



ST.PETER'S R.C. PRIMARY SCHOOL



# **Bereavement Policy**



St Peter's RC Primary School



## Mission Statement



St. Peter's Catholic School Mission is that pupils, parents staff, governors and parish build together a learning community which develops love, concern for each other and forgiveness, by living out the Gospel.

This means our school will be a place which:

- ☺ *To foster knowledge and understanding of the Gospel values and growing in God's love.*
- ☺ *To ensure we care for and respect others, develop an understanding of the world and contribute to society as responsible citizens.*
- ☺ *To promote independence and excellence.*
- ☺ *To encourage us to use our gifts and talents for self-fulfilment and the good of all.*
- ☺ *To appreciate that we are all uniquely created and loved by God.*
- ☺ *To put our trust in God through prayer.*

## **Rationale**

We understand that bereavement is faced by members of our school community at different times and that when the loss is of a member of our school community – such as a child or staff member, it can be particularly difficult. Pupils need to be supported when they experience family bereavements and other significant losses in the course of their lives while they are at school.

This policy will provide guidelines to be followed after a bereavement. The aim is to be supportive to both pupils 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.

This school is committed to the emotional, mental health and well-being of its staff and pupils. We are dedicated to the continual development of a 'healthy learning environment' whereby safeguarding is our utmost priority. 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 family circumstances.

## **Following a Bereavement:**

We believe that children and adults alike have the right to:

- be given space and time to grieve
- be given support from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate – if possible, of their own choice.
- encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement.

## **We recognise that:**

- grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real.
- differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment.
- the death of a child has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/care team of that child and every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far reaching contacts.

## **The Management of Bereavement in School**

A universally accepted procedure outline will, in itself, not enable everyone to feel comfortable in dealing with the practicalities of death and bereavement. Each bereavement is unique and comes with its own specific challenges; however, it is helpful to have a framework on which to build. One of our main concerns must be

the immediate family of the deceased and as a school we state our commitment to any such family as may need practical, emotional and ongoing support.

## Transition

It is vitally important to ensure that if a child has experienced bereavement that this information is passed on to the relevant persons when they move on to a new class or school.

## Death of a pupil

The school may be notified in a number of ways. Upon notification of the death of a pupil:

- If death occurs parents should 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 can contact the parish and let the school know via email – [sao1@stpeters.greenwich.sch.uk](mailto:sao1@stpeters.greenwich.sch.uk) or [woolwich@rcaos.org.uk](mailto:woolwich@rcaos.org.uk)
- 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.

## Sharing information

It is important to agree, with the parent, before the school can take on the role of informing concerned parties within, or outside, the school community. Evidence from many special schools has shown that parents are often happy to have this burden taken away from them, as they have many people unconnected with the school to contact. There can be no definitive list of people to contact and, therefore, it will be different for each child. The school should ensure that all people who are close to the child are told in a sensitive and supportive manner rather than risk them hearing it 'on the grapevine'. The school needs to ensure it does not add to the sorrow by leaving people feeling marginalised.

## First Response

In the midst of a tragic event, it can often help to have a checklist (Appendix B). Each case is different and may or may not require the same detail. In the event of a bereavement, after consultation with the family, we will:

- Inform Father Michael or Father Matthew
- Inform the Diocese and Local Authority
- Inform the Chair and Vice- Chair of Governors
- Arrange a staff meeting as soon as practicable.
- Inform staff members
- Inform parents and students – if children have been informed, the school needs to send a letter to parents informing them of the loss, and they may need to support or comfort their children. See Appendix C. Some parents may need to be telephoned if their relationship is closer but who may not have been informed by the family.

The following people should also be considered:

- Current school staff not in school that day – including therapy staff
  - Previous school staff who worked closely with the child
  - Social Work team if applicable
  - SEN team
  - Medical team – the school nurse for example
  - Chair of Governors
  - Respite centres if applicable
  - Other professionals who work with the child – Ed Psych
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- Identify a nominated spokesperson (e.g. Head teacher, Chair of Governors) to provide a timed 'news statement' with agreement with the Director of the Education Commission and the Diocese for a death that may attract media coverage. Liaison with the individual's family is essential, prior to reporting information to the media, in order to respect their privacy and wishes.
  - Prepare a short assembly
  - Issue a list of organisations to all staff members who can provide them with support. (See Appendix A)
  - Send parents a "Dealing with Loss" guidance letter to support students and parents at home.
  - Ensure that all members of the school community are provided with the same information. Allocate a member of staff to inform and update support staff, Midday supervisors, premises managers and Office administrators.

