



Bereavement Policy

Reviewed/Updated	Date
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Review	September 2025

Aims & Ethos

Kircubbin Integrated Primary 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 support and prepare pupils for coping with difficult experiences. KIPS will endeavour to help our children explore and develop an awareness and understanding of death as well as to support those who are personally affected by it.

Rationale

As a school community we have dealt with tragedy and loss and we believe that all pupils and staff are equipped to deal with bereavement and understand the grieving process. At KIPS we wish to inform pupils that at times 'It is OK not to be OK.'

1 in 29 pupils aged five to sixteen-years olds has been bereaved of a parent or sibling. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, relative, friend or other significant person. Within a school community there will almost always be some pupils who are struggling with bereavement – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil.

It is important that children are helped to understand bereavement in clear and unambiguous ways, and given opportunities to experience the full range of emotions that may accompany a bereavement within a safe and supportive atmosphere.

Objectives

This policy aims to -

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

Roles and Responsibilities

Intervention Team and Roles:

Key Member	Principal. The first point of contact and is responsible for liaising with all parties concerned and affected. (There may be times when another member of staff is best placed to liaise directly with the family; eg, Pastoral Care Coordinator).
Deputy	Vice-Principal. Would temporarily deputise for the Key Member in the running of their routine day to day tasks.
Media Spokesperson	Key Member or Deputy who may (if the need arises) liaise with the media and decide what information should be released. They may also need to liaise with the police.
Member of Board of Governors	Chair of Board of Governors in a crisis may need to come into school to liaise with Key Member and Deputy.
Others Head of FS/KS1/Vice Principal	Liaise with members of staff, key member, deputy and Counsellor.
Head of Pastoral Care / DT	Offer support, consultation and guidance to the team and the bereaved should they required it. Make contact with Bereavement Support team if required.
School Secretary	School phone line will be busy. Secretary should be briefed by Principal on information to be released. Keep records of all phone calls made and information given. Ensure a separate telephone line ~ one that is not accessible for incoming calls.

Procedures

Our school will:

- Speak to the family and offer them condolences;
- Obtain factual information to avoid unnecessary speculation;
- Inform staff as soon as possible;
- Agree a script for class teachers to use to inform their own classes.
- Identify the most vulnerable pupils and ensure they are supported appropriately;
- Send a letter to parents/carers as soon as possible.
- Consider whether it is necessary for school to close to put the above procedures in place.
- Give guidance to parents on supporting bereaved children.
- Maintain normal school routines as soon as possible.
- Engage with the EA CRIT (Critical Incident Response Team) to agree suitable support package.

Funerals

Our school will:

- Find out the family's wishes and how they wish the school to be involved;
- Consider the cultural and religious implications if appropriate;
- Send cards/flowers if acceptable;
- Identify which staff may want to attend alongside members of the SLT. Enable the person(s) who had the closest relationship with the child/children to attend the funeral - this would usually be the current class teacher/Form teacher but may be a staff member who had worked closely with the family in a previous class, and be able to have absence to attend.

Support for Pupils

Not all children and young people will need the support of specialist practitioners; they most often need familiar people who care. Pupils will react to bereavement in a variety of ways; no two reactions are the same. Personality, family support and life experiences will all impact on children's responses.

Adults often wish to shield children from pain and distress. Experience and research have shown, however, that children are best supported by having the incident acknowledged in an appropriate way rather than having it ignored.

It is important to be available and receptive to pupils, to listen to them, to empathise with them and normalise their emotions, thus enabling the development of healthy coping strategies.

The principal or identified Key Member should consider whether support can be provided by school staff who are familiar to the pupils.

Support for Staff

Our school will:

- Support bereaved staff and acknowledge they may be struggling with their own reactions and emotions while supporting pupils;
- Plan for informal mutual support to give staff an opportunity to share feelings and reactions.
- Give people time to attend the funeral, if appropriate.
- Offer general training for all staff.
- Be aware of all supporting information and resources available.

Remembering

KIPS acknowledges the importance of remembering the deceased.

Our school will:

- Consult the family of the person who died about any plans for a memorial or other tribute. A more permanent memorial (a tree, a special garden, a piece of artwork, a bench) may be appropriate, but in future the removal, relocation or replacement will need to be managed sensitively.
- Give appropriate stakeholders an opportunity to make suggestions regarding a memorial or tribute (eg, School Council).
- Invite the family to any official memorial or thanksgiving ceremony.

