pupils and staff will be made aware that there are a range of different responses to bereavement and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

## RESPONDING TO THE MEDIA

Some deaths may attract media attention. All members of staff will be advised not to respond to journalists and to refer all enquiries to the Head Teacher, who will make a considered response after seeking assistance from the Local Authority Press Office.

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Head Teacher or his representative to take into account any Statutory Guidance. Any changes made will be shared with the staff and Governing Body.

## EQUALITY, SAFEGUARDING AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES STATEMENT

St Nicholas School, in all policies and procedures, will promote equality of opportunity for students and staff from all social, cultural and economic backgrounds and ensure freedom from discrimination on the basis of membership of any group including gender, sexual orientation, family circumstances, ethnic or national origin, disability (physical or mental), religious or political beliefs.

St Nicholas School aims to:

- Provide equal opportunity for all
- Foster good relations, and create effective partnership with all sections of the community
- Only take actions which does not discriminate unlawfully in service delivery, commissioning and employment
- Provide an environment free from fear and discrimination, where diversity, respect and dignity are valued.

All aspects of Safeguarding will be embedded into the life of the School and be adhered to and be the responsibility of all staff.

*'Death neither obeys the school timetable nor appears on it ..... it enters the classroom without knocking' (unknown)*

## LINKS TO OTHER POLICIES:

Religious Education  
Collective Worship  
PSHE  
Anti-bullying  
Single Equality Scheme  
Safeguarding  
Behaviour Policy  
Community Cohesion  
Health and Safety  
Counselling

Emma Wellard and Stephen King  
Reviewed Jan 2020