



Cognus

No Limits on Learning

Educational Psychology Service

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE GUIDANCE SCHOOL SUPPORT FOR CRITICAL INCIDENTS AND OTHER TRAUMATIC EVENTS

SEPTEMBER 2022



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SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION

Unexpected and tragic events cannot be prevented from occurring, and sadly bereavements and traumatic incidents are a reality that schools face. How we respond to these events is important in **promoting feelings of safety** and **psychological wellbeing** for the students and staff in our schools. The unexpected, and thankfully infrequent, nature of these events however mean that they can sometimes **overwhelm** the usual systems of support and coping strategies of a setting.

This guidance has been written to provide Educational Psychologists with information about best practice following a critical incident, traumatic event or other unfortunate circumstances which cause distress of prolonged anxiety for students, parents and staff. It also provides information about how settings can promote mental health and emotional wellbeing and be 'wise before the event' and proactive in preparing for critical incidents.

The information within this pack is applicable to Early Years, primary, secondary, and post-16 settings, for mainstream and specialist contexts, and can be shared by EPs with settings as they deem to be necessary and appropriate.

Cognus Educational Psychology Service (EPS) is able to offer support to settings following a critical incident, and the type of support which can be expected from the service is detailed below. As part of our community service offer there is no charge to schools for short term input.

Key contacts and important links

Acting Director of Children's Services, Jonathan Williams (contact as soon as an incident occurs)

T: 0208 770 6534, E: jonathan.williams@sutton.gov.uk

Acting Strategic Lead for Education, Kieran Holliday

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Head of Communications, Louise Fenner

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Director (Head of Safeguarding), Joanna Cassey

T: 0208 323 0450, E: joanna.cassey@cognus.org.uk

Principal Educational Psychologist, Nicholas English

T: 020 8323 0456, M: 07534 538553, E: nicholas.english@cognus.org.uk

Notification of Child Death website [SWLondon eCDOP](#)

Statutory child death arrangements for the LBS [Local Arrangements - Sutton Council](#)

[Report](#) a serious child safeguarding incident

[Report](#) a serious childcare incident to Ofsted

CRITICAL INCIDENT WORK

"A critical incident may be defined as any sudden and unexpected incident or sequence of events which causes trauma within a school community and overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school."

Critical incidents vary greatly in magnitude from the expected death of a staff member, to sudden and traumatic incidents that affect the whole school and its surrounding community. Critical incidents can be defined using the following system although it should be acknowledged that different settings will vary in their capacity to cope based on a number of factors.

When an incident occurs, it is important that schools contact the Assistant Director for Education, Fiona Phelps on **T: 020 8770 4604 | M: 07849 079412** as soon as possible. The Assistant Director will then contact the EPS who in turn will contact school to identify what support is required.

Level	Examples of incidents	Examples of EP response
Level 1 – An incident which impacts some of the school community	Expected death of a pupil or staff member Death of a parent or sibling of a pupil in the school	Conversation with Headteacher/ senior leader to provide advice about coping with bereavement and loss and the normal grieving process.
Level 2 – A significant incident which impacts the whole school community	Sudden death of a pupil or staff member Accident or death on the school site or on a school trip A violent intrusion on to the school premises, e.g. an armed intruder, bomb scare	Immediate communication with Headteacher/ senior leader to provide support and advice about how to give sad news to pupils. Guidance about how to manage communication to parents/carers and support for the emotional wellbeing of all in the school community.
Level 3 – A major incident that impacts the wider community	An event involving a large number of pupils/staff and/or the local community e.g. transport accident, terrorism, pandemic A violent death An incident with a high media profile	In addition to the above, the EP response is likely to form part of a larger multi-agency response.

It is a statutory requirement to notify [CDOP](#) of all child deaths from birth up to their 18th birthday. If there are a number of agencies involved, liaison should take place to agree which agency will submit the Notification. However, unless you know someone else has done so, please notify CDOP with as much information as possible.

Child deaths and serious injuries of suspected abuse or neglect for any child who is on roll with the school need to be reported to CFSC or EDT if out of hours. If the child is not resident in the London Borough of Sutton, the referral will be to the equivalent referral point in the relevant Local Authority. Schools must also notify the CDOP SPOC of a child who is on roll with the school dies abroad.



EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE RESPONSE

As well as working with settings to develop policies and planning for critical incidents, the EPS also supports schools when tragic events happen. We are able to respond to critical incidents that occur because this is a core element of our work and a **free service**. It takes priority over most other forms of work that an EP will be doing.

The primary role of the EPS is to **advise** and **support** teachers and other adults who work daily with students and who know them well, as well as helping schools manage the immediate aftermath of an event. Best practice indicates that students need to be with people they know and trust. It is therefore more beneficial if school staff provide support for students as they will be around in the longer term and will be in a better position to monitor their students over the days and weeks following an incident.

Every critical incident is different and needs a sensitive, thoughtful and planned approach. Not all will require a 'full-scale' response, and for some schools a consultation between the EP and Headteacher may be the response required.

The EPS does not provide counselling, but rather immediate, short-term support, information and advice to staff. On rare occasions, and in the event of a major critical incident, school management may decide to host a parent meeting in order to support parents and to disseminate information. The psychologist may attend this meeting to outline the role of the EPS, answer questions on the psychological impact of the event and offer advice on how parents can best support their children.

The EP managing the incident will support you in the immediate aftermath of the incident and they will also follow up with you to support with any issues that arise. If after a period of time, there are members of the school community who are showing signs of continued distress the EP will discuss this and signpost to further support. The EPS response depends on the magnitude of the incident, but generally involves:

Planning	Helping school management to assess the significance and impact of the event, to draw up a plan, to mobilise the school's resources and to access other support.
Information and Advice	Providing information and advice to management and staff which may include how to communicate information to children, parents and staff or signposting information about other services for all members of the school community.
Support	Being available for consultation to school staff as they support students and providing information about coping strategies. This may include longer-term supervision of staff or involvement in the set-up of peer support measures.
Vulnerability Mapping	Identification of those individuals most at risk of adverse reaction to events. EPs can support with identifying risk and resilience factors amongst the school population and planning accordingly.

Following a school emergency EPS involvement tends to follow the process below:

1. A senior member of the Educational Psychology Service will contact you to identify what steps have been taken so far and what needs to happen next. This will be by telephone or video call. In some instances, this level of support will be sufficient, and through an initial discussion it may be decided that the school has sufficient resources to proceed independently and requires no further support.
2. As soon as is possible two EPs (where this is appropriate) will come to the school site and provide support to:
 - i. Assess the likely impact of the particular incident on the school community and help in identifying school resources to manage identified impacts.
 - ii. Identify whether there are any cultural or religious implications surrounding the incident and how they might be addressed.
 - iii. Advise and support the Head and Senior Leadership Team, in conjunction with other support provided by Sutton Council.
 - iv. Advise and support members of staff who are supporting children and young people.
3. Follow-up visits will be arranged by the EPs in order to provide continued support, including to:
 - i. Continue to advise and support members of staff who are supporting children and young people.
 - ii. Attend parents' meetings arranged by the school, with a view to briefing them on possible reactions and symptoms that children and young people may display, and to provide signposting and service threshold information.
 - iii. Support school staff in identifying staff or pupils experiencing enduring or acute effects and signpost to other services.
4. A senior member of the EPS will monitor the situation and arrange for a period of stand-by before support is stood down – usually within two weeks.
5. Ongoing monitoring will then be provided by the school EP, in consultation with the senior member of the EPS.



As soon as possible

A senior member of the EPS will contact you



The same/next day

A member of the EPS (two if needed) will come to the school and provide initial support and plan next steps



Over the next week

Follow-up visits will be arranged by the EP to provide further advice and support



After two weeks

The EP will monitor the situation and agree with you a time to step back



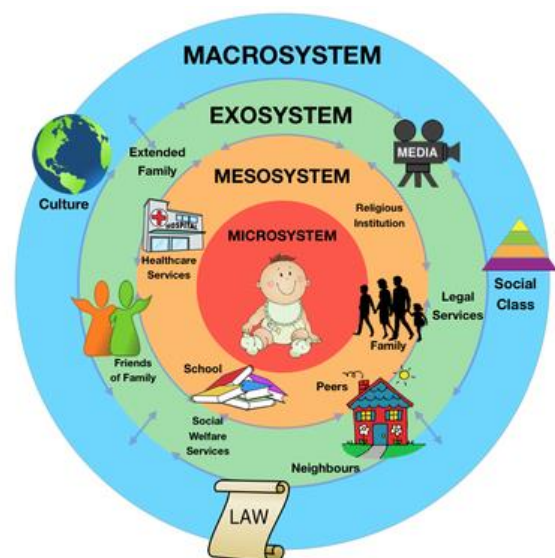
Ongoing

The school EP will provide support as needed in the longer-term

PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES

EPs are practitioner psychologists and as such, a range of different theories underpin the work involved as part of a critical incident response. Some key theoretical frameworks include:

- Promoting recovery through the five principles of psychosocial support (Hobfoll, 2007) – a sense of safety, a sense of calm, a sense of self- and collective-efficacy, social connectedness, promoting hope.
- Hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) – in which it is understood how an individual’s most basic needs must be met before they can attend to needs further up the hierarchy.
- Ecological model of child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979) – the understanding that child development occurs within a complex system of relationships and is affected by influences at all levels around the child, from immediate settings of family and school to broad cultural values, laws, and customs.
- Resilience – a concept that explains how individuals and communities are able to manage in times of adversity. Models of resilience also recognise that factors that promote recovery are usually based on existing strengths and resources of an individual or community (this is outlined further in Section 2).
- Psychological First Aid for Schools (PFA-S) - an evidence-informed intervention to support students, families and school staff immediately after an emergency (see Section 3 for further information).
- Models of grief (detailed in Section 4).
- Trauma – the notion that as the result of an event, or a series of events, someone feels overwhelmed and is pushed beyond their ability to cope.



Bronfenbrenner's ecological model



SECTION 2 - BEFORE THE EVENT: PREVENTION AND PREPAREDNESS

This part of the guidance describes how schools can be prepared in advance of a critical incident through use of whole school policies and practices which promote positive mental health, resilience and emotional wellbeing.

PREVENTION

When we think about prevention related to critical incidents, it is not about preventing the incident itself, but promoting the wellbeing and resilience of the school community so that they are more able to cope in response to such an incident.

PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

There is often a focus on targeting support for mental health and wellbeing when individuals are experiencing difficulties. Whilst this is necessary and appropriate we would advocate that settings also reflect on what they can do at a whole school level, taking into account pupils, staff and families, to see 'mental health and wellbeing as fundamental to its values, mission and culture'¹.

Mentally Healthy Schools define a whole-school approach as being:

'a positive ethos and culture – where everyone feels that they belong. It involves working with families and making sure that the whole school community is welcoming, inclusive and respectful. It means maximising children's learning through promoting good mental health and wellbeing across the school – through the curriculum, early support for pupils, staff-pupil relationships, leadership and a commitment from everybody'

A summary of the evidence about 'what works in promoting social and emotional wellbeing and responding to mental health problems in schools' has been compiled by Professor Katherine Weare². This fits with the whole school approach as detailed by [Public Health England](#) and is a useful framework to consider when planning for wellbeing at a whole school level and summarises the following seven key principles:

¹ <https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/whole-school-approach/>

² [What works in promoting social and emotional well-being and responding to mental health problems in schools?](#) Advice for Schools and Framework Document; Professor Katherine Weare for NCB 2015.

1. ADOPT WHOLE SCHOOL THINKING

- Develop a supportive school and classroom climate and ethos which builds a sense of connectedness, focus and purpose, the acceptance of emotion and vulnerability, warm relationships and the celebration of difference.
- Start early with skills-based programmes, preventive work, the identification of difficulties and targeted interventions. Work intensively, coherently, and carry on for the long term.
- Promote staff wellbeing, and in particular address staff stress.
- Implement universal support which has a positive focus; seeking to promote wellbeing and prevent mental health difficulties, across the curriculum and all aspects of school life.

2. ENGAGE THE WHOLE COMMUNITY

- Engage pupils through encouraging pupil voice, authentic involvement in learning, decision making, and peer-led approaches.
- Engage parents/carers and families in genuine participation, particularly those of pupils in difficulties whose families may feel blamed and stigmatised.

