

# Scoil Mhuire, Clondra

## BEREAVEMENT POLICY

**RATIONALE:** This policy was formulated by the staff of Scoil Mhuire, Clondra in June 2007 following the death of a colleague in another school. Reviewed in May 2011 and further reviewed in March 2014. Reviewed in January 2019 and March 2021. Current review April 2024

This policy should be referred to in the event of a bereavement of a member of the school community which does not constitute a critical incident. The school community comprises pupils, parents, staff and people closely involved with the school. In the event of a sudden/accidental death, our Critical Incidents policy should be consulted.

The family of bereaved member of the school community will be consulted/considered in implementing all aspects of this policy.

### **Influential Factors:-**

#### **Type of Death:**

- Anticipated (i.e., death of a member of the school community occurs following a long-term illness).

#### **Response:**

1. Immediate
2. Medium
3. Long-term, if necessary.

#### **1. Immediate:**

- Facts need to be established
- Prioritising immediate tasks and responsibilities
- Convening a management meeting
- Appointing key people
- Informing students/staff
- Contacting bereaved family

#### **1.1 Informing Students:**

##### **A) Who should inform?**

- Meeting of teaching staff – before class starts to plan a strategy and inform all staff (e.g. night before school or in the morning).
- Make decision to inform students in small groups or in their classrooms.

##### **C) How should students be told?**

- Consistent information
- Anticipate questions/concerns
- Normalise feelings/concerns

##### **D) How will students react?**

- Various reactions, including anger, guilt, blame, sadness, pain, shock, seeking explanation.

- Acknowledge their distress. Empathise.
- Respect the wishes of the family.
- Provision of back-up professional staff (e.g., psychologists), if necessary.

E) Meeting with students closely related/connected to bereaved student – in small group setting.

- Identification and provision of support to vulnerable student(s) and staff.
- Availability of professional help.

## **2. Medium:**

- Closure of school if deceased is a student or member of staff
- Preparation of students attending funeral
- Staff support and monitoring of students during funeral.
- Support and counselling of students following the funeral.
- Facilitating the return to school of bereaved child, close friends.
- Arranging school participation in funeral e.g. Guard of Honour, participation in Liturgy of Funeral Mass or Service in accordance with family wishes
- Supporting the family after the funeral

## **3. Long Term**

- Ongoing monitoring and review of school's response.
- Follow up support
- Memorial service or appropriate memorial (tree-planting)

## **Death of a Parent or a Sibling of a Student**

### **1. Who should inform the student?**

- The school should be guided by the wishes of the family. A family member may call to the school with the news. It is also a good idea that a teacher who knows the student well be present.

### **2. Where should this take place?**

- In one of the Special Education rooms.

### **3. How should the student be told?**

- Simply and directly with opportunity and support for expression of feelings and room for questions – may need to know what/when/why?

### **4. How will the student react?**

The children's understanding of and reactions to death is dependent on a number of things.

- Sudden/expected death
- Relationship with deceased
- Cognitive age

Various reactions, including numbness, sadness, anger, guilt and withdrawal.

### **5. Who else to inform**

- Teachers, classmates.

## **6. Supporting a student immediately following the death**

- Teacher/class teacher call to student's home to express sympathy directly.
- School should be represented at the funeral – class of the bereaved/class teacher may wish to form guard of honour (dependent on family wishes).

## **7. Prior to student's return:**

Talk with student's class about the death of parent/sibling.

Aim to help class to be supportive, talk to bereaved child's friends to help them cope and explore how to be supportive. Friends may be uncomfortable and awkward in their attempts to be supportive or make contact especially if friends or class have not experienced death in their family.

Anticipate questions/ concerns.

Normalise concerns/feelings.

Back-up professional support if anticipated.

## **8. Return to school:**

Consider options in consultation with family including a gradual return e.g. half day Thursday/Friday or return on Friday and have the weekend off.

Speak to the student on day of return, offer support, acknowledge return may be difficult, especially if death was sudden/traumatic. Try to maintain a normal environment/routine for the student. Follow up on the progress of that student.

## **REVIEW**

This Bereavement Policy will be reviewed as necessary, but at the latest April 2027.

## **RATIFICATION**

This policy was ratified on \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Ms Mary Duignan, Chairperson, Board of Management, Scoil Mhuire, Clondra.