



CBS Thurles

Bereavement Policy

Mission Statement

CBS Thurles is a place of learning where students are prepared for adult life, academically, emotionally, spiritually and culturally. We strive for a safe environment free from bullying.

We aim to promote the Christian values inspired by the vision of Blessed Edmund Rice.

We seek to create an atmosphere of respect for the needs and talents of all members of our school community, while challenging all to reach their full potential.

Rationale for this Policy

CBS Thurles recognises that bereavement profoundly impacts students and staff. This policy, intrinsically linked to the school's Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP), outlines compassionate, practical supports to assist the school community through loss, ensuring consistent, dignified responses aligned with the school's Catholic ethos and NCCA Wellbeing Guidelines.

The school commits to ongoing empathy and support for students and staff experiencing personal losses, recognising that grief is individual, non-linear, and may require sustained, flexible responses over months or years.

This policy is developed in accordance with DES Circular 59/2017 (Compassionate Leave), the NCCA Wellbeing Guidelines and Framework, Tusla's Child Safeguarding: A Guide for Policy, Procedure and Practice (2019), the Children First Act 2015, GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018, and the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015. It is intrinsically linked to the school's Child Safeguarding Statement and complements existing wellbeing, pastoral care, and critical incident structures.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- Death of a student or staff member
- Death of a parent/guardian, sibling, or close family member of a student

- Death of a family member of a staff member (including extended family)
- Death of significant others (friends, pets, community members) where impact is evident
- Personal losses beyond the immediate school community

Roles and Responsibilities

Principal

- Activates Critical Incident Management Plan where appropriate
- Liaises with bereaved family regarding school involvement
- Coordinates communication and supports
- Ensures staff experiencing personal loss receive appropriate compassionate response

Deputy Principal/Year Head

- Monitors affected students with ongoing empathy
- Arranges practical supports (timetable adjustments, compassionate leave)
- Maintains discreet awareness of anniversary dates and triggers
- Links bereaved students with One Good Adult support service

Student Support Team

- Convenes to coordinate response for bereaved students
- Develops individual support plans with input from student/family
- Monitors progress and reviews interventions regularly
- Provides check-ins at sensitive times (anniversaries, Christmas, Mother's/Father's Day)
- Liaises with external agencies (NEPS, CAMHS, Pieta House)
- Identifies and facilitates One Good Adult matches for bereaved students

Guidance Counsellor

- Provides immediate and ongoing counselling
- Offers non-judgmental space for expressing grief
- Identifies students requiring additional external support
- Maintains awareness that grief surfaces at unexpected times

One Good Adult (Identified Staff Member)

- Provides consistent, trusted presence for bereaved student
- Offers regular, informal check-ins (daily/weekly as needed)
- Acts as safe contact point when student needs support
- Liaises with CBS Thurles Student Support Team on student wellbeing
- Maintains confidentiality within safeguarding parameters

Class Tutors/Subject Teachers

- Maintain normality and routine while being sensitive to individual needs
- Show ongoing compassion without singling out student
- Refer concerns to Year Head/Student Support Team/One Good Adult
- Accept that academic performance/behaviour may fluctuate

Board of Management

- Reviews policy biennially
- Ensures adequate resources and training

Supports for Students Experiencing Personal Loss

Immediate Response

- Private space for students to process news
- Contact with parent/guardian
- Access to Guidance Counsellor or trained staff member
- Peer support facilitated as appropriate
- Validation of feelings without platitudes
- Identification of One Good Adult if appropriate

Short-term (Days/Weeks)

Flexible attendance/homework arrangements (communicated via Year Head)

Exam accommodations under NCCA/SEC reasonable accommodations framework

Check-ins from Class Tutor, One Good Adult, or trusted adult (frequency based on need)

Facilitation of funeral attendance (with parental permission)

Information on external supports (Barnardos Bereavement Counselling, Rainbows Ireland, Irish Childhood Bereavement Network)

Permission to leave class if emotions become overwhelming

Daily access to One Good Adult (e.g., morning check-in, lunchtime availability)

Medium/Long-term (Months/Years)

- Student Support Team reviews case at regular intervals (minimum termly)
- Ongoing access to Guidance Counsellor without needing to re-explain
- Referral to NEPS or external counselling services
- Anniversary awareness (death anniversary, birthdays, significant dates, holidays)

- Academic support to manage missed work or learning gaps
- Recognition that grief doesn't end; ongoing empathy embedded in daily interactions
- Transition support (moving year groups, starting exams, life milestones)
- "Check-in" system where student can signal need for support
- Continued One Good Adult relationship as long as beneficial
- One Good Adult maintains connection across year transitions

One Good Adult Support Service

- Voluntary matching system between bereaved student and trusted staff member
- Student has input into identifying their One Good Adult
- Regular, low-pressure contact (brief conversations, shared activities, being present)
- Provides continuity when other supports fluctuate
- Not therapy, but consistent relational support
- Staff member receives guidance/supervision from Student Support Team
- Relationship reviewed termly; adjusted as student needs change