3. PRIORITISE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- Understand and reduce the risk factors that can affect wellbeing, and help pupils develop resilience to overcome adverse circumstances.
- Provide training so that staff have an understanding of child and adolescent development.
- Raise staff awareness about the widespread nature of mental health problems in children and young people, and the school's responsibility to identify them and intervene early.
- Help all pupils cope with predictable life changes and transitions, through ensuring staff are knowledgeable about child and adolescent development.
- Adapt practice and policy in line with new challenges posed by information technology, such as cyber bullying.



Eight (8) principles of the whole school and college approach (PHE)

4. IMPLEMENT TARGETED PROGRAMMES AND INTERVENTIONS (INCLUDING CURRICULUM)

- Ensure high-quality implementation of specific programmes and interventions e.g. Friends for Life, Zippy's Friends, The Incredible Years Programme, ELSA, Nurture Groups. The Education Endowment Foundation's [social and emotional learning toolkit](#) is a useful resource.
- Explicitly teach social and emotional skills, attitudes and values, using well trained and enthusiastic teachers and positive, experiential and interactive methods and resources. Integrate this learning into the mainstream processes of school life.

5. DEVELOP SUPPORTIVE POLICY

- Ensure that school leaders are central to promoting policies of mental health and emotional wellbeing, through opening up conversations and championing support.
- Ensure that there are robust policies and practice in key areas such as behaviour, anti-bullying and diversity, including tackling prejudice and stigma around mental health. An example of a relationship-based policy which reflects each of these issues has been produced by [Brighton and Hove](#).

6. CONNECT APPROPRIATELY WITH APPROACHES TO BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT

- Respond wisely to 'difficult' behaviour, both responding actively with clear consequences and also understanding its deeper roots.
- Take opportunities to model and teach positive alternatives through use of approaches including Emotion Coaching and Zones of Regulation.

7. IMPLEMENT TARGETED RESPONSES AND IDENTIFY SPECIALIST PATHWAYS

- Provide more targeted and intense work on social and emotional skill development for pupils in need, including 1:1, group work, nurture rooms, counselling, key worker support.
- Use specialist staff to initiate innovative and specialist programmes to ensure they are implemented authentically, transferring responsibility to mainstream staff whenever possible, to ensure longer term sustainability and integration.
- Where pupils experience difficulties, provide clear plans and pathways for help and referral, using a coherent teamwork approach, including in the involvement of outside agencies such as CAMHS and Educational Psychology.
- Anchor help in the school environment.

Educational Psychology Service

It is important that school staff do not feel they are being asked to undertake specialist mental health support, or that support is only focused on those with identified mental health difficulties. Many difficulties will not be at the clinical level, but if they are specialist support should be sought. It is also important that with a focus on prevention, through enhancing resilience and wellbeing, pupils who have no identified needs will also receive support. This means that the role for supporting wellbeing is extended beyond the pastoral team, or specific members of staff, and is something that everyone is consciously involved with.

Other points from the research indicate how important it is that any work to developing a whole school approach isn't seen as an isolated project, but that it is underpinned by a change in school culture. Another important point which is regularly overlooked pertains to staff wellbeing and ensuring that recognition of the stresses and support to manage these are embedded in any changes.

Various audits and self-assessment tools have been created for settings to use. One example is the 'Whole School/College Approach Audit' tool which can be found on the [SENCO microsite](#) with other resources related to the Wellbeing for Education Return project. Other measurement tools which are useful for settings to consider are those which help them to evidence the impact of the measures they are putting in place. This would include screening measures used to baseline and review the emotional wellbeing of pupils e.g. Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, or the Stirling children's wellbeing scale. The toolkit created by Anna Freud provides information about a range of validated tools and can be accessed [here](#) (you can also speak to your school EP if you require further support in this area).

CURRICULUM, TEACHING AND LEARNING

Opportunities exist to develop and promote social and emotional skills through both a dedicated Personal Social Health and Economic education (PSHE) curriculum and the wider curriculum. Skills and teaching including, but not limited to:



The PSHE Association has published [advice for teachers](#) on preparing to teach about mental health and emotional wellbeing.

It is also important to teach pupils specific skills which relate to the experiences they are undergoing. This may include focusing on coping at times of transition, or how to manage stress before exam periods. There may be other school wide, or more localised, issues that your setting feels would be appropriate to target. This may be identified by adults in the setting but could also be appropriately identified through engaging with pupils.

A cross-curricula approach can provide many opportunities to discuss concepts related to well-being and coping, and more specifically about bereavement and loss. This may include through stories and texts in English/literacy, religious rituals and differing understandings of death in RE, as well as creative ways to express feelings through Art, Drama or Music. PSHE can be the perfect forum to discuss relationships, feelings and emotions, and how these can be experienced at times of bereavement. It is important however to take into account pupils who are bereaved, and to communicate the content of lessons to them and their parent/carers to ensure that it is appropriate for them to be a part of, or whether additional support may be warranted.

RESILIENCE

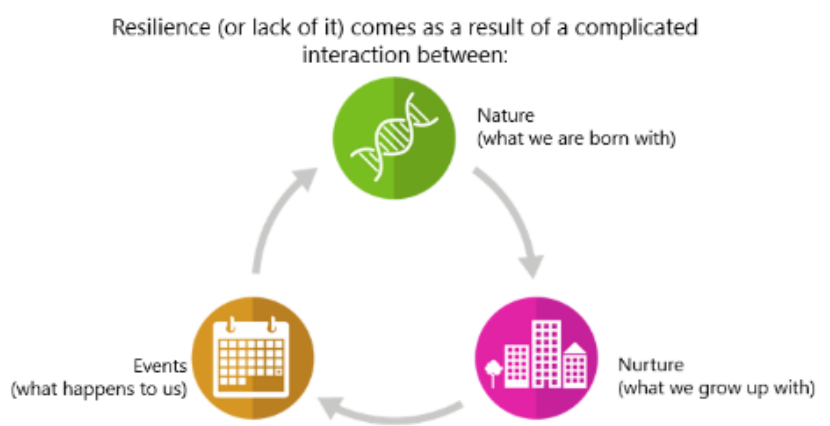
Another useful concept when thinking about the promotion of emotional wellbeing is resilience, and it is likely that this would form a part of any whole school approach. There are a range of ways that the psychological concept of resilience is understood, both in the research literature and when it is used as part of our everyday language. Some examples include:

"The capacity to resume positive functioning following adversity"

"A person's ability to adapt successfully to acute stress, trauma, or more chronic forms of adversity"

"The capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten its function, viability, or development"

We know that levels of resilience can be promoted over time, as well as decreased. This tells us that resilience is not best viewed as an internal state, but as a process that can adjust according to an individual's context and environment (Duffield and O'Hare, 2020). When we think about the resilience of a pupil it is therefore important to consider the system around the child or young person in contributing to their resilience (e.g. the interactions they have with the environment and people around them), rather than focusing only on the individual.





BUILDING RESILIENCE IN PUPILS

There has been a significant amount of research undertaken to try and distil the factors that promote resilience and those which hinder it, and these are often termed protective and risk factors. Whilst a range of different influences have been explored it is unequivocal that the one which promotes resilience most greatly is the presence of a trusted and consistent adult. Research has also shown that promotion of factors deemed to be protective can enable children and young people to experience successful outcomes despite the presence of risk factors. As part of a whole school approach to wellbeing it is therefore important to think about how protective factors can be enhanced, and risk factors lessened for individuals. Research and practice related to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) may be useful in this respect (for further information on this topic contact your link EP who can provide training on trauma-informed practice in collaboration with the Virtual School).

Protective factors which enhance the resilience of pupils:	Risk factors which lessen the resilience of pupils:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☆ A trusted and consistent key adult (this is usually someone at home, but could be in school) ☆ Other 'secondary' key adults (often within the school community) ☆ Positive relationships with peers and teachers ☆ Adults who respond to pupils with respect and positive regard ☆ Sharing of positive behaviour management practices with parents ☆ Feeling a sense of belonging, security and connectedness to school ☆ Opportunities for social and emotional learning ☆ Teaching of vocabulary about feelings and emotions and open communication about emotions encouraged and modelled by adults ☆ Opportunities for the development of self-efficacy and for pupils to experience success through learning and using their strengths ☆ Identification of pupils who have experienced trauma or ACEs³ and targeted resilience-building interventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Disengagement with learning, poor attendance and absenteeism × Social isolation or alienation from peer × Violence/aggression, bullying and relationship difficulties × Low achievement/learning difficulties/SEN × A difference cultural background to the majority of the community × Moving between schools and increased experiences of transition × Poor connection between family and school × Harsh and inconsistent discipline at home and/or in school × Lack of opportunity to develop social and emotional skills

³ A study by Hughes et al. has highlighted the harmful effects of ACEs throughout life, showing that individuals with at least four ACEs face increased risk of poor health outcomes, including violence, mental illness, and substance abuse.



BUILDING RESILIENCE IN STAFF

Ideas of resilience are also useful to hold in mind when we think about the support that staff may require following a time of crisis, as well as the support that can be put in place for staff to access at all times.

The following framework (taken from Duffield and O'Hare, 2020) explores how resilience can be built upon in relation to three broad areas: *belonging*, *help-seeking*, and *learning*. This is a useful model to use when thinking about promoting resilience at the time of a crisis, but also when planning ongoing and preventative support for staff to promote their wellbeing.



BELONGING

Fundamental to resilience is positive relationships, and the need each of us shows to connect with others in a meaningful way.

Promote physical contact with others, and where this is not possible use virtual means.

Staff "buddy" systems particularly for newer members of staff.

Provide opportunities for staff to engage in reflective conversations and to feedback and be involved in decision-making.

Help staff to help each other through peer support groups (the EPS can provide schools with some formal models of peer support which are easily accessible).

Arrange regular times when the staff team can come together, either as a whole or in smaller groups, to receive updates, to have coffee breaks, to mark life events as usual e.g. birthdays.



PROMOTE HELP-SEEKING

Resilience of staff can also be engendered through encouraging staff to seek help.

Leadership should encourage and model help-seeking and promote individual and peer support.

Some may be resistant to support, or to expressing any needs at this time, and it is important that there is sensitivity to this, for example, through emphasising that seeking help is not a weakness but a strength).

Undertake a needs assessment to identify what support individuals would find helpful now, and on an ongoing basis.



LEARNING

Resilience can also be enhanced through learning and recognising that learning can be inherently challenging and an experience that can lead to feelings of self-doubt or vulnerability.

Engage in initiatives that promote team reflection with leaders modelling how they learn from others.

Staff should continue to be encouraged to access experiences and learning opportunities that develop their sense of self-efficacy (the belief of being capable to achieve/excel in something), and sense of mastery.

School may wish to carry out an audit on areas in which staff would value training.



PREPAREDNESS

Supporting pupils effectively after a critical incident, or other bereavement, is only possible when there is a strong system in place for supporting emotional and mental health needs, ideally forming part of a whole-school approach.

RESPONSE PLAN

It is necessary for a setting to have an up-to-date emergency management/critical incident response plan that take into account a wide range of potential hazards. Staff training, for instance in Psychological First Aid for Schools, and frequent reminders of this plan is also necessary so that it becomes something people are familiar with and can be evaluated and adapted as needed. It will also be helpful to have previously identified which members of staff will hold which responsibilities, and to develop a Critical Incident Management Team (see following section for more information).

There is a number of competing factors to consider in the immediate aftermath of an incident, which involve balancing the need for schools systems to return to some level of normality, alongside the need to recognise and give space to the emotional responses and grief of those in the school community (please see Appendix for an example).

SECTION 3 – RESPONSE: IMMEDIATE AND MEDIUM-TERM

Following a critical incident or traumatic event, the school system and those within it are vulnerable, and a clear and guided response will be needed. A critical incident or emergency management plan created prior to the event will provide guidance and enable people to feel some level of control, but it may still be a challenging experience.

PRINCIPLES OF PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

The EPS response centres on an approach relating to the five key principles of psychosocial support. Research undertaken by Stevan Hobfoll identified these five principles as being conducive to resilience, and protective against trauma, in his work about what supports recovery following a disaster or serious incident (Hobfoll et al., 2007).