## Sharing with Pupils

The process for telling the other pupils will be decided by the Headteacher following consultation with the teaching staff. For example, with different aged pupils there will be different decisions made and the class teacher of the class with the loss will usually be the best person to tell the rest of the children in that class. It is important that staff avoid adding worry – for example, if the child died in hospital we do not want to give children a fear of hospitals. Although the finality of death cannot be diminished, if there are mitigating circumstances that may help - such as that the child was in pain and now is free of pain - this can be used to help alleviate sorrow. Children must be told that, while they may feel sad, they do not have to feel guilty if they go on to have fun and pleasure in their day ahead. They must not feel obliged to assume a burden of grief. Children 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. The school will continue to work closely with the parish church and the priests to support children and staff. See Appendix D

## The funeral

- 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 the Deputy Headteacher will make arrangements for the school to be represented at the funeral, and identify which staff and pupils 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.
- Will flowers be sent and/or a collection made? Involve staff and pupils in the decision.
- Cultural and religious implications need consideration.
- 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.

## Memory Assemblies

It may be appropriate to hold a memory assembly for the child. Staff need to be able to show pupils 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. (Appendix E)

## If A Child Dies In School

- If any member of staff has concerns regarding a child's health they will contact a first aider and ideally the Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher.
- In the case of serious concern, the school will call for an ambulance. Due to the seriousness of the situation, this decision can be taken by the first aider or a member of the SLT.
- Immediately inform the Headteacher or, in her absence, the most senior member of staff on site.
- The Head Teacher will then ensure that the parents are contacted and seek their agreement to meet the ambulance at the hospital.
- If the child stops breathing a trained school staff member will administer CPR. In some cases, parents may have given the school a protocol to be followed in the event of a serious health incidence. In rare cases, this may include a request that mechanical resuscitation is not administered. However, whilst the school respects the parents' preference in this matter, due to the statutory responsibility imposed on the school regarding "duty of care", the need for school staff to administer manual CPR overrides such preference. Once the ambulance has arrived at school, the child is given over to their care and it is the ambulance team's decision as to where the child is taken or which form of treatment is administered.
- Where the parents have given the school a protocol to be followed in the event of an emergency medical issue occurring - e.g. no resuscitation - this protocol will be handed to the paramedics.

- Any change in circumstance following the first call to parents should be reported to them as soon as possible. NB: Staff must not impart shocking or worrying news to a parent if they are travelling in a car alone.
- Once the child is placed in the ambulance a member of staff will be appointed to travel to the hospital either in the ambulance or in their own transport. The purpose of this is to be a familiar face to the child's family on their arrival at the hospital. This person will remain in regular contact with Headteacher and/or the Deputy Headteacher.
- Father Michael will be informed at the earliest opportunity.
- The school will notify the LA if there is a death in school at the earliest opportunity. All press enquiries are to be routed through the Headteacher, Chair of Governors and LA Media Team.

### If a Child 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 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 sites visits protocols give guidance for such situations and should be followed. The school will notify the LA and Father Michael, at the earliest opportunity, if there is a death out of school. The above procedures and protocols will then apply.

### Responding to the media

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 Diocese and Local Authority Press Office.

### On-Going Support

For staff:

Following bereavement, it is only to be expected that some members of staff will be emotionally affected and would benefit from the provision of some time for reflection. Some staff members have had bereavement training to help support the school community. The following support may be helpful:

- A specific room could be allocated- e.g. the Rainbow 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 offer counselling support and staff will be reminded about this service.
- Availability of information about accessing bereavement support outside of school, eg: CRUSE - 02088500505

#### For Pupils:

Experience in many special schools has shown that most pupils can be supported by the school staff, particularly those that have received bereavement training.

