

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT IN POST PRIMARY SCHOOLS

RESOURCE BOOKLET FOR MANAGEMENT AND STAFF

POST PRIMARY EDUCATION RESOURCES - DIOCESE OF KERRY

Chapter 1: Understanding Loss and the School Response

Bereavement Support Resource

Grief is not something to be fixed—it is something to be witnessed, supported, and carried with compassion.

Bereavement is something that every school community will encounter. The death of a parent, sibling, family member, friend, staff member, or member of the wider school community can have a profound impact on children and young people, affecting their emotional wellbeing, relationships, behaviour, learning, and sense of security.

Schools play a vital role in providing stability, understanding, and compassionate support during times of grief. While school staff are not expected to be grief counsellors, they are uniquely placed to create safe, supportive environments where bereaved pupils feel seen, heard, and understood.

This resource has been developed to support post-primary school communities in responding appropriately, sensitively, and effectively when a death occurs within the school community. It is intended to complement existing school policies and national guidance by providing practical advice, reflective guidance, and evidence-informed approaches to supporting bereaved students, staff, and families.

Within these pages you will find:

- An overview of grief and how it presents itself.
- Practical strategies for supporting bereaved pupils in the classroom and wider school environment.
- Guidance on communicating with families and responding to significant incidents.
- Information on memorials, anniversaries, and managing difficult circumstances.
- Prayer Services and signposts to additional supports and services.

While no resource can remove the pain of bereavement, thoughtful preparation and a compassionate, coordinated response can make a significant difference to how individuals and the wider school community experience and navigate loss.

Every child's grief journey is unique. There is no "right" way to grieve and no fixed timeline for healing. By working together with empathy, consistency, and compassion, schools can make a lasting difference in helping children and young people navigate loss while continuing to grow, learn, and thrive.

Types of Loss Encountered in Schools

Schools may be required to respond to many different forms of bereavement. Every death is unique, and every school community will experience loss differently. Understanding the nature of bereavement enables schools to tailor their response to the needs of students, staff, and families.

Death of a Student

The death of a student has a significant emotional impact on classmates, teachers, families, and the wider school community. The sudden loss of a young person often raises difficult questions and can affect students' sense of safety and security. Students may experience feelings of shock, sadness, anger, confusion, or disbelief, while staff often balance their own grief with the responsibility of supporting others. A calm, compassionate, and coordinated school response is essential.

Death of a Staff Member

Teachers and school staff are often trusted adults who provide stability, guidance, and care throughout a student's school life. The death of a staff member can deeply affect students, colleagues, and families, particularly when the individual has been part of the school community for many years. Schools should acknowledge both the professional and personal loss experienced by staff and students alike.

Death of a Parent, Sibling or Close Family Member

Many young people experience the death of someone close to them while continuing to attend school. Grief may affect their concentration, attendance, behaviour, friendships, and academic performance. Schools play an important role in providing understanding, maintaining communication with families, and making reasonable accommodations while the student adjusts to life after their loss.

Sudden or Traumatic Deaths

Deaths resulting from accidents, suicide, violence, or other traumatic circumstances often generate additional emotional responses, including shock, fear, confusion, guilt, and anxiety. Rumours and misinformation can spread quickly, particularly through social media, making clear and accurate communication essential. These situations require schools to follow established critical incident procedures while ensuring that support is available for all those affected.

School Preparedness and Planning

Preparation before a crisis is one of the strongest protective factors for any school community. While no school wishes to anticipate the death of a student, staff member, or parent, having clear procedures in place allows everyone to respond with greater confidence and consistency when a bereavement occurs.

Bereavement and critical incident planning should form part of a school's overall wellbeing strategy rather than being developed only after a tragedy has occurred.

Preparation includes:

- Establishing a Critical Incident Management Team.
- Clearly defining roles and responsibilities.
- Maintaining up-to-date emergency contact information.
- Providing regular staff training and professional learning.
- Identifying external agencies and community supports.
- Developing clear communication procedures for students, staff, families, and the wider community.

When staff are familiar with agreed procedures before a crisis occurs, they are better able to focus on supporting those affected rather than making decisions under pressure.

The Role of the Critical Incident Management Team

A well-prepared **Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)** is central to an effective school response following a bereavement or other critical incident. During times of crisis, emotions run high and decisions often need to be made quickly. Having an established team with clearly defined responsibilities helps ensure that the school's response is coordinated, compassionate, and consistent.

The effectiveness of the team depends not only on having the right people in place but also on every member understanding their role before an incident occurs. Preparation and regular review of responsibilities reduce uncertainty, prevent duplication of tasks, and enable staff to focus on supporting students, colleagues, and families.

While the composition of the team will vary from school to school, it typically includes the Principal, Deputy Principal, members of the Senior Leadership Team, Guidance Counsellor, School Chaplain or Religious Education representative, Pastoral Care Coordinator, SEN Coordinator, and administrative staff where appropriate.

Each member should be familiar with their specific responsibilities, which may include:

- coordinating the school's overall response;
- liaising with the bereaved family;
- communicating with staff, students, parents, and the wider school community;
- coordinating pastoral supports for students and staff;
- organising memorials, prayer services, or other appropriate rituals;

- maintaining accurate records and documentation;
- liaising with external agencies, including the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), emergency services, and support organisations; and
- managing media enquiries and social media communication in line with school policy.

Regular meetings of the Critical Incident Management Team provide opportunities to review policies, update contact information, clarify responsibilities, and evaluate previous responses. Conducting occasional scenario-based exercises or tabletop discussions can also help staff become more confident in implementing agreed procedures.

Although individual members have designated responsibilities, responding to bereavement is a shared responsibility across the whole school community. A coordinated approach ensures that students, staff, and families receive consistent messages and appropriate support throughout the grieving process.

Ultimately, the aim of the Critical Incident Management Team is not simply to manage an incident but to provide calm leadership, foster compassionate care, and help restore a sense of safety and stability within the school community.

Essential Policies and Documentation

Clear policies provide schools with a framework for responding consistently, compassionately, and effectively during times of bereavement.

Schools should ensure that key documentation is current, accessible, and regularly reviewed. Staff should know where these documents are located and understand their role in implementing them.

Essential documents include:



Policies should not remain simply as written documents. They should inform everyday practice and be supported through regular discussion, review, and training.

Preparing Before a Critical Incident

Effective preparation extends beyond policies and procedures. It involves creating a school culture where wellbeing, compassion, and resilience are valued every day.

Schools that foster positive relationships, open communication, and emotional literacy are better equipped to respond when loss occurs. Preparing for bereavement is not about expecting tragedy but about ensuring that students and staff know they will be cared for if difficult circumstances arise.

Areas for consideration include:

- Strategic planning before an incident occurs.
- Creating an ethos of care and compassion.
- Reviewing health and safety procedures.
- Promoting responsible use of social media and digital communication.
- Embedding resilience, coping skills, and emotional wellbeing within the curriculum.
- Maintaining accurate emergency contact information.
- Building relationships with external support agencies before they are required.

Preparation enables schools to respond in a thoughtful, coordinated, and person-centred manner rather than reacting under pressure.

Critical Incidents and Their Impact

Every individual experiences grief differently. There is no single or predictable pattern of grieving, and reactions will vary according to age, personality, previous experiences of loss, family circumstances, cultural background, and the nature of the death.

Students and staff may experience any or all of the following over a period of two years.



Some reactions appear immediately, while others may emerge weeks or months later. Adolescents, in particular, may move between grief and everyday activities with surprising speed, which should not be interpreted as a lack of caring.

Recognising the diversity of grief responses helps school staff avoid making assumptions about how someone "should" react and encourages a compassionate, individualised approach to support.

Supporting Students Following a Bereavement

Teachers are often among the adults who spend the greatest amount of time with young people following a bereavement. While staff are not expected to be grief counsellors, their everyday interactions can have a lasting impact on a bereaved student's sense of belonging, safety, and wellbeing.

Simple, compassionate actions can make a significant difference.



Students consistently report that they value adults who are willing to listen, remember the person who has died, acknowledge their grief, and continue to offer support long after the funeral has taken place. Sometimes, the most meaningful support comes not from having the right words but from being consistently present, compassionate, and understanding.

Chapter 2: Understanding Grief and Accessing Support

Grief is a natural response to loss and is experienced differently by every individual. Within a school community, students and staff may respond to bereavement in a variety of ways depending on their age, personality, previous experiences, cultural background, relationship with the deceased, and the circumstances surrounding the death.

Schools are not expected to provide specialist grief counselling. However, they do play a significant role in creating a supportive environment where bereaved members of the school community feel safe, understood, and connected. This chapter explores the nature of grief and outlines the supports available within schools and through external services.

Understanding Grief

Grief is far more than sadness. It is a whole-person experience that affects how people think, feel, behave, and function physically.

There is no single "correct" way to grieve. Some people openly express their emotions, while others grieve quietly. Young people, in particular, may move between moments of sadness and everyday activities with surprising speed. This does not mean they have forgotten or are unaffected by their loss.



One of the most important messages for schools is that grief is **not predictable**. It is not something that follows a series of neat stages. Instead, grief changes over time and often comes in waves, with difficult days occurring weeks, months, or even years after a bereavement.

What Does a Bereaved Person Need?

Although every individual grieves differently, many bereaved people share similar needs.

Students and adults often need:

- to be listened to without judgement;
- opportunities to tell and retell their story;
- permission to grieve in their own way;
- reassurance that there is no right or wrong way to grieve;
- understanding that grief can feel exhausting both emotionally and physically;
- acceptance that moments of laughter can exist alongside sadness;
- encouragement to seek support beyond the immediate family when needed; and
- reassurance that grief is often unpredictable and may become more intense before it begins to ease.

The role of school staff is not to fix grief but to provide a consistent, compassionate presence that allows students to feel heard and supported.

School-Based Supports

Schools already possess many valuable supports that contribute to a student's wellbeing during bereavement.

These may include:

Pastoral Care Teams

Pastoral care teams coordinate the school's response, identify students who may require additional support, and liaise with families and external agencies where appropriate.

School Chaplain

The chaplain provides pastoral and spiritual support for students, families, and staff. This may include opportunities for prayer, reflection, memorial services, or simply providing a compassionate listening presence.

Guidance Counsellor

Guidance counsellors provide emotional support, monitor student wellbeing, assist with referrals where necessary, and help students manage the impact of grief on their education.

Student Support Systems

Year Heads, tutors, class teachers, Special Educational Needs teams, Student Support Teams, and Student Support Plans all contribute to ensuring that bereaved students continue to feel connected and supported within the school community.

Choosing the Right Support

Not every bereaved student requires specialist counselling.

Many young people benefit most from: • trusted relationships with familiar adults; • maintaining everyday routines; • opportunities to talk when they choose; • practical adjustments within school; and • continued observation and support. Additional interventions should always be guided by individual need.	Schools should consider: • the student's age and developmental stage; • the circumstances of the bereavement; • previous experiences of trauma or loss; • available family support; and • whether specialist intervention is indicated. Where concerns persist or increase over time, referral to appropriate services should be considered.

EXTERNAL SUPPORTS AVAILABLE TO SCHOOLS

These organisations provide information, guidance, counselling and specialist support for students, staff and families experiencing grief and loss.

SCHOOL & EDUCATIONAL SUPPORTS

NEPS
National Educational Psychological Service

NEPS
Critical incident support, guidance for schools and psychological services.
www.gov.ie/neps

Rainbows Ireland
Guiding kids through life's storms

Rainbows Ireland
Peer-support programme for children and young people experiencing bereavement or family change.
www.rainbowsireland.ie

Seasons for Growth
Growing through change

Seasons for Growth
Education programme supporting children and young people through loss and change.
www.goodgrief.org.au/seasons-for-growth

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORTS

HSE Bereavement Supports
National bereavement information, helplines and resources.
www2.hse.ie/mental-health/services-support/bereavement/

Barnardos
Because childhood lasts a lifetime

Barnardos Children's Bereavement Service
Childhood bereavement counselling, resources and critical incident support.
www.barnardos.ie/bereavement-services

AnamCara
Supporting Parents After Bereavement

Anam Cara
Support for bereaved parents and families.
www.anamcara.ie

LauraLynn
Ireland's Children's Hospice

LauraLynn Children's Hospice
Family, palliative and bereavement support.
www.lauralynn.ie

MENTAL HEALTH & COUNSELLING SUPPORTS

JIGSAW
Young people's health in mind

Jigsaw
Mental health support for young people (12–25 years).
www.jigsaw.ie

IACP

IACP
Find an accredited counsellor or psychotherapist.
www.iacp.ie

Pieta
Ending Suicide. Beginning Hope.

Pieta
Suicide bereavement support and crisis intervention.
www.pieta.ie

IAHIP

IAHIP
Find an accredited Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapist.
www.iahip.org

LOCAL KERRY SUPPORTS

Supporting our local school communities

KCYS
Kerry Catholic Youth Service

KCYS
Youth and family support services.
www.kcys.ie

KACS
Kerry Adolescent Counselling Service

KACS
Counselling and support for young people.
www.kacs.ie

SouthWest Counselling Centre
Building better wellbeing

SouthWest Counselling Centre
Community counselling services across Kerry.
www.southwestcounselling.ie

Please note:
Contact details and services may change. Schools should maintain an up-to-date directory of local supports as part of their Critical Incident Management Plan.

No one has to face grief alone.
Help and support are available.

Chapter 3: Long-Term Bereavement Support in Schools

While the initial days following a bereavement often receive the greatest attention, the need for support rarely ends after the funeral or memorial service. As life within the school gradually returns to normal, students and staff continue to carry their grief in different ways and at different times.

Schools play an important role in recognising that bereavement is an ongoing process rather than a single event. Continued compassion, flexibility, and understanding can make a significant difference to the long-term wellbeing of bereaved members of the school community.

This chapter explores the continuing nature of grief and offers practical guidance for supporting students and staff long after the immediate response has ended.

The Ongoing Nature of Grief

Grief is not a linear process with a clear beginning and end. Rather, it is an evolving experience that changes over time.

Many bereaved people describe grief as coming in waves. There may be periods when life feels manageable, followed by unexpected moments of intense sadness triggered by a memory, a place, a song, a photograph, or an important milestone.

