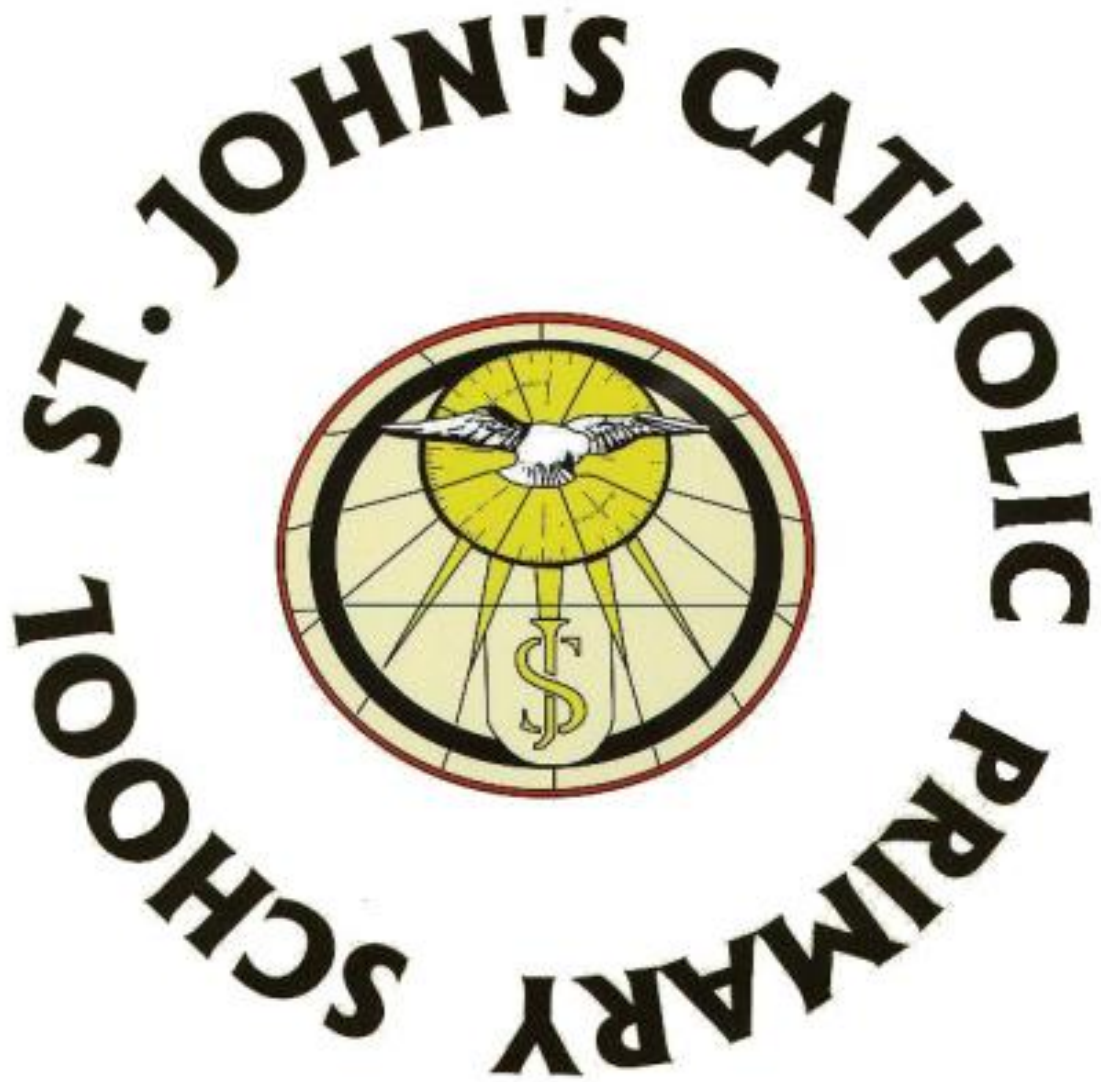




Bereavement Policy

September 2023

Our Mission Statement

The Mission of St. John's Catholic Primary School is to grow and learn in the footsteps of Jesus by being: responsible, caring, prayerful, creative, independent, thoughtful, curious and respectful. We live our Mission by:

- Ensuring that our attitudes and values are transmitted through a curriculum that is consistent with the Catholic faith
- Delivering a curriculum that is relevant, varied, interesting, stimulating, balanced and appropriate
- Developing policies and schemes of work which recognise that R.E. is an integral part of the curriculum
- Developing sound teaching and effective classroom management
- Generating a positive attitude to learning where realistic expectations of pupils and high standards of work are expected
- Using a variety of teaching approaches that reflect the needs of individual pupils
- Participating in projects which focus on the needs of others including local and international charities.
- St. John's is a Catholic voluntary aided primary school, established by the Church to serve the parishes of St. John the Baptist, Trowbridge and St. Thomas More, Bradford on Avon.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and rationale

Around 41,000 children are bereaved of a parent every year in the UK. That's nearly two children under 16 every hour. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person¹.

