

Dealing with Bereavement During the Coronavirus

Communication

During these unusual and difficult times, many school communities will be faced with the challenge of dealing with bereavement and it will not be possible for schools to follow the steps and advice set out in many guidance booklets and policies. A lack of face to face contact and a reliance on social media as the main way of communicating for many pupils and families, present a particular challenge when coping with bereavement. It is possible that a situation might arise where a member of the school community or a relative of a pupil might die from contracting COVID-19 and that this is relayed instantly via Facebook or other social media formats before a headteacher is notified and can decide how to share this news.

We therefore recommend that in addition to looking at guidance documents and seeking advice, you consider the following points:

Consent

It may be worth reminding parents and pupils not to share anything on social media without the consent and support of the family concerned. Do ensure that **you** have this consent and support before you do anything. Even if it is being tweeted or shared via social media, you should not share **anything** without first speaking to the family.

Who needs to know and when?

Each case will be different. If it is a central member of the community, a teacher or pupil, then everyone needs to be informed. However, if it is an elderly relative of a member of your community this might not be the case. You may want to inform people immediately, having gained consent, if a member of the school community has died. You may want to mark the death of other people later through your collective worship or a special service.
YOU KNOW BEST!

Informing the Local Authority

Many Local Authorities have established dedicated phone lines which you can contact during this period. Many will be linked to the Educational Psychology service. Please check your LA information for details.

Informing Staff

All staff need to be informed of every death. But it might not be urgent. It may be a worth preparing a dissemination tree and drawing up a telephone tree - so some people make one

or two calls to share the news. Not everyone will be trained, equipped or willing to do this, so it is worth thinking about this now.

Informing Governors

Ring your Chair of Governors and ask them to help you inform other governors. Share the burden of contact where possible.

Informing Pupils and families

Take advice and follow guidance provided by different dioceses, LA or organisations before informing pupils and their families. Informing those learning at home is very difficult. Again, think about the relationship of the children to the deceased. There might be a way of sharing through your online assemblies. Is this the best way? Do some people need a personal phone call – ie the good friends/classmates or pupils of the deceased? Can you use the website? **You know your families best, so you need to manage this in the best way for your school.** This could be done through class teachers/tutors and possibly as part of a weekly check in call. Teachers will need time to listen to pupils and parents and will probably need the support of the wellbeing service you buy into. Be aware that some at home pupils are unlikely to get a lot of support in this situation so will need follow up calls. Ask advice and act on it.

Dealing with the response

Be ready to be flooded with a wide range of responses and reactions. This is a very difficult time for us all so it is hard to know how our communities will cope when the virulence of this awful disease begins to touch our communities. Do make use of the help available from your local religious leaders, our diocesan team, experienced colleagues, unions, the LA and other organisations. Prepare for scrapbooks, memorial services, fundraising ideas and many other ways of showing support.

A number of Dioceses have produced very helpful resources for dealing with bereavement in schools. You can find links to these on our website by clicking on the 'COVID-19 Diocesan Resources for Schools' section of the homepage [<https://schools.chichester.anglican.org>]. There are also a number of excellent documents which can be downloaded. **We recommend the Bereavement Guidance produced by our colleagues in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich where you will find a number of helpful flow diagrams to support your thinking and actions and which address a number of different scenarios**

We are thinking of you at this time and will continue to support you in whatever way we can. So do remember that you are not on your own.

The Diocesan Education team can be contacted on 01273 425 687 or via email.

These materials have been adapted from materials produced by the Diocese of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich.