

# ***St. Patrick's Primary School***

## **Whole School Policy for Bereavement and Loss (part A) and Critical Incident (part B)**

This policy has been developed by Mrs Grugan (Principal) in consultation with all staff and the BOG/parent representatives.

### **Rationale**

"Death neither obeys the school timetable nor appears on it... it enters the classroom without knocking."

No matter how prepared we think we are, death is often traumatic and unexpected. A considered, planned and organised response to an event is often more effective than acting on impulse. At St Patrick's Primary School we want to be well prepared for dealing with such critical incidents. We want to ensure that we have a consistent and appropriate response to each individual bereavement.

### **Principles**

We feel it is important for the school to respond to such incidents because;

The school is a significant part of a child's life and support system.  
It is a normal place and offers security at a time of insecurity.  
It is an important part of the community and  
Is part of a multi-dimensional approach to supporting children and families.

Teachers know their children very well.

They can encourage families to seek support

They can provide continuity, security, coping skills and a supportive response

They are in a central position to observe behavioural changes and monitor progress.

### **The death of a member of the school community.**

When news of a death reaches the school, the Principal must be informed so that she can assess how to respond. It is important to clarify that a bereavement has occurred, gather all the facts and disseminate this information to all staff in a sensitive manner. It is then necessary to

sensitively inform the pupil community. The Principal will visit the home of the child, parent or member of staff to discuss how the school can best respond to the needs of the child, parent or bereaved family.

After children have been informed they should be given the opportunity, within their class, to express their emotions, feelings and thoughts. Not all staff will feel confident with this and, if required, a EA Critical Incident team member will help support staff. Sharing grief in a supportive environment can facilitate the grieving process. Sensitivity should be shown respecting the pupil's choice as to when they are ready to explore their feelings. For pupils or staff particularly affected it may be necessary to contact appropriate outside agencies.

### **Funerals, Memorial Services:**

The school will be represented at the funeral or memorial service for any pupil, parent or member of staff. The level of involvement of the school will be agreed with the bereaved family.

### **Return to school**

Bereaved pupils should return to school as soon as possible. In this phase of the process, the work of the school staff should be reactive, sympathetic and supportive to meet the needs, feelings and emotions of both other staff and pupils. Everyone needs to be supportive and available.

Everyone will be aware of the situation before the pupil returns and peers prepared and equipped to support child through discussion and with the help of the EA Critical Incident Team.

Teachers should endeavour to foster an environment that is compassionate, yet disciplined. School, with its routines and rituals, often provides a respite at this traumatic time.

Anniversaries or birthdays often spark a revival of feelings of bereavement and it is important to be aware of such dates and to react with sensitivity and respect.

### **What can the school do?**

Provide a consistent, positive and appropriate school response.

Invite parents or carers into the school to talk about the support they need.

Talk to the children about how they are feeling.

Be vigilant with regard to bullying or self harm.

Establish good links with outside agencies and support groups.

Provide opportunities for pupils to leave class if required.

Provide reliable information and answers to children's questions

Help the child to understand that they are not to blame.

Encourage established routines

Encourage safe expression of feelings.

Encourage remembering and opportunities for their story to be heard.

Encourage peer group support.

Be sensitive to special days and take your cue from the pupil.

Normalise loss and loss reaction

Be attentive

Seek help and support for staff and pupils

### **The most helpful interventions for children are:**

The teacher's perceptive presence

Attending to the verbal and non-verbal signals of distress

Helping the pupils ask questions and express fears or grief

### **Changes in the Bereaved Child**

Children in the Primary School age group have an understanding of the finality of death. After a death a child may display reactions such as:

- **Withdrawal**
- **Aggression**
- **Anger**
- **Nervousness**
- **Sullen moods**
- **Lack of concentration**
- **Sleep problems**
- **Loss of self-esteem**
- **Headaches, stomach ache, sickness**

These are all normal reactions for young children. Pupils can act out their feelings through their behaviour. All pupils will respond differently. Work, attention and behaviour will all be affected by their emotional distress.

### **Terminally ill Pupils/Staff**

The wishes of the person and their next of kin must be respected. Honesty about dying is the best line of approach. This is anticipatory grief and it is important that there is a good home/school link and all of the above apply. E.g visiting the home, finding out who should know etc

### **Self-care**

"The loss of a loved person is one of the most intensely painful experiences a human being can suffer and not only is it painful to experience but also painful to witness, if only because we are so impotent to help."- Bowlby

Teachers also require support structures when dealing with grief. Never take on too much. If you are having difficulty dealing with your own or other's grief, talk to a partner, friend or colleague.

**and finally.....**

### **Some advice**

- **Tell the people you love that you love them**
- **Leave no unfinished business**
- **Have fun - enjoy the child in you**
- **Each day maximise the pleasure of living**
- **Strive to be happy and loving**
- **Accept the fact that no one can live forever**

## **Appendix**

### **Useful Contacts:**

#### **EA:**

**Ann Hart Henderson 02882411411**

#### **Curse**

**Helpline 0808 808 1677**

**Barnardo's Advice Line  
028 9064 5899**

#### **Useful Resources:**

- **"When someone very Special Dies" Woodland Press**
- **"Out of the Blue" Hawthorn Press**
- **"Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine" Winston's Wish**
- **"A Child's Grief" Winston's Wish**
- **"Making a Memory Box" Winston's Wish**

**This policy will be reviewed regularly by the Principal and further courses attended as offered by EA.**