The assumptions underpinning psychosocial support are that relationships underpin resilience, and we are the most important and effective support for one another. Following a traumatic incident students and school staff will experience a broad range of responses. Whilst some of these responses cause a level of distress that the person cannot manage with their usual coping strategies, informed and compassionate support from people around them will enable most to recover. When this is not sufficient, it is important to identify those who may need additional support and work collaboratively to obtain this.

Further training around the principles and core messages of psychosocial support can be provided by the EPS. Please speak to your school EP for further details.

A SENSE OF SAFETY

The physiological response to feeling unsafe is heightened levels of stress including increased alertness and primal fight, flight freeze responses. Increasing feelings of safety promotes psychological wellbeing, as well as cognitive processes including thinking, reasoning and concentrating. This could include:

- ✓ **Clear structure** and explanation of **safety measures** that have been taken or any **changes** that have been made
- ✓ **Routine** which looks as similar as possible to how it was before
- ✓ Pupils allowed to bring **transitional objects** from home if they are finding it difficult to separate from caregivers
- ✓ **Safe spaces** for pupils and staff to go if they want to talk or to have a space to calm
- ✓ Acceptance and encouragement of **emotional expression**
- ✓ Offer staff and families the opportunity to **express their worries** so that their concerns can be validated and addressed
- ✓ For some pupil's plan for additional **emotional support** and **nurture**. This will need to be provided by adults who can offer caring and consistent relationships and the opportunity for a pupil to develop a **secure attachment**. These adults need to be emotionally available, and to receive the support they will need to contain the pupils' emotions



A SENSE OF CALM

When upsetting situations occur, we experience a huge amount of change which feels unsettling. We often experience strong and uncomfortable emotions, including elevated levels of anxiety. It is important that these are normalised and that children, young people, staff and families are given support and taught coping strategies to help manage their emotions and return to a state of calm. This could include:

- ✓ Provide **emotional containment** through acknowledging behaviours as a form of communication and 'wondering aloud' to translate behaviours into a language that can be understood and a need that can then be met
- ✓ All staff to be **emotionally available** and spend time with the emotions that pupils are expressing. Approaches such as PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) and **Emotion Coaching** are perfect for this
- ✓ Teach all pupils **self-regulation skills** and practise this at the whole class level. This could include relaxation training, breathing control, problem-solving, positive self-talk and physical activities. Plan time for relaxation exercises such as visualisation, stretching, or yoga. Send information home to parents/carers
- ✓ **Give time to welcoming** children back, offer kindness and comfort and listen to their thoughts, feelings and ideas, so that they can feel safe and trust staff to meet their needs through planned activities as well as incidental means
- ✓ Implement **check-ins** with pupils and staff throughout the day

A SENSE OF SELF- AND COLLECTIVE- EFFICACY

Self-efficacy relates to the feelings we have that we have some control over what happens to us; our behaviour, our emotions, our motivations. It relates to whether we believe we can achieve something and therefore has a direct impact on our confidence to attempt something. Collective efficacy is similar but relates to feeling you are part of a group that has control and can achieve. Feelings of powerlessness and lack of control are often experienced when there is some kind of crisis or traumatic incident, and these feelings reduce our senses of both personal and collective efficacy. Ways of supporting self and collective efficacy include:

- ✓ Provide adults, children and young people with **responsibilities** such as specific jobs or tasks to help manage the school's social distancing strategies
- ✓ Create a sense of belonging within the school and the classroom or tutor group through active involvement in **planning and implementing strategies** to keep everyone safe and the use of communal language such as 'our school' or 'our project'
- ✓ Give **feedback** on how everyone's thoughts and ideas have shaped decision-making in managing the running of the school in the new environment
- ✓ Work with children and young people to **set targets and goals** for themselves and encourage reflection after tasks so that pupils can experience success.
- ✓ Help children and young people to **regulate their emotions** to help them feel they are in control of and can manage any unpleasant feelings they may experience. Make use of

strategies like **Emotion Coaching** to provide support 'in the moment' and structured times to teach all regulation skills

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

There is a huge power in social relationships, and the need to feel they belong to a social group is shared by adults, children and young people, both inside and outside of school. To support relationships and connectedness you could:

- ✓ Put an emphasis on **relationships, friendships and interactions** and provide time for pupils and staff to re-connect and be together before putting other expectations on them
- ✓ If pupils have been out of school for a prolonged period of time provide **structured ways** for them to rekindle their friendships
- ✓ Tutor or circle times can promote a collective understanding of '**how to support each other**' and opportunities for small acts of kindness.
- ✓ **Relational approaches** that are supportive rather than punitive would benefit both staff and pupils' understanding of emotions and challenging behaviour

PROMOTING HOPE

When there is a lot of sad news and frightening information being shared it can leave people feeling hopeless. It is important that pupils and staff are reassured so that they feel things will get better in future. Some strategies to achieve this include:

- ✓ Support pupils to identify things to be **positive** about. Activities around **gratitude** can be helpful including gratitude diaries
- ✓ Exercises in which pupils have to articulate **strengths** about themselves and others, or things that they are **proud of**
- ✓ **Acts of kindness** towards others can also boost our own emotional wellbeing and could be structured as part of the school day or as a class challenge
- ✓ Adults to model **hopeful thinking**, for instance about things to look forward to in the future/next school year

CRITICAL INCIDENT TEAM (CIT)

It is helpful to identify the roles and responsibilities for the various aspects of a critical incident response before it occurs. This means that different elements of the response are clear to all, that roles are distributed evenly and fairly, and that important aspects are not forgotten. See Appendix for further information about suggested roles, and a proposed agenda for a CIT meeting. If staff members who have been recently bereaved have been assigned to any of these roles this should be reviewed.

IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

Research indicates that the response to an emergency within the first 48 hours is crucial. Within this timeframe it will be necessary to have completed most, if not all, of the actions in the list below which will need to be undertaken in the immediate aftermath of a critical incident or traumatic event.

- Ensure the safety of children and staff, and account for any of those who are missing
- Contact emergency services as required
- Deploy first aiders as needed
- Contact key people – Assistant Director, Sutton Communications Team, governors
- Call together Critical Incident Team/group of people who will have key responsibilities to fulfil and clarify tasks and roles
- Inform wider staff team and provide them with the information that they will need in order to support pupils and to dispel rumours
- Gather information about the incident and open a log/record details
- Remind staff about the principles of PFA-S or other support frameworks they are trained in
- Inform other schools or organisations who may be impacted by the incident
- Hold briefing meetings for staff and communicate support services
- Issue a statement to parents
- Inform pupils in the most appropriate way
- Identify pupils, staff and families who will require additional support
- Signpost families to support services

DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

In some instances, there may be media interest in the critical incident situation, and this may feel overwhelming. It is helpful to prepare a factual statement which can be read directly or sent directly to journalists as requests come in if this is required. Request a list of potential questions that may be posed so that these can be prepared, and practice responses to questions. Ensure that only one person is providing information to the media, and request that 'off the record' comments are not made by anyone in the school community.

Sutton Council's Communication Team can be contacted in the first instance by emailing: pressoffice@sutton.gov.uk and then by phoning **020 8770 4339**, or **07395 283152** for support outside of office hours.

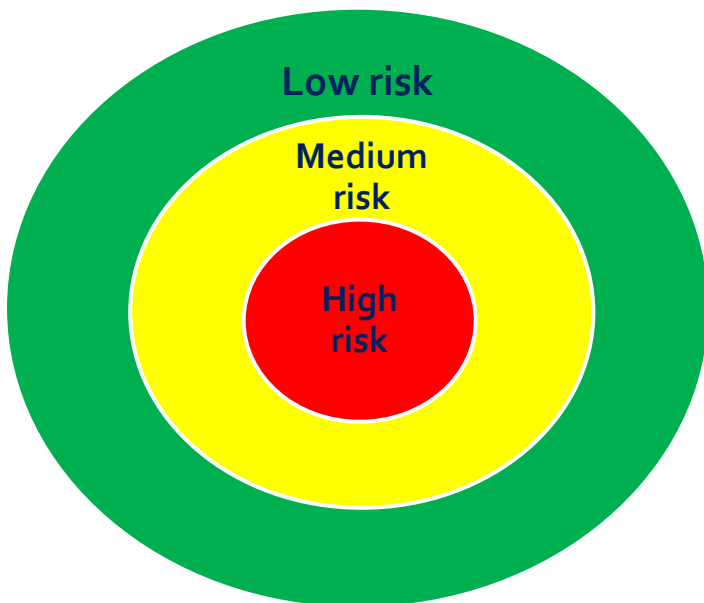


IDENTIFYING VULNERABLE PUPILS

It is important to quickly identify pupils and staff who may be vulnerable following a critical incident or traumatic event. They may require additional support, or closer monitoring to prevent against extreme responses.

A useful task is to categorise those who fall into these categories (as well as others you may identify) using a traffic light system in which green = low risk, yellow = medium risk and red = high risk. It can be helpful to use a circle to depict this (see below).

To identify the individuals within your school who may be vulnerable, place the individuals within each circle (**Green: low risk; yellow: medium risk; red: high risk**) based on the criteria above and degree of concern.



Students and staff who will need to be closely monitored may include those:

- Directly exposed to event
- Witnesses
- Injured in some way
- Have experienced the death or serious injury of a loved one
- Friends with/close to the victim(s)
- Any perceived responsibility
- History of depression or suicidal thoughts or behaviours
- History of anxiety, shyness, or low self-confidence
- History of risk-taking behaviour
- Have additional needs including SEND
- Speak English as an additional language
- Have experienced prior traumatic events and are at current risk, including:
 - Pupils known to have experienced ACEs
 - Those exposed to community violence or domestic violence
 - Those with a history of abuse and/or neglect
 - Those who have fled dangerous situations including refugees and asylum seekers
 - Members of economically disadvantaged groups
 - Medically vulnerable individuals

IMMEDIATE SUPPORT FOR PUPILS AND STAFF⁴

School staff are often seen as the 'first and last responders' for children following an emergency.

Key roles of support include:

- ✓ Establish a positive connection with students and staff
- ✓ Communicate in an empathic and non-intrusive way
- ✓ Support immediate and ongoing safety through providing physical and emotional comfort
- ✓ Speak slowly and calmly, using concrete terms
- ✓ Give information that is accurate and age-appropriate when asked.
- ✓ Help to identify people's immediate concerns; provide practical assistance if needed
- ✓ Ensure that support staff have their emotional needs met
- ✓ Connect students and staff to the social support they have and help them to make use of this
- ✓ Empower people in taking an active role in their recovery by acknowledging helpful coping strategies they are using and other strengths they have
- ✓ Offer signposting and support to access other services if needed
- ✓ Remain calm and model effective coping strategies including a sense of hope
- ✓ Organise groups who have had similar experiences of the event when providing further information and initial support
- ✓ Create a safe, quiet space that pupils are able to use
- ✓ Create a similar area for staff to go if they are feeling overwhelmed and have a system in place that facilitates staff cover at this time
- ✓ If a pupil has died consider how this will be addressed as soon as possible e.g. what do you do about their chair, their place in the register?
- ✓ Arrange regular staff meetings to check in about the wellbeing of staff and of pupils
- ✓ Plan for additional staff to cover unstructured times (e.g. breaks and lunchtimes) when pupils may be more likely to become overwhelmed by their emotions

Things to avoid:

- × Assumptions about what people have experienced
- × Assumptions that everyone who was involved has experienced trauma
- × Pathologizing more extreme emotional reactions (for most this will subside over time) (see section 4 for more detail)
- × Focusing on what students or staff can't do or things that they are struggling with
- × Assuming that students or staff will want to speak about what has happened. Being physically present in a supportive and calm way is more helpful and often helps people feel safer to talk when they are ready
- × Debriefing by asking for details of what has happened
- × Speculation or giving inaccurate answers because you don't yet know something
- × Large group settings for delivering emotionally sensitive information. Messages can be distorted, and strong emotions can spread quickly under these conditions

⁴ Much of the following section is taken directly from the Psychological First Aid – School Fieldwork Guide.



COMMUNICATING INFORMATION ABOUT THE EMERGENCY/EVENT

It is important to share information about what has happened with students, families and staff quickly and concisely, although there are a number of considerations about what to share and how to deliver this information. It can be helpful to deliver news to small groups of students or staff because this enables the chance for questions to be asked and answered. Whole school events may seem time efficient but can be a quick way of raising the emotionality of a situation and provide more chance for rumours and misinformation to be spread.

