



Critical Incidents Guide for School



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**Royal Borough
of Windsor &
Maidenhead**

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Critical Incidents

What is a Critical Incident?

A **Critical Incident** is a sudden unexpected event that is distressing to pupils and staff. It may be an event that attracts large media attention e.g. violent crime or traumatic accident or it may be a smaller event causing significant personal upset.

Examples of critical incidents include:

- A student/staff member lost or injured during a school trip
- Student or staff suicide
- Sudden death of a member of the school community
- The terminal illness of a student or staff member
- A violent attack or violent intrusion onto the school premises
- A disaster close to the school e.g. major transport accident, terrorism

In serious incidents, schools and Children's Services need to act in partnership. Schools are required to have an up to date **Emergency Plan**. Guidance regarding the plan is available at www.gov.uk/emergencies-and-severe-weather-schools-and-early-years-settings (updated December 2015).

The Educational Psychology Service has written this guide to support you through any critical incident that may take place in your school community.

Initial response to a Critical Incident

It is important to draw a distinction between the kinds of incidents listed above and major civil emergencies requiring a multi-agency response e.g. a plane crash, a nuclear accident. The RBWM Emergency Planning Officer has prepared plans for such eventualities.

Schools are not expected to cope alone with all critical incidents, especially those that involve loss of life or attract extensive media interest. The head teacher may want to seek support from the Educational Psychology Team, Counselling Service or Social Care depending on the incident.

The head teacher, or the person dealing with the incident, should telephone 07926 075 218 (Psychology & Wellbeing Service) during office hours and explain that a critical incident has occurred.

The school can expect a prompt response from either one of our trained Educational Psychologists or the Director of Children's Service/Head of Service, dependent on the critical incident and immediate availability.

Please note: RBWM academy and maintained schools will be able to access a free critical incident trauma informed systemic consultation. All other RBWM located education or community providers including private schools and colleges can be offered a critical incident systemic trauma informed consultation on a charged basis (£200 for a 1.5 hour Consultation) to support the Senior Management Team with the CI and in developing a support plan.

Developing a Critical Incident Policy

You may find it helpful to:

- Define which events constitute a critical incident for your particular school.
- Outline your aims and objectives.
- Establish your core “critical incident” response team and assign the roles they would play should an incident arise.
- Make a list of the support agencies and personnel that you will need to contact in the event of an emergency.

The following resources have useful information about policy development:

- Yule, W. & Gold, A. “Wise Before the Event” (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation 1993). Pages 27 – 57 give guidance on what schools can do.
- Kibble, D. “Safety & Disaster Management in Schools and Colleges” (David Fulton, 1998)
- Killick, S. & Lindeman, S. “ Giving Sorrow Words” (Lucky Duck Publishing Ltd, 1999). Section 8 pp 20 – 24 give framework for a bereavement policy.
- Death and Bereavement in Schools – a policy document (Principal Education Ltd)

The Educational Psychology Team are able to advise and support schools on the development of their School Emergency Plan and / or their Bereavement Policy. Please contact your liaison link EP if you would like help and have purchased a Core+ package.

Critical Incidents and the curriculum

The Education Act (1996) emphasizes the use of the curriculum to promote a child’s personal, social and physical well-being. This includes helping children to develop the skills that they need to cope with issues of loss, change and bereavement.

Building on this, the Department for Education guidance (September 2013) indicates the need for schools to develop their own Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) curricula and have grant funded the PSHE Association, www.pshe-association.org.uk to support schools in doing this.

There are many materials available on line that can be used as part of the normal curriculum and are invaluable in helping children to understand and deal with the difficult emotions surrounding loss, bereavement and guilt. Such materials could also be used, with care, in specific circumstances, such as when incidents happen. Specific materials support the development of self-awareness and the management of change, e.g. the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning available from the National Archives (google ‘Social and emotional aspects of learning SEAL).

Sensitive subjects are best covered with children and young people in smaller groups so that they have opportunities to ask questions.

A good general resource for how to include issues of loss and bereavement within the National Curriculum is Barbara Ward's "Good Grief" books. These are published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Good Grief 1 ISBN 1 85302 324 8

Good Grief 2 ISBN 1 85302 340 X

Responding to traumatic events

Common physical reactions during trauma

When we experience a threatening event, our bodies automatically respond in a way that helps us to protect ourselves or to prepare to escape from the situation. This is often called the "fight, flight or freeze" response.

