



WELLINGTON COLLEGE BELFAST

## **Bereavement Policy**

Reviewed by The Board of Governors April 2020

## Introduction

Death is a significant life event whatever the age of those affected. When a child is bereaved, teachers and the wider school community can help to lessen the devastating effects that death and loss can have on the child. By addressing our knowledge and understanding of death and loss within a bereavement policy Wellington College can help children and young people to understand more about the emotional and physical impacts of loss.

How a child recovers from bereavement is most affected by the coping skills and strategies of the adults around them, including those in schools.

## Features of a child's grief

Grief of children is similar to that of adults, but certain features are particularly pronounced:

- Children may become frightened that they themselves will die;
- Physical complaints following bereavement – such as headaches, stomach aches, or other minor ailments – can increase in some children;
- Sometimes children can become much more tense and anxious, especially if the death was sudden;
- Difficulties in sleeping can be common;
- Anger and acting-out is another response to grief which is found in children.

By being aware of all these possibilities, Wellington College aims to:

- Provide a supportive environment for children affected by bereavement
- Make families aware of support that will be useful to them
- Offer necessary pastoral care and assistance
- Monitor the impact on engagement and progress in school

## What the school can do when a death occurs

When a death occurs the main thing the school will need to address is maintaining contact with the family. It is always best if the child can be told by a family member about a significant death in the family. If that is not possible the school may be in a position of having to break the news to the child. In that case it should be done with someone who knows the child well and to whom the child feels some emotional connection present.

## Telling others about the death

- The class teachers/tutor will need to know about the death as soon as possible
- The teacher will need time and support from the school to work out and check through the plan for the child's return
- It is best if all the staff (including supply staff) of a school are prepared when a child has been bereaved, so that the absence from school and lessons, missed

work, unfinished assignments or homework are all dealt with sensitively and supportively

- The friends and class or tutor group will be given time before the child returns to school to talk over how they will support the bereaved child on his or her return, including the possible insensitivity of other children
- The child's closest friends need to be told as soon as possible, and then the class or tutor group.
- It is best to be as open as possible (taking into account the wishes of the family) to help prevent the spread of rumours.

## Making and Keeping Contact with the Family

The school needs to be in contact with the family as soon as possible:

- to express condolences
- enquire if any practical help is needed
- find out about funeral arrangements/representation
- support the family in meeting the child's needs
- encourage the child to return to school as soon as possible
- find out how much the child has been told about the death
- find out about the family's religious beliefs, if any
- provide a person for the child to talk to when s/he wants
- provide a suitable private place to allow privacy and access to support
- support and encourage the child's friends in being supportive
- consider whether it would be useful to involve an older child in providing support
- keep up contact with the family
- consider what support the class teacher or form tutor might need
- consider whether the child or family might need specialised help from outside school

While the effects of bereavement may lessen over time, it is a life event that lasts for ever.

## When a child or staff member dies, how can the school mourn?

When a child or staff member dies, the whole of the school community will need to be informed, and may wish to be involved in the process of mourning. Key issues include:

- Informing the members of the school community as soon as possible
- Acknowledging the need for teachers, as well as pupils, to express their feelings
- Making arrangements for members of the school community to attend the funeral
- Acknowledging the death in the school community – in class time, through assemblies, and through normalising the need to grieve and be supported
- Through positive memorials such as charitable events or planting a tree
- Keeping in contact with the family following the funeral

*Wellington College acknowledges that teachers will need in-service training and education opportunities if they are to address these areas with some confidence.*

*It is also recognised that the preventative curriculum and PD programme play an important role in building the emotional resilience of children and young people to prepare for loss.*