

# EMMANUEL COLLEGE

## BEREAVEMENT POLICY



We recognise that experiencing the bereavement of a relative, friend or other significant person can make a child more vulnerable. Bereavement, whether it is an expected death because of illness or a sudden and unexpected death or suicide, is something that can impact on members of our school community at any time. Emmanuel College is committed to the emotional health and wellbeing of its staff and students. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that prepares students for coping with bereavement.

We are committed to working closely with families when they have suffered a bereavement. We will make contact with parents or carers to ensure we have appropriate factual information so that we can support families and avoid rumours and misunderstandings. When a member of staff is informed that a young person has been bereaved, they will immediately contact the Student Welfare team.

Mrs Lunn is our bereavement specialist. She has worked closely with bereavement charities to write a programme of support that young people may benefit from following, with her guidance. We recognise that some young people do not want to talk about their loss in school, and we are also equipped to refer you to local bereavement charities for support. This may take the form of literature students can read, face-to-face appointments, or online support.

We recognise that everyone grieves differently and therefore there is no time limit placed on how long a student may access support for, or the time elapsed between the bereavement and an initial request for help. Indeed, some students may find there are periods in which they do not need support but may struggle at a later date (for example, around significant anniversaries or if studying a certain topic in lessons).

We include loss and bereavement in our Personal Development programme, currently aimed largely at our Year 10 students. We endeavour to give students warnings when this is coming up, and offer before and after care for those students who are affected by the issues covered.

If there is a death in our school community, we plan to support staff, students and the wider community in the following ways:

- Find out, if possible, how the family would like the information to be managed by the school.
- Allocate member(s) of staff to be the key point(s) of support for the affected child/young person or children/young people and ensure there is support in place for the staff members if required.
- Send letters or cards of condolence to families or individuals directly affected.
- Prepare a press statement, with support from the council's communications team if required and with due regard to the family affected (Principal).
- Inform staff of the death before students are informed, recognising that some students may have found out through other means. Where possible, staff will be prepared (through prior training) to share information in

age-appropriate ways to make sure all staff have the same version of the event. Where this has not been possible, staff will be supported to share the information.

- Inform pupils who are most directly affected (such as a friendship group), preferably in small groups, by someone known to them and in keeping with the wishes of the family and expertise of the school.
- Inform the wider school community in line with the wishes of the family. We would normally do this through assemblies and/or letters to parents.
- Make small changes to the school timetable to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of the child or children affected by the situation. However, we will aim for minimal disruption to the timetable as this can offer a sense of security and familiarity.

#### **For the funeral we will:**

- Find out the family's wishes and follow these in terms of the involvement, or not, of members of the school community.
- Identify which staff and students may want to attend if invited by the family and the practicalities of issues such as risk assessment, staff cover and transport. In some rare circumstances it may be appropriate to close the school.
- Organise tributes such as flowers or a collection in line with family wishes.
- Be sensitive to religious and cultural matters.

#### **After the funeral we will:**

- Consider whether it is appropriate to visit the child and family affected at home and plan a return to school, or hold a meeting in school.
- Work with the peer group to help them offer their support as necessary.
- Consider practical issues and make thoughtful and sensitive updates to parental and other contact details when needed.
- Continue to assess the needs of children most affected, and record and plan for support accordingly.

#### **Longer term we will:**

- Be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life. So, we will record information and share with relevant people, particularly at transition points. This could include ensuring significant dates and events for the child are recorded and shared with appropriate staff for future reference.
- Signpost families to bereavement support.
- Ensure that learning about loss and bereavement is embedded into appropriate curriculum areas including personal development education. When teaching about loss and bereavement we will give careful thought as to how to support those directly affected by loss and bereavement.

## Following a sudden and unexpected death – suicide

Suicide is not just a really difficult event to deal with, it also presents the unique risk of potentially being the trigger for another suicide. As a school community we will make a response to a sudden death within two school days. We will seek advice from external agencies as appropriate, for example the Educational Psychology Service. We will utilise support available such as The Samaritans' Step by Step Guide. <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/step-step/>.

It is necessary to maintain the structure and order of the school routine, while facilitating the expression of grief, and reducing the risk of imitative suicide.

Information provided to the school community in the immediate aftermath of a sudden and unexpected death will depend on the age of the pupils but should be based on and reinforce:

- Facts (not rumours).
- An understanding that death is permanent.
- An exploration of normal and wide-ranging reactions to sudden and unexpected death – expressions of anger and guilt are entirely normal.
- An understanding that, with support, people can cope.
- An understanding that fleeting thoughts of suicide are not unusual.
- An awareness of suicidal warning signs and resources available to help.
- An understanding of expectations around funerals.

When discussing any suicide that has occurred, we will ensure that the information given is age appropriate and:

- Factually correct, but does not include detail of the suicidal act itself and does not romanticise, glorify or vilify the death.
- Does not include details of any suicide note.
- Does not include speculation over the motive for suicide.
- Takes care with language used – for example, using phrases such as 'died by suicide' or 'ended his/her life' rather than 'committed suicide' or 'successful suicide', and saying 'attempted to end his/her life' rather than 'unsuccessful suicide' or 'failed attempt at suicide'.

In all of our plans, we seek to support students with a range of cultural and religious beliefs, customs and procedures concerning death. It follows that bereaved children and families may have differing expectations.