- In most cases, each child will have a favoured member of staff to approach.
- The PSHE co-ordinator will ensure that we have suitable books and other materials to help children discuss death and come to terms with loss.
- Social Stories may be one way to help pupils to understand loss.
- The Educational Psychology team can offer support to pupils who may need more help.

#### For The Family:

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support. Send a letter of condolence from the school.
- 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.
- 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 pupils informed where it has gone.
- If the parents wish to visit the school at any time after the funeral, this will be agreed.

Parents will be told that they are welcome in the school and will be encouraged to come and visit. Past experience has shown that this can be helpful in their grieving. 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 on going links. Each family will be different, with differing needs. Therefore, the school will always be there to act as a source of support and information.

#### The Death of a Member of Staff

All of the principles and procedures listed above apply to the death of a staff member. For a letter template see Appendix C. In addition to the above, the school will notify the LA as employer. Where appropriate to the wishes of the staff member's family, the Headteacher will seek permission from the Chair of Governors for members of staff to attend the funeral.

#### Responsibilities

The designated person within the school who has overall responsibility for support and liaison in event of a death or traumatic loss is the Headteacher. In the event that this person is absent then another Senior Leader will take responsibility. His/Her responsibilities are:

- Policy development and review, involving pupils, staff, governors, parents/carers and relevant local agencies.
- Implementing the policy and reflecting on its effectiveness in practice.
- Using the expertise within the school and sharing the responsibilities.

- Establishing and co-ordinating links with external agencies.
- Cross-phase liaison with other primary or secondary school.
- Accessing and co-ordinating training and support for staff.

The nominated Governors with responsibility for bereavement: Gerry Franklin and Father Michael Branch

Their responsibilities:

- To contribute to generating and updating the policy.
- To support the Head Teacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is managed.
- To support the Head Teacher in overseeing the way in which bereavement is tackled in the curriculum.
- To review practice.

St.Peter's Governing Body will review this policy every three years.

