

Bereavement Policy of Harold's Cross NS

Introduction:

This policy was drawn up by members of staff in consultation with parents. It provides a framework for all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, to give guidance on how to deal sensitively and compassionately in difficult and upsetting circumstances such as the death or the loss of a loved one.

Loss and grief take on many different forms, such as loss of a beloved belonging, changing schools, a pet, redundancy, separation, divorce and the death of a sibling, or member of a family or a relative or friend. No matter how prepared we think we are, death and loss is often traumatic and unexpected. Its unpredictability can severely upset individuals, families or whole communities. At Harold's Cross National School, we believe that death is a part of life and is experienced in many different ways by people depending on their faith and culture. We believe that one needs to be given time to grieve and opportunities to talk freely about feelings of loss without fear or ridicule. Our school community recognises loss experienced by others, cares about their loss and supports others in their loss. Our school community creates a Christian understanding of hope and celebration where all members are valued, including those of other faiths and those of none.

When home circumstances are changed because of a death in the family and all around is 'different' (see the definition of loss below), our school aims to be a place that both child and family can rely on, and gain some much needed support. If the death is of a child or member of staff, the whole school community will work together, with outside agencies as appropriate to support each other. In drawing up this policy our school aims to put in place protocols to enable children, their parents and staff to cope with bereavement in the event that it arises..(A list of contact numbers is provided in Appendix 1).

Vision

Harold's Cross NS is a community which supports and provides for the creative, intellectual, spiritual, physical, moral and cultural well-being of our students and staff. We have a duty of care towards pupils and each other and we endeavour to provide appropriate support and guidance in dealing with a loss which can impact on all members the school community.

Objectives

- To ensure everyone – parents, guardians, pupils and staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities when caring for a bereaved child/adult.
- To ensure that the school is a place of support, where the care and support for anyone who has lost a loved one is a priority.
- To ensure that the bereaved child/adult is aware of the supports that are in place for them.
- To ensure that the guidelines and protocols which are in place when a bereavement occurs are followed.

Initial Procedures:

When school is informed of a bereavement or loss in a family the following actions should be considered:

1. The family should be contacted offering appropriate support
2. The family should be asked how much and what the child already knows, how and if they will be involved in the funeral service
3. The school explains to the family how they can support the child and family if they want support.
4. The family should be asked to keep the school informed of changes in a child's behaviour and vice versa. (e.g. The child can become withdrawn or has concentration issues)
5. Involve outside agencies when appropriate (e.g. NEPS, Barnardos)

The child -

- Needs to be given strategies for coping with loss.
- Needs to be helped to recognise and appreciate loss as experienced by others
- Needs to feel that they are valued and are listened to.
- Needs to be helped to recognise that the death of a family member can hurt.
- Needs to be taught to identify their emotions when discussing loss.

Terminally ill Pupils/Staff member:

- First and foremost, in the event of a child or staff member becoming terminally ill, their wishes and those of their parents or guardians and next-of-kin, must be respected.
- Should the child wish to attend school as normal, the class teacher should inform the class of the child's condition. Honesty about death and dying is the best approach if the individual is comfortable with such and parental consent is given.
- Similarly for the staff member once management has been informed.

Roles and Responsibilities:

Management -

- Needs to ensure that parents, students and staff are aware of the policy, guidelines and of the protocols in play.
- Needs to appoint a staff member to provide continuing support to the bereaved child/adult. (Intervention team)
- Needs to identify internal and external support agencies and how these agencies can help when appropriate. (Intervention team)
- Ensure that staff are aware of their leave entitlements if a bereavement should occur.
- Check in with the relevant teacher during a time of bereavement.
- Provide advice and support to a particular staff member if a bereavement occurs amongst his/her pupils, their colleagues or their family and also staff.
- Put support structures in place to help teachers so that they can seek out others in the school environment or external agencies for advice and information (Talk on Bereavement by Barnardos staff).
- Set up an intervention team, to provide support in these circumstances for staff members, parents and students alike. (The school staff can also seek

outside help from external agencies when appropriate. A list of these agencies and additional tips for staff can be found below)