WHEN BREAKING SAD NEWS TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE:

- Consider who the most appropriate person to speak to the pupil is (someone they know and trust, someone who will continue to be around).
- Consider where you speak to them (somewhere familiar, safe, comfortable and private).
- Position yourself at the same level as the child and use a calm, reassuring tone of voice.
- Provide accurate information, in easy to understand terms. Consider using visual cues and materials to illustrate your information. Avoid euphemisms, use words like 'dead' and 'died'.
- Prepare for and be willing to answer questions.
- Allow them to express how they are feeling and normalise emotional responses.
- Let them know how they can seek further support.
- Consider when talking to children:
 - Is it appropriate to share this information given his/her age?
 - Does he/she appear able to comprehend what you are saying?
 - Is he/she ready to hear the content of what you are saying?

WHEN PROVIDING INFORMATION TO YOUNG PEOPLE, FAMILIES, AND STAFF:

- Make sure you have permission to share event-specific information. Communicate with affected families about what information is released and how is vitally important.
- Use your judgment as to whether and when to present specific information.
- Provide information related to what currently known about the unfolding event, and if safe, the status of other pupils, teachers and school staff.
- Use clear and concise language while avoiding technical jargon.
- Give information about support services that are available and how to access them.
- Inform about the best way to get updated information about the situation in the hours or days ahead. It may be useful to share trusted information on the school website.

REMEMBER:

- Address immediate needs and concerns to reduce fears, answer pressing questions, and support adaptive coping.
- Students, staff, and family members may be getting information from many sources of technology (texting, Twitter, Facebook, TV, radio, phone, Internet). Ask about what they have heard or read and address any misinformation or distressing information.
- Do not guess or invent information if you do not know it in order to provide reassurance. Instead, develop a plan, with those you are helping, to get them the information.

RETURNING TO LEARNING

It is also important to recognise that an event may impact on the ability of pupils who have been affected, to engage with learning and certain adjustments will need to be made in line with this. Pupils may become quickly distressed and need the flexibility to leave class and go to a safe place. They may also find it difficult to concentrate and need academic expectations to be adapted/lessened for some time. Individual differences in how a pupil responds to a situation, as well as the nature of the situation will impact on their ability to return to learning.

It is also important to consider pupils and staff who are not able to return initially, and to make additional preparations for their return and for support whilst they are not in school. This may include home learning, support for their emotional needs or gestures that demonstrate that people in school are thinking of them. Some frameworks include:

Three elements of 'good transition'

Planning and preparation, clear communication, relationships

Five levels of the Recovery Curriculum

Relationships, community, transparent curriculum, metacognition, space

Principles of psycho-social recovery

A sense of safety, a sense of calm, a sense of self- and collective- efficacy, social connectedness, promoting hope

Please seek additional advice from your school EP if you would like additional information on any of the approaches above, and please also refer to the guidance documented produced by the EPS 'Returning to school and supporting transitions across the school community' (May 2020).

PERSONAL BELONGINGS, 'EMPTY CHAIRS' AND TEMPORARY MATERIALS

Whilst it will be necessary to remove items that belonged to a person who is now deceased at some point, there does not need to be a rush to do so. There needs to be an acknowledgment that everyone will grieve at their own pace and removing items too soon may create greater distress. Guidance generally suggests not removing pictures of the deceased or having another student sit in their place immediately.

Students should also be allowed to speak about their memories of the person who has died, although it is important to flag if a particular student seems over-focused on the topic, and that this is impacting on their ability to engage in other aspects of their life (e.g. friendships, learning, hobbies).

SECTION 4 – GRIEF, LOSS AND TRAUMA

THE GRIEVING PROCESS

Experiencing bereavement or loss can have a profound impact on social and emotional development and can impact on the longer-term learning progress of a pupil. It is also important to remember that grief is a normal response to stress, and that most young people who experience grief will not need specialist support or counselling. Two key theories of grief are described below and can be used when helping pupils to process the feelings they are having. It is also important to consider the age and developmental level of the child to better understand how they may be processing their feelings of grief (see section below for further information)

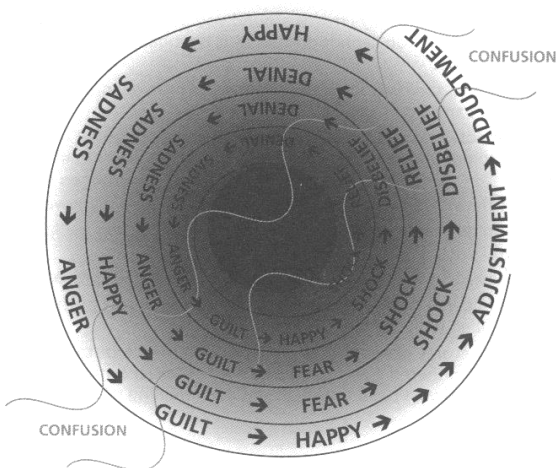
THE DUAL MODEL OF COPING WITH GRIEF

This model by Stroebe and Schut (1999) suggests that people move between two states of being following on from an experience of loss. These states can be described as 'loss-oriented', during which time a person is engaging in behaviour connecting them to the person who has died (e.g. visiting a grave, mourning, engaging with talking therapy) and 'restoration-oriented' where they are more focused on the present day, engaging in positive pursuits and adaptation. The model helpfully suggests that someone will move between these two states throughout the day and sometimes for years to come.



UPWARD SPIRAL OF GRIEF

This model of grief recognises the journey of emotions that are experienced through grief, and how the different emotions (including sadness, guilt, happiness, anger, disbelief) can be experienced more than once. There is also a recognition that whilst painful emotions will be prominent, there will also be moments of happiness experienced; something that people often require permission to feel, and that over time a sense of adjustment will be felt.





CULTURAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF DEATH AND LOSS

It is also necessary to take into account any cultural or religious beliefs that a person holds which will impact on their beliefs about death, how the death will be recognised as well as the length of the mourning period. Whilst there will be many commonalities between the beliefs of people across different faiths, there may also be differences. It is important to ask the young person and their family about their beliefs, which may differ from what is widely known about the general beliefs of the faith, to ensure that the support you offer is sensitive and considered. Differences in belief should be considered in your school’s bereavement policy.

The table⁵ below is intended to highlight some of the key differences in responses to death across different faiths and cultures. It also briefly notes the rituals and ceremonies that might be performed. Customs and beliefs will vary even within religious groups and, in all situations, it is wise to consult the family on their views and wishes.

Buddhism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buddhists believe in a cycle of birth, death and rebirth in various states (e.g. human, divine, animal) until attaining an enlightened state of lasting happiness (nirvana). • The last thought in this life is believed to condition the first thought of the next life. When death is imminent a monk may be called, or relatives bring religious objects. • Funerals are dignified but not sad and usually take place within three days. The body is usually buried cremated and the ashes scattered or buried – a tree may be planted where the ashes are scattered, as a symbol of the earth bringing forth new life, part of the cycle of life and death • Buddhists do not believe in God.
Christianity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a person dies, it is seen as the end of their life on earth. Christians believe that the righteous go to Heaven and sinners go to Hell. Some Catholics also believe in Purgatory, which is place for those who have committed ‘forgivable sins’. • The funeral is held about a week after death and can take place either in a church or at a crematorium. The funeral allows friends and family to grieve for the person and give thanks for their life. • A Catholic funeral may include Mass. Prayers are said at the graveside or before the curtains close for cremation. Candles may be lit. There is no set period for mourning, and this varies across families and countries.
Hinduism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hindus believe in a cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth, repeating over time until reaching the purity which allows a return to the creator. • Hindus generally cremate their dead and this should take place within 24 hours of death. In the cremation ceremony, the body is carried three times around the pyre, then placed upon it. • There is no standard period of mourning, although 10-13 days may be typical. During this period, mourners cover religious pictures in the house and do not attend

⁵ Acknowledgments: Coping with a Traumatic Incident. Surrey Educational Psychology Service
Concise guide to the customs of minority ethnic religions (Collins et al)
Supporting Children, Young People and Schools through Bereavement and Loss. Derby City Council
Funeral Rites Across Different Cultures. London Borough of Ealing

	<p>festivals or take part in marriage ceremonies. On the eleventh day, close male family members may shave their beards and heads.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory is preserved in the family's daily prayers (puja).
Humanist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humanists do not believe in God and do not believe in an after-life or in reincarnation. • The humanist funeral is non-religious and may include music, poetry, a eulogy, reminiscences about the dead person. There is no set mourning period.
Islam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muslims believe that there is another world after death. Individuals should prepare for this next world during their time on Earth. • Muslims believe that the soul leaves the body at the point of death and Muslim law decrees that the body belongs to Allah and must not be interfered with once the soul has departed. • Only burial in the ground is allowed and this should take place within 4 hours of death. The body is bathed and wrapped in a plain cloth in preparation. • During the funeral, mourners gather and offer prayers for the forgiveness of the deceased (Janazah). Men wear white as a sign of mourning and purity, however women do not attend burials. • Mourning continues for 40 days. During this time, passages from the Qu'ran are read daily and prayers said every Thursday. After 40 days, family and friends meet for a final act of remembrance.
Judaism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are many regional differences in the customs around death but generally after death the body is washed, dressed in a white shroud and placed in a coffin and burial takes place within 24 hours. • Flowers and music are avoided at the ceremony, ensuring no discrimination between rich and poor. • Jews observe seven days of strict mourning; close relatives say prayers throughout the day and neighbours and friends visit to offer condolences. • Males may be forbidden to shave their beards during this time. Mourners ritually cut their clothes as a sign of grief or wear black ribbons to represent this practice. • The Kaddish is said every day for the following eleven months, and every year on the anniversary of the death. A candle will then be lit of 24 hours.
Sikhism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sikhs are usually cremated, and the ashes scattered in flowing water. • Sikhs see death as a natural process and God's will; public displays of grief such as wailing or crying out loud are discouraged. • Hymns and prayers are recited by the congregation at the cremation ceremony.
Travellers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditions and customs will differ from family to family. • Immediately after the death, keeping vigil and viewing the body are common. Burial is the usual practice. • Funerals are important social events and children and young people may be expected to miss school to attend. • It is traditional for close family to wear black for up to 12 months.



DEVELOPMENTAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF GRIEF AND LOSS

The ways in which feelings of grief and loss are felt, and how bereavement is understood, will depend on the age and developmental level of a child or young person (please see Appendix for resources to be used with children and young people of different ages). The table below provides an overview of thoughts, emotions, and reactions common in children who display typical development at a certain age. However, whilst the below are common responses there will be individual variation, and the particular circumstances of an event will be very important to consider as will taking into account wider information about the child or young person. It is also important to note that some pupils will not exhibit any of these behaviours in school, but parents will report a very different picture from home. This does not mean that child or young person isn't feeling this way, but that perhaps the structures and expectations of school enable them to put aside their grief for the time they are there.

There will also be pupils who do not display an overt grief response, yet present as tired, unmotivated and find it difficult to concentrate. It is important that work is differentiated in line with what the pupil can achieve at the moment, even if this is less advanced than what they were previously working on. It is also important that school staff remain patient with young people and therefore adjust their expectations accordingly in terms of work demands.

When a person experiences something that causes them to grieve, this grief is unlikely to go away, but they will become able to adapt to a changed life. This is the same for children and young people. Although there will be differences in how children understand death and other traumatic events, the grief response is often very similar for young people as it is for adults.

Common feelings associated with grief:

- **Shock** and **disbelief**. Children and young people may feel physical symptoms of shock including feeling sick or dizzy. Others might struggle to process the information and revert to protective behaviours or go back to their play/what they were doing before.
- **Denial** is another common feeling experienced after a loss. For children this can be because they don't understand that death is permanent and therefore talk about the person coming back, or search for them.
- **Anger** and 'acting out' behaviours are often seen when a child or young person doesn't have the words to express the other emotions that they are feeling. They can also feel angry with the people who didn't prevent their loved one from dying and the person who has died.
- **Guilt** is another common feeling associated with grief in which a child or young people may feel that they could have done more to stop the person from dying. Guilt can also be felt if their last interaction with the person who died was a difficult one.
- **Sadness** and/or feelings of **helplessness**. When they realise that the person who has died isn't coming back feelings of low mood are common. This could result in your child losing their appetite, becoming lethargic or uninterested in things they previously enjoyed.
- **Worry** and **anxiety**. It is especially common that a child or young person may worry about other family members, displayed by them becoming distressed at separations. They could also develop fear that they may die.



