Thornleigh Salesian College

Bereavement, Loss and Change Policy

Person responsible	Deputy Headteacher
Date of Last Review	Autumn 2026
Adopted by Governing Body	Autumn 2026
Date of Next Review	Autumn 2027

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1. Statement of intent

At Thornleigh Salesian College, we understand that bereavement is faced by students in our school community at different times. We are aware that bereavement affects individuals in different ways and our mission must be to comfort those most in need and support them in navigating bereavement. Father Michael Winstanley in his book, Jesus and Young People describes how

'We need to take Jesus in prayer for those for whom we are concerned and for whom we seek healing. In our prayer we entrust the sufferer to Jesus' compassion. We need to be people who trust in his power and loving care.'

We understand the importance of providing support to students during and after bereavement. This policy provides an outline of how Thornleigh Salesian College will respond in supporting those students affected by bereavement. It is very important that students are offered space upon receiving news of a bereavement and that the circumstances for each bereavement are unique. Easing school pressure will be a prime aim of the Care Guidance and Support team (CGS) liaising closely with classroom teachers to ensure this happens. Information of the bereavement may be shared with class teachers so that they can be sensitive around the topics they teach to the student.

The school Chaplain will lead on any service of remembrance and prayers for the deceased. He will also be available to offer religious provision, the writing of prayers, and be on hand for any students spending time in the school chaplaincy. The grieving process will be allowed to take its natural course with support offered when the student feels they are ready. Birthdays and anniversaries will be recorded centrally on a calendar, so that the Care Guidance and Support team can monitor the students and be there for them if there is a need and monitor any emotional or behaviour changes related to bereavement,A centralised record of bereavement will also be centrally kept to ensure that all students who experience a loss are cared for adequately. This record will detail the student and their siblings, the relationship to the deceased, significant dates, and a 'check in' tracker to ensure students are supported through this process.

The policy also outlines how the school is committed to providing a safe, inclusive and supportive environment for all students. We recognise that family separation, divorce or other significant changes in family circumstances can be challenging and may affect a student's emotional wellbeing, behaviour and learning.

This policy aims to ensure that students experiencing family change are supported with sensitivity, respect and understanding. We are committed to working in partnership with families/carers/guardians, maintaining appropriate confidentiality and providing access to pastoral care, guidance and support. Through this policy, the school seeks to promote student wellbeing, minimise the impact of family change on learning and ensure that every student feels valued, supported and able to thrive in our school community.

Fr Michael Winstanley SDB also states that *'In our lives there are many death experiences which we have to embrace and work through. Jesus comes as the compassionate one who will be supportively with us, sustaining us in our struggle.*

The widow of Nain represents the many bereaved and vulnerable in our world, people whose lives are in shreds, whose futures look grim. However, her pain is a catalyst moving Jesus to compassion. Jesus comes as the compassionate one who will be supportively with us,

sustaining us in our struggle. Like Jesus, we need to be compassionate people, willing to touch the bier and get involved, and in that expression of compassion be creative.'

2. Roles and responsibilities

The **Governing body** will be responsible for:

- Overseeing the implementation of this policy.
- Reviewing this policy with the Headteacher to ensure its effectiveness.

Some **designated Care Guidance and Support staff** will be responsible for:

- Undertaking bereavement support training and conducting in-school training to share their knowledge with other staff.
- Supporting the Headteacher in carrying out the procedures outlined in this policy.
- Supporting students and parents following a death, as directed by the Headteacher.
- Making referrals for students to receive support.

All staff members will be responsible for:

- Seeking support from the CGS team as appropriate.
- Supporting students following a death, as appropriate.

The **Deputy Headteache**r will be responsible for:

- Owning the Bereavement Tracker.
- QA of Bereavement Tracker to ensure it is kept up to date.
- Assigning the Designated Key Adult to identified students.

The **Year Team** will be responsible for:

- Working with the family in order to tailor individual support for affected students where necessary
- Seeking appropriate support for individual students where necessary.
- Completing 'check-ins' with identified students.
- Keeping the Bereavement Tracker up to date and identifying key dates in order to proactively support individual students around key times of the year.

The **Attendance Team** will be responsible for:

- Liaising with families to support attendance protocols during periods of bereavement.
- Developing supportive attendance plans in partnership with both families and Year Teams to support attendance during periods of bereavement where necessary.

The **Chaplaincy Team** will be responsible for:

- Offering a quiet space for students when they are struggling with bereavement.
- Offering a space for students to talk about bereavement.
- Leading on memorials or services of remembrance

3. The initial response

If the family of a student contacts school to inform us of a death, separation, divorce or change, the member of staff that answers the phone will transfer the call to the Headteacher, Deputy Headteachers or key members of the CGS team. If the school is made aware of a death through a source other than the family, they will be contacted either by phone or through a home visit ensuring this information is accurate before responding.