Peer Support

Age-appropriate communication to classmates (with family consent)

Guidance on supporting bereaved peers over time

Monitoring group dynamics to prevent isolation or excessive attention

Education on grief responses (withdrawal, anger, humour as coping)

Empathy Principles	
	▪ Listen more than advise
	▪ Accept silence and tears

- Avoid comparisons or "moving on" language
- Remember: grief is not linear; "bad days" are normal
- Small gestures matter (remembered names, acknowledged absences)

Supports for Staff Experiencing Personal Loss

Immediate Response

- Compassionate leave as per DES Circular 59/2017 (3–5 days; extendable)
- Private meeting with Principal to discuss needs
- Colleague cover arrangements to reduce immediate pressures
- No expectation to attend work events/meetings during acute grief

Short-term (Weeks/Months)

- Access to Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or Spectrum.Life
- Phased return to work if needed
- Referral to Carecall (DES counselling service: 1800 411 057)
- Reduction of additional duties during bereavement period

Long-term (Months/Years)

- Ongoing empathy from colleagues and leadership
- Acknowledgment that grief affects work performance; supportive rather than punitive approach
- Anniversary awareness (cards, private acknowledgment)
- Reduced expectations during difficult dates (Christmas, first year markers)

- Permission to step back from emotionally demanding situations (e.g., supporting bereaved students if triggering)
- Regular check-ins from Principal or trusted colleague
- Peer support from colleague acting as informal "One Good Adult" if desired

Colleague Support

- Staff briefed sensitively on supporting bereaved colleague over time
- Respect for privacy; no pressure to disclose details or "be strong"
- Practical help (covering duties, preparing resources, providing meals)
- Normalise talking about the deceased (using their name, sharing memories if staff member welcomes it)

Professional Boundaries

- Staff reminded of own wellbeing; encouraged to seek support if secondary trauma arises from supporting bereaved students
- Supervision/peer support for staff regularly supporting grieving students
- One Good Adult staff members receive regular check-ins to prevent burnout

Empathy Principles
▪ Listen more than advise ▪ Accept silence and tears ▪ Avoid comparisons or "moving on" language ▪ Allow professional vulnerability; model healthy responses ▪ Remember: grief is not linear; "bad days" are normal

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Small gestures matter (remembered names, acknowledged absences)▪ Practical support can matter more than words |
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Link to Critical Incident Management Plan

When bereavement constitutes a critical incident (e.g., sudden death, death by suicide, death on school grounds), the **Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)** is activated:

CIMT Actions:

- Convene within 24 hours
- Verify facts and liaise with family
- Prepare staff briefing and communication templates
- Coordinate response (assemblies, counselling resources, media management)
- Establish quiet room and staffing rota
- Brief external agencies (NEPS, Tusla if safeguarding concerns arise)
- Monitor vulnerable students (those with prior bereavements, mental health concerns)
- Activate One Good Adult supports for at-risk students
- Provide ongoing review at 1 week, 1 month, 3 months, 6 months, 1 year
- Debrief after incident; update CIMP as needed

Bereavement vs. Critical Incident

- Not all bereavements trigger full CIMT activation (e.g., anticipated death after illness may require pastoral response only)
- Principal determines level of response in consultation with CIMT Chairperson
- Personal losses receive empathetic individual support via Student Support Team/One Good Adult/pastoral care structures

Communication Protocol

With Bereaved Family:

- Principal makes initial contact; respects wishes regarding school involvement, funeral attendance, public statements
- Ascertain family preferences for information sharing with students/staff
- Discuss One Good Adult support option

With Staff:

- Emergency staff meeting or written briefing (facts, supports available, expectations)
- Guidance on language (avoid clichés; allow silence; validate feelings)
- Ongoing reminders that bereaved person may need continued flexibility
- Briefing on One Good Adult roles and referral process

With Students:

- Age-appropriate assemblies or class discussions (prepared script)
- Avoid over-exposure; allow opt-out for vulnerable students
- Discourage social media speculation; promote respectful online behaviour
- Follow-up at intervals to prevent "forgotten grief"

With Parents:

Letter/text via VShare outlining supports (including One Good Adult service) and encouraging home vigilance

Resources for supporting children through grief

Update on ongoing supports available

With Media (if applicable):

CIMT Communications Officer handles all queries

No student/staff interviews without explicit consent

Training and Resources

Staff Training:

- Annual bereavement awareness session (Irish Childhood Bereavement Network resources)
- Focus on ongoing empathy, not just crisis response
- CIMT training includes bereavement response
- Guidance Counsellor accesses CPD on adolescent grief and complicated grief
- One Good Adult training: boundaries, active listening, recognising escalation, self-care

Contact list:

NEPS psychologist, local counselling services, Pieta House (1800 247 247), Childline (1800 66 66 66), Barnardos, Rainbows Ireland.

