



ST LEONARD'S CE PRIMARY ACADEMY
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St Leonard's CE Primary Academy Bereavement Policy 2017-19

This policy should be taken and used as part of St Leonard's CE Primary Academy's overall strategy, and implemented within the context of our vision, instrument of government aims, and values of a Church of England Academy. St Leonard's is a Church of England Primary Academy which celebrates a love of God and puts the Christian ethos at the centre of all that it does.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 At St Leonard's CE Primary Academy, we aim to support and guide our staff and pupils with the utmost respect and care regarding bereavement and terminal illness.
- 1.2 This policy has been written bearing in mind the Children's Education Act 2004 which highlights the 'Every Child Matters' agenda which states that every pupil should:
 - Be healthy
 - Be safe
 - Enjoy and achieve
 - Make a positive contribution
 - Achieve economic well-being

2 Rationale

- 2.1 Death is often traumatic and unexpected. Its unpredictability can severely unbalance school, whose normal working environment is one based on routine. Death therefore can be regarded as a potentially dis-unifying force that exists in an unpredictable world. At the same time, it can also be unifying, bringing people together in their grief.
- 2.2 Intervention is essential in managing and minimising any disruption. The aim should be to help the individual to cope in terms of the unpredictable and to use the reassurance of friends and school community to surround the bereaved person with a predictable routine.
- 2.3 A considered, planned and organised response to an event is much more effective than acting on impulse. It is vital that a school maintains a shared course of action.



Living and Learning Together with God's Help



3 Intervention Team

3.1 An intervention team will be set up to help pupils and staff to cope with the bereavement process. This team will consist of: Key member (usually the Head Teacher); Foundation Governor (usually a priest); Teacher; Teaching Assistant.

4 Managing the first day

4.1 When informed of a death affecting a child in their class, members of staff should, in the first instance, contact the key member of the intervention team. If a parent/carer, relative or close friend of a child has died, the key member will decide (after speaking to the next of kin) who should approach the child.

4.2 A parent/carer or relative coming into school to break the news, possibly with support from a member of staff, may be the best approach. If neither parents/carers nor relatives are able to attend, the key member will decide who is best suited to deal with the situation.

4.3 The key member will need to gather as many details surrounding the death as possible. If the death has been particularly traumatic, the media may be involved. It is essential that the correct information is disseminated to all staff. The key member will be responsible for dealing with the media and will decide whether or not to assemble the whole team.

5 Multiple deaths, death in school of either a pupil or member of staff

5.1 These instances may warrant assembling the entire intervention team. It is crucial for the key member to gather together facts and details, and then determine the likely impact on the whole school. In the case of multiple deaths, additional support and resources may be required. Additional teaching staff may also be required.

5.2 In the case of the death of either a child or member of staff, whether at home or at school, the key member of staff (after consultation with the deceased's family or relatives) will then inform close friends and acquaintances. A general staff meeting will be called to allow private grief before announcing the news to the rest of the school, perhaps in a special assembly.

5.3 Confidentiality is paramount. To avoid rumours, it is important to be open and honest, to not make any assumptions about the cause of death unless:

The deceased next-of-kin has given consent
There has been an official determination

5.4 After the assembly, in the confines of the classroom and preferably in small groups, teachers should allow pupils to express their emotions, allowing them to show their feelings and thoughts in a safe environment with a member of staff. However, the key member will discuss with staff how they feel about this. Not all staff will feel confident in these circumstances and should not be pressurised. If required, the team member who is conversant with bereavement counselling skills or another/additional teacher should be asked to attend to support staff.

5.5 It is essential to allow pupils to articulate their thoughts and feelings, to support them and not to let them feel in any way inhibited. Sharing their grief in a supportive environment can facilitate the grieving process. It should also be remembered that as pupils react to such news in very different ways, some pupils might not want to share their feelings straight away. Sensitivity must always be shown, respecting pupils' choice as to when they are ready to explore their feelings about what has happened.

5.6 For students or staff particularly affected, the school may wish to enlist the named professional bereavement counsellor or the appropriate outside agencies. This could include:

Cruse bereavement Care - Young persons helpline - 0808 808 1677

6 Funerals, Memorial services/Pupil participation

- 6.1 Before the bereaved pupil or member of staff returns to school there is likely to be either a funeral or a memorial service. It is likely that pupils and staff will express a wish to attend, or take part in the service, but they should only do so with the deceased's family or relatives' prior agreement, as well as the agreement of their own parents/carers. The key member, who should be the only person representing the school and in contact with the family/relatives, will need to discuss funeral arrangements.
- 6.2 The class most affected might like to write down their thoughts and feelings; these could then be given to the bereaved family to assist in the planning of the service. It should be the role of the key member to ensure that no inappropriate remarks or comments are made. After the service, staff and pupils should be encouraged to meet and express their thoughts and feelings as such services are important in the grieving process.

7 Managing the first week and beyond

- 7.1 This is a period of consolidation. The intervention team will meet to discuss progress and developments. The key member will maintain close links with the family to support the return of the bereaved to school.

8 Return to school

- 8.1 For the bereaved child or member of staff, returning to school will be traumatic. It is essential to pave the way for their return.
- 8.2 In most cases it is advisable (with the bereaved family's agreement) that everyone in school is aware of the situation before the pupil returns.
- 8.3 Whilst it is natural to show compassion and allow expression to those suffering grief, it is important not to forget that for the bereaved, school, with its routines and rules, can provide respite. Death brings unpredictability, fear and uncertainty. For the bereaved, family life at this traumatic time, can be particularly distressing, routines upset, relationships strained, the future uncertain.
- 8.4 In the interests of the bereaved, therefore, teachers should endeavour to foster an environment that is compassionate, yet disciplined. Getting the balance right can be difficult, but school may be the only safe haven available.
- 8.5 It is important to remember that birthdays and anniversaries often spark a revival of feelings associated with the initial bereavement. The family and close friends will remember the deceased's pupil's birthday, as they will the anniversary of the death. Siblings in the school will be particularly vulnerable at these difficult times. Staff should be made aware of such dates in order that they may react with the necessary sensitivity and respect.
- 8.6 It is at times like these when members of staff often feel insecure of their own abilities, finding it difficult to cope. Without encroaching on their privacy, staff might keep an eye on those teachers particularly affected by the death of a close associate. Ideally, a member of staff or the intervention team trained in bereavement counselling should provide support.

9 Terminally ill Pupils and Staff

- 9.1 In the event of a child or member of staff becoming terminally ill, their wishes and those of their parents/carers/next-of-kin should always be respected. Should the child wish to attend school, the class teacher may need to inform the class of the child's condition. Occasionally, the child may wish to

talk to their fellow class mates about their predicament themselves. We believe honesty about death and dying is the best line of approach.

10 Points to consider:

- Keep classes informed of changes to daily routines
- Decide how long the school may need for a settling down period. This must be flexible, as it may need to be revised
- Have support available for staff and pupils
- Be aware of pupils who overreact

School life has to continue and appear to be normal, to keep it the safe haven it should be. Momentarily this may be shaken, but bringing things gently back to normality will help to increase the feeling of safety within the school for everyone.

This policy will be reviewed at least annually and after any death related incident.