Information about what has happened will be gathered, establishing the family's wishes with regards to what information will be communicated to the school community and how.

If the death of a student's family member occurs while the student is at school, a member of their family will be asked to come to the school to inform the student of what has happened and to take them home. If this is not possible, arrangements will be made for a member of staff to take the student home. The Attendance Officer will monitor attendance and keep the year teams informed of a student experiencing difficulties.

If a death affects the entire school, e.g. the death of a student or member of staff, the Headteacher will inform the family that staff and students will be informed as soon as possible.

If the death affects an individual member of staff, e.g. the death of a relative, the Headteacher will ask the member of staff if they would like this to be communicated to any of their colleagues. If it is decided that the death will be communicated, the Headteacher will discuss with the staff member what information will be communicated and how they would like it to be delivered.

If a death affects an individual student, e.g. the death of a parent, the Headteacher will ask the family if they would like this to be communicated to the school community. If it is decided that the death will be communicated, the Headteacher will discuss with the family, and the student if possible, what information will be communicated and how the family would like it to be delivered.

The Headteacher will make contact with any other agencies as required, e.g. the police or children's services, and will decide if any temporary variation needs to be made to the school timetable, e.g. rearranging or cancelling certain lessons.

In the event of the death of the Headteacher, the Deputy Headteacher will be responsible for the duties outlined above.

4. Informing students about bereavements

Students with specific needs that may influence their response to being informed about the death will be identified and may be told separately. These needs include the following:

- Students with a history of loss
- Students with SEND
- Students who have difficulty managing their emotions or behaviour

Where possible, a member of the **Care Guidance and Support team** will be present giving them time to ask questions about what has happened and to talk about how they are feeling. Students will be told where they can go to school for support and will also be directed to any external support.

Informing students in a large group

If it is not possible to inform students about a death in small groups, the Headteacher, in communication with the family, will decide if it would be appropriate to inform students in a large group, e.g. during an assembly.

Where an individual student has been bereaved, they will be asked if they want to attend the assembly and, if they do not want to be involved, appropriate support will be arranged for the student during and after the assembly. The Headteacher will tell the family and, where relevant, the bereaved student exactly what they will say and to whom.

The Headteacher, with support from relevant Care Guidance and Support staff, will deliver the information to students. After students have been informed, they will go to their forms and be given time to express any thoughts or feelings about what they have been told.

Informing the Parents

The Headteacher will have a discussion with the family about whether any parents need to be informed about the death. If the death affects the whole school, e.g. the death of a staff member or student, the Headteacher will strongly recommend to the family that all parents should be informed; however, if the death does not affect the whole school, it may be more appropriate to just inform parents that are directly affected, if any.

A nominated member of staff will compose a letter to parents about the death. The letter will contain the basic, factual information about the death, information about how the school is supporting pupils, how they can support their children, and who to direct questions or concerns to.

5. Funerals

If appropriate, the Headteacher will discuss with the family whether any staff, governors or students are able to attend the funeral. With the family's approval, the Headteacher will arrange for the school to be represented at the funeral and identify which staff and students may want to attend.

6. Support for the family following bereavement

The Headteacher, SLT or a key member of the CGS team will be the main point of contact between the school and the family, or will appoint another member of staff to this role where necessary. The school will invite the family into school to discuss how support can best be offered. The family's wishes and feelings will always be considered and respected when making decisions and conducting activities relating to the death.

Any support that is put in place will be decided on a case-by-case basis, depending on the family's needs and wishes. Support may include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Sending a card of condolence from the Headteacher, year team and teachers that have a close relationship with the child.
- Inviting the family to commemorative events held by the school, including a service of remembrance, conducted by the School Chaplain.

7. Support for students following a bereavement

A member of staff that is familiar with the student will be appointed to act as their main point of contact – the student will be made aware of who the staff member is. The Headteacher, SLT or a key member of the CGS team will contact the student's family to discuss whether they will be attending school. Any support put in place, will be student-led and based on their needs and wishes.

When deciding what support will be put in place, the impact the death will have on the student will always be considered in the context of pre-existing factors. The school may complete an Individual Education Bereavement Support Plan with the student/s to ascertain the support that may be needed to be put in place. The following contextual factors will also be considered:

- The circumstances surrounding the death, e.g. was it under traumatic circumstances, was the death expected.
- The relationship between the student and the person who has died.
- The ability of the student's family to support them following the death, e.g. if a student's parent has died, how able is the surviving parent to provide support?
- Family factors such as size, financial state, structure, style of coping, communication and stressors that affect the child.
- The support the student has from their peers and other organisations and people.
- Characteristics of the student, including their age and any SEND they have.

The student will be a part of discussions regarding who should be informed about the death and how, where appropriate.

If a student chooses to attend school immediately after a bereavement, they will be allowed a flexible timetable and their teachers will be made aware via an email from the year team that they may not be able to work to their usual capacity. The designated staff member will keep in communication with the student's family to inform them about how they are doing. If the student is absent from school following the bereavement, they will be made aware of who has been informed about what has happened and what they were told.

The designated staff member will make regular contact with the student during their absence. The Headteacher, designated staff member, student and their family will make arrangements for a return to school, e.g. a phased return.

If a death occurs soon before or during a time where the student will take an examination, the Exams Officer will consider whether an application for special consideration should be submitted to the relevant awarding organisation in accordance with current JCQ and awarding organisation guidance. If a student misses an exam due to the death of a close family member or friend, the Headteacher will report this to the appropriate exam board who will then make a decision as to whether special considerations can be applied.

Any safeguarding concerns regarding a bereaved student will be dealt with in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

8. Trauma response

Staff will remain vigilant to the following behaviours that a student may display immediately after the death of someone close to them:

- Inability to concentrate

- Lack of motivation
- Tiredness and irritability
- Heightened sensitivity to comments and remarks
- Inability to take others' feelings into account
- Anger, frustration or aggression
- A general change in behaviour, e.g. becoming unnaturally quiet or withdrawn
- Anxiety
- Being easily upset by events that would normally not affect them
- Physical complaints, such as headaches, stomach aches and a general tendency to be prone to minor illness

The student's designated staff member will keep in contact with the family and share information about how the student is behaving at school and home. Any challenging behaviour displayed by bereaved students will be addressed using the individual graduated response outlined in the Behavioural Policy.

A record will be made of anniversaries and days with regards to the death which may act as a trigger for challenging behaviour will be kept in a calendar by the Care Guidance and Support team.

9. Specific circumstances

The procedures outlined in this policy will be followed for all deaths affecting individual students; however, specific measures will be implemented for certain circumstances.

Pre-bereavement – when a family member is not expected to live

If a student has an illness where they are not expected to live, their family will make the school aware of the situation and the school will ensure the appropriate support is in place. A member of the Care Guidance and Support team will meet with the student and provide them with an opportunity to talk about what is happening and how they are feeling.

All staff will remain vigilant to signs that the student is facing challenges in relation to their psychological, physical and social development and will refer any concerns to Care Guidance and Support staff who will ensure appropriate support is put in place.

Students with a life-threatening illness

Students with life-threatening illnesses will be encouraged to take part in school routines as much as possible, and the school will continue to expect the usual standards of behaviour as appropriate.

The Headteacher, the student and their family, and other relevant staff members (e.g. a member of the Care, Guidance and Support staff) will decide how to share the news that a student is terminally ill with the school community. Other students will be informed about how they can best support them in the most appropriate way.

If the student is receiving treatment from a local hospice or hospital, the key professional responsible for the student will be identified and the Headteacher will contact this person for advice and support as necessary.

Suicide

The school will respond to a suspected suicide as soon as is practical. The Headteacher, or other appointed member of staff, will contact the police or the family as soon as possible to confirm the death and whether it is being treated as a suicide.

If the family does not wish the cause of death to be disclosed to the school community, the school will not speculate or communicate unconfirmed information. If the death is subject to an ongoing investigation, the Headteacher will check with the police before speaking about the death with students who may need to be interviewed by the police.

Staff will be told about the death first. The script that staff will use to inform students of the death will be factual while avoiding excessive detail about the suicidal act itself.

Any information distributed to the school community and media regarding the death will:

- Be factually correct but not include detail of the cause of death or method used.
- Not romanticise, glorify or vilify the death.
- Not include details of any suicide note.
- Not include speculation over the motivation for suicide.

Research indicates that students directly affected by suicide are at an increased risk of taking their own life. Any disclosure or indication of suicidal thoughts/self-harm is managed under the school's safeguarding procedures, with immediate escalation where required.

Any memorial activities conducted by the school will be held within two weeks of the death; following this, any memorial material will be given to the family.

Students and staff will be warned about the risks of un-moderated online memorials (e.g. those on social media), such as their comments becoming public without their permission and online memorials attracting negative comments.

10. Teaching about bereavement and grief

Different aspects of the curriculum such as RE and PSHE will be used to discuss relationships, feelings and emotions, and to think about how to manage these in relation to family events and death. Before delivering any lessons that cover topics of death and bereavement, the teacher will consider how the lesson may affect the bereaved students they are teaching.

Bereaved students and their families will be consulted over whether it is appropriate for them to attend lessons about death or bereavement, and alternative arrangements or additional support will be put in place as required. Where appropriate, the teacher will discuss what the lesson is going to cover with the student and will work with them to design activities that they feel they are able to get involved with.