Review:

- This policy is reviewed every two years by the Board of Management
- Post-incident debrief informs amendments
- Staff/parent feedback gathered via anonymous survey
- Student voice included where appropriate

Policy Adopted: 25th March 2026

Review Date: March 2028

Appendices: Relevant Legislation and Circulars

Appendix A: DES Circular 59/2017 – Compassionate Leave

Purpose: Outlines compassionate leave entitlements for school staff following bereavement.

Key Provisions:

- 3 days paid leave for death of spouse, civil partner, parent, child, sibling, parent-in-law
- 5 days paid leave for death occurring outside Ireland requiring travel
- 1 day leave for funeral attendance of close relative/friend
- Additional special leave may be granted at Principal/BOM discretion
- Leave does not require medical certification
- Staff may extend leave using annual leave or unpaid leave
- Applies to permanent, CID, and fixed-term staff

Relevance: Ensures staff experiencing bereavement receive statutory entitlements while school provides additional pastoral support.

Appendix B: NCCA Wellbeing Guidelines and Framework

Purpose: Provides national framework for promoting student wellbeing in schools.

Key Principles:

- Wellbeing encompasses physical, mental, emotional, social dimensions
- Schools promote connectedness, resilience, respect, awareness
- Whole-school approach involving students, staff, families, community
- Wellbeing integrated across curriculum and school culture
- Importance of trusted adult relationships ("One Good Adult" concept)

Relevance: Bereavement support is core wellbeing provision; policy aligns with framework's emphasis on connectedness, empathy, and sustained relational support.

Appendix C: Tusla Child Safeguarding – A Guide for Policy, Procedure and Practice (2019)

Purpose: Sets standards for child safeguarding in organisations working with children.

Key Provisions:

- All staff must recognise and respond to child protection concerns

- Safe, child-centred environments required
- Policies, procedures, training must be in place
- Risk assessments conducted regularly
- Designated Liaison Person (DLP) appointed
- Children's voices heard; welfare paramount

Relevance: Bereaved children may be vulnerable; staff trained to recognise safeguarding concerns arising from bereavement (e.g., neglect, abuse, self-harm). DLP involved if concerns emerge. One Good Adult relationships operate within safeguarding boundaries.

Appendix D: Children First Act 2015

Purpose: Legal framework for protection and welfare of children.

Key Provisions:

- Mandated persons must report child protection concerns to Tusla
- Teachers, principals, deputy principals are mandated persons
- Duty to report harm (abuse, neglect, risk of harm)
- Children First National Guidance underpins practice
- Organisations must produce Child Safeguarding Statement

Relevance: Staff supporting bereaved students remain vigilant for safeguarding issues. Bereavement does not suspend mandated reporting duties. All supports operate within Children First framework.

Appendix E: GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018

Purpose: Protects personal data and privacy rights.

Key Provisions:

- Personal data processed lawfully, fairly, transparently
- Data minimisation: collect only necessary information
- Confidentiality maintained; information shared on need-to-know basis
- Consent required for data sharing (except safeguarding/legal obligations)
- Individuals have right to access, correct, delete data
- Special category data (health, sensitive information) requires heightened protection

Relevance: Information about bereavement is sensitive. Staff share details only within Student Support Team/One Good Adult network as necessary for student welfare. Records stored securely; retention policies followed. Family consent sought for external referrals unless safeguarding concern overrides.

Appendix F: Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015

Purpose: Prohibits discrimination in employment on nine grounds, including family status and disability.

Key Provisions:

- Employers must not discriminate in recruitment, promotion, conditions, dismissal
- Reasonable accommodations required for employees with disabilities (including mental health conditions arising from bereavement)
- Family status includes responsibilities as parent/carer; bereavement may impact family circumstances
- Harassment and victimisation prohibited
- Employers must promote equality and accommodate diverse needs

Relevance: Staff experiencing bereavement entitled to compassionate, non-discriminatory treatment. Adjustments (reduced duties, phased return, flexibility) support staff wellbeing without penalty. Bereavement-related mental health difficulties (e.g., depression, anxiety) may require reasonable accommodations under disability ground.

Appendix G: NCCA/SEC Reasonable Accommodations in Certificate Examinations

Purpose: Ensures students with temporary or permanent difficulties can access state examinations fairly.

Key Provisions:

- Reasonable accommodations available for students with physical, sensory, learning, mental health difficulties
- Temporary accommodations granted for bereavement, illness, injury (RACE scheme)
- Examples: extra time, rest breaks, separate venue, postponement
- Applications require evidence (psychologist, GP, school report)
- Accommodations aim to remove barriers, not provide advantage

Relevance: Students bereaved before/during exam periods may qualify for RACE accommodations. School supports applications with documentation of impact on learning/attendance. Guidance Counsellor/Year Head coordinate process with SEC.

Note: Full text of legislation/circulars available at:

- www.education.ie (DES Circulars)
- www.ncca.ie (NCCA Wellbeing Framework)
- www.tusla.ie (Child Safeguarding)
- www.irishstatutebook.ie (Acts)
- www.examinations.ie (SEC Reasonable Accommodations)