- **Difficulties focusing** their attention, especially on demanding tasks like schoolwork. Others may experience vivid memories for a time. Plan for alternative activities and more practical tasks alongside the usual curriculum tasks so that a pupil can be directed to a different activity if they are not managing.
- **Tiredness** can be seen in pupils following a bereavement, as the grief impacts on their eating and sleeping patterns. Tiredness contributes to mood and encouraging a good sleep routine can be really helpful. Providing a quiet space where a pupil can rest at school is another strategy that can help.

Feelings of grief can be more intense if:

- The death has been sudden, traumatic in some way.
- It is related to the death of a loved one or close friend.
- The child or young person is experiencing other changes, transitions or worries in their lives. In the same way that it is difficult to process a large amount of verbal information it is also difficult to process a large amount of emotional information. This can lead to people not fully expressing their grief until later.
- The usual rituals such as saying goodbye or attending a funeral are not possible.
- There is a period of isolation at the time of bereavement which reduces access to social support that helps people to recover.
- The loss occurs at a time when the usual structures and routines of life are not in place (e.g. summer holidays).

The initial intense, all-consuming response to loss can be described as '**acute grief**', and over time as the intensity of feelings becomes more manageable '**integrated grief**'. If the intensity of feelings does not reduce this can be called '**complicated grief**' as the usual healing and integrative processes have not occurred.

Age/stage of development	Understanding of bereavement and loss	Typical feelings and behaviours
Birth to two years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May notice the absence of a primary caregiver • From 8 months will begin to develop a sense of 'missing' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of abandonment • Crying and upset • Changes to eating and sleeping habits
Two to five years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not understand the permanence of death or abstract concepts like 'forever' • May understand that 'dead' is different to 'alive' • Believe death to be reversible and the person to return 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May show little emotional response • Struggle to express feelings using words • Use play to communicate • Express through behaviour • Ask questions over and over • More anxious at points of separation



Six to nine years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin to understand the permanence of death • Understand death in a story-like way e.g. ghosts, monsters • May think that their actions caused the death (magical thinking) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel loss strongly • Some may struggle to express feelings using words • Some may try to hide their grief and need permission to express • Guilt if they feel responsible
Nine to twelve years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the permanence of death • Seek to understand the death, especially physical aspects • Begin to realise death is something that could happen to them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the vocabulary to express their feelings but may choose not to • May copy behaviours they associate with the person who has died • Struggle to focus and channel attention • Anxious about their own and others' safety
Thirteen to eighteen years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the permanence of death in an adult way • Try to understand the meaning of death <p>Those who were bereaved earlier in life may re-process their grief as their understanding develops.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the vocabulary to express their feelings but may choose not to • Feel isolated from peers • Impact on all areas of their life • Engage in more risky behaviour

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Should any of these behaviours continue to interfere with someone's ability to function for more than a month, specialist services should be sought to offer support. Consider referring before this time if someone is having difficulties with sleeping, is having persistent and intrusive thoughts, dreams or flashbacks about the distressing event, is avoiding anything to do with the event, is not engaging in any self-care or is showing other safety concerns.

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Other behavioural responses

- Reluctance to go to school or to do things previously enjoyed
- Difficulties maintaining relationships
- Unwilling to play with friends
- Developmental regression e.g. bedwetting, being afraid of the dark
- Difficulties focusing and attending to learning
- Sleep difficulties or nightmares
- Change in eating habits/problems with eating
- Somatic complaints inc. headaches, stomach aches
- Constant tiredness/lethargy
- Irritability
- Becoming clingy towards adults and being unwilling to separate
- Easily upset by 'small' things



PUPILS WITH SEND

As teaching and learning must be differentiated for children and young people with SEND, it is likely that the approach put in place to support these pupils following a traumatic incident will require some level of differentiation. It is also important to use your knowledge of individual pupils to adapt the support they receive, as well as seeking the child's views and liaising with their parents and carers. The following are some general factors that should be taken into consideration.

AUTISM

Students with Autism are usually more sensitive to changes in routine, therefore providing advance warning is supportive. Where possible keep structures and surroundings (including people) as consistent as possible. These students may have heightened sensitivity to sounds, bright lights, new tastes, smells, or temperatures, and exposure to this type of stimulation may make them feel anxious and less able to make use of their usual emotional regulation strategies. Students with Autism may be obsessive or hyper-focused on some element of an event which may be upsetting to others, for instance is they keep talking about details. They may exhibit self-soothing behaviours such as rocking or repetitive actions. Calm, clear boundaries are helpful, as are strategies that enable children to feel safe; from a physical, sensory and emotional perspective.

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE/LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

Children and young people who have greater difficulty expressing how they feel, and in understanding the situation around them, may be less able to engage with positive coping strategies. They may also be more dependent on adults co-regulating their emotional needs. Strategies that make use of their strengths and usual ways of adapting written/verbal tasks should be implemented, for example encouraging them to draw how they feel, or to make use of widgets and other visual communication methods.

SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

Students who have identified SEMH needs may find normal school life difficult to manage, and some will have a history of trauma which the current situation is a reminder of. Where possible following an established routine and identifying members of staff who the pupils knows and trusts to support them will be helpful. It is important that these students be reminded of positive coping strategies they have been working on and are supported to make use of these.

ADHD

Children and young people diagnosed with ADHD may demonstrate an increase in their usual hyperactivity and impulsivity; sometimes seen more through risk-taking in older students. These behaviours may be quite challenging, so allow for increase physical movement, reduced and clear instructions, as well as the usual warnings about specific consequences of inappropriate actions.



HEARING OR VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

Students who have identified sensory impairments may experience an increased sense of vulnerability and distress when unexpected events occur. They will need reassurance from familiar adults and quick access to any necessary adaptations to feel safe.

TRAUMA

Pupils who have been identified as having experienced previous trauma are more at risk from struggling with an additional stressor or traumatic event. These children and young people are often 'wired for stress' and on high alert to situations that may reduce their feelings of safety. Clear boundaries, routines and consistency are very important to these pupils, and the presence of a trusted adult is integral in providing this.

TYPES OF BEREAVEMENT

The theories of grief and loss discussed above will be relevant to all types of bereavement and other forms of loss, although it is vitally important to consider the individual context in which a bereavement has occurred when planning support. The following information highlights a range of bereavement experiences which may require additional support for bereaved relatives, because the feelings of acute grief may last for longer due to the circumstances. The information above pertaining to developmental norms should still be considered.

DEATH OF A FAMILY MEMBER

When a child or young person is bereaved of a close family member their feelings of grief are likely to be more intense because of the relationship they had with the person who has died, as well as the greater amount of change that has occurred as a result of the death. Whatever the context of the death it is important to encourage and maintain open lines of communication between home and school to ascertain if there has been a change in the primary caregiver, what a child has been told (how much information etc.) and whether others in the family require signposting to additional support.

When a pupil returns to school it is advised that a transition plan is put in place, that the pupil is told who they can go to if they are feeling upset, and that a safe space they can retreat to is identified. It is also important to check with the pupil what they would like their peers to know, and if they need support to talk to them.

DEATH IN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

The death of an individual who is part of the school community can affect the whole school system. In breaking the news to pupils and staff it can be helpful to do this in smaller groups if possible, using assemblies and larger group meetings to clarify details or provide subsequent information. Factual information needs to be provided to prevent rumours, once permission has been sought from the family of the bereaved person, and to be conveyed by a trusted adult. Communication with parents is also needed so that they can reinforce the messages provided by school and receive signposting to additional support should they require this.



Following the death of a pupil the children who were their friends may need additional support. Providing a safe and calm environment that allows these pupils to be together is supportive, as is providing a range of resources which they can use to express themselves.

VIOLENT DEATH

A sudden and violent death can be traumatic and trigger personal safety fears. It can be especially hard to manage if the perpetrator belongs to the same community, or if the death occurs within a family. Reassurance about the rarity of such events will be necessary for children and young people as prior to this such an event may have been dismissed as something that would never happen. Care and sensitivity will need to be exercised if family or friends of the preparator are also in the setting, and ways to diffuse any tension between groups may be necessary and should be planned for. Aside from this many of the same rituals and processes for the bereaved person should be undertaken.

OTHER SUDDEN DEATHS

Increased feelings of shock and disbelief can be felt when a death occurs unexpectedly and suddenly. It can therefore be more difficult for those who have been bereaved to process what has happened as feelings caused by not being able to say goodbye are much stronger. Emotions related to lost opportunities or unfilled plans are also commonly felt.

If the cause of death is accidental injury, feelings of anger may be more intense. Those who are bereaved may feel they could have done some differently to prevent the death or feel overwhelmed by the senselessness of it. Supporting children and young people to talk through the 'if only' feelings they have can be helpful, alongside reminding them about the things that were not in their control.

Children and young people who witness an accident are likely to feel scared and upset. Helping them to feel safe through reassurances, and maintenance of routines is helpful. Children may also use play to help them process what they have seen, and this should be understood as a normal way to respond.

WHEN SOMEONE IS NOT EXPECTED TO LIVE⁶

Although the adults around a child may try to shield them from this information for as long as possible children often hear conversations or read the signs that something is not right. When children perceive that important information isn't being shared with them this can make them feel worried, confused or excluded. For a child to feel safe they need to feel that there are adults around them who they can trust and feeling as if they are being excluded from something can reduce this trust. When it is a child who is seriously ill it is also common for them to know more than adults think they do.

When sharing information with a child it is important to give clear, accurate information in line with their level of understanding. It can be useful to speak to them when you have certainty; for instance, when it is known that someone will not get better, otherwise when the child is showing signs that they need to know more. Provide information that they need; you can always tell them more later.

⁶ Please see also guidance by Child Bereavement UK who have created an information sheet specially on this topic.



SUICIDE

BEREAVEMENT THROUGH SUICIDE

Following a death by suicide, the pain and emotion for those who have been bereaved can be more painful and intense than other types of bereavement. It may present with additional pressures because of the way that other people may view and scrutinise the death, asking questions or making assumptions that are extremely painful for the bereaved. The emotions experienced following a bereavement by suicide may also feel stronger, with guilt, shame, rejection, and betrayal being more prominent, alongside sadness and anger. The bereaved friends and family may also hold feelings of isolation and feel they can't share how they feel with others because of the nature of the death.

When someone dies from suicide people often feel less well-equipped to provide grief support to those who are bereaved. Some key principles include:

- Adhering to the same processes and rituals that you would undertake for any other death within the school community incl. normalising grief and supporting expression of emotions.
- Consider whether it is appropriate to undertake awareness raising work with students because this can increase suicidal behaviour in pupils as it risks normalising suicide as a response to stress.
- Offering the same support to pupils who have been bereaved by suicide as you would for pupils bereaved in another way.
- Explicitly giving them permission to grieve and to talk about their loss.
- Support to reduce feelings of shame and guilt.
- Supporting them to move to a place of acceptance of the unknowns even though they will have lots of 'why' questions.
- Helping them to plan scripts and answers to questions people may ask them.
- Stories related to death by suicide can be helpful to tell and re-tell younger children who find the situation difficult to process.

It is important to note that in all cases of a suspected suicide a post-mortem will be undertaken (this can sometimes take months). Only once suicide has been confirmed through this process should it be labelled as such. The language used in relation to suicide is important, and many phrases which have typically been used are now advised to be avoided. It is also important not to speculate about the motives of a suicide, and as with all bereavements to clarify what information the family is happy to have shared if the victim is a member of the school community. Memorials which occur at a later date to the funeral can be useful as this time allows people to become more accepting of the situation enabling the memorial to be a celebration of the person's life.

Phrases to use: Died/death by suicide, took their own life, killed themselves, ended their life, attempted to end their life/suicide.