- If possible, management will organise appropriate training in dealing with bereavement for staff members.
- Organise a formal representation of the appropriate members of staff and or the board to attend the funeral of a child/parent/staff member if appropriate.
- Organise for members of the Students Council, School Choir and other appropriate members of staff to attend services where appropriate or when asked by parents/staff members.
- Procedures for Bereavement leave for staff- **please see circular 0032/2007 titled 'Teacher Absences':** <https://www.into.ie/help-advice/leave-of-absence/brief-absences/#death>

Intervention Team -Key members:

The intervention team may comprise some of the following-Principal, Deputy Principal, relevant Class Teacher and SNA if applicable, Support Teacher if applicable, Home School Liaison Person, Parish Priest, member of the Board of Management, representative of non-teaching staff, or external agency representatives such as NEPs Barnardos-Solas, Lucena, CAHMs.

Teacher Actions:

- Draw up a planned intervention specific to each loss when it arises.
- Create a caring environment where loss is recognised and supported.
- Offer physical comfort when appropriate.
- Talk with the child in simple terms
- Highlight that feeling sad and crying is ok.
- Encourage the child to talk about their feelings naturally and without judgement.
- Involve parents in discussions when appropriate.
- Answer questions directly and be honest in your response. Eg. What happens to people who die-How to answer honestly?)
- Be understanding, sensitive and patient at all times.
- Inform the principal if he/she is not comfortable or sure of themselves when dealing with discussions around bereavement. (Teachers should not feel under pressure or uncomfortable when taking on this role)
- Use a wide range of strategies to help the bereaved child cope with the bereavement loss e.g. use of stories, poems, music, dance, games and drama, celebration of the person's life, scrap books of photos, journals. (See Appendix 3 below)
- Be approachable to pupils and respond sympathetically if a pupil approaches them with a concern

.When the Child Re-enters Class

- Explain you know what has happened and that you are there if they want to talk.
- Discuss with the child other individuals in the school that they can turn to for support.
- Discuss with the child the resources and strategies available to him/ her (see list below).
- Make the child aware that you care for them and their feelings.
- Assign time to talk to the child when the child is ready.

- Provide a special place for alone time and show them this space e.g. sensory pod.
- Look out for and record changes in behaviour.
- Never be cross with the child.
- Encourage and praise the child.
- Be ready for questions the child may ask.
- Address the child's emotions, don't change or avoid the subject of death.
- Encourage the child to think of and share happy memories of the individual they have lost.
- If the child demonstrates a sense of blame, reassure the child that they are not responsible.
- Be patient with the child and consider the stages of grief. If the child is not upset, it doesn't mean he/ she is ok.

Parents Should:

- Understand the guidelines and policy in place if they suffer a bereavement in their family or wider community.
- Ensure that they inform the school of a bereavement.
- Must provide a note/email to the class teacher explaining the absence of a child or the need to attend a funeral. This note/email must be signed and dated by a parent/guardian and must be given to the teacher/principal before the funeral is to take place.
- Understand that as parents/guardians, they are responsible for the primary care of their child and they must keep the school informed at all times.
- In the event of a sudden or tragic death or death by suicide it is not appropriate that students should attend funerals without the support of an adult if at all.

Return to School for the Bereaved Child or Staff Member:

- It is advisable (providing the adult or parents/guardians of a bereaved pupil give consent) that all staff members and pupils are informed of the situation and circumstances before the person returns to school.
- For the bereaved, school can assist in settling emotions and bring some routine and normality into a strained situation. We must respect the need for a sense of normality to be restored.
- It is important to bear in mind that anniversaries can trigger a revival of feelings associated with the initial feelings following the bereavement. For closer relatives of the bereaved, staff should be made aware of their anniversary dates. It is at times like these where the bereaved need to be looked out for.
- Awareness of how one child's / person's grief may trigger another child's / person's grief

The Curriculum

In the school's SPHE whole school plan, the issue of bereavement and death is addressed at an appropriate level for each class group SPHE lessons, Children will be given an opportunity to discuss this difficult issue and ask questions regarding their own personal bereavement experiences.