Experiencing a bereavement can make children more vulnerable. Bereavement, whether it is an expected death because of illness or a sudden and unexpected death or suicide, is something that can impact on members of our school community at any time.

Our school is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and pupils. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that prepares pupils for coping with bereavement.

This policy is for all staff, pupils, parents and carers, governors, visitors and partner agencies working within the school. It provides guidelines and procedures as to how our school can best prepare for, and respond to, bereavement in the school community.

We recognise that members of the school community will be affected by a range of losses, including separation and divorce. Some aspects of this policy may also be helpful in these cases.

This policy is based on an exemplar developed by the national charity Winston's Wish. It has included input from our staff, our governing body, and our school nurse.

1.2 Policy links

This policy also links to the following other policies we hold in school:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection policy
- RSE policy
- Data Protection policy
- Equality & Diversity policy
- Sickness Absence Procedure
- Flexible Working policy

1.3 Purpose of the policy

This bereavement policy supports us to provide effective support to pupils and staff before and after bereavement. It covers both expected and unexpected deaths.

¹ Winston's Wish <https://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/facts-and-figures/>

Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children and staff require. However, we also need to be prepared to call on more specialist support where there is a sudden and unexpected death, or where the impact of a bereavement is complex.

The objectives of this policy are to:

- enhance effective communication at a difficult time
- clarify the pathway of support between school, pupils, family, community and services
- support pupils and/or members of staff (where applicable), during and after bereavement
- provide a framework for all staff to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with the bereavement
- have clear expectations about the way school will respond to a death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.

2 Our charter for bereaved children and young people

To help us meet the objectives of this policy, we have adopted the [Winston's Wish Charter for Bereaved Children](#) and will display this in appropriate staff areas and on our website.

B	Bereavement support Bereaved children need to receive support from their family, from their school and from important people around them. We will signpost them to specialist support if needed.
E	Express feelings and thoughts We will help bereaved children to find appropriate ways to express all their feelings and thoughts associated with grief, such as sadness, anxiety, confusion, anger and guilt.
R	Remember the person who has died We understand that bereaved children have the right to remember the person who has died for the rest of their lives. We will support them to share special and difficult memories.
E	Education and information All children, particularly bereaved children, are entitled to receive answers to their questions. They also need information that clearly explains what

	has happened, why it has happened and what will be happening. We will strive to enable children to have their questions answered, through the PSHE curriculum, on an individual basis, working with parents and carers or through support services.
A	Appropriate response from schools and colleges Bereaved children need understanding and support from their teachers and fellow students without having to ask for it. We will provide training to ensure this happens.
V	Voice in important decisions We will work with families to encourage them to involve bereaved children in important decisions that have an impact on their lives such as planning the funeral and remembering anniversaries.
E	Enjoyment We will support the bereaved child's right to enjoy their lives even though someone important has died.
M	Meet others We will try where possible to enable bereaved children to benefit from the opportunity to meet other children who have had similar experiences.
E	Established routines We will endeavour, whenever possible, to enable bereaved children to continue activities and interests so that parts of their lives can still feel 'normal'.
N	Not to blame We will help bereaved children to understand that they are not responsible, and not to blame, for the death.
T	Tell the story We will encourage bereaved children to tell an accurate and coherent story of what has happened. We know this is helpful to them particularly if these stories are heard by those important people in their lives.

3 Safeguarding, confidentiality and recording

We follow our school's safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure that the welfare of the child remains paramount throughout, and that all children are protected from harm (see Safeguarding Policy).

It is important to maintain confidentiality throughout the handling of any incident or disclosure. However, pupils will need to be made aware that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

To retain the trust of pupils and parents and carers, we will ensure that the sharing of appropriate information is kept to a minimum. Sensitive information will only be disclosed internally or externally with careful attention to the rights and needs of individuals and in line with general data protection regulation.

If a child is suffering from trauma, we will share this as appropriate with staff, but not necessarily the details of their experience.

We will discuss with the bereaved child and their family which adults in the school community they would like made aware of the experiences impacting on the child.

We will use our usual school systems (e.g. SIMS, safeguarding records, PSA records) to record when a child has experienced a close bereavement, is at risk of suicide or has made a suicide attempt.

4 Roles and responsibilities in dealing with bereavement

4.1 The role of the governing body is to:

- approve the bereavement policy and ensure its implementation
- ensure the policy is reviewed every three years or when national or local policy directs a change
- ensure that appropriate attention is given to how bereavement issues are addressed within the curriculum
- ensure that approaches to bereavement are respectful of religious and cultural values and beliefs

- ensure that staff are given appropriate opportunities for training, reflection and access to support if they need it.