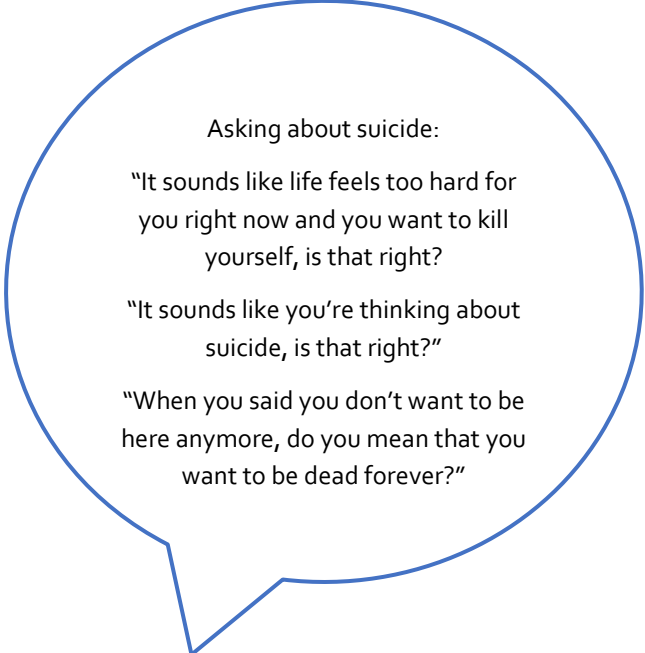
Phrases to avoid using: Committed suicide (because of the implication this has of suicide being a crime), failed/unsuccessful suicide attempt, a cry for help.



SUICIDE PREVENTION ⁷

A school-wide approach to suicide prevention is important, especially in secondary school settings. Comprehensive guidance has been produced by Papyrus in relation to what a suicide prevention policy and approach should look like and can be accessed [here](#). Key points from this document:

- Talking about suicide does not create or worsen risk. Evidence shows that two main principles underpin good suicide prevention strategies. The first is '**improve connectedness**' through providing safe spaces for pupils to share their worries and thoughts. Having suicidal thoughts can be incredibly isolating for a young person but the opportunity to talk can save a life.
- Children and young people may not communicate verbally that they are having thoughts of suicide, but staff may notice changes in their behaviour or other things that they are saying that cause concern. Asking a pupil directly if this is the case is necessary, as they may have been waiting to be asked.
- Alternatively, pupils may express suicidal thoughts more generally for instance "*I wish I wasn't here*", "*I am worthless*", "*It doesn't matter anymore*". Invite a pupil to tell you more and show that you want to listen.
- The second is '**reduce access to means**' through ensuring the physical environment of a school setting is safe and free from potential means of suicide.
- Ensure that all school staff are aware of the language that is advised (see above) and that they have an awareness of suicide and how to intervene with students.
- If school staff are concerned that a pupil may be thinking about suicide it is important to direct them to HOPELineUK which is a national helpline staffed by Suicide Prevention Advisors: Call **0800 068 4141** or text **07786 209 697**.
- In the event of a concern related to an imminent risk of death or harm it is necessary to contact **999** and to stay with the child until emergency services arrive.
- Suicide-safety plan templates are available on the Papyrus website and are a useful way of structuring the support of a young person in addition to referring them on to a medical practitioner or more specialist service.
- Schools can also contact the EPS should they require further support developing their suicide prevention strategy.



⁷ Papyrus have created a useful toolkit 'Building Suicide-Safe Schools' <https://papyrus-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/toolkitfinal.pdf> which includes an example policy, sentence starters for talking about suicide.



SUICIDE CONTAGION

The response following a suicide must be approached in a planned and thought through manner. Suicide postvention needs to ensure that those in the school community who are at risk are aware that support is available and feel able to access this. It is important that everyone in the wider school community is aware that in the months following a suicide there is increased risk for all, especially those who are identified as being vulnerable. Pupil attendance should be more closely monitored and parents or staff with any concerns should know how to raise these in a timely manner.

Suicide contagion (also known as copycat suicides) occur when a suicidal behaviour is imitated, and in the worst-case scenario can lead to a suicide cluster in which a number of seemingly unrelated suicides occur. Guilt, identification and modelling are thought to be principles that contribute to contagion. A balance between offering support yet not providing so much attention that a suicide becomes 'sensationalised' is necessary in the response of settings and communities. A similar balance is required regarding the information that is communicated to pupils. Whilst it is important to inform students they should not be told of the method of suicide, any information pertaining to a suicide note, anything about the circumstances that might have contributed to the suicide.

To minimise the risk of contagion the following steps should be taken:

- Speak with students in small groups providing clear and accurate information.
- Recognise and monitor young people at increased risk.
- Address rumours and other misinformation that may be being spread over social media.
- Acknowledge that the situation is distressing and talk to students about what support is available to them for bereavement and mental health and publicise these around the school.
- Ensure that pupils have clear information about what they should do if they are worried about the mental health of a friend and are reminded about the importance of self-care and emotional regulation strategies.
- Make sure that all staff are aware of the safeguarding procedures and the importance of taking seriously any mention of suicide.
- If it is thought that a pupil is at immediate and significant risk to themselves or others (e.g. a suicide attempt has been made) call 999.

SUICIDE POSTVENTION

Postvention aims to reduce the distress in the school community following a death by suicide. It helps people to heal, continue to function in their community and importantly, it helps to reduce the risk of further suicides in the area. The role of the school is important in ensuring the mental and physical health and wellbeing of staff and students, both immediately following the suicide and into the longer term.

Further guidance produced by the Australian organisation Headspace can be found [here](#), and by Public Health England [here](#).

OTHER TRAUMATIC EVENTS

Type of traumatic event	Principles of support	Other things to consider
<p>Terror attacks will be sudden and may directly impact a school. Otherwise they may be felt at a regional or national level and have wide-ranging impacts on a community.</p>	<p>Ensure that terrorism, violence and war are addressed as topics in the school curriculum as this will increase preparedness, and that evacuation procedures are practised.</p> <p>Facilitate reunification with parents/carers as soon as possible.</p> <p>Provide factual information and answers to questions pupils may have to prevent the spread of misinformation. This also applies to communication with school staff and families.</p> <p>Remind people to limit their exposure to media coverage, especially violent images and content and saturation of information.</p> <p>Promote expression and communication about emotional responses and provide reassurance and advice about support that is available.</p> <p>Reaffirm physical safety and perceptions of emotional safety and security as quickly as possible.</p> <p>A 'question box' or other anonymous means of seeking information are usually more accessible for older pupils.</p>	<p>What items need to be kept in 'safe zones' where pupils and staff may have to remain for an extended period?</p> <p>In the aftermath how can the risk of media overload be minimised?</p> <p>If an attack has occurred on the school site how can the school environment once again feel safe?</p> <p>Pupils who seem preoccupied with violent content or ideas who may be struggling to process the event and require additional support.</p> <p>Also, those who experience ongoing difficulties with sleep, persistently upsetting thoughts, intrusive images or other enduring difficulties.</p>
<p>Community disasters such as pandemics, floods, earthquakes, fires or landslides can impact across the community and be experienced as</p>	<p>Support return to normality and consistency and stability as much as possible e.g. through return to school and usual routines.</p> <p>Limit the amount of time spent talking/thinking about the event as repeated exposure can lead to vicarious traumatisation. However, it is important to give information children need in order for them to understand what has happened whilst at the same time normalising emotional responses and providing information about coping strategies.</p>	<p>Whilst adults may experience fear for their lives, children more commonly fear separation from parents/carers after a traumatic event.</p> <p>In the event of school closures consider how the return to learning is managed.</p>

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<p>incredibly frightening, overwhelming and traumatic events. The wider context is also important to consider as national uncertainty is likely to have a compounding effect.</p>	<p>Create safe spaces within the school environment and encourage usage of these alongside adult co-regulation.</p> <p>Pay attention to the behaviour of pupils and monitor changes over time.</p> <p>Reaffirm physical safety and perceptions of emotional safety and security as quickly as possible.</p> <p>Provide ways for pupils and staff to regain a sense of control, even over small aspects of the school day/learning environment.</p>	<p>In the event of school closures ensure ways to maintain a sense of belonging to school are considered.</p> <p>The support given to staff who may be struggling themselves yet are expected to take on additional responsibilities.</p>
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OTHER TYPES OF LOSS

Whilst bereavement is often the first thing we consider when we think about loss, there are other circumstances which impact on children and young people which may provoke a grief response, as they experience it as loss. Some examples include:

- Loss of **familiar environments** e.g. leaving Nursery, transition to a new school, moving to a new house.
- Loss of **significant adults** e.g. teaching or support staff when a pupil moves to a new class, loss when a parent or step-parent moves out.
- Loss of **parental attention** e.g. with a parent returning to work, diverted attention due to the birth of a younger sibling, illness within the family, marital tensions, other family crises such as unemployment or financial pressures.
- Loss of **friendships** e.g. as friendship groups change, as pupils move classes.
- Loss of **opportunities** e.g. parental safety fears restricting play opportunities, additional or health needs restricting activity, poverty restricting access

SECTION 5 – RESPONSE: LONGER-TERM

Traumatic events and critical incidents cause pain and intense, sometimes overwhelming feelings, and often they leave a lasting impact on the people who have experienced them. The recovery phase can be lifelong for some people or institutions as they go on to be forever changed, but for the most part recovery is a part of the human experience and with the right support individuals will adapt to the new normal.

A perspective from researcher Rebecca Solnit⁸ who studied disasters is that whilst emergencies create hardship, there is often something that can be learnt, something that arises following the incident or a new way of feeling and being that brings possibilities of a more positive kind.

"Those who live through terrible times will often be able to help others....and some may go on to do something to make the world a better place. Even terrible things can teach some good things – like understanding, caring, courage... and how to be okay during difficult times"⁹

Post-traumatic growth is a concept that was formed by psychologists Tedeschi and Calhoun and describes the potentially positive after-effects of experiencing adversity. This can include viewing themselves differently, viewing the world differently and reflecting on how they will make changes to the way they live their life. An appreciation for life is common after experiencing a traumatic event, as is the realisation of new possibilities, and a feeling of personal strength. Some are drawn to a belief in something bigger than themselves, for instance a new spiritual or religious belief.

This final section of guidance considers the response schools should take in the longer-term following on from a traumatic event or critical incident, thinking most about the pupils and staff who continue to struggle, and for whom post-traumatic growth is less applicable.



⁸ Solnit, R. (2009) 'A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster'

⁹ Marge Heegaard (1991) 'When Something Terrible Happens' Woodland Press.



KEY PRINCIPLES WHEN SUPPORTING GRIEVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

1. Remember that every child and young person is individual, as are the circumstances around the bereavement or loss that is causing them to grieve.
2. Normalise emotions and provide a way for them to better understand and manage the uncomfortable feelings that they have and model your own emotions.
3. With love and support from people around them most children do not need professional help. Attuned and caring support from a familiar adult is often more useful than support from an experienced, yet unfamiliar person.
4. Use active listening skills when a child is speaking to you about how they feel, and answer questions they have using language they understand. Otherwise a child will seek to fill the gaps in what they know and feel that secrets are being kept.
5. Use language that is concrete rather than phrases which leave room for misinterpretation (see below).
6. When someone is grieving it consumes a lot of their energy and strength. Anything that can be done to maintain usual routines and some level of normality helps. This often includes going back to soon quickly, especially as more time off makes it harder to return.
7. Be patient and model calmness. Emotions are contagious and modelling feelings of calmness can provide effective emotional containment.
8. It is important that children and young people are reminded that they are still loved and will continue to be looked after.
9. Involve them in any decisions that are being made which will affect them.
10. Significant events can cause feelings of grief to rise to the surface. This doesn't mean that a child or young person is suffering from unresolved grief, but that their understanding of a previous event and their feelings may have changed or matured.

When someone dies their body stops working. A dead body can't move, and it can't feel anything. This means it can't feel pain.

I have some very sad news for you You know last time we saw Granny she was very unwell

Dead people stay dead forever. Even if we really want them to, they can't come back to life.



COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

(see Guidance sheets in Appendix for more information specifically related to bereavement and loss)

THINGS TO AVOID SAYING:

- × I know how you feel
- × It was probably for the best
- × It was her time to go
- × At least he went quickly
- × Let's talk about something else
- × You are strong enough to deal with this
- × Be glad that he passed quickly
- × You'll feel better soon
- × You need to grieve
- × Things that don't kill us make us stronger
- × It could be worse; you still have a brother/sister/mother etc

HELPING PUPILS TO UNDERSTAND THEIR REACTIONS

You may feel strong emotions coming and going like waves.