The topic of death and bereavement is also covered in the 'Grow in Love' programme appropriately for each class level.

The stands 'Myself' and 'Myself and Others' addresses issues of death, bereavement and loss at an appropriate level for each age group. -

Resources

There are a wide range of resources such as; story books, poems, games, drama activities, art, dance and music available to help staff to raise difficult and concerning issues with their classes. Suitable resources for children are listed in Appendix 4.

Implementation Procedures:

Procedures for school students:

- Students may be absent from school from one to five days for funerals of close family and relatives.
- It is to be expected that a student may be absent from school on the day of the funeral of close friends or peers. However permission should be sought from the principal by the parent, to absent themselves from school.
- If the bereavement is that of a distant family member or distant friend, if it is appropriate, the students are to pay their respects outside of the school day accompanied by their parent/guardian.

Appendix 1

Useful support organisations include:

- Rainbows Ireland- www.rainbowireland.ie
- Bethany Bereavement Support- <https://www.bethany.ie/> 087 9905299
- The Irish Childhood Bereavement Network- <https://www.childhoodbereavement.ie/> (01) 679 3188
- Barnardos- <https://www.barnardos.ie/our-services/work-with-families/bereavement-services/> (01) 473 2110
- <https://www.cgcmaine.org/> Email: cgc@cgcmaine.org
- <https://www.childrensai.org/amelia-center> Email: ameliacenter@childrensai.org

Appendix 2: Support and Further Suggestions

Parents or guardians often turn to the school for advice and information. It is vital to bear in mind that the family, friends and the immediate community are often the best support for grieving families.

The following points are important for parents/adults to consider when dealing with the situation of bereavement:

- A death in the family will alter the family indefinitely.
- Family members are grieving and with this comes changes in relationships and roles in the household.
- In some situations, there is a change of primary carer or house. This can cause disruption and distress for the child/adult.
- If possible, the school should minimise changes and disruptions in the child's normal daily routine in school and overall school life. The bereaved family members can sometimes emotionally and physically withdraw from the child

and deny the bereaved child is grieving, as it can be too distressing for them to admit to the child's pain.

- Grief can cause confusion, a sense of being unsafe, anger, social and academic withdrawal, clinginess or psychosomatic behaviours like headaches and stomach-aches.
- Withdrawal of attention from the child can lead to issues such as the child feeling resentment, jealousy or guilt. The child may also act out towards parents or guardians.
- Parents and guardians should be aware that this is normal and will decrease as the situation becomes more stable following their loss.
- Parents or guardians need to be aware of the benefits that a child gains from being involved in the ceremonies and rituals that follow death. They should therefore consider their involvement in such.

Appendix 3

SUPPORT IDEAS AND RESOURCES:

- **Teacher/ Pupil Communication Diary:** a way to communicate with a bereaved child who finds it difficult to speak out about his or her thoughts and feelings. The pupil and teacher agree where the diary will be kept. The teacher responds in the diary and leaves it to be picked up or discretely returns it to the pupil.
- **Quiet Time Cards:** The pupil is given permission to leave class for a short time when beginning to feel upset or just to get some quiet time. A quiet time card is carried in their pocket and the pupil can leave the room without having to ask. The children must go to a designated place and person as opposed to walking around the school alone.
- **Pocket Pal:** The pupil can carry in their pocket an object of significance relating to the deceased or indeed another inanimate object such as a pebble or stone. Touching the object can provide a form of comfort to the child when they require it or assist the child to feel the deceased is still looking over them.
- **Class Communication Box:** a subtle way for the child to verbalise their feelings or worries without standing out from others, as it is a whole class system as opposed to an individual one.
- **Feelings Cards:** The pupil has a selection of feelings cards. The pupil shows the card that reflects how they are feeling on a particular day. This gives the teacher an idea of how they are without the child having to speak out if they do not wish to verbalise how they are feeling.
- **Balloon message:** Children could be encouraged to write a message to their loved one who has passed away. They tie their message to a helium balloon and release the balloon allowing their message to their loved one float away.

