

Critical Incident Response Support: information for schools

Jersey Psychology and Wellbeing Service

May 2020

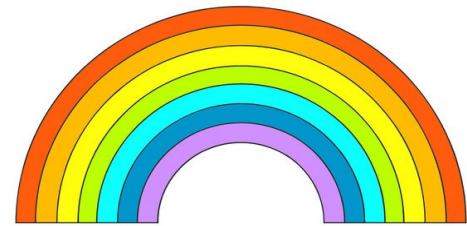
Critical Incidents

A Critical Incident is a single incident or a sequence of incidents which:

- Are sudden and unexpected.
- Contain real or imagined threats to a person.
- Overwhelm usual coping mechanisms.
- Cause severe disruption.
- Are traumatic to anyone.

Critical Incidents may include:

- Death of a pupil, a family member, a close friend or a member of school staff.
- A serious accident involving pupils or school personnel, on or off school premises.
- A violent attack or intrusion into premises e.g. armed intruder or bomb alert.
- Fire, flood, building collapse, or major vandalism.
- A disaster in the community.
- A health pandemic such as COVID-19 (Coronavirus).



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Providing Information to Pupils

- Depending on the nature and timing of the incident, some pupils may already know or suspect that something untoward has happened. As above it is important to ensure that accurate information, containing facts, rather than speculation, is disseminated.
- Inform close friends and close friends of any siblings, individually or in small groups.
- Inform other pupils with factual information calmly and sensitively – if possible within their form or class groups, rather than in large groups (e.g. whole school assemblies).
- When talking to groups of pupils, ensure there are at least two adults available. Ideally, one adult should be known to them.

Informing Parents and Carers

- Prepare a sensitively written letter informing parents / carers of the facts of the incident, on the same day. Depending on the circumstances, it may also be necessary to provide additional health information, or contact numbers where such information can be obtained. This is particularly important where parents/ carers may have concerns for their own child's health or well-being – for example in the case of known or suspected meningitis.
- The families of close friends or class members of the pupil(s) / staff who have died may also be reassured to be provided with information about how to support each other regarding loss and bereavement.
- Remember that churches and other religious, or community based groups, may be able to provide support at this time, but be sensitive and alert to religious and/or cultural sensitivities for individual families.

Supporting Pupils and Staff

- It is generally felt that keeping as much 'normal structure' as possible to the school's day is beneficial – this is to ensure some stability in the lives of pupils at a time of crisis. Although it may not be possible for much learning to occur, it is important that the usual routine - lessons, breaks, lunch-times etc. – is kept.
- Feelings and expressions of grief are normal, appropriate and healthy.
- As with any 'emotionally charged' experience, it is important for staff to remain aware of confidentiality issues, and respond appropriately to information or concerns shared with them by their pupils.
- Identify and make available designated places for children to go for reflection time, or for expressions of emotion. This will reduce the likelihood of whole classes becoming increasingly upset through the expressed grief of a small