It can help to keep in mind the family members and friends who love and support you.

Lots of people need help at times like this. XXXX are here to keep you and other children safe, and to help people feel better.

Sometimes you may feel so anxious, upset, and out of control, you wonder if you're going crazy. Remember that these are expectable and understandable reactions to a very upsetting and frightening event.

Just doing something can make you feel better. Would you like to play with the other children, or to draw (suggest activities)?

Sometimes the best way to recover is to take a few moments to do activities that calm you (take a walk, breathe slowly, listen to music).

You may find that shocking experiences trigger strong, self-protective "alarm" reactions in the body, such as an adrenaline surge, startling easily, or being on-guard.

You may feel like you want to do something risky, but it is important to talk to an adult you trust if you feel like this.

PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT COPING STRATEGIES

Some children and young people will have well developed strategies for managing their emotions and may just need reminders to use these at times of stress. Others may not have yet developed their own independent self-regulation strategies, and will require co-regulation from adults, as well as teaching about coping strategies and support over time to make use of them for themselves. Pupils who are not coping well may present in a variety of different ways and it is therefore important to monitor individual pupils over time and make use of information from adults who know them well and can spot changes in their behaviour. Pupils may be demonstrating intense emotions for longer than would be expected, may be exhibiting difficulties focusing or be engaging in more risk-taking behaviours. As noted above individual changes and unusual behaviour for that pupil will be the most useful signs to watch out for.

The following provides some examples of helpful and unhelpful coping strategies, although it is recognised that schools will have their own strategies and interventions in place, and these should be used initially.

Helpful coping strategies	Unhelpful coping strategies
Talking to someone	Withdrawing from previously enjoyed activities
Putting a label on the emotion that is being felt 'name it to tame it'	Withdrawing from family and friends
Controlled breathing activities e.g.	Watching too much TV
Noticing feelings and accepting them	Not getting enough sleep, exercise or good nutrition
Asking questions	Ignoring feelings; bottling them up
Reassuring yourself that these feelings will not last forever	Keeping unusual sleeping patterns e.g. staying up all night
Getting enough sleep, exercise and nutrition	Playing computer games all the time
Positive activities to distract when feelings are overwhelming e.g. sports, hobbies, reading, music	Blaming yourself or other excessively
Maintaining a normal routine	Using substances to cope or to dull feelings
Take breaks	Doing risky or dangerous things
Relaxation activities e.g. guided meditation	Overly focusing on small details
Mindfulness and grounding activities e.g. 5 senses, body scan, progressive muscle relaxation	Comparing yourself negatively to others and how they are coping
Keep a diary or journal of thoughts and feelings	Not asking for help
Use coping strategies that have previously helped	

SUPPORT IN THE CLASSROOM

It is also useful to think about the set-up of the classroom and the expectations of the learning environment if a pupil, or if a group of pupils have experienced a critical incident or traumatic event. Many of the below strategies are also good practice for supporting social and emotional needs and will therefore benefit a wider range of pupils and act as preventative measures.

Open communication about feelings and emotions – children and young people may need to be taught emotional vocabulary over time, and to have a structured way of expressing these terms. PSHE lessons can be a good time to do this, although it is most effective when this learning features across the whole curriculum. First thing in the morning can be a helpful time to have a 'check-in' in which pupils identify how they are feeling, and by doing it at the start of the school day any issues can quickly be addressed.



Visuals – a pupil's ability to process verbal communication can be reduced when they are preoccupied by something, and this is common following a traumatic event. Ensuring that they are clear about the routine of the day, the expectations of a task, and have a way of asking for help are all features of the support that should be in place and can be aided by the use of visuals.

Visuals are also very helpful when supporting emotional literacy development and for children and young people who are less able to understand and express their emotions verbally. This may include having posters around the room which depict emotion words with facial expressions, emojis or colours. Scales of emotional intensity are also useful to have around the classroom to use with all pupils, although some will require an individualised version.

Praise – the use of praise can support pupils in feeling more motivated to engage in learning leading to them experience success and then developing their intrinsic motivation. All praise is not equal however, and research indicates that praising the process and the skills a child is using to complete a task is more helpful than praising the outcome which can be experienced as a judgement on the child's ability. Ideas from growth mindset provide useful guidance in this area.

Safe space ('emotional regulation station') – another useful strategy to have in place at all times, but that is especially important for pupils transitioning back to school following a bereavement or other traumatic event, is the creation of a safe space within the classroom. Within this area it is important to have resources that allow a pupil to self-regulate how they are feeling, including a range of calming strategies (e.g. colouring, drawing, jigsaws, headphones and music, the option to chat with a friend, sensory objects).

In secondary settings this may be more appropriate to be identified as somewhere in the Learning Centre or pastoral office. For other pupils it the best approach may be to work with the young person to think of strategies they can use in the classroom so that rather than them withdrawing to a different area they can just take some time out within the classroom.

Focus on emotions, not behaviour – although the behaviour of pupils may be easy to see, it is important that adults seek to understand the feelings underlying behaviour. School staff can use the above strategies to gain this information from pupils, which will have the added benefit of increasing the ability of the pupil to better understand how they are feeling and to use more appropriate coping strategies in the future.

PUPILS WHO REQUIRE LONGER-TERM SUPPORT

Sometimes pupils will require ongoing support from a member of staff in school because they have been more deeply affected by an event. This is more likely to be appropriate if the pupil has suffered directly from a critical incident, or if they possess other characteristics that make them more vulnerable. Ongoing support may be appropriate alongside specialist support, but this will need to be clarified. Support offered in school that is longer term is likely to take the form of targeted work to develop a specific emotional literacy skill (e.g. identifying emotions, developing coping strategies), or to be a more flexible 'check-in'. It may also be considered appropriate to set up a group for pupils who have experienced similar circumstances to enable them to share these experiences and to support one another in developing coping strategies and adapting to a new way of life. It is important that pupil's consent to 1:1 and group work.

It is likely that this support will be offered by a member of staff who has additional training or experience in this area, but importantly should be someone who the pupil is able to form a relationship with. For this kind of support, it is more important that someone is able to listen with sympathy, empathy and support rather than knowing the 'right' thing to say.

Key points when supporting pupils:

- ✓ Be accepting and allow the pupil to express their emotions
- ✓ Ask open-ended questions
- ✓ Try and follow their lead, even if this means sitting in silence
- ✓ Only work with pupils if you feel able to manage your own emotions. It can be helpful to share difficult emotions you have had, but in a careful and restrained way.
- ✓ Use skills of active listening and reflect back what you are being told if a pupil is struggling to process or understand their feelings
- ✓ Explain the limits of confidentiality you have to adhere to
- ✓ Promote a healthy lifestyle (e.g. 5 ways to wellbeing)
- ✓ Help them to previous adaptive coping strategies that they have used. Questions to elicit this type of information might include:

"What have you done in the past to help yourself feel better when things were difficult?"

"What do you think would help you to feel better?"

"If it would be helpful, we could talk about strategies that other people find useful to deal with difficult situations. Would that be helpful for you?"

"People can be very different in what helps them to feel better. When things get difficult for me, it has helped me to . . . Do you think something like that would work for you?"

- ✓ If appropriate, to reduce dependency, agree the length of time that you will be supporting them for
- ✓ Similarly, encourage a pupil to identify others that they can seek support from
- ✓ Be an advocate for the pupil, communicating with other members of staff if needed
- ✓ Ensure that holidays, anniversaries or other events that might trigger distress for the pupil are planned for

EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES

When supporting a child or young person to process a loss, or other difficult event there are a number of creative activities that can be used to help them process and manage their feelings. When supporting a pupil who has been bereaved creating something which helps them to remember positive feelings about the person can be helpful. This could include:

- Provide younger children with play equipment including small figures, dolls houses or art materials to provide them with a way to **'play-out'** the feelings they are having.
- Creating a **lapbook**, **memory book** or **memory box** which includes things that remind them of the person who has died.
- Listening to music, looking through cards or **sharing memories** that remind them of the person.
- Reading a **story book** which describes a similar situation to that which the pupil has experienced (see Resource list). These can provide a new perspective but are also reassuring in that they tend to feature a character who is feeling the same way and can normalise those emotions for the pupil.
- Using the idea of **'growing around grief'** and creating visual representations using different sized jars and balls.

Following other traumatic events, the following activities can be useful:

- Practising **relaxation** and **calming activities** e.g. breathing, progression muscle relaxation, guided meditation.
- Helping the child or young person to **identify people** who care for and support them, for instance through drawing around their hand and labelling each finger with a different person.
- Creating a **mantra** with a young person that they can remind themselves of when they are struggling.
- Talking about and recording **positive memories** and things they are looking forward to.
- Activities focused on reflecting on **personal strengths** and ability to cope, e.g. through using sentence starters "a challenge I have overcome ..."
- Using a **weekly planner** and thinking about ways to incorporate the **'5 ways to well-being'** and other positive and restorative activities.
- Opportunities to express how they are feeling in an extended manner e.g. **writing, drawing, acting**.

WHEN SOMEONE IS UNWILLING TO ACCEPT SUPPORT

There are a number of reasons why someone may be reluctant to seek support. This could include not knowing what support they need, feeling embarrassed or guilty about receiving help, thinking that others need help more than they do, not knowing where to ask for help or how, feeling that they have already received help so shouldn't ask for more, doubting that support will even help them, feeling that no one will understand. If you feel that a pupil would benefit from further support but is displaying an unwillingness, it might be helpful to speak to them and try to identify together:

- The type of support that would be the most helpful
- Who could offer this type of support
- When and how they could ask for this support

SUPPORTING SCHOOL STAFF

The role of teaching and support staff will go far above the usual demands of the curriculum following a traumatic event. Whilst for some this will feel natural and something they embrace; others will find it more challenging. During and after an emergency, teachers and other staff are a critical link in promoting resilience, in recognizing the signs of traumatic stress, and in helping students and their families regain a sense of normalcy.

However, supporting others following on from a critical incident or trauma is especially difficult if you have also experienced that event in some way, if you have personally experienced something similar recently or if current events trigger older, unprocessed feelings. School staff need to be reminded of the emotional strain that they may feel from being exposed to distressing stories from pupils. It is important to consider staff development in relation to emotional support and containment of pupils on a regular basis, because this will improve their ability to understand and manage emotions and behaviour during 'normal' times, but also following on from a crisis. It is vital that adults show congruence in what they are saying and how they are behaving and ensuring that staff have a full understanding of this, and when to seek help is necessary. In the immediate aftermath of an incident staff will often act on 'autopilot', ensuring that the needs of pupils are met. This does not mean that they are managing their own emotions effectively even if it appears so at the surface level.

In the event of a critical incident it is important for the senior management team to meet staff individually, and in small groups, away from pupils. Much of the same information that needs to be conveyed to students also needs to be shared with staff, this includes:

- Promote a sense of safety and provide psychoeducation about emotional reactions and stress.
- Acknowledge fears and worries about personal safety or health issues.
- Find out what staff may specifically need and try to provide it.
- Secure the use of a landline telephone, cell phone, or email, as much is possible, so that they can contact and reassure family members that they are safe.
- Compliment their professionalism, protective instincts, and fast thinking.
- Recommend limiting "second guessing" or re-evaluating their actions "in hindsight."
- Provide information about coping strategies (see below).

Signs of stress:

Feeling lethargic and lacking energy
Disconnection from loved ones
Not wanting to spend time with family or friends
Negative thought patterns that are hard to shift
Feelings of despair and hopelessness
Difficulties sleeping or experiencing nightmare
Emotions that feel more intense and difficult to manage e.g. tearfulness

Helpful coping strategies

- ✓ Talk about your worries with friends, family, colleagues, or a professional
- ✓ Look after your physical wellbeing and try to maintain healthy patterns of behaviour including eating well, drinking enough water, exercising and reducing your intake of alcohol and caffeine
- ✓ Look after your sleep through trying to maintain regular sleeping patterns and keep good sleep hygiene practices
- ✓ Try to manage difficult feelings by focusing on the things you can control, including where you get information from and actions to make yourself feel better prepared
- ✓ Manage your media and information intake through setting limits around the time you spend watching, reading, or listening to media coverage, and seeking out credible sources of news
- ✓ Do things you enjoy
- ✓ Setting goals and achieving them gives a sense of control and purpose
- ✓ Keep your mind active through reading, writing, drawing, painting, doing puzzles or playing board games
- ✓ Take the time to relax and focus on the present
- ✓ Get outside or bring nature in. Spending time in green spaces can benefit both your mental and physical wellbeing

Unhelpful coping strategies

- × Ignoring strong emotions and hoping that they will pass
- × Telling yourself that how you feel isn't right, or that you shouldn't be feeling this way
- × Thinking that other people have lost more than you therefore you don't have the right to grieve
- × Withdrawing from your social supports
- × Not doing any of the things that you previously enjoyed
- × It is okay to acknowledge some things that are outside of your control but constant repetitive thoughts about the situation which lead you to feel anxious or overwhelmed are not helpful. Engaging in constant repetitive thinking which increases anxiety

Useful links:

For someone to talk to [NHS recommended helplines](#)

The [Every Mind Matters page](#) provides practical advice on how to improve your sleep

Relaxation resources from [Every Mind Matters](#) and [NHS' mindfulness page](#).