Any lessons covering topics of death or bereavement will take account of religious and cultural beliefs.

11. Staff training

Some Care Guidance and Support staff will receive training in bereavement support. The CGS bereavement team will organise whole-school training sessions to share their knowledge with all staff members, including support staff.

12. Supporting Students through change and Loss

The school will support students experiencing family separation, divorce, or other significant changes by working closely with the student and their family to identify individual needs. Where appropriate, the school will put in place a tailored support plan to help address both educational and pastoral needs through an Individual Education Change Support Plan. This may include liaison with relevant staff, adjustments within the school day, and access to pastoral or wellbeing support. The school will approach all situations with sensitivity, respect, and confidentiality, with the aim of ensuring that each student feels supported and able to continue to engage positively with their learning.

13. Supporting CLA Students with change

The policy also will also take into account CLA students and the impact of change in carers/living situations. Again, where appropriate the school will work with individual students, carers, family, virtual school and the Local Authority to develop a tailored Individual Education Change Support Plan to support students as they navigate this period of change and possible re-settlement. The school will approach all situations with sensitivity, respect, and confidentiality, with the aim of ensuring that each student feels supported and able to continue to engage positively with their learning.

14. Supporting International New Arrivals and Asylum Seekers

The policy also will also take into account the situations of INA students and Asylum Seekers. These students will be experiencing quite significant change and potential loss in some circumstances. The school has appointed a Mama Margaret Family Link Coordinator to work with these families. Where appropriate and in consultation with agencies such as ACIS we may develop a tailored Individual Education Support Plan for these students to help them navigate the change they are experiencing and support their settlement into our school.

15. Monitoring and review

This policy will be reviewed by the Governing Body and Headteacher. Any changes to this policy will be communicated to all staff members and all relevant stakeholders.

Appendix A - Bereavement Flow Chart

The Headteacher, SLT member or key member of the CGS team will contact the family to ensure the information the school has is correct and offer support.

Information is shared with SLT, HOY and SPC

Students are offered space upon receiving the news of the bereavement. Easing school pressure will be the aim of the CGS team and they will work with classroom teachers to ensure this happens. Information will be shared with classroom teachers so that they can be sensitive around topics that they teach that student

Time out, break and lunchtime arrangements may be made and adjustments considered that may support the student.

Funeral dates and family support will be discussed/considered and the Attendance Team to be informed.

Chaplaincy team/Father Saju will offer religious provision/liturgy - writing prayers, lighting candles, spending time in Chaplaincy

Information will be updated on the Bereavement Tracker with key dates noted

Appendix B - Bereavement Support Plan

This plan is designed to support **you**. We want to help you, both in school and away from school to navigate this difficult path. Please use this plan to express yourself, your concerns and worries so that we can understand how best to support you at this time and beyond.

Plan for:	
Date created:	
Created with:	
Your key contacts:	

Who has died or is dying? Use this space to tell us about the person, their relationship to you, how they died or their illness.

How are things at home? Use this space to tell us how things are at home, how your family is dealing with it. Can you tell us if there are any cultural/traditional differences associated around death/illness in your family

Who are your key people? Use this space to tell us about who is there to support you at home and who is good at supporting you here at school	
Home:	School:

Who are your key people?
Use this space to tell us about who is there to support you at home and who is good at supporting you here at school

What helps/doesn't help?
Use this space to tell us what things help to support you or makes things feel a bit easier and also what things makes things feel more difficult for you

What helps me:	What isn't helpful:

Key dates
Use this space to tell us about important dates that we should be aware of such as anniversaries and birthdays

Triggers and Signals
Use this space to tell us if there are any topics that may be difficult for you to learn/talk about in lessons. Tell us if there is a code or signal you would like to use to tell staff you are struggling.

They're great
Use this space to tell us something nice, like a story or memory you have about this person.

Anything else:

Appendix C - Change Support Plan

This plan is designed to support **you**. We want to help you, both in school and away from school to navigate this path. Please use this plan to express yourself, your concerns and worries so that we can understand how best to support you at this time and beyond.

Plan for:	
Date created:	
Created with:	
Your key contacts:	

How have things changed for you? Use this space to tell us about what has changed and how this may impact you both in and out of school.

How are things at home? Use this space to tell us how things are at home, how your family is dealing with it.

Who are your key people?
Use this space to tell us about who is there to support you at home and who is good at supporting you here at school

Home:	School:

What helps/doesn't help?
Use this space to tell us what things help to support you or makes things feel a bit easier and also what things makes things feel more difficult for you

What helps me:	What isn't helpful:

Triggers and Signals
Use this space to tell us if there are any topics that may be difficult for you to learn/talk about in lessons. Tell us if there is a code or signal you would like to use to tell staff you are struggling.

Anything else:

