



# Victoria College Preparatory School Bereavement Policy

November 2023

Policy Date – 13/11/23  
Agreed by Governors –  
Review Date – 13/11/26  
Drafted by – K Hrabovsky

## **Rationale**

Pastoral care is a high priority in Victoria College Preparatory School. There is concern not only for the academic and intellectual development of young people, but also for their social, emotional, physical and their spiritual needs. Considering issues such as bereavement ensure staff are better prepared and able to support their pupils if tragedy strikes. When loss and death are part of integrated teaching programmes, considered in school and class assemblies, and when staff have formulated policies and discussed their own responses to bereavement, and the need to acknowledge feelings and emotions is an accepted part of the school ethos, then the school community will be supportive towards a bereaved child. Bereaved parents (and grandparents) appreciate the thoughtfulness, planning and effort that goes into the care of their children, especially at times of great distress for all in their family.

## **Definition**

Every year over 23,000 children under the age of 18 years will be bereaved of a parent and many more will experience the death of someone else special in their life (Childhood Bereavement Network Omnibus Survey 2016). In addition to these individual pupils, schools may also experience the death of a child at the school or a staff member. It is almost inevitable therefore, that at some time all schools will have to deal with a death that affects the school community.

As children spend much of their time at school, teachers and staff members may be the primary source of care and support. Bereaved children may see school as a safe haven and should be able to look to trusted staff members for help.

## **Aims and Objectives**

Intervention is essential in managing and minimising disruption. School's aim is to restore equilibrium between the pupil's environment and her perception of the world as a safe and predictable place.

The purpose of the Bereavement Policy is to help everyone involved at a time when there may be shock, upset and confusion. Effective communication is essential within the school community and with the pupil's family to support and help in difficulty times to ensure that there is as little disruption as possible for the pupil and the school community.

## **Death of a pupil or member of staff**

In the event of the death of a pupil or member of staff, a general staff meeting will be called to allow private grief before announcing the news to the rest of the school.

It is essential that all staff and pupils, who are acquainted with the deceased, be informed as quickly as possible. An announcement that is clear and cannot be misinterpreted will be made to the school in a special assembly. After assembly, in form classes, teachers should allow pupils to express their emotions, allowing them to share their feelings and thoughts in a safe environment with a member of staff with whom they feel at ease. Not all staff will feel confident in these circumstances and should not be pressurised to participate. Additional teachers/bereavement counsellors may be called in for support.

In the event of media involvement, the school's Critical Incident Policy procedures will be adhered to.

Participation at funeral services will be discussed with the Principal or his/her Head of Prep and where possible staff and pupil representatives should attend.

## **Procedure**

- The Principal and Head of Prep will usually be the first to be informed about a bereavement.
- Where a class teacher, or any other member of staff is informed of a bereavement, that information should go directly to the Head of Prep using the normal procedures.
- The Head of Prep will ensure that a notice is placed on the staff notice board and in the case of the death of a parent or sibling, a photograph of the pupil(s) concerned will be displayed.
- The Head of Prep will inform all the teachers, both academic and extra- curricular, who are involved in teaching the pupil.
- On the pupil's return to school the Head of Prep and class teacher will speak to the pupil unless this is contrary to the wishes of the parent/guardian.
- The class teacher will remain in contact with the pupil and consult other members of staff, keeping a check on the pupil's progress.

### Support and counselling:

It is important that pupils are allowed to articulate their thoughts and feelings, to be supported and not feel in any way inhibited. Showing grief in a supportive environment can assist in the grieving process. It should also be remembered that as pupils react to such news in very different ways, some pupils might not want to share their feelings straight away. Sensitivity must always be shown, respecting the pupil's choice as to when and if she is ready to explore her feelings about what has happened. Some suggestions for support within the school may include:

- provide a safe quiet place for reflection as directed by a member of staff
- someone to talk to e.g. member of staff, school nurse
- regular contact with a teacher to whom the pupil can relate to if she so wishes
- support for the individual teachers involved in the above
- provide information re grief process (from outside agencies) for both the pupil and her family
- offer to inform others

It is envisaged that this policy will also be used for pupils suffering from any form of traumatic event in their lives, for example, terminal illness of member of family, terminally ill pupil, etc.

For the pupils or staff particularly affected, the school may wish to enlist professional bereavement counsellors or appropriate outside agencies. Parents will be kept informed of all school suggestions in this respect.

## **Review and Evaluation**

The policy will be reviewed at least once every three years by the Board of Governors. The policy will be kept under review by senior members of staff who will keep Governors informed of any difficulties that may arise.

Useful addresses: CRUSE Bereavement Care (NI)  
Regional Headquarters  
Knockbracken Healthcare Park  
Belfast BT8

Tel: (028) 9079 2419

Child Bereavement Service  
Scheme Co-ordinator  
Piney Ridge  
Knockbracken Healthcare Park  
Belfast BT8 8BH

Tel: (028) 9040 3000

Barnardo's  
Regional Office  
542 Upper Newtownards Road  
Belfast BT4 3HE

Tel: (028) 9067 2366