Our bodies produce excess adrenaline at such times, which results in an increase in heart rate, blood pressure, muscle tension and breathing rate.

During an extremely traumatic event this reaction will be very strong. Common physiological reactions may include: pounding heart, trembling, shaking, fast breathing, sweating, nausea.

Psychological Responses to traumatic stress

Common reactions include intense fear, disbelief, numbness, anger and confusion. These are normal reactions to an abnormal situation. Individuals may experience such reactions for a number of days, and even weeks following the trauma.

A great deal of research in recent years has led to a greater understanding about the effect of events that seriously affect the safety of individuals, their families, colleagues or friends.

It is acknowledged that there are common responses to severe stress but that the manifestation of stress will vary from individual to individual.

Understanding that everyone has a difficult time following a shock (although some people disguise it well) can help to reduce the feelings of isolation and further anxieties about the feelings experienced.

Some of the commonly reported feelings in adults include:

- *Anxiety or fear* of being alone or in other frightening situations, of danger to ourselves and those we care about, or of a similar event happening again
- *Being easily startled* by loud noises or sudden movements that remind one of the traumatic event
- *Flashbacks* where images of the traumatic event come suddenly into mind for no apparent reason, or where one mentally re-experiences the event
- *Physical symptoms* such as tense muscles, trembling or shaking, diarrhoea, constipation, nausea, headaches, sweating, tiredness

- *Lack of interest* in usual activities, including loss of appetite and, for adults, loss of sexual interest
- *Sadness* or feelings of loss or aloneness
- *Shock* or disbelief at what has happened, feeling numb or unreal, or feeling isolated or detached from other people
- *Sleep problems* including getting to sleep, staying asleep, dreams or nightmares
- *Problems with thinking*, in concentrating or remembering things
- *Preoccupation* with trauma
- *Guilt and self-doubt* for not having acted in some way during the trauma, or for being better off than others, or feeling responsible for another person's loss, injury or death
- *Anger* or irritability at what has happened; at the senselessness of it all; at what caused the event to happen, often asking "Why me?"

Children respond to trauma too. However, because they have not developed the same conceptual skills as adults, they may have more difficulty articulating their feelings. Their feelings may be shown through behaviour rather than words and these behaviours will vary with the age of the child.

Behaviours might include:

- Regression to the behaviour of a younger child
- Being more naughty or aggressive
- Being withdrawn and reluctant to talk
- Sleep problems
- Clinginess
- Poor concentration
- Changes in appetite
- Worrying about being safe
- Unwillingness to go to school

All of these are normal reactions to an abnormal and distressing event. For many people these will be short-lived. Some however, may have more severe and lasting reactions. General Practitioners can usually suggest a range of support services that might be available.

Although we cannot always know how we will be affected by traumatic events it is useful to think about what has proved helpful for us personally in any stressful events we have experienced in the past. This thinking generates ideas that can form the foundation for a personal plan about our own need for support after a traumatic incident e.g. time and space to think, talking to colleagues, friends, or to someone independent.

What should I do immediately after the incident?

Suggestions that you may find helpful:

- Don't go home to an empty house, ask a friend or relative to stay with you.
- Remind yourself you are safe now.
- Talk about how you are feeling with someone you trust.
- Spend time with other people, coping with stressful events is easier when people support each other, sometimes just by being together.
- Sharing and listening to others who have been involved in the incident can help to get the facts clear and put things in perspective.
- If possible keep to your usual routines, as this familiarity can be soothing.
- Consider the support you need from colleagues, family, friends, church, or other community resources.
- Try to eat nourishing food, as stress uses up a lot of energy.
- Take time to walk, stretch, exercise, and relax, even if just for a few minutes at a time, as this will help release tension and minimize anxiety.
- Avoid the use of alcohol; the effect of alcohol is heightened at times of significant stress.
- Make sure you get enough rest and sleep because people often need more sleep than usual when stressed. If this is difficult, do something relaxing until you feel tired.
- Do some things that you enjoy e.g. have a warm bath, listen to music, go for a walk, sit quietly, or spend time with your family pet
- Accidents are more common following a traumatic incident so take great care if driving.

In the days following the event

- If you begin to feel anxious do some breathing exercises. Focus on the intake of several deep breaths and on the letting go of tension as you breathe out
- Don't make any big decisions for a time
- Re-establish routines but take tasks on gradually and in small steps so you don't do too many things at once.
- Remind yourself that your reactions are the normal result of experiencing traumatic events and will pass in time.
- Continue to build in things that are enjoyable and relaxing.