**Date:** May 2020

**Review Date:** May 2022

**Chair of Governors:** Mr Gerry Franklin

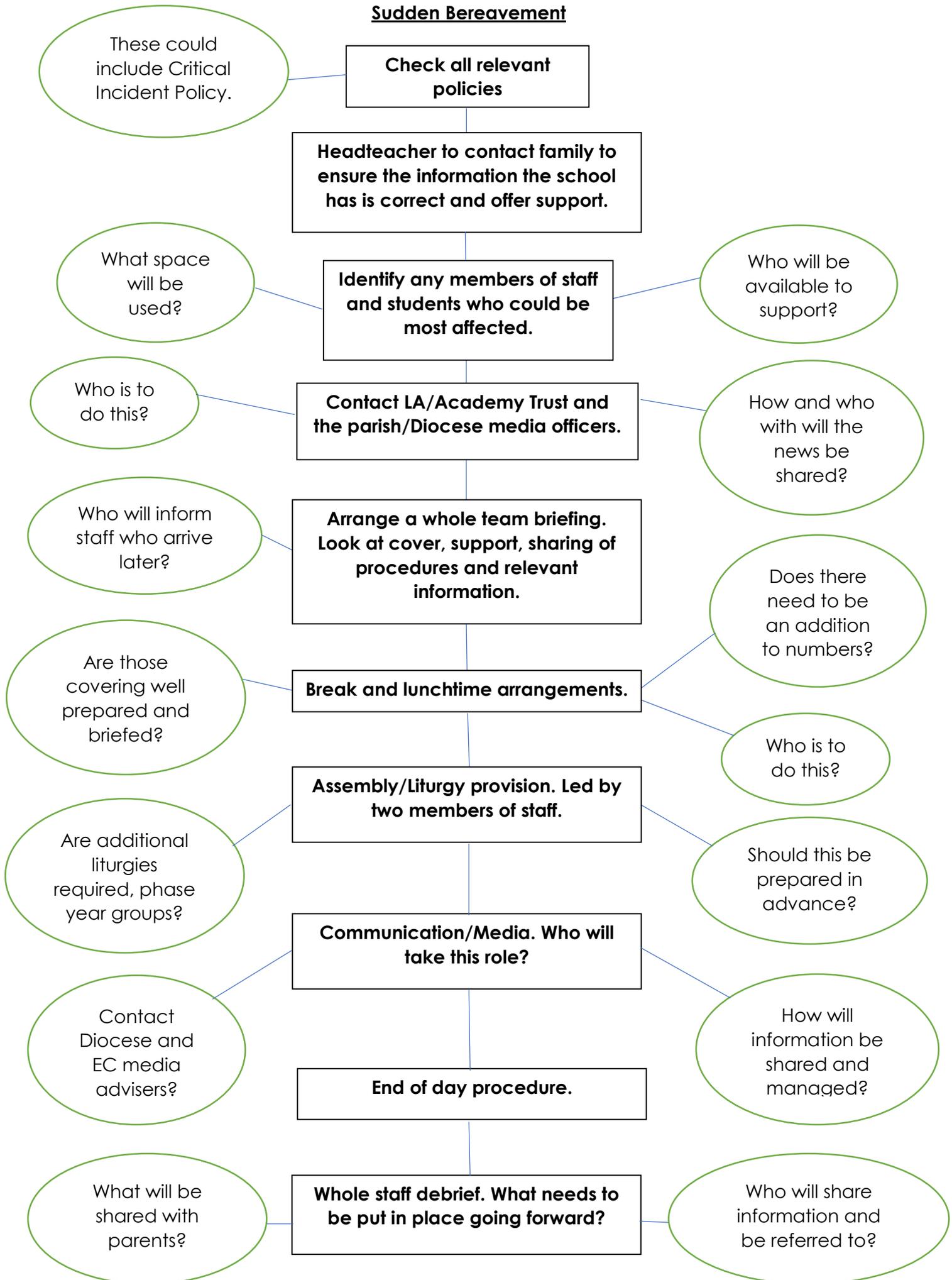
## Appendix A

### Useful Contacts

Your local Parish Priest	Father Michael Branch	<a href="mailto:woolwich@rcaos.org.uk">woolwich@rcaos.org.uk</a> 020 8854 0359
Simon Hughes	Director of Education	<a href="mailto:educationdirector@rcaos.org.uk">educationdirector@rcaos.org.uk</a>
Susan Elderfield	Chaplaincy Adviser	<a href="mailto:susanelderfield@rcaos.org.uk">susanelderfield@rcaos.org.uk</a>
Yvonne Epale	Education Adviser	<a href="mailto:yvonneepale@rcaos.org.uk">yvonneepale@rcaos.org.uk</a>
Jo Driver -	Communications Officer for RC Southwark	<a href="mailto:jodriver@rcaos.org.uk">jodriver@rcaos.org.uk</a>
Rainbows Bereavement Support	Provide in-service training, counselling and support and resources	<a href="http://www.rainbowsgb.org">www.rainbowsgb.org</a>
Catholic Children's Society	Provide family counselling and first response counselling in schools and resources	<a href="http://www.cathchild.org">www.cathchild.org</a>
Winston's Wish	Excellent early years resources	<a href="http://www.winstonswish.org">www.winstonswish.org</a>
Cruse Trust	Excellent resource and bespoke training for schools	<a href="http://www.cruse.org.uk">www.cruse.org.uk</a>
Greenwich Cruse Bereavement Care	Excellent resource and bespoke training for schools	<a href="mailto:greenwich@cruse.org.uk">greenwich@cruse.org.uk</a> 02088500505
Hope again	A site for young people living with loss	<a href="http://www.hopeagain.org.uk">www.hopeagain.org.uk</a>
St Christopher's Hospice	Provide free counselling and therapy for relatives/children of terminally ill patients	<a href="http://www.stchristophers.org.uk/candle">www.stchristophers.org.uk/candle</a>

Appendix B

**Sudden Bereavement**



## Appendix C

### 1. TO INFORM PARENTS / CARERS OF THE DEATH OF A MEMBER OF STAFF AS A RESULT OF ILLNESS

Dear Parents/Carers,

It is with great sadness that I write to inform you that over the weekend, N..., a highly respected and much loved member of our teaching staff, has died. S/he had become increasingly poorly over the last few days and in the end died peacefully, with his/her family at his/her side

The children/young people have been told of her/his death today in their own classrooms and as anticipated, a number of them are experiencing some significant distress. They were told the name of the illness was cancer and it was also explained to them that many times people with cancer do get better, but other times people die from it.