4.2 The role of the head teacher and senior leadership team is to:

- lead a whole-school approach to the effective management of loss and bereavement including ensuring appropriate training and support provided for staff
- contact Wiltshire Council in the case of a suspected or confirmed suicide. Key professionals would be expected to be involved – e.g. Wiltshire Educational Psychology Team, alongside relevant colleagues and managers. All questions surrounding the incident must be directed to the Headteacher; staff must not make any comments on social media or to anyone enquiring about the incident. All press enquiries will be handled by Wiltshire Council in association with the Headteacher and the Chair of Governors.
- be the first point of contact for family/child/staff directly affected by a bereavement
- record bereavements affecting children
- designate liaison and support to other trained members of staff when appropriate
- monitor progress in supporting those impacted by a bereavement and liaise with external agencies
- keep the governing body appropriately informed
- deal with media enquiries, with support from Wiltshire Council if required.

4.3 The role of all staff in our school is to:

- access bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff if appropriate
- know how to access support for themselves, for other staff and for the family, if advice or information is needed
- know how to report a concern if the bereavement or sudden and unexpected death has placed a child at significant risk of harm
- know how to support a child when they are distressed and how to refer to specialist support if needed
- have a basic understanding of a child's needs when facing loss and change

- provide individual support as and when needed and in consultation with the head teacher
- teach about loss and bereavement as part of the planned curriculum or in the role of tutor (teachers only)
- inform the head teacher at the earliest possibility if they hear about a death of someone in the school community

Mrs T Sessions (Senior Mental Health Lead & HT), Mrs D. O'Mahony (Inclusion Manager), Mrs Thorpe-Khan (PSA) and Mrs Talarico (ELSA) have had bereavement awareness training. They can offer professional support to other members of staff.

4.4 The role of external agencies

Signpost families to bereavement support organisations such as 'Cruse', 'Child Bereavement UK', 'Winston's Wish' and 'Wiltshire Treehouse'.

If a pupil or family member requires more complex bereavement support, refer them where appropriate to the bereavement counselling service 'We Hear You' at The Hub, John of Gaunt School. Contact details can be found under 10.3 Local Support Services.

5 Procedures

5.1 Pre-bereavement

In some situations, it is known in advance that a death is going to occur. This is usually because of a long illness.

In cases where this is an adult within the school community, individual conversations will be held with the head teacher in terms of support, information exchange and practical considerations.

When the expected death is of a child or a member of a child's family we will:

- contact the family to confirm factual information and explore what support could be provided to them

- ensure that all relevant adults are clear about what information has and needs to be shared with the pupil
- keep lines of communication open to ensure that all information is received in a timely fashion
- explore the possibility of signposting to other organisations such as Winston's Wish or a local hospice
- explore what support for the pupils affected might look like in practice
- ensure involved members of staff are confident in their ability to support the pupil
- if appropriate, consider and reflect on how to communicate with the wider school community for example the pupil's class mates
- if appropriate, begin conversations around practical considerations in the events leading up to the death and following the death

5.2 Following a bereavement

We will consider each individual situation carefully to ensure that the response from the school is sensitive, accurately reflects the gravity of the situation, and involves those affected as appropriate.

As an immediate response, we will:

- contact the deceased's family with the aim to establish the facts and avoid rumours (Head teacher)
- find out, if possible, how the family would like the information to be managed by the school
- talk to the pupil/family about how they would prefer staff members to act
- inform staff of the death before pupils are informed via the most appropriate communication e.g. telephone pyramid (out of hours), staff meeting, text, email etc., recognising that some pupils may have found out through other means. Where possible, staff will be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways to make sure all staff have the same version of the event. Where this has not been possible, staff will be supported to share the information.

For the funeral we will:

- find out the family's wishes and follow these in terms of the involvement of members of the school community (or not)
- be sensitive to religious and cultural issues.

After the funeral we will:

- consider whether it is appropriate to visit the child and family affected at home and plan how best to manage their return to school
- continue regular contact with the family and show we still care about them and their child over time
- consider practical issues and make thoughtful and sensitive updates to parental and other contact details when needed
- continue to assess the needs of children most affected, and record and plan for support accordingly.

When the pupil returns to school we will:

- ensure teachers are aware of the pupil/s preferred way/s staff relate to them on their return.
- MDSA's to keep an eye on whether pupil is eating each day and liaise with Inclusion Manager/PSA if there are any concerns.
- be aware of areas of the curriculum, calendared events such as birthdays and anniversaries of the death, and assemblies which may trigger memories
- signpost families to bereavement support including that provided by Winston's Wish <https://www.winstonswish.org/about-us/>
- ensure that learning about loss is embedded into appropriate curriculum areas including PSHE education. When teaching about loss and bereavement we will give careful thought as to how to support those directly affected by loss and bereavement.
- refer to external services such as bereavement counselling if further support is required by either the pupil or family.