The [Every Mind Matters page on anxiety](#) and [NHS mental wellbeing audio guides](#) provide further information on how to manage anxiety

IDEAS FROM ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY (ACT)

- We can't **prevent** ourselves from experiencing difficult thoughts and feelings, but we can change how we **relate to them** and choose where we **focus our attention**.
- It is more helpful to focus our attention on things that are **in our control** including:
 - What we do in the here and now
 - How we deal with our thoughts and feelings – notice and acknowledge them in a non-judgemental manner, as well as noticing and connecting with the way our body feels. Refocus through engaging with the senses and fully focusing on the task that you are doing.
 - How we engage with the outer world
- Rather than things which are outside of our control including what might happen in the future, other people's behaviour, our thoughts and feelings (until we make a conscious effort to change these), we can choose to focus our attention on pursuing goals and actions that fit with our values.

SUPPORTING THE WHOLE-SCHOOL COMMUNITY

How the wider school community responds and copes with an incident is important for the coping of individuals within it. Some useful points to consider within your setting is how to:

- Promote tolerance and acceptance of individual recovery, and the understanding that some people will need a lot longer.
- Encourage students and staff to support one another and promote the importance of social support. This could be facilitated through specific events as well as the school ethos.
- Encourage everyone to look out for others and to be watchful for signs that someone may not be managing.
- Think about ways to minimise the impact of students missing certain 'milestone' events or other school celebrations (e.g. exams, prom, special assemblies). Where possible relocate or postpone such events.

FUNERALS AND SCHOOL MEMORIALS

Settings may choose to hold school-wide functions to memorialise events. These events have the potential to re-traumatise those who were involved, especially for children. As such, if you are to hold one of these events in your setting it is important to monitor students and staff who attend, and to engage with any who find the experience difficult in a sensitive way. It may be that additional support, including using psychoeducational materials (information about understanding their feelings and coping strategies) are then provided or worked through. It is important to speak with the family of the deceased to ensure that anything you organise is in line with their wishes and any cultural beliefs they hold.

Whilst memorials and commemoration are important it is generally understood that permanent memorials should be avoided due to the changing and dynamic nature of school communities. In the case of a major event which is likely to hold ongoing significance to a community this may be appropriate. Similarly, living memorials (e.g. trees) tend not to be advised due to the ongoing maintenance they require and the possibility that their health may become an issue. With any memorial it is important to make clear from the start that it is temporary and will be in place for a limited time.

Ideas for memorials¹⁰:

- An assembly to celebrate the person or to commemorate the event
- A memorial service for families and the wider school community
- A condolence book
- An event which relates to something that was important to the person, or something that raises money for a charity related to the nature of the bereavement
- A memory box in which notes, photos, drawings, poems etc. can be collected
- Naming an award or holding an event in memory of someone

¹⁰ Memorials should only be created following consultation and agreement from the family and friends of the person who has died.

SECTION 6 – RESOURCES AND USEFUL LINKS

USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

[Jigsaw4U](#) - a charity that provides a wide variety of services across the London Boroughs of Merton and Sutton

[Child Bereavement UK](#) – organisation set up to help children and young people (up to age 25), parents, and families, to rebuild their lives when a child grieves or when a child dies

[Hope Again](#) – youth website of [Cruse Bereavement Care](#) for young people to learn from other young people how to cope with grief and feel less alone

[Winston's Wish](#) – help for grieving children, young people and families

[Grief Encounter](#) – organisation offering counselling, workshops, therapy, and helpline service to support bereaved children and young people

[Papyrus](#) – charity for the prevention of young suicide. For support through HOPELINEUK call 0800 068 4141 (open 9am - midnight every day of the year).

[Samaritans](#) – helpline service for anyone who needs to talk. For support call 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org

USEFUL RESOURCES

[Psychological First Aid for Schools \(PFA-S\) Field Operations Guide](#)

'A teacher's handbook of death' Jackson and Colwell

'Grief in School Communities: Effective support strategies' Rowling

'Supporting Bereaved Children: A handbook for primary school' Brown

'Mind Matters - Loss and Grief' Harvey

'Draw On Your Emotions' Margot Sutherland.

'Brief Interventions with Bereaved Children' - Barbara Monroe and Frances Kraus.

'Out Of The Blue – Making Memories Last When Someone Dies' – Stokes and Oxley.

[Video and animations](#) compiled by Child Bereavement UK

TERMINAL ILLNESS AND WHEN SOMEONE IS NOT EXPECTED TO LIVE

'My Brother and Me' by Sarah Courtauld – a pre-bereavement book to help children understand how they and their family might feel when someone is seriously ill.

'When you Mum or Dad has Cancer' by Ann Couldrick – a book for children aged 7 and older, explaining cancer and answering many of the questions a child might have.

'As Big as it Gets' by Winston's Wish – a short booklet providing information about how to cope with the serious illness of a parent or child.

'When Someone has a Very Serious Illness' Heegard

[Riprap website](#) to support children when a parent has cancer

[Macmillan Cancer](#) website offering information and support

BEREAVEMENT

'Teenage Guide to Coping with Bereavement' by Child Bereavement UK – guidance for young people about managing confusing emotions.

'Someone I know has Died' by Trish Phillips – an activity book for very young children to help them understand what dead means, what we do and how we might feel.

'Remembering' by Child Bereavement UK – an illustrated memory book for primary aged children which provides a way of recording memories about someone special.

'When Someone Very Special Dies' by Marge Heegard – a workbook for children to express the feelings, they have when someone special to them has died.

'I Miss my Sister' by Sarah Courtauld – a book for children to be shared with an adult to start conversations about loss and bereavement.

'A Child's Grief: Supporting a child when someone in their family has died' by Julie Stokes and Diana Crossley – a booklet containing ideas about how to support children following a bereavement.

'Badger's Parting Gifts' – story book in which a badger realises that his old age will soon lead to death. His friends learn to come to terms with his death and he lives on in all they have learned from him.

'Always and Forger' – story book. When Fox dies, Otter, Mole and Hare remember the things he used to do. In their hearts and memories and laughter he will always be there.

'Good Grief – Exploring Feelings Loss and Death with Under 11s' Ward (separate book for over 11's).

'Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine' Crossley

'As Big As it Gets' Stokes and Crossley

'Hand in Hand: Supporting children and young people who have a learning difficulty through the experience of bereavement' – Pentland and Druce.

'Let's Talk About DEATH' - A leaflet produced by Scottish Down's Syndrome Association

SUICIDE

'Building Suicide-Safer Schools' A guide for school staff by Papyrus. Accessible: <https://papyrus-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/toolkitfinal.pdf>

'Help is at Hand: a resource for people bereaved by suicide and other sudden, traumatic death' by Keith Hawton and Sue Simkin – supportive guide.

'Beyond the Rough Rock – Supporting a child who has been bereaved through suicide' Crossley and Stokes

OTHER TRAUMATIC EVENTS

'Terrorism and War: How to Talk to Children' [website](#) by American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

'After a murder: A workbook for grieving kids' Dougy Center for Grieving Children

'Someone has Died in a Road Crash' Williams and Chisholm

'No New Baby' Gryte

'Hope Beyond the Headlines: supporting a child bereaved through murder or manslaughter' - Stubbs, Nugus & Gardner. (Winston's Wish)



SUICIDE POSTVENTION SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS AND EDUCATION STAFF

Resource	Type	Link/ Contact	Availability
Workplace Options Up to 6 sessions of counselling are available to Sutton employees if triaged as appropriate, give them a call for a chat or contact through their web pages.	Counselling, online resources	https://www.workplaceoptions.com/	All schools that use Sutton Council's Insurance Team's service have access to Workplace Options - list
South West London Suicide Bereavement Liaison Service The Suicide Bereavement Liaison Service aims to support individuals and families bereaved by suicide and link them to relevant services.	One-to-one support	https://www.swlondon.nhs.uk/ourwork/suicide-prevention/bereavement-liaison-service/ Phone on 07753 650951 Email sbls@bwwmind.org.uk	Individuals and families bereaved by suicide living or working in South West London
Help is at hand. A resource for people bereaved through suicide or other unexplained death, and for those helping them.	PDF Support Guide	https://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Suicide/Documents/Help%20is%20at%20Hand.pdf	All Printed copies available upon request
First Hand A support guide for people who have witnessed a suicide of someone they didn't know	PDF Support Guide	https://nspa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/SASP_BookletToSupportWitnesses_A5_2021_WEB.pdf	All
Support after suicide Website offers information and support for anyone impacted by a suicide.	Written Guidance and support	https://supportaftersuicide.org.uk/	All
UK Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide	Online resources	https://uksobs.org/	All
Education Support When you call you'll talk to a qualified counsellor. We'll offer you immediate, confidential emotional support.	Helpline and online resources	https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/ Helpline: 08000 562 561	Teachers and education staff
Cruse We have volunteers who are trained in all types of bereavement	Helpline	Helpline: 0808 808 1677 CruseChat -Chat online with expert grief counsellors.	All



<p>Samaritans We offer confidential, non-judgemental, listening 24/7, 365 days a year.</p>	<p>Helpline</p>	<p>www.samaritans.org Call for free on 116 123.</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>At a loss Chat live to a specially trained GriefChat bereavement counsellor. It is a completely free service and available Monday-Friday, 9am-9pm.</p>	<p>Livechat</p>	<p>https://www.ataloss.org/live-chat</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) Talk to CALM from 5pm to midnight everyday. Our professional helpline workers are there to talk and to help you find ways to move forward.</p>	<p>Helpline, webchat</p>	<p>www.thecalmzone.net Need help? Call our helpline 5pm–midnight, 365 days a year on 0800 58 58 58</p>	<p>London 0808 8025858 National 0800 585858</p>
<p>Our Frontline Provide 24/7 emotional support, by call or text with trained volunteers, or online resources, to frontline worker</p>	<p>Helpline</p>	<p>https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/toolkit/ourfrontline-education/ text KEYWORKER to 85258 or call 116 123, any time, night or day.</p>	<p>All/ teacher specific support</p>
<p>Shout Free text service for anyone in crisis.</p>	<p>Text support service.</p>	<p>https://giveusashout.org/ Text SHOUT to 85258</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>Coroners support service Offers emotional support and practical help to bereaved families, witnesses and others attending an Inquest at a Coroner’s Court.</p>	<p>Helpline</p>	<p>https://coronerscourtsupportservice.org.uk/ Helpline 0300 111 2141 Email helpline@ccss.org.uk</p>	<p>Those attending an Inquest at a Coroner’s Court.</p>
<p>Educational Psychology Service Part of the Critical Incident support offer for schools. This usually begins with consultation with senior leaders and may involve meetings over time, emotional support for leaders as well as signposting, support communicating with staff and sometimes work with other groups within the school community e.g., information session for parents.</p>	<p>Consultation, signposting</p>	<p>Email Principal Educational Psychologist: Nicholas.english@cognus.org</p>	<p>An initial consultation within 24 hours of the event during term time, and as soon as possible out of school term time.</p>
<p>Papyrus Charity for the prevention of suicide in young people, who also offer a debrief service for professionals, parents/carers and young people.</p>	<p>Telephone support, email support, online resources</p>	<p>Call HOPELINEUK on 0800 068 4141, text 07860 039967 or email pat@papyrus-uk.org</p>	<p>Every day of the year from 9am to midnight</p>