For children and young people, grief often changes as they mature. A loss experienced in early adolescence may be understood very differently several years later as emotional and cognitive development continues.

Rather than "moving on" from grief, many people learn to integrate their loss into their lives while continuing to grow. Schools can support this process by recognising that grief may re-emerge at different stages and by responding with patience and understanding whenever additional support is needed.

A Relationship-Centred Approach

One of the most powerful forms of support a school can offer is a caring and consistent relationship.

Students do not usually remember the exact words spoken to them following a bereavement, but they often remember how people made them feel. Feeling accepted, listened to, and understood can reduce feelings of isolation and strengthen a student's sense of belonging within the school community.

Supporting bereaved students does not require staff to have all the answers. Instead, it requires a willingness to be present, to listen without judgement, and to remain available over time.

Simple acts of kindness, consistency, and genuine care often have the greatest impact.

The Core Conditions for Supporting Bereaved Students

The work of the psychologist Carl Rogers reminds us that healing relationships are built on three essential attitudes or *core conditions*. These principles are highly relevant within a school setting and can guide staff in their everyday interactions with bereaved students.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand another person's feelings and experiences from their perspective. It involves listening carefully, acknowledging emotions, and communicating understanding without making assumptions.

Congruence

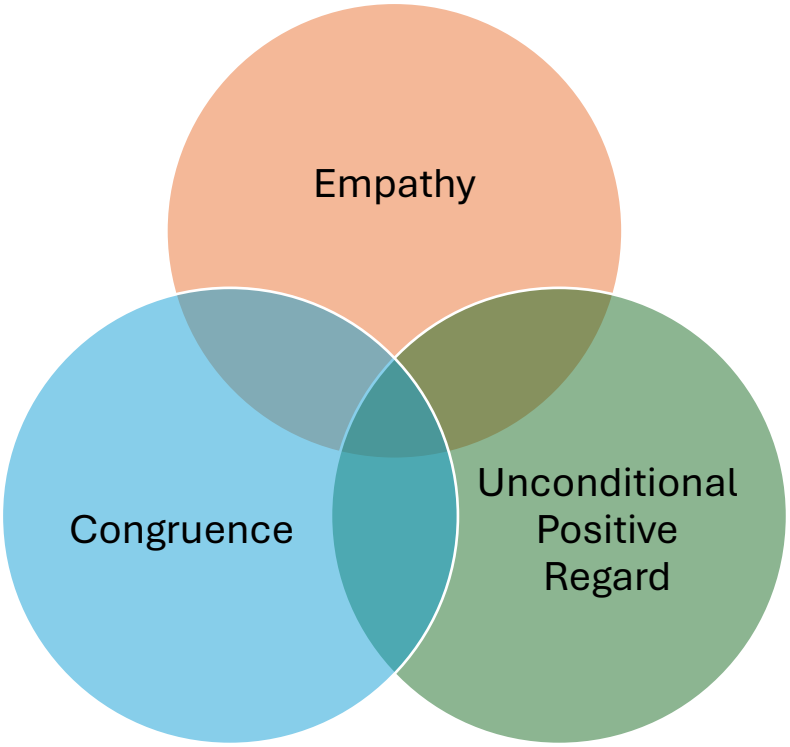
Congruence refers to being genuine and authentic. Students respond positively to adults who are honest, approachable, and comfortable acknowledging when they do not have all the answers.

Unconditional Positive Regard

This involves accepting the individual without judgement. Grief affects everyone differently, and students should feel accepted regardless of how they express their emotions.

These three attitudes form the foundation of compassionate pastoral care and help create an environment where bereaved students feel psychologically safe.

Compassionate Pastoral Care Model



The Importance of Presence

When someone is grieving, our presence is often more important than our words.

Schools sometimes feel pressure to "say the right thing" or to find solutions that ease a student's pain. However, grief cannot be fixed.

Instead, supportive relationships are built through:

- being available;
- listening attentively;
- allowing silence when appropriate;
- showing genuine interest;
- responding calmly;
- acknowledging difficult emotions; and
- avoiding judgement or false reassurance.

Simply sitting with someone in their grief can be one of the most meaningful forms of support.

Becoming an Effective Listener

Listening is one of the most valuable skills school staff can offer.



Students often benefit more from being heard than from receiving solutions.

Recognising Delayed Grief

Not all grief is expressed immediately following a bereavement.

Some young people initially appear to cope well before experiencing difficulties weeks or months later. Others may suppress their emotions until they feel emotionally safe enough to express them.

Possible signs of delayed grief include:

- withdrawal from friends or activities;
- increased irritability or conflict;
- changes in behaviour;
- difficulty concentrating;
- declining academic performance;
- increased emotional sensitivity;
- frequent absences
- seeking reassurance or additional attention.

These behaviours should always be considered within the wider context of the student's circumstances and discussed sensitively with families where appropriate.

