



St. Thomas More Catholic Primary School

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BEREAVEMENT POLICY

At St Thomas More our policy is based on our belief that the following applies:-

Normality

For a child, or young person, whose life has been turned upside down, the routines of school life can give a sense of normality. Everything else may have fallen apart but school and the people within it are still there, offering a sense of security and continuity.

Relief from grief

For young children and adolescents, school can give relief from an emotionally charged atmosphere at home. They may feel overwhelmed by a grieving family. There may be a constant stream of visitors expressing their own grief. Children and young people can find this difficult to deal with.

An outlet for grief

When a parent or sibling has died, children and young people can try to spare their surviving parent by hiding their own grief and appearing to be ok. School is often seen as somewhere safe to express this grief.

A listening ear

Children can be overlooked by family members struggling to deal with their own grief. For a child who wishes to, school staff can provide an opportunity to talk about what has happened with a familiar and trusted adult in relative peace and calm.

The opportunity to be a child

Even when deeply sad, children still need to be children. Loss and grief are very grown up experiences. School offers the chance to play, laugh, sing and generally just be a child without feeling guilty.

General Support

We will keep in contact with home and discuss concerns but equally important are successes. The family or carers will find this reassuring. Grieving children and young people can display altered behaviours in different situation. Good communication with home will help school be aware of this and provide a more realistic picture of how the child is coping.

Resources

We have in school a selection of resources on the subject. Stories are a wonderful way to gently introduce young children to the concept of death. Novels and poems offer young people a chance to learn through reading listening and discussion.

- We will use the expertise within the school and share the responsibilities
- Normally the Headteacher and class teacher will be responsible for bereavement support
- Headteacher and class teacher will communicate with the families directly involved
- Headteacher will give the news to the rest of the school community

- If the press are involved, Headteacher will liaise with them
- Headteacher will organise training for all involved

Breaking the news to staff, pupils and families

- Obtaining factual information is a priority. It is important not to make assumptions or repeat what has been heard through rumour. This will only add to distress.
- It is essential that all staff are informed straight away, ideally before pupils
- We will remember part-time and peripatetic staff.
- Pupils should be told as soon as possible. This will be done in familiar groups and by someone they know
- A letter will go to families as soon as possible.

The first few days

- We will consider what to do if pupils are too upset to attend lessons. If it is a teacher who has died, the Headteacher will take his/her class.

The funeral

With regard to the funeral we will sound out the family's wishes. The family may well welcome involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to keep it private.

- We will identify which staff and pupils may want to attend and the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport. It may be appropriate to close.
- Flowers may be sent and we will involve staff and pupils in the decision.
- We will consider cultural and religious implications.

Support for staff

- Supporting bereaved pupils will be very stressful for staff who may well be already struggling with their own reactions and emotions.
- There will be informal mutual support, for example, in the staff room at the end of the school day, to give staff an opportunity to share feelings and reactions.

Support for pupils

It is important to identify pupils who may be particularly vulnerable or likely to experience PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). For example, any one who witnessed the death.

- We have compiled (and will 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.
- Make sure that help offered from outside is appropriate before accepting. Pupils may find it difficult to be receptive to support or counselling from families of fellow pupils.
- Identify 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 to for support

Remembering

This is difficult to plan in advance, but careful thought is required. The dead person's family will be consulted.

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