



Bereavement Guidance to Schools on the death of a member of staff, student or parent

FIRST RESPONSE

For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end. Psalm 48:14

This guidance is to support Schools in their **first response** to the death of a staff member, student and parent. Although much of the advice is common sense, in the midst of a tragic event it can often help to have a checklist. Each case is different and may or may not require the same detail. Please use the "Sudden Bereavement Flow Chart" to assist you – Appendix 1

- **Arrange a staff meeting as soon as practicable.**

Identify absent staff. Include members of support staff, mid-day supervisors, premises staff. More than one meeting maybe required but ensure that everyone hears the same message.

- **Informing staff members**

If a death has occurred in a holiday period, make sure that all staff are informed. Some schools have a 'snow day' or other urgent communication systems in place that could be used.

- **Informing Parents and student**

Ensure a letter or notification has been sent to parents clearly informing them of the school's procedure and how the pupils will be supported when they arrive at school. It is appropriate to consult with the bereaved family as to the content. It is sometimes difficult for parents to communicate upsetting news to the children, so repeating information in school ensures that everyone hears the same message.

Give a **factual and brief** explanation of how the death occurred

Be prepared for obvious upset and feelings of anger/guilt. Staff and students may connect the incident to their own personal experience of bereavement, so feelings about past bereavements may need to be discussed. This is perfectly natural.

- **Staff Absence**

To enable absent staff to feel part of a caring team, arrangements should be made to inform them over the telephone if a personal visit is impractical.



- **Media & Communications**

For a death that may attract media coverage (e.g. if the member of staff was a well-known personality or died tragically), 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, as a way of dealing with media intrusion. Liaison with the individual's family is essential, prior to reporting information to the media, in order to respect their privacy and wishes.

Establish good lines of communication with all relevant parties, this will always include family and staff, in other cases it may involve communication with emergency services, health, the Educational Psychology service, Social Care, and other support services.

- **Prepare a short assembly**

Ideally, this should be led by two members of staff to model support, giving a factual and brief explanation of what has happened. Include a time of prayer for the person who has died and the family who are experiencing loss. Encourage the community to pray as this can bring consolation and support. Please contact your Parish Priest, Chaplain or Diocesan Chaplaincy Adviser for further support.

- **Sign-posting**

Issue a list of organisations to all staff members (please see 'Useful Contacts') and allocate named members of staff who can provide support them (Headteacher, classroom teacher, Counsellor, Chaplain, named support staff). Send parents a "Dealing with Loss" guidance letter to support the students and parents at home

- **Be inclusive**

There can be times when members of our school community are not provided with the same information. This is often unintentional, and misunderstandings can be avoided by allocating a member of staff to inform and update support staff, Midday supervisors, Premises officers and Office administrators. These are often many of the front-line staff who come in to contact with parents, students and staff members.



GENERAL GUIDANCE

Be honest

Death is not an easy subject for anyone. Model the fact that difficult feelings are ok, and totally normal. If you are upset, do not be afraid to be empathic but manage your emotions.

Use clear language

Trying to avoid the death by using phrases such as “your loss” and “gone to a better place” can be frustrating. Simply use language which is real and clear; “I was really sorry to hear that your Dad died last week, how are you feeling?” or “I’m sorry to hear about.....”

Expect questions, but don’t feel pressured to provide immediate answers

Recognise that every death and every reaction to it is unique

Don’t assume anything

Ask the pupils how they feel, rather than projecting feelings that you might expect them to have.

Allow time and space

Staff and students need time to work out how they feel and this is different for everyone; be prepared to questions and feelings over days and weeks as they move in and out of grief.

Act early to prevent rumours

In the case of an unexpected death, it is important to act early to prevent rumours and protect the family involved. Please seek advice from the Local Authority and Education Commission.



(Adapted from ©Winston's Wish: Strategies for Schools)



NEXT STEPS

Breathe and take a moment to reflect on your next steps:

Stability and Calm

Establishing stability and calm within the school after a bereavement takes time and must be handled sensitively. Therefore, it is vital to have allocated named staff in place to **listen** to the concerns of staff and students and **guide** them through the next steps of grief. Whilst acknowledging that some members of the community will want to “do something” or “be active” it is important to remain calm and consider ‘if and when’ this appropriate.

The empty chair

The ‘empty chair’ could be a physical reminder of the person who has died, a cup in the staffroom, a nameplate on a tray. Staff and students often have a particular chair that they sit in or place that they stand. It may take a few weeks, but often there is a natural movement that requires the seat to be taken. Again, this can be acknowledged as part of the process, but not forgetting.

Here are a few ideas of support

- Find time to gather the staff together for ‘afternoon tea’ to support their well-being and each other at the end of the first week.
- Invite students, staff and parents to contribute to a book of remembrance
- How and who will keep in touch with the family
- Access counselling services for on-going support to staff and students
- Organise a memorial mass for the life of the pupil or staff who has died at an appropriate time
- Note when the funeral will take place and always communicate the wishes of the family to staff and students in good time.
- Tree planting ceremony
- Memorial Garden
- Memory Box



USEFUL CONTACTS

Your local Parish Priest		http://rcsouthwark.co.uk/parlink.html
Simon Hughes	<u>Director of Education</u>	educationdirector@rcaos.org.uk
Susan Elderfield	Chaplaincy Adviser	susanelderfield@rcaos.org.uk
<u>Yvonne Epale</u>	Education Adviser	yvonneepale@rcaos.org.uk
Jo Driver -	Communications Officer for RC Southwark	jodriver@rcaos.org.uk
Rainbows Bereavement Support	Provide in-service training, counselling and support and resources	www.rainbowsgb.org
Catholic Children's Society	Provide family counselling and first response counselling in schools and resources	www.cathchild.org
Winston's Wish	Excellent early years resources	www.winstonswish.org
Cruse Trust	Excellent resource and bespoke training for schools	www.cruse.org.uk
Hope again	A site for young people living with loss	www.hopeagain.org.uk
St Christopher's Hospice	Provide free counselling and therapy for relatives/children of terminally ill patients	www.stchristophers.org.uk/candle
Papyrus UK	Prevention of Young Suicide	www.papyrus-uk.org



Sudden Bereavement – Appendix 1

