

St. Augustine's College, Abbeyside, Dungarvan.



Student Support & Bereavement Policy

Mission Statement.

St. Augustine's College is a caring community, committed to offering all of its students and staff a happy and safe environment in which they can work, learn, pray and play. We endeavour to facilitate the academic, personal, moral, spiritual and social development of each member of our school community. Our aim is to provide a balanced and well-rounded education for all our students.

Aims & Objectives of Student Support & Bereavement Policy

The primary aim of the Student Support System in our school is to develop an environment that adapts to the needs of students of all abilities and backgrounds. We also wish to foster a sense of community that surrounds the Augustinian values and ethos of the school. We are mindful that students' needs are constantly changing. The needs of students may include special needs, emotional needs, personal, social needs, academic, vocational, or English language acquisition needs. Our Student Support Team aims to identify 'At Risk' students at an early stage. The Student Support Team meetings aim to provide an environment in which students may achieve their full potential.

The Student Support Team also helps to provide a programme of guidance for dealing with critical incidents (exam stress, bullying, bereavement, etc.) St. Augustine's College is a school that understands the pain and difficulty of bereavement. It is especially difficult when dealing with teenagers, because often the students have to face up to issues they never thought they would have to deal with, such as their own mortality. In this policy, we have included those who have been affected by a separation and divorce, as often these can be just as devastating. Grief is confusing, unexpected, frustrating, and painful; it is the process of accepting loss and acknowledging the pain that comes with it. The hurt students feel is good because it is real and reminds the students of how much they cared and loved what has been taken from them. If we as a school deny the grief or ignore it, there can be lasting, destructive effects on the students and their relationships. It becomes like a wound that will not go away because we refuse to treat it.

Student Support Structures available in St. Augustine's College.

- Year Heads in place for all year groups.
- Special Needs Coordinator available to coordinate the needs of students with additional learning needs.
- Guidance Counsellor available to provide career advice, educational, emotional support, and counselling services to students. Guidance Counsellor is available to provide behaviour counselling, anxiety counselling and alienation counselling, bereavement counselling, identity, bullying, eating disorders, self-harm and suicide ideation.
- Junior Cycle & Senior Cycle Student Support Care Teams include the; Principal, Deputy Principals, Year Heads, Special Needs Coordinator and Guidance Counsellor, Chaplain) meet fortnightly to discuss issues within year groups. Weekly assemblies for year groups.
- Use of student journal to aid communication between teachers and parents/guardians.
- Code of Behaviour also places emphasis on rewards for good behaviour.

- Student Council and Mentoring Group, are place to facilitate leadership opportunities for students.
- Study skills sessions organised for 1st year, 2nd 3rd ,5th and 6th year students. First Year Open Night/Information Night for Parents.
- Junior and Senior Cycle Information Night for Parents.
- First Day/Month Induction Programme for new First Years with Mentoring Group.
- Lunchtime activities organised for 1st year students by Transition Year students.
- Wide range of extracurricular activities offered to students. Active Parents Council contributing to school life.

Aims and Objectives of Bereavement

This school's policy is to help students deal with bereavement, a painful and difficult time, by:

Noticing the signs of grief in the classroom.

1. The do's and don'ts by the teachers.
2. Knowing and understanding the 5 stages of grief.
3. Through these steps, the school can offer the best support to the grieving student.

Step 1: Noticing the signs in the classroom

It is important for teachers to notice the following in the classroom:

- Outburst during class.
- Continual daydreaming, the student is unfocused.
- Homework incomplete, tests unfinished.
- High absenteeism, wanting to call home often.
- Dropping out of school activities and events.
- Not having a uniform, uninterested in appearance.
- Teary-eyed, emotional.
- The above are more prevalent with the loss of a parent or parental figure.
- The following are more prevalent with the loss of a sibling, friend, or boyfriend/girlfriend:
- Bouts of anger, not getting along with other students.
- Using alcohol and drugs.
- Withdrawn.
- Taking on their lost sibling, friend, boyfriend/girlfriend in mannerisms, dress, actions, and speech.
- Needing to speak about death and life after death.

Step 2: The things that teachers should do to deal with a grieving student in class

- **Do** show you care, let them know that you are aware of their loss.
- **Do** be available; tell them that you are there to help.
- **Do** let them express their grief.
- **Do** let them talk about their loss, even if it is during a busy class.
- **Do** be honest and positive with the student.

The things that teachers should not do when dealing with a grieving student

- **Don't** avoid the student because you feel helpless.
- **Don't** say you know how they feel (unless the same has happened to you).
- **Don't** tell the student how they should feel.

Step 3: Knowing and understanding the 5 stages of grief.

Stage 1: Denial

This is when the student may reject what has happened and be in denial. Teachers shouldn't force the issue upon the student or make them face up to it.

Stage 2: Anger

Sometimes students may feel a sense of rage, which may be directed towards fellow students and teachers.

Teachers in this position should calmly tell the student that it is okay to be hurt and angry, but should gently reprimand the student and offer to listen to them.

Stage 3: Bargaining

This is the 'if only stage', where students will generally attempt to change the death of a loved one. Teachers are advised to leave the student's work through this.

State 4: Depression

It is important for the teachers to be especially aware of this. During this stage, students may turn to alcohol and drugs. Some may even resort to self-harm, have suicidal thoughts, or even attempt suicide.

Stage 5: Acceptance

This is when the student finally learns to accept the death and endeavours to move on.

Referral Policy

A student can be referred by a Parent/Guardian/Year head/ Member of the Student Support Team to the Guidance Counsellor. Students may also self-refer if they wish.

A student support referral form is available in the main office and in the guidance counsellors office.

“Seedlings” is available for individual/group counselling for bereaved students.

‘Seedlings’

Grief is as unique as a fingerprint, and everyone’s experience of it is different. It is a universal process of coping with Loss.

Seedlings is a programme that is run over 8 weeks, providing support services on living with change and loss and teaching lifelong coping skills with students being referred from the school's Pastoral Team, Year Heads or Management.

The aim is to help our students explore and understand their own reactions, to provide a safe place to come together, to assist in the development of coping skills to enable them to deal with their loss, and to help young people to relearn their world.

The programme is designed to explain to teenagers that grief is a natural process of adjustment to loss and change, and that the feelings associated with grief are normal and, in fact, a healthy part of grief. Being part of the group is the realization that they are not alone.

Review and Evaluation

The student support and bereavement policy will be reviewed regularly. In practice, this policy is co-ordinated by a core committee consisting of two staff members, two parents/guardians nominated by the Parents’ Association, and two students in consultation with the wider school community. Ongoing review and evaluation will take note of changing information, legislation, and developments in school-based programmes, and feedback to parents/guardians, staff, and students. This policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and within the framework of school planning.

Signed: 
(Chairperson of the BOM)

Date: 17/9/26.

Signed: 
(Principal)

Date: 17/9/26.

Reviewed 2025

To Be reviewed 2027