Supporting Staff Over Time

Bereavement also affects teachers and school staff. While supporting students, staff may also be managing their own grief, particularly following the death of a colleague or student.

School leaders should continue to monitor staff wellbeing after the immediate crisis has passed by:

- encouraging regular communication;
- creating opportunities for informal support;
- recognising the emotional demands placed on staff;
- promoting professional wellbeing services where appropriate; and
- acknowledging that staff members may also experience grief differently.

Supporting staff is an essential part of supporting the wider school community.

Supporting a Student Returning to School

Returning to school following a bereavement can be an anxious experience for both students and their families.

Schools should work collaboratively with parents or caregivers to agree an appropriate plan for returning to school.

This may include:

- agreeing a suitable return date;
- considering a phased or partial return where appropriate;
- identifying a trusted adult within the school;
- informing relevant staff in advance;
- planning how classmates will be informed, where appropriate; and
- ensuring ongoing communication with the family during the transition.

A thoughtful return-to-school plan can reduce anxiety and help students regain a sense of safety and routine.

Classroom Strategies

Teachers play an important role in supporting bereaved students through everyday classroom practice.

Helpful approaches include:

Establish Predictable Routines Maintaining familiar routines provides stability and reassurance while allowing flexibility when additional support is needed.	**Offer Opportunities for Expression** Students should know they are welcome to talk, write, draw, or express themselves creatively, but should never feel pressured to share.
Use Gentle Check-Ins Brief, private conversations can help teachers monitor wellbeing without drawing unnecessary attention to the student.	**Small adjustments** Small adjustments made consistently over time are often more beneficial than large interventions immediately following the bereavement.

Remembering Within the School Community

Grief often becomes more noticeable at significant times throughout the year.



Sensitive acknowledgement of these milestones can reassure bereaved students that their loss has not been forgotten.

Commemorative activities should always be discussed with the family and balanced carefully with the everyday life of the school.

Reflection for Schools

Long-term bereavement support is not defined by one significant event but by many small, compassionate actions over time.

Schools that continue to notice, remember, listen, and respond with empathy help create communities where bereaved students and staff feel valued, understood, and supported throughout their grief journey.

Ultimately, the greatest gift a school can offer is not the removal of grief, but the reassurance that no one has to carry it alone.

Additional Resources for Schools

Principal's Checklist following a School Bereavement.

The following is a checklist of things to consider on the morning of the death of a member of the school community. They are not written in order of what must come first etc. It is important for a principal to take time to plan what he/she must do and what is appropriate to say to all concerned.

- ☐ Take time to let the news sink in.
- ☐ Put together as much factual information as possible from reliable sources
- ☐ Inform the Critical Incident Team and staff of what has happened
- ☐ Inform the Chairperson of the Board of Management
- ☐ Follow the Critical Incident Policy and discuss the routine for the first day with staff
- ☐ Identify particular students who may need to be told individually e.g. close friends, relatives etc.
- ☐ Inform the pupils that a student or member of staff has died as per the Critical Incident Policy
- ☐ Contact NEPS
- ☐ Make contact with the family of the deceased
- ☐ Decide on any arrangements which need to be made on the first day e.g. prayers, sacred space etc with the RE Team or relevant member of the Critical Incident Team
- ☐ Check in with staff in the staff room during the day and keep abreast of what is happening in the school
- ☐ Be aware of any particular teachers who may be distressed e.g. those who may have been recently bereaved
- ☐ Encourage staff to come to you during the day and let you know how things are going
- ☐ Find out details of the funeral etc and communicate this to staff and students
- ☐ Visit the bereaved family with another member of staff
- ☐ At the end of the first day review events with staff and make plans for the following day as per the Critical Incident Policy
- ☐ Make staff aware of students who are particularly vulnerable and what supports will be available to them
- ☐ If there is a likelihood of interest from the media discuss a strategy to deal with any such requests and prepare a statement.

External Supports for Schools.



Have the numbers of the following **local services** to hand also.

- Priest
- Garda Station
- Local doctors

Draft Email/letter to Parents

Please note that this draft document will need to be amended to suit your school.

Date:

Dear Parents/Guardians,

We have learned, with great sadness, of the death of ....., *one of our ..... year students/ a member of our school staff*.

This is a very difficult time for all of us, and we would like to support our students in every way possible. Our Guidance Counsellor(s), *insert names here,* our chaplain – (*insert name here*) and RE and Pastoral Care Teachers are available to students.

We all react and cope with loss in different ways, but common reactions include shock, anger, sadness, guilt, lack of interest and poor concentration.

Teachers/Year Heads have already spoken to students about these reactions, and we have attached an information sheet which you might find helpful.

Because it would be impossible for the entire student population to attend the funeral, we have decided to keep the school open. Both staff and students will be represented at the funeral mass. There will be a short whole school service and reflection in the school tomorrow at *(name the time*) for those who are at school.

In the case of students attending the funeral with their parents we would ask that they attend in their school uniform.

We especially remember and pray for..... and the.....family at this time.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.

Yours sincerely,

Supporting Your Teenager Through Grief

A Guide for Parents and Guardians

Responding to Loss

When a young person experiences the death of someone important, their world can feel changed. Teenagers grieve in different ways and there is no "right" way to respond to loss.

Some may want to talk openly, while others may become quiet or appear to cope well. Your patience, understanding and presence can provide the reassurance they need.

How You Can Help

Be present

Your teenager may not always want to talk, but knowing you are there matters.

Try saying:

"I'm here whenever you want to talk."

"You don't have to go through this alone."

Listen and acknowledge feelings

You do not need to have all the answers. Listening with care is often the greatest support.

Helpful responses:

- "That sounds really difficult."
- "I can understand why you feel that way."
- "Thank you for telling me."

Avoid rushing them or expecting them to "move on"

Keep routines where possible

Familiar routines can provide security.

Encourage:

✓ Regular sleep and meals

✓ Time with supportive friends and family

✓ School attendance where possible

✓ Activities that bring comfort and enjoyment

Allow flexibility when needed.

Understanding Teen Grief

Grief may affect teenagers emotionally, physically, socially and academically. They may experience:

Emotions

- Sadness, loneliness or feeling overwhelmed
- Anger, frustration or irritability
- Guilt or worry
- Feeling numb or disconnected

Changes in behaviour

- Becoming quieter or needing more time alone
- Changes in sleep, appetite or concentration
- Finding schoolwork more difficult
- Seeming "fine" while still grieving

Social challenges

- Feeling different from friends
- Finding it hard when others do not understand
- Struggling to ask for support

Remember: grief is not always visible.

Accept their way of grieving

Teenagers may:

- Talk about the person who died
- Avoid talking for a while
- Cry one day and laugh the next
- Find comfort in memories, music, prayer or personal rituals

Everyone's grief journey is unique.

Remembering and Honouring Loved Ones

Many young people find comfort in keeping memories alive.

You could:

- Look at photographs together
- Share stories and memories
- Mark important dates
- Light a candle or say a prayer
- Create a memory box

Working Together with School

Please let the school know if your child has experienced a bereavement or if you have concerns.

We can support students by:

- Providing a listening ear
- Offering understanding and flexibility
- Monitoring wellbeing
- Helping them access further support

Supporting Faith and Spiritual Needs

For young people with faith, prayer and reflection can bring comfort and hope.

You may wish to:

- Pray together
- Attend Mass or school liturgies
- Talk about questions they may have about life, death and God

It is natural for young people to ask difficult questions.

When to Seek Extra Support

Please seek additional help if your teenager:

- Struggles to manage everyday life for a prolonged period
- Becomes increasingly withdrawn
- Shows significant changes in behaviour
- Expresses hopelessness or thoughts of self-harm

Support is available through school, your GP and other appropriate services.

If you have any concerns about your child, you can contact the following people in our school by simply ringing the school office.

- The Principal
- Deputy Principal
- Year Head
- Guidance Counsellor
- Chaplain

Draft Media Statement

Please note that this document will need to be amended to suit the circumstances

If is important that the school prepare a factual statement and that only one member of staff, usually the principal, speaks to the media.

- Thought should be given to the following suggestions:
- Priority to be given to the sensitivities and needs of those affected by the crises
- The non-release of names, addresses and telephone numbers
- Rely on facts and avoid speculation
- Consider likely questions and a response to them but it would be advisable to tell the media that you will be taking no questions and simply make a statement
- Agree with the media a time for briefing if this is necessary in an on-going situation
- Nominate a specific location for the media briefing
- Keep it brief, factual, and compassionate.
- Avoid sharing cause of death unless the family has given explicit consent.
- Focus on support measures and community solidarity.
- Use calm, empathetic language that reflects the school's values.

Possible Statement 1 – *this statement presumes that the name of the student is not publicly known*.

It is with deep sadness that we confirm the passing of one of our students. Our entire school community is heartbroken by this loss, and our thoughts and prayers are with the student's family and friends at this very difficult time.

With the support of NEPS, we are providing support to our students, staff, and families through our school's pastoral care and counselling services. We ask that the privacy of the family be respected as they grieve.

Out of respect for the family, we will not be releasing further details at this time. We appreciate the understanding and compassion of the wider community as we come together to support one another.

Possible Statement 2 – this statement presumes that the name of the student is publicly known.

It is with profound sadness that we confirm the passing of our student, [Student's Full Name]. [First Name] was a valued member of our school community, known for [a brief, positive attribute—e.g., "their kindness and bright spirit"].

Our thoughts and deepest condolences are with [First Name]'s family, friends, and all who knew and loved them. This is an incredibly difficult time for our school, and we are focused on supporting our students, staff, and families through counselling and pastoral care services.

We kindly ask that the privacy of the family be respected as they grieve. Out of respect for them, we will not be commenting further at this time.

Possible Statement 3 – this statement is a longer statement probably best used under tragic circumstances.

We learned this morning of the death of one of our students (name the student). This is a terrible tragedy for the family of (name the student) and for our school community. We are deeply saddened by these events. Our sympathy and thoughts are with (name of student) family and friends.

(Name of student) was a (Year) student and will be greatly missed by all who knew him/her. We have been in contact with his/her parents, and they have requested that we all understand their need for privacy at this difficult time.

Offers of support have been pouring in and are greatly appreciated. Our school has implemented our Critical Incident Management Plan. Psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) have been with us all day supporting and advising teachers in their efforts to assist our students.

The teachers have been helping students to deal with this sad news. The school has been open to parents, to support them and to offer them advice and guidance.

We would ask that you respect our privacy at this time. Thank you.

Breaking the News to Students in the event of a death of a fellow pupil

Guidelines for Year Heads, Guidance Counsellors and Chaplains.

(These guidelines could also be used if breaking the news about the death of a staff member)

- The classmates of the student who has died should be the first to be told by their Year Head with the Guidance Counsellor, Chaplain or another member of staff.
- Other years should be told by their Year Heads.
- Not every class or pupil will be affected, some may not even know the deceased, but it is important to acknowledge the loss for the whole school community.
- Tell the class you have sad news and it is difficult for you to share it.
- Let them know the name of the person the news is about.
- Expect tears and outbursts
- Don't allow a student to leave the classroom alone in a distressed state
- Students must be supervised within the building while in a distressed state
- Let them know that the school will support them
- Don't be afraid to let them know that you are upset by the news
- Allow them time to mingle and talk to one another in groups
- Explain how they can support one another
- Be attentive to identifying those who are not coping well with the news
- You may need to remind students again who is there to help
- Arrange to have refreshments and boxes of tissues ready
- A short prayer for the deceased would be appropriate
- If the students appear ready, a year group assembly may be held later in the day
- Some students will be able to continue and go to class
- Other students may need a room to go to for a longer period of time
- Encourage students to stay in school to support their friends
- Some may need to go home following school policy for this
- Those who do go to class may not be able to concentrate very well so a gentle reminder to subject teachers to make allowances throughout the day would be advisable.

Sacred Space of Remembrance

This document may be helpful to Chaplains and RE Teachers. It may be advisable to have all items in a box and ready to use if needed.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Matthew 5:4

Suggested Items

Symbol/Objects	Purpose
🖼 Framed photograph (or framed name if the family prefers no photograph)	Honours the person who has died.
✝ Cross	A visible sign of Christ's love, hope and the promise of eternal life.
🕯 Battery-operated candle or vigil candle	Symbolises the light of Christ and the enduring presence of hope.
📖 Book of Condolence	Allows students and staff to write messages, prayers and memories.
💐 Fresh flowers	A symbol of respect, beauty and remembrance.
📜 Prayer card	Offers people a moment of reflection and prayer.

Near the **Book of Condolence**, you could place a card that reads the following:

"You are invited to write a message, prayer or cherished memory."

The **Prayer Card** could read the following:

Loving God, Hold our loved one in your eternal care.
Comfort all who grieve, and fill our hearts with hope, peace and the promise of new life. Amen.

Display Tips

- Cover the table with a **white cloth** to symbolise hope and resurrection.
- Place the **cross centrally** behind the framed photograph.
- Position the **candle and flowers** on either side for balance.
- Keep the **Book of Condolence** open with a suitable pen.
- Consider placing a small sign inviting quiet reflection, for example:

Please take a moment to remember and pray for our friend and all who are grieving.

Prayer for Display

God of Love,
We remember with gratitude the life of our friend.
Comfort all who mourn and surround their family with your peace.
Help our school community to support one another with kindness, compassion and hope.
May your light shine in our hearts today and always.
Amen.

Prayer Service (5 Minutes)

Theme: *"Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled"*

Gathering

Leader:
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we gather as a school community with heavy hearts following the death of our fellow student, **N.** We come together to pray, to remember, and to place our trust in God's promise of eternal life.

Lighting of the Candle

A single candle is lit.

Leader:
This candle reminds us of the light of Christ which no darkness can overcome. As we remember **N.**, we pray that Christ's eternal light will shine upon them forever.

(Pause for silent reflection – 30 seconds.)

Gospel Reading

John 14:1–4

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still, and trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house; if there were not, I should have told you. I am now going to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return to take you with me; so that where I am you may be too. You know the way to the place where I am going."

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection

Leader:
Jesus reminds us that death is not the end. He prepares a place for each one of us in the Father's house. Today we entrust **N.** into God's loving care and pray for all who mourn.

(Pause for silent reflection – 1 minute.)

Closing Prayer

Loving God,
welcome **N.** into your eternal home.
Comfort their family,
strengthen their friends,
and help us to support one another with kindness and hope.

May Christ, the Light of the World, lead **N.** into everlasting peace. May the Lord bless us, comfort us and give us strength during this difficult time.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Prayer Service (15 Minutes)

Entrance Hymn: Be Not Afraid *(instrumental or sung)*

Welcome

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we gather in sadness but also in faith. We remember **N.**, give thanks for their life among us, and ask God to comfort everyone who is grieving.

Lighting of the Candle - *A candle is lit.*

Leader: This candle is a sign of Christ's presence among us.
As its light shines before us, we remember **N.** and pray that they now share in the light of eternal life.

(30 seconds silence.)

Opening Prayer

God of love, you know our sorrow and our pain.
Be close to us today.
Give us courage to face these difficult days and remind us that your love is stronger than death. Amen.

Gospel Reading - John 14:1–4

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still, and trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house; if there were not, I should have told you. I am now going to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return to take you with me; so that where I am you may be too. You know the way to the place where I am going."

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection

Leader: Jesus does not promise that life will always be easy, but he promises never to leave us alone. Today we hold on to that promise. We remember the kindness, friendship and gifts that **N.** shared with our school community. Although we grieve, we also give thanks for the privilege of having known them. *(Two minutes of quiet reflection.)*

Intercessions

Leader: Your response to these prayers is, Lord, hear our prayer.

- For **N.**, that God may welcome them into eternal life. Lord hear us. *Response*
- For their family, that they may find strength and comfort. *Response*
- For friends, classmates and all in our school community who are grieving. *Response*
- For all who have experienced loss, that they may know God's peace. *Response*

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father...

Closing Prayer

Lord, walk beside us in our sadness.
Help us to care for one another.
May the love we shared with **N.** remain in our hearts forever.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Final Hymn: You Raise Me Up *(instrumental or sung)*

Prayer Service - Whole School/Year Group (30 Minutes)

Theme: *"The Lord Is Close to the Broken-hearted"*

What you will need:

• *3 candles and 1 – 3 people to light the candles* • *A lighter* • *Cross* • *Flowers* • *White Cloth*	• *Framed photo of the deceased* • *Approximately 6 readers if you wish to involve students in readings* • *Musicians and singers or an electronic source of music*

Entrance Music : You Raise Me Up

Welcome

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we gather as one school family to remember **N.** We come with sadness, questions and grief, but also with faith that God's love is stronger than death. May this time of prayer help us to support one another and place our trust in God's promise of eternal life.

Opening Prayer

God of compassion, you know every tear that is shed. Be with us as we remember **N.** Surround this school community with your love, bring comfort to those who mourn, and strengthen us with the hope of the Resurrection. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lighting of Three Candles *Pause for silence after each candle has been lit (30 seconds).*

First Candle – For N.

Leader: We light this candle in memory of **N.** May Christ, the Light of the World, lead them into everlasting life.

Second Candle – For the Family

Leader: We light this candle for the family of **N.** May God surround them with strength, peace and loving support.

Pause for silence (30 seconds).

Third Candle – For Friends and Our School Community

Leader: We light this candle for friends, classmates, teachers and everyone whose lives have been touched by **N.**
May we find hope in one another and in God's love.

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia (spoken or sung)

Gospel Reading - John 14:1–4

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still, and trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house; if there were not, I should have told you. I am now going to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return to take you with me; so that where I am you may be too. You know the way to the place where I am going."

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection (5–7 minutes)

The following reflective poem may now be read - *(Allow the poem to be read slowly and prayerfully.)*

"Death Is Nothing at All"
by Canon Henry Scott-Holland – adapted

Death is nothing at all,
I have only slipped away into the next room.
I am I and you are you.
Whatever we were to each other
That we still are.
Call me by my old familiar name,
Speak to me in the easy way
You always used.
Put no difference in your tone,
Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow.
What is death, but a negligible accident.
Why should I be out of mind, because
I am out of sight.
I am waiting for you, for an interval,
Somewhere near just around the corner.
All is well.

Prayer of the Faithful

Leader: Lord, in your mercy hear our prayers.

Response: Lord hear our prayer.

1. For **N.**, that they may rest forever in God's eternal peace. *Response*
2. For the parents, brothers, sisters and family of **N.**, that they may be comforted by God's love. *Response*
3. For classmates, close friends and teammates, that they may find strength in one another. *Response*
4. For teachers and staff as they support students through this difficult time. *Response*
5. For everyone who feels overwhelmed by grief, anxiety or loneliness, that they may experience God's healing presence. *Response*
6. For our whole school community, that we may continue to care for one another with compassion and hope. *Response*

The Lord's Prayer

Leader: Together we pray - Our Father...

Closing Prayer

May the Lord bless us and keep us.
May he let his face shine upon us and be gracious to us.
May he give us peace.

In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Closing Music: Be Not Afraid