Supporting a bereaved pupil to return to school after a bereavement

It is important to plan for a pupils return to school following the death of a family member:

- Who will meet with the pupil and their family/carers to discuss their return to school or upon their return to school following a bereavement?
- Most grieving pupils do not need a 'bereavement expert', they need the support of familiar and trusted adults. School, with its familiar environment and routines, can be a place of comfort for a bereaved young person.
- It can be helpful to meet with the pupil and their family/carers to establish what has happened and to discuss their return to school. This could be a familiar adult, such as the class teacher or a member of the pastoral support team. The purpose of this meeting should be to acknowledge the death and find out how the pupil would like to share their news.
- Organise a safe space for the bereaved pupil to go if they feel overwhelmed by their grief and need a 'time-out'. How will they inform staff of this? For example, a 'time-out' card, a non-verbal signal or message. How will this be communicated to all staff?
- Consider whether to provide 'time-out' activities – journals, art and craft, books, screen time, memory boxes etc.
- Set guidelines for communication – with the pupil, between members of staff and between home and school.
- Consider providing support for peers when they have a bereaved friend.
- Make allowances for incomplete homework, uniform compliance, forgotten lunches/dinner money etc.

Our school will:

- Acknowledge what has happened
- Ask our pupils how we can help
- Be flexible and understanding
- Create a supportive environment
- Maintain routine
- Listen with our eyes, ears and heart.

Our school will offer:

- A routine, which can have a stabilising effect
- Neutral space and people to share their feelings without the worry of upsetting a loved one;
- Time for the pupils to be themselves without feeling guilty (being with friends, time to play in a safe space outside the home environment);
- Regular communication with home, providing reassurance about behaviour and general well-being, ensuring the child or young person is managing their grief;
- Access to appropriate resources via Class/Form teacher
- Preparation time for children and young people to discuss what to say and how to behave when the bereaved child or young person returns to school;
- Time for staff to be aware of changes in behaviour that may be related to the death;
- An individual link person (such as the Pastoral Care Coordinator) to support the pupils when necessary;
- A suitable place in school for pupils who need some space if too upset to stay in the classroom and people to whom they can go for support.

Longer term support

- We will record the date of death on a Pupil Record of Loss Form (Appendix 1)
- The Pastoral Care Coordinator will link in with the family and/or liaise with the class teacher to ensure ongoing support is offered.
- The Pupil Record of Loss form will be attached to pupil records in order to inform the child's next class teacher.
- The pupil will continue to grieve for the rest of their life and may require ongoing support. Significant dates or anniversaries, Mother's/Father's Day, etc. may be particularly difficult. Regular contact with the family/carers and reviews with the pupil will help to build up an overall picture of how the pupil is coping.
- The grief may impact the pupil's progress. Some pupils work really hard and may put themselves under extra pressure to succeed, while others may find it difficult to focus in class and on their work. There may be changes in their behaviour, how will these be managed?
- Bereaved young people can find change difficult, so preparing them in advance (where possible) may help them to voice their worries and ease the process.
- Consider vulnerable pupils as they may need additional support, particularly on transition.

Death, grief and bereavement in the curriculum

Addressing bereavement in the curriculum:

At KIPS we value the importance of teaching the topic of death, grief and bereavement in a sensitive but informative manner. We believe it will help pupils to understand feelings of grief and prepare them for the future. Informing parents and carers in advance will help to gather information about previous bereavements so that vulnerable pupils can be prepared for the lesson. Recently bereaved pupils may find it helpful if they are given the option to work elsewhere or step outside, if they think it would be too painful to attend.

We believe this is best taught through story, looking at fiction and non-fiction texts and encouraging pupils to be empathetic through character analysis. Books such as 'A Long Walk to Water' (upper KS2) and the Elephant's Tea Party Resources (KS1/2) from Child Bereavement UK are used to enable class discussion.

Staff Training

Whole school training in dealing with bereavement has been delivered and refresher training should be arranged as appropriate.

Inclusion and equality

KIPS recognises that there is a range of cultural and religious customs and procedures concerning death and that there may be different expectations of the bereaved pupil and family. We will try to present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. Pupils and staff will be made aware that there are a range of different responses to bereavement and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

Responding to the media

Some incidents and deaths, particularly those in sudden or traumatic circumstances, may attract media attention. All members of staff will be advised **not to respond to journalists** and to refer all enquiries to the Principal, who will make a considered response (with EA guidance).

Staff support

KIPS believes it is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for pupils and mutual support for each other. We will ensure members of staff update their skills and knowledge as required. All staff will be reminded that they have access to support from Inspire.

Links to other policies

- Managing Critical Incidents
- Religious Education
- Pastoral Care,
- Bullying Prevention
- Safeguarding & Child Protection
- Positive Behaviour Policy
- School Attendance
- Health and Safety
- Staff Well Being

Monitoring and evaluation

This policy will be reviewed regularly by the Principal in consultation with staff and pupils. Consideration will be given to any developments and will take into account the learning from ongoing practice and experience. Any changes made will be shared with the staff and presented to the Board of Governors for approval.