5.3 Following a sudden and unexpected death – suicide

A suicide can be the trigger for other suicides.

As described in section 4.3 we will seek advice from Wiltshire Council and Wiltshire Educational Psychology Team. As a school community, we will make a response to a sudden death within two school days

It is necessary to maintain the structure and order of the school routine, while facilitating the expression of grief, and reducing the risk of imitative suicide.

In the case of suicide, we will refer to The Samaritans Step by Step Guide.

<https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/step-step/>.

5.4 Following a sudden and unexpected death – homicide

The Childhood Bereavement Network and Winston's Wish estimate that around one child every day is bereaved of a parent or sibling through murder or manslaughter in Great Britain.

Children may experience profound and lasting shock, enormous anger at what has happened, rage at the person who caused their relative to die, deep fear at the perceived insecurity of the world around them. Sadly, in many cases, the person who caused the death is also known to the child, resulting in great confusion and a double loss, for example, if one parent kills the other and is then imprisoned. In some families, the child may have to move to a new house, school, area – away from familiar and comforting places and routines.

Winston's Wish recommend taking an honest and consistent age appropriate approach to talking with children about what has happened. It is not possible to shield them from what has happened completely. Winston's Wish can provide support to families bereaved in this way and further information can be found on their website:

<https://www.winstonswish.org/death-through-homicide/>

5.5 Following a sudden and unexpected death – coronavirus

Children who have been bereaved are likely to show a stronger reaction to the uncertainty and worry surrounding the coronavirus, and may worry that they or someone they know will die. The nature of the coronavirus means that pupils may not get to see their family member before they die, and they may additionally have questions and concerns that being unwell with a cough and a temperature might result in death.

It is important to be honest and not provide any guarantees. However, reassurance will be needed that not everyone who gets unwell dies and most people with coronavirus will not die.

6 Equality and inclusion, values and beliefs

We recognise that there is a range of cultural and religious beliefs, customs and procedures concerning death. It follows that bereaved children and families may have differing expectations.

Some of these may affect matters of school organisation. We will source training and guidance to develop our understanding of the range of beliefs to best support pupils.

We will present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. We will make pupils aware of differing responses to bereavement, and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

7 Young asylum seekers and refugees

Many young asylum seekers and refugees have experienced the death of family members or friends, often in traumatic circumstances. This, and further traumatic experiences and losses, can have a devastating effect on their emotional and physical health, behaviour, learning and relationships.

Sudden traumatic death complicates the process of grief and mourning, as usual ways of coping may be overwhelmed. We will consult with bereavement counselling services and specialist mental health services where appropriate.

8 Supporting staff

8.1 Support for bereaved staff

We are aware that staff also experience bereavement. When this happens, we will ensure they are provided with support to take care of themselves, and to know where they can go for additional help should they need it.

This could include: their GP; Cruse Bereavement Care <http://www.cruse.org.uk/>.

We will work within our sickness absence procedure and if necessary, with the council or trust's occupational health team to ensure staff are provided with appropriate leave and support at a time of bereavement.

Teachers who are dealing with their own bereavement are encouraged to speak with their line manager about any areas of the curriculum which they feel uncomfortable to teach or want support to teach.

8.2 Staff training

We will ensure that regular training is provided to staff to support staff in meeting their roles and responsibilities as identified in this policy. Winston's Wish offers [training courses](#) and also a [free online training course for school staff](#).

9 Curriculum

Teachers should be aware of common adverse childhood experiences, such as bereavement. Children and young people explore the concept of loss as part of the statutory elements of our PSHE curriculum. It is also addressed through cross-curricular opportunities such as body changes or life cycles, as well as through religious education.

We also use assemblies to address aspects of death – such as Remembrance Day or commemorative occasions. We also observe national minutes of silence and explain the purpose of this.

When appropriate, we respond to a tragedy or serious incident by discussing this in class having discussed as a staff team the language we will use to respond to the incident.

Teachers are provided with training on how to deliver this sensitive area of the curriculum within a safe, learning environment. We also point parents and carers towards appropriate advice on how to talk to their children about these events when necessary.

We will answer any questions relating to loss or death in a sensitive, age-appropriate, honest and factual way. Children and young people will not be expected to disclose any personal experiences but will be signposted to support if they want it.

10 Additional support and links

Please see Bereavement Guidance document for a list of appropriate sources of support for signposting pupils and adults in the school community, along with a range of sample scripts and letters for communicating with those involved in bereavement.

This policy has been approved and adopted by the Governing Body on: 26/9/23

Head teacher:

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Signed



Chair of Governors :

Signed



Review cycle:	24 months
Next review due:	September 2025