



BALLYORAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

Loss/Bereavement Policy

December 2020

Introduction

Ballyoran Primary School is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its pupils and staff. We work towards this in all aspects of school life, seeking to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that supports members of the school community in coping with the loss of a loved one through separation or death. Bereavement and loss affect everybody at some time and, as a close community, our school aims to provide the best support for its members during such times.

'Death neither obeys the school timetable nor appears on it ...it enters the classroom without knocking.'
Winston's Wish

This policy gives guidance on how to deal professionally, sensitively, and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances. It outlines the basic principles and procedures that underpin our approach. The Principal and Vice Principal attended training with the Education Authority on Loss and Bereavement in November 2019. They have an understanding of the complexities surrounding bereavement and loss thus enabling the school to do what it can to best meet the needs of the bereaved.

It is recognised that each experience of bereavement and loss is unique. Therefore, the guidelines developed must take account of individual circumstances and the wishes of those most closely involved.

This policy is for all members of the school community. It has been developed to complement our Critical Incident Management Policy.

All aspects of Safeguarding are embedded into the life of our school and are the responsibility of all staff.

Aims

- Support for all those affected by loss and death in a supportive and caring environment in which everyone can respond appropriately to individual circumstances;
- Offer understanding of the impact of loss and grief on the pupils' physical and emotional health;
- Gain insight into children's /staff reactions to loss and grief and how our school responds to meet the needs of grieving pupils, parents, and staff;
- Provide pastoral support for pupils, parents and staff.

Curriculum

Children explore the concept of loss, bereavement and grief as part of the PDMU curriculum. It is also addressed through cross curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles as well as Art, Literacy and Religious Education. Any questions relating to loss or death will be answered in a sensitive and age-appropriate yet honest and factual way.

Children are given opportunities to learn and discuss cultural and religious issues around death as well as being encouraged to express their own responses and feelings.

Roles and Responsibilities in dealing with bereavement

The Role of the Board of Governors

- Approve the bereavement policy and ensure its implementation.
- Ensure the policy is reviewed every two years.
- Ensure appropriate attention is given to how bereavement issues are addressed within the curriculum.
- Ensure approaches to bereavement are respectful of religious and cultural values and beliefs.
- Ensure staff are given appropriate opportunities for training, reflection and access to support if needed.

The Role of the Principal

The Principal will have overall responsibility for support and liaison in event of a death or traumatic loss. In the event that the Principal is absent, then the Vice Principal will take responsibility.

These responsibilities are:

- Obtaining accurate information.
- Communicating with families directly involved.
- Informing the whole school community.
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities of supporting children.
- Supporting staff.
- Co-ordinating the planned action to manage school-related incidents.
- Liaising with the media if appropriate.
- Establishing and co-ordinating links with the Education Authority's Critical Incident Team.
- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff.
- Consider what will be appropriate in holding some form of remembrance.

The Role of all Staff

- To be familiar with and guided by the policy.
- 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 support a child when they are distressed and how to refer to specialist support if needed.
- Have a basic understanding of a child's needs when facing loss and change.
- Teach about loss and bereavement as part of the planned curriculum (teachers only)

Procedures

Pre-bereavement

In some situations, it is known in advance that a death is going to occur. This is usually because of a long illness.

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

When the expected death is of a child or a member of a child's family the Principal will:

- Contact the family to confirm factual information and explore what support could be provided to them.
- Be the key point of contact in terms of information exchange and to update when things change.
- Ensure all relevant adults are clear about what information has and needs to be shared.
- Keep lines of communication open to ensure that all information is received in a timely fashion.
- Explore the possibility of signposting to other organisations such as Winston's Wish, Cruise or a local hospice.
- Look to involve faith or community leaders when appropriate and with the agreement of the family.
- Explore what support for the pupils affected might look like in practice.
- Arrange training for specific members of staff to ensure all involved are confident in their ability to support the pupil.
- If appropriate, consider and reflect on how to communicate with the wider school community for example the pupil's class.
- If appropriate, begin conversations around practical considerations in the events leading up to the death and following the death

Following a bereavement

The Senior Leadership Team will consider each individual situation carefully to ensure that the response from school is sensitive, accurately reflects the gravity of the situation and involves those affected as appropriate.

As an immediate response the Principal will:

- Contact the deceased's family with the aim to establish the facts and avoid rumours.
- Consider any religious beliefs that may affect the timing of the funeral or impact on other aspects of the bereavement process.
- Find out, if possible, how the family would like the information to be managed by the school.

- Allocate member(s) of staff to be the key point(s) of support for the affected child / young person or children / young people and ensure there is support in place for the staff members if required.
- Send letters or cards of condolence to families or individuals directly affected.
- Inform staff of the death before pupils are informed, recognising that some pupils may have found out through other means.
- Decide how and who will inform the pupils. The class teacher with the loss will usually be the best person to tell the rest of the children in that class. Where possible, staff will be prepared to share information in age-appropriate ways to make sure all staff have the same version. Where this has not been possible, staff will be supported to share the information.
- Inform the wider school community in line with the wishes of the family.
- Make small changes to the school timetable to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of the child or children affected by the situation. However, we will aim for minimal disruption to the timetable as this can offer a sense of security and familiarity.

For the funeral the Principal will:

- Find out the family's wishes and follow these in terms of the involvement of members of the school community (or not).
- Identify which staff and pupils may want to attend if invited by the family and the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport. In exceptional circumstances, it may be appropriate to close the school.
- Organise tributes such as flowers or a collection in line with family wishes and the wishes of staff and pupils.
- Consider cultural and religious implications.

After the funeral the Principal will:

- Consider whether it is appropriate to visit the child and family affected at home and plan a return to school.
- Speak to the teacher to ensure friendships are secure – peer support can be particularly important for a bereaved child.
- Continue regular contact with the family and show we still care about them and their child over time.
- Monitor the emotional needs of staff and pupils and provide listening time and ongoing appropriate support
- Consider practical issues and make thoughtful and sensitive updates to parental and other contact details when needed.
- Continue to assess the needs of children most affected, and record and plan for support accordingly.

Longer term we will:

- Be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life. So, we will record information and share with relevant people, particularly at transition points. This could include ensuring significant dates and events for the child are recorded and shared with appropriate staff for future reference.

- Signpost families to bereavement support including that provided by Winston’s Wish <https://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/>
- Ensure that learning about loss and bereavement is embedded into appropriate curriculum areas including PDMU education. When teaching about loss and bereavement, we will give careful thought as to how to support those directly affected by loss and bereavement.

Support for bereaved staff

We are aware that staff also experience bereavement. When this happens, we will ensure they are provided with support to take care of themselves and to know where they can go for additional help should they need it.

This could include: their GP, Inspire Wellbeing (free 24 hour counselling) 0808 800 0002, <https://www.inspirewellbeing.org/>, the EA’s Health and Wellbeing Team <http://www.eani.org.uk/ea-staff-hub/hr-online/healthwell-being> or Cruse Bereavement Care <http://www.cruse.org.uk/>.

Responding to the media

Some incidents and deaths, particularly those in sudden or traumatic circumstances, may attract media attention. All members of staff will be advised **not** to respond to journalists and to refer all enquiries to the Principal, who will make a considered response after seeking assistance from the Education Authority. Pupils will be given advice.

Related Policies

Other policies which relate to the implementation of this policy are:

- Critical Incident Management Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Confidentiality Policy
- Pastoral Care Policy

Reference Documents

iMatter: Promoting emotional health and wellbeing - A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools
Winston’s Wish Schools Information Pack

Appendices

Appendix A – List of online resources and information

Appendix B – Books on Bereavement