- **Worry Beads:** Arts and craft idea: Make their own worry beads.
- **Finish the sentence activity:** giving a child the following prompts and asking them to finish the sentence (either out loud, or in writing): e.g. ***The thing that makes me feel the saddest is.., If I could talk to the person who died, I would ask...Since the death, my family doesn't... taken from*** <https://www.dougy.org/grief-resources/activities/>
- **Memory box:** The bereaved child could be encouraged to make a memory box following listening to the story 'The Memory Box' by Joanna Rawland. The child will fill the box with things that remind them of good memories they had of the person who passed away.
- **Memory Stones:** Paint memories onto stones and keep in a jar.
- **Memory Book:** Draw or write memories of their lost loved one.
- **Prayers Services** (where applicable to the background of child):
- In class or during Assembly, taking time to pray for lost loved ones and addressing loss.

ONLINE RESOURCES: (Taken from childhood bereavement website)

Ireland Based Resources

- **Anam Cara**: Rainbows, Jigsaw, First Light, A Little Lifetime Foundation, An Feileacan

UK Based Resources

- **Childhood Bereavement Network UK** :Tips from bereaved pupils about how teachers can help. Also discusses the policy context for addressing bereavement in schools.
- **Child Bereavement UK** :Video 'What Teachers need to know from bereaved students.'
- **Department of Education and Skills** :DES guidelines to help schools respond to critical incidents, including bereavement, in the school setting.
- **Elephants Tea Party** : Enables teachers to introduce the concept of death to young people, with downloadable activity packs to follow.
- **Grief Encounter** : Links to resources for schools and outlines a basic bereavement strategy.
- **Office of Minister for Children and Youth Affairs** : Online resources from the Office of the Minister for Youth Affairs, listing research and information on children. Contains links to research publications, databases and key policy documents.
- **SeeSaw** :Information pack on supporting bereaved pupils in school, and on supporting bereaved pupils with special needs in school.
- **The Guardian Teachers Network** :A selection of resources compiled by the Guardian newspaper about bereavement in the classroom.

- **Winston's Wish:** UK-based charity with a range of information and packs to download to help schools to support a child who is bereaved.

Other useful resources:

- <https://www.childhoodbereavement.ie/>
- www.rainbowsireland.ie
- <https://www.cgcmaine.org/>
- <https://www.childrensal.org/amelia-center>

APPENDIX 4

Suggested Booklist:

General Books on Bereavement:

- I Miss You by Pat Thomas
- The Goodbye Book by Todd Parker
- The Secret C by Julie A. Stokes- illustrated book about cancer.
- The Invisible String by Geoff Stevenson
- Children Also Grieve: Talking about Death and Healing by Linda Goldman

Death of a Pet:

- Goodbye Mog by Judith Kerr
- Heaven by Nicholas Allan
- Scrumpy by Elizabeth Dale
- It Must Hurt A Lot by Doris Sanford
- I'll Always Love You by Hans Wilhelm

Death of a Mother:

- The Scar by Charlotte Moundlic
- Her Mother's Face by Roddy Doyle
- I Must Tell You Something by Arno Bo
- Sara Takes Charge by Joyce A. Stengel
- Missing Mummy by Rebecca Cobb

Death of a Father:

- What on Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies? by Trevor Romain
- Is Daddy Coming Back in a Minute? by Elke Barber
- Samantha Jane's Missing Smile by Julie Kaplo

Death of a Grandparent:

- River Boy- Tom Bowler (suited to Senior pupils)
- The Heart and the Bottle by Oliver Jeffers
- Come Back, Grandma by Sue Limb
- Goodbye Pappa by Una Leavy
- Just Grandpa and Me by Sally Grindley
- Remembering Grandad By Sheila & Kate Isherwood
- Are You Sad, Little Bear? by Rachel Rivett
- Tell Me About Heaven, Grandpa Rabbit! By Jenny Album