Initiating the Emergency Plan

Possible Procedures to be followed (adapted from: *Wise Before the Event– Yule and Gould*) **Short Term – within 12 hours**

- Give yourself time to deal with memories of the event and ask for the support you feel you need in the days following the incident.
- Gather accurate information
- Assess situation, deliver first aid if necessary
- Call emergency services
- Mobilise Critical Incident Response Team
- Ensure safety of all staff and students
- If it is a critical incident off-site, contact police to gain information
- Notify Education Directorate and Governors
- Contact parents of those people involved in incident
- Determine what information is to be shared and how (staff, students, parents, Community, media). Ensure that communications have taken into account the wishes of the family.
- Contact Children's Services Business support or the EPS if you would like support to
 - help to plan the reestablishment of normal routines
 - identify vulnerable students and staff
 - give adults and children an opportunity to talk through what has happened

Medium Term – 24 to 72 hours

- Hold meetings for students and parents
- Arrange meetings and provide support with those staff directly involved with the incident
- Arrange daily briefing meetings for staff to inform and discuss intervention plans > Make arrangements for any returns to school
- Agree referral procedures for staff and students for individual support

Longer Term – 72 hours plus

- Attend/organise condolences, memorials, visits to families/hospitals etc
- Continue to monitor staff and students for signs of stress
- Evaluate crisis response
- "Debrief" critical incident response team
- Review School Emergency Plan and procedures
- Plan for, and be sensitive to, the disturbing influence of anniversaries, inquests etc.

Working with Children after a Critical Incident

- ***Children need an opportunity to discuss what has happened.*** Helping them to share and discuss what they know in a supportive environment will help them to understand the experience and increase their coping skills. Pupils need to know that adults value their questions and their opinions. Equally pupils need to feel that they can choose not to talk if they prefer.

- **Normal Classroom routines should be established as soon as possible**
- **The curriculum may need to be adjusted and adapted.** Children will enjoy the comfort of the “familiar” and may find it difficult to take on board new concepts and new ideas.
- **Encourage involvement in usual extra curricular activities** but do not force them to join in.
- **For younger children toys and drawing can provide them with an outlet to express their feelings**
- **Maintain the school behaviour code.** It is likely that there will be an increase in arguments and aggressive behaviour as people come to terms with their emotions. Acknowledging that a child might be feeling sad or angry about what has happened, but that the behaviour is not appropriate, is important. You may be able to offer the child alternative behaviours that would be more helpful.

Informing children about traumatic events

When children hear sad news they need reassurance from adults. It is difficult to tell children things that may be upsetting and, therefore, it is advisable for staff to work in pairs. One adult can break the news; the other adult can monitor the group and provide support for his/her colleague.

- **Deal with your own anxieties first.** In order to help others you need to consider your own reactions and feelings. You may want to discuss these with a friend, a colleague or someone else first.
- **Address the practicalities of time and place.** Pupils are usually best informed in the smallest groups possible – classes, tutor groups or year groups. Some classes, tutor groups or year groups may be more directly affected by the incident and will benefit from extra consideration, support and sensitive handling of information. For such groups, you may wish to involve other adults, perhaps from outside agencies such as members of the Educational Psychology Service, in informing the pupils of the incident. Children with previous bereavement/loss/separation experiences and those with special educational needs may also need extra support. Siblings and other close relatives of victims should be informed separately, and where possible, in liaison with parents.
- **Prepare well and check facts.** Try and find out what they already might know or think. For instance, has the incident had media coverage? Are there rumours circulating? Check with other adults so that you can give children the truth, as you know it. You may not know everything and it is okay to tell children that you do not know. Rehearse what you might say and think about the age group of the children you will be talking to.
- **Give only essential information.** Keep it simple and avoid jargon and euphemisms. The essential elements to cover are what happened, how it happened, why it happened and what happens next.
- **Keep a close eye on the group.** Look out for children known to be vulnerable, and those that might be sensationalist.
- **Take the lead from the children.** Answer questions but take things slowly so as not to overwhelm them. Children need more time to process information when they are anxious.
- **Provide reassurance and comfort**
- **Share their feelings** e.g. “it makes me feel very sad for and the family / it will be especially sad for them”.
- **Talk about what you might do as a school** e.g. make cards, write poems etc.
- **Let parents know what you have told the children.** It will make it easier for them to support their children. In this pack there is an advice leaflet for parents.

