



## St Michael's School

# Bereavement Policy

**SCOPE:** This Policy applies to the whole school including EYFS.

**This policy has been agreed by the SMT, Fr. David and Chair of Governors but has not been formally ratified by the governing body and should be treated as a working document.**

This policy will provide guidelines to be followed after a bereavement. The aim is to be supportive through good communication, responding to needs, and emotional awareness.

St Michael's is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and pupils. We work towards this in all aspects of school life, from the pervading Christian ethos, environment and curriculum that support and nurture pupils.

### **COVID -19**

The Coronavirus Pandemic can cause children to worry about themselves and others. Children who have been bereaved at this time or whose bereavement has been caused by COVID -19 are likely to show a stronger reaction and may worry that they or someone they know will die as well. COVID -19 makes a bereavement more complex. This policy will still apply but will be mindful of the points raised in Appendix I.

A flexible approach is key to the situation, of which advice from the government is subject to change.

### **Loss**

Bereavement is the state of loss which is felt when someone dies. The loss of pets, separation and divorce and having a seriously ill parent can and often do evoke similar reactions to death. In addition, fear of bereavement and of loss can also evoke some of the issues associated with death. This policy focuses on bereavement and the role of the school.

### **Bereavement in School**

Every bereavement is different, unique and personal and children will be affected to a greater or lesser degree, dependent on the circumstances of the death and the nature of the relationship they had with the person who has died.

*Most grieving children do not need a 'bereavement expert' they need people who care about them. Schools, just by carrying on with their usual day-to-day activities while being aware of the bereavement, can do a huge amount to support a grieving pupil. Child Bereavement UK*

Bereaved pupils need the stability of a familiar routine with caring adults. However, where the impact and presentation of the grief is more complex or becomes more complicated, referral to more specialist support may need to be considered. A bereavement would become more complicated if the grief does not fade over time and impacts upon the child leading their everyday life.

### **The School's Role**

School can provide the stability and normality which may understandably be lacking at home following a bereavement.

Most of the bereavement management in school will involve being mindful of the child's wellbeing and their family and adjusting the curriculum if appropriate and remaining in contact with the child's family.

Bereavements are treated on a case by case scenario. Due to the unique nature of each bereavement a flexible approach is best. Most bereavements that occur at St Michael's though, are managed by the families themselves and school input is generally minimal.

Once the school has been informed of a bereavement the child's family should be asked how best the school can support the child whilst being aware of the family's personal needs, wishes and beliefs. The form tutor will be key in this, though support is available from the Pastoral Lead and team or Senco.

Staff are informed and the child's bereavement communicated in SCIM or SMT or before if necessary. Regular updates may well occur if needed. A note may be put on the child's file if deemed necessary.

The school will remain mindful of the child and where the impact and presentation of the grief is perceived as becoming more complex, referral to more specialist support may need to be considered, such as School Nursing, EWMHS, Southend Safeguarding and Southend Educational Psychologist Services.

Colleagues should be mindful of bereavements involving children with SEND requirements and those children with existing Mental Health conditions.

If there are safeguarding concerns, school safeguarding policy is referred to.

### **The Form Tutor**

The child's form tutor will be key in providing a stable and caring environment for the child. They will be the first point of contact with the family. They will be aware of the curriculum and events on the calendar and may make necessary adjustments in consultation with the school and child's family. The child or their family may well wish to discuss how they are feeling and the form tutor should be ready for this and be prepared to update knowledge or seek support from the Pastoral lead or Senco.

This policy is limited and additional support, information and training can be gleaned from CPD through Educare and websites specialising in childhood bereavement such as detailed below.

### **Bereavements with more impact**

These would include a death of a parent, pupil, brother or sister, closer family member, close friend or significant pet. Here, referral to more specialist support may need to be considered. Time away from school may well be appropriate too. The essential role of the school would remain the same though, namely to provide a stable environment for the child. Consideration would be given to internal management and external support.

### **Bereavements of a Complex and Tragic Nature**

Some bereavements may well be more complex and tragic, not only because of their impact but the circumstances surrounding the death. These will include the death of a pupil on site or on an educational visit or a member of staff or a death involving sudden tragic circumstances such as homicide or suicide and the possible media interest that these may bring. During such events the Disaster Recovery Policy would be consulted as well as looking to external agencies of support.

### **Transitions and ongoing support**

The details of the bereavement, including important dates, should be passed on to subsequent teachers/schools to ensure continued support and understanding for the pupil. The school needs to be mindful of dates, etc related to the bereavement during the pupil's time at the school.

### **Responsibilities**

The Pastoral Lead has overall responsibility for bereavement management in the school, and the Bereavement policy, though he is supported by the Pastoral Team, the SMT, School Nursing and Fr David.

In the event of a death of a tragic nature the Headteacher has responsibility and works in accordance with the Disaster Recovery Policy. Should this person be absent then another Senior Leader will take responsibility.

The nominated Governor with responsibility for bereavement is Fr David. He is available to give pastoral support to school families regardless of their belief.

### **Useful websites**

[Child Bereavement UK](#)

[Winston's Wish - giving hope to grieving children](#)

[Samaritans | Every life lost to suicide is a tragedy | Here to listen](#)

[Children and bereavement](#)

[How to help a child or young person | Cruse Bereavement Care](#)

[Southend Educational Psychology Service - Resources Page](#)

## Appendix I

### COVID - 19

Colleagues need to be mindful that the usual school community and its routine will be absent and a virtual school with online learning in place. In addition there may well be some pupils being educated in school from 1st June.

Consideration needs to be given to the need of the online schooling routine or the practicality of such a routine in the occurrence of a bereavement. In addition, the usual grieving systems available will not be in evidence, which will place extra demands on the family and child, such as social distancing and different funeral arrangements.

Consideration could be given for the child to attend school as a vulnerable child because of the lack of usual support systems that would help with the bereavement process., ie the school community and the child's friends and caring adults.

Contact through the school's online platforms with friends or chosen teachers would be useful for the bereaved child and family.

Increasingly, social media is being used as a platform for memorials and messages of condolence. Some bereaved pupils find social media a source of comfort as they can:

- View messages of condolence.
- Find and access support.
- Use it as a forum to share special memories of the person who died.
- Find others who have had similar experiences.

This can be very positive but needs careful monitoring to ensure that it is used appropriately and sensitively. The longevity of the software may mean that these precious messages may not be permanently available.

Fr David is available for pastoral support.