On behalf of the school community I have expressed our sympathy to her/his family.

I hope in the weeks to come we will find an appropriate way to celebrate the life that s/he had with us here at our school, together with the significant contribution s/he has made.

Personal end.....

### 2. TO INFORM PARENTS / CARERS OF THE DEATH OF A PUPIL

Dear Parents/Carers,

It is with great sadness that I write to inform you of the tragic death of one of our pupils, N..... from Year/Mrs .....class. We learned this morning that N.....had died after (*a short illness/tragic accident or other appropriate phrase*). Mr and Mrs ..... have told me that N..... died peacefully in hospital last night.

Members of staff have informed the pupils in school this morning and lessons were suspended for a short time to allow us to gather to express our individual and shared sorrow.

It is our intention, with Mr & Mrs .....’s permission, to hold a ‘Celebration of N’s.....Life’ on the same day as the funeral will be taking place in order for the whole school to be part of this time. You are more than welcome to join us at this service and we will post details on our school website as soon as times have been confirmed.

I enclose a leaflet which you may find useful with one or two suggestions that might help you to help your child with their grief.

Personal end.....



#### 4. TO THANK PARENTS AFTER A TIME OF SUPPORT FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF A PUPIL

**Dear Parents,**

On behalf of all the staff I would like to express our sincere thanks to everyone for the support, sympathy and concern we received throughout last week.

The emails, texts, letters and flowers have helped ease our sadness here in school and for that we are all most grateful.

Our hearts go out to Mr & Mrs ..... and their family. They will need our support for many months to come.

I know that despite their pain and sorrow they were greatly comforted by the love and genuine compassion shown by the whole school and the local community. The special assembly and funeral service gave tangible evidence of this compassion. The remembrance book will remain in the hall for the remainder of this half-term. Please do continue to add to it or visit the garden/chapel at any time. Its presence has been a tremendous release and comfort for many of us.

As at other times of the school year, please do not hesitate to talk to me or any member of staff if you are concerned about your child's reaction to N's tragic death. However, we also enclose some practical guidance for parents which you may find helpful and our school website lists a number of books and links to other websites which may be useful

Thankfully, what we have experienced as a school is extremely rare. I have no doubt that the experience has drawn us closer and has created new bonds but it will also leave a lasting heartache. Together I know we will ensure that it is also a positive experience, which will enable us all, children and adults to be more sensitive and compassionate human beings.

Above all else, perhaps this tragedy has helped us all put things into perspective and recognise our own and each others' humanity.

With our sincere thanks for your on-going support and understanding

Yours sincerely

## Appendix D

### Supporting pupils

The following guidelines are taken from CRUSE bereavement care website. They are general principles, and need to be thought about whatever the needs of the child are. Adapt and aid communication as appropriate.

#### Loss from a child's perspective

For many children and young people the death of a parent, caregiver, sibling or grandparent is an experience they are faced with early in life. It is sometimes incorrectly assumed that a child or young person who is bereaved by the death of someone close at a young age will not be greatly affected as they are too young to understand the full implications of death. This is untrue and unhelpful. Even babies are able to experience loss. A baby cannot cognitively process the implications of the bereavement but that does not mean that they do not feel the loss.

#### Accepting the child's experience

Children and young people need to be given the opportunity to grieve as any adult would. Trying to ignore or avert the child's grief is not protective, in fact it can prove to be extremely damaging as the child enters adulthood. Children and young people regardless of their age need to be encouraged to talk about how they are feeling and supported to understand their emotions. It is also important to remember that children and young people grieve in different ways. Grief is unique and therefore it is not wise to assume that all children and young people will experience the same emotions, enact the same behaviour or respond similarly to other grieving children and young people. A child or young person's grief differs from that of an adult's grief because it alters as they develop.