- ***Find time to reflect on what you have done.*** This is difficult work and it is helpful to sit down and talk with a colleague or friend afterwards. An Educational Psychologist may be on site to help you reflect as well.

How the Educational Psychology Team help you

Training (*available to schools who have purchased time from the EPS*)

We can offer training to individual schools, or groups of schools, about:

- Loss and Bereavement
- Managing Critical Incidents in a School Setting
- Working with children who have terminal illnesses

Support for schools where there is a critical incident and a significant number of distressed pupils and staff

Our teams are prepared to support any borough school in these events. Our response is geared to helping you, as a school, cope with the crisis and resume a normal working environment.

When we know that you would like support we will negotiate with you the nature of that support. It is likely that two psychologists will work with the school staff. The work is usually brief in its nature and we do not offer long- term counselling. If it is felt this is required the Counselling Service should be contacted. There are also further organisations that can offer support listed at the end of this document.

Support for Major Disasters

If there were a major disaster then all of our work would be led by the RBWM Emergency Planning team.

Additional information

We have a small number of helpful resources which can be downloaded from RBWM Local Offer, including:

- A leaflet outlining how to help children when someone they know has died
- A leaflet outlining how to talk to children when someone has died.

Link to the Local Offer: https://rbwm.afcinfo.org.uk/local_offer

Reading list

Key References

Barnard, Morland & Nagy, *Children, Bereavement and Trauma –Nurturing Resilience*
Cathcart, F *Understanding Death and Dying*
Job, N & Frances, G *Childhood Bereavement (National Children’s Bureau)*
Killick & Lindeman *Giving Sorrow Words*
Dyregov, A *Grief in Children*
Johnson, K *Trauma in the Lives of Children*

Books for Adults:

Mary Kelly Perschy, *Helping Teens through Grief*
Zagdanski, D *Stuck for Words*
Leaman, O *Death and Loss – Compassionate Approaches in the Classroom*
Ward, B *Good Grief 1*
Good Grief 2
Wells, R *Helping Children cope with Grief*
Pennells & Smith *The Forgotten Mourners*
Goldman, L *Breaking the Silence*
Johnson, K *Trauma in the lives of Children*
Holland, J *Coping with Bereavement, a handbook for teachers* Durkin, Warner & Sharkey *Children’s Experiences of Separation and Loss*

Books for Children:

There are very useful booklists on both the Child Bereavement website and Daisy’s Dream website, details of which are on the Useful Addresses Page.

Contact Us

Educational Psychology Service, Town Hall, St Ives Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire, SL6 1RF

Tel: 07926 075 218

Email: edpsych@achievingforchildren.org.uk

Further information about the EPS can be found on the Windsor and Maidenhead website or SEND Local Offer.

Useful addresses and websites

Amparo (Support following suicide)

0330 088 9255

<https://amparo.org.uk/>

British Red Cross

Support & advice for emergencies

On-line training materials for students

British Red Cross

UK Office

44 Moorfields

London, EC2Y 9AL

0844 871 11 11

www.redcross.org.uk

CAMHS

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team

Fir Tree House, Upton Hospital

Albert Street

Slough

SL1 2BJ

0300 365 0300

Crisis after 5pm: 0300 365 9999

www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care

PO Box 800

Richmond, Surrey

TW9 1RG

020 8939 9530

(Maidenhead Branch 01628-670410)

www.cruse.org.uk

Daisy's Dream

Supporting bereavement for children & young people

PO Box 4738

Twyford, Reading

RG10 9GT

0118 934 2604

www.daisysdream.org.uk

Victim Support

08081 689111

www.victimsupport.org.uk

The Elephants Tea Party (Child Bereavement Charity)

Clare Charity Centre

Wycombe Road

Saunderton, Buckinghamshire

HP14 4BF

01494 568 900

www.childbereavementuk.org

Samaritans

08457 909090

Samaritan Step by Step programme:

Supporting schools following a suicide

08081 682528

www.samaritans.org

MindEd

Information & training portal for anybody working with children and young people's mental health [issues. www.minded.org.uk](http://www.minded.org.uk)

Winston's Wish

Supporting bereavement for children & young people

17 Royal Crescent

Cheltenham

GL50 3DA

08088 020021

01242 515517

www@winstonswish.org