- A Place in my Heart by Annette Aubrey
- Cry Heart but Never Break by Glenn Ringtved, Charlotte Pardi, and Robert Moulthrop

Death of a Sibling:

- I Miss My Sister by Sarah Courtauld
- Goodbye Baby: Cameron's Story by Gillian Griffiths
- We Were Gonna Have a Baby, But We Had an Angel Instead by Pat Schwiebert

Death of a Friend:

- Always and Forever by Alan Durant
- The Memory Tree by Britta Teckentrup
- Badgers Parting Gifts by Susan Varley
- Remembering Hare: The Great Race by Carol Lee

Discussing Death with Children:

- Sad Book by Michael Rosen
- Laura's Star by Klaus Baumgart
- Sad Isn't Bad by Michaelene Mundy
- The Lonely Tree by Nicholas Halliday
- When People Die by Sarah Levet
- Gentle Willow by Joyce C Mills
- Someone Has Died Suddenly by Mary Williams
- When Dinosaurs Die by Laurie Krasny Brown
- The Day the Sea Went out and Never Came Back by Margot Sunderland
- The Frog Who Longed for the Moon to Smile by Margot Sunderland
- The Copper Tree: Helping a Child Cope with Death and Loss By Hilary Robinson
- Lifetimes by Bryan Mellonie
- The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages by Leo Buscaglia
- Sadako by Eleanor Coerr

For Parents:

- Helping Children Cope with Grief by Rosemary Wells
- Water Bugs and Dragonflies by Doris Stickney
- Helping Children Cope with the Loss of a Loved One by William Kroen

For Teachers:

- The Grieving Student by David Schonfeld & Marcia Quakenbush
- Grief in School Communities: Effective Support Strategies by Louise Rowling
- Grief in Young Children: A Handbook for Adults by Atle Dyregrov
- Grief in Children by Atle Dyregrov
- When Kids are Grieving: Addressing Grief and Loss in Schools by Donna M. Burns
- Responding to Loss and Bereavement in Schools by John Holland
- Talking About Death and Bereavement in School: How to Help Children Aged 4 to 11 to Feel Supported and Understood by Ann Chadwick

Online Articles for Children: (Taken from the Rainbow's website) *Preparing a child for loss:*

- Children's Grief Irish Hospice Foundation
- Adolescent Grief- Irish Hospice Foundation
- Talking to Children about Cancer- Irish Cancer Society
- Irish Childhood Bereavement – Families
- Irish Childhood Bereavement – Children and Grief
- Irish Childhood Bereavement – Supporting a child at a time of death
- Preparing children for loss- Winstons Wish
- Factsheets for Parents- Irish Childhood Bereavement Network (ICBN)
- How to Help a Grieving Child– The Dougy Centre
- Ten Ways to Help Grieving Children– The Amelia Centre
- Ten Things Grieving Children Want You to Know

Sudden Death:

- Barnardos Resources: Barnardos have a host of resources and downloadable eBooks that can support a child after a bereavement.

Schools:

Online Supports for Teachers and Professionals:

- <https://www.childhoodbereavement.ie/schools/>
- <https://www.childhoodbereavement.ie/schools/primary-school-teachers/>
- Children and an anticipated bereavement:
<https://www.childhoodbereavement.ie/families/supporting-children-before-a-death/>

Other Useful Online Articles:

- The Amelia Centre has a host of resources for families, schools and other professionals that may be useful: <https://www.childrensai.org/for-families>
- The Centre For Grieving Children has some helpful articles:
<https://www.cgcmaine.org/resources/>
- Mesothelioma Cancer information:
<https://www.asbestos.com/support/mesothelioma-grief-guide/>

Ratification:

This policy was ratified by the BOM on May 4th, 2021.

It will be reviewed every three years or as the need arises.