#### Time to grieve

Children and young people often revisit the death and review their emotions and feelings about their bereavement as they move through their stages of development. Children and young people do not have the emotional capacity to focus on their grief for long periods of time and therefore it is not uncommon for grieving children and young people to become distracted by play. This is a protective mechanism which allows the child or young person to be temporarily diverted from the bereavement. Bereaved children and young people need time to grieve and in order for them to address the bereavement they need to be given the facts regarding the death in language appropriate to their age or level of comprehension. Avoid using metaphors for death such as, "Daddy has gone to sleep", this will make the child or young person believe that Daddy will come back to them and may constantly ask when he is going to wake up. Similarly the child or young person might encounter problems with bedtime and not wanting to sleep for fear of not waking up.

#### Talking to children

It is understandable that many caregivers are reluctant to talk to the child or young person about the death as they do not want to cause distress or fear. Children and young people who

are bereaved need to know that their loved one has died, how they died and where they are now. Failure to be honest with the grieving child or young person means that their grief is not being acknowledged and this can cause problems later on. If the bereaved child or young person wants to ask questions about death and what dying means, answer them truthfully and if you do not know the answer to a specific question don't be tempted to make the answer up. Assure the child or young person that although you do not know the answer to their question you will find out for them.

#### Key points to remember

- Babies can experience feelings of loss
- Be honest with the bereaved child or young person
- Avoid using metaphors for death
- Every child and young person's grief is unique
- Encourage the child or young person to talk about the death and how they feel
- Children and young people may 'revisit' the death and review their feelings about the bereavement as they develop
- Use language that is appropriate to the child or young person's age and level of comprehension. <http://www.cruse.org.uk/Children/loss-from-childs-perspective>

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## School assemblies at times of bereavement

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### Words and Prayers

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Eternal rest grant unto Name O Lord and let perpetual light shine upon him/her. May s/he rest in peace. Amen

Heavenly Father we are stunned and shocked at the death of Name and as a community we have gathered together to share our sorrow, our bewilderment and our pain. We are all asking the question 'Why?' but there seems to be no easy answer.

We pray especially today for her/his friends, her/his classmates, her/his teachers and all who knew her/him.

We remember Name for ..... (List some characteristics or traits of the deceased)

We just don't understand this Lord, but help us to let go of any anger or any desire for revenge. May our tears be replaced by smiles when we think of Name, giving thanks for her/his life and all that she/he was to us and our school.

Help us now pick up the pieces once again and to carry on in life as we believe Name would wish us to.

Almighty God, you know that it will be very difficult for us at our school without Name.

Bring us the strength and the hope we need to carry on as Name would have wished us to do.

We thank you Lord for the special gifts Name brought to the school and shared with us.

May the Church and the wider community give thanks for the contribution Name made to the life of (village/town name) and may we redouble our efforts to serve each other, in honour of her/his memory.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

We hold before God all those who are sad because someone they loved has died

We hold before God all those who are sad because someone they knew has died

We hold before God each one of us that we may support each other in the days to come.

We hold before God Name who has died. May s/he rest in peace. Amen.

Lord, we look up to you and receive from you

Your blessing

Your strength  
Your most holy love.  
In the darkest moments of our lives,  
Let us remember that you are the light  
You are the hope  
You are the courage we need. Amen

Lord God, help us find comfort in our sadness,  
Certainty in our doubt  
And the courage to live.  
Make our faith strong  
Through Christ our Lord,  
Amen

Circle us Lord  
Keep hope within;  
Keep fear without.

Circle us Lord,  
Keep peace within,  
Keep darkness out.

Circle us Lord,  
Keep calm within  
Keep turmoil out.

Circle us Lord,  
Keep love within  
Keep anger away.

## Useful Scriptures

1. Job 5:11  
The lowly he sets on high, and those who mourn are lifted to safety.
2. Psalm 27:13-14  
I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.
3. Isaiah 41:10  
Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.
4. John 16:33  
I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.
5. Romans 8:28  
And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose.
6. Romans 8:37-38  
No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
7. Romans 15:13  
May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
8. 2 Corinthians 1:3  
Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.
9. Philippians 4:6  
Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done.
10. Hebrews 13:5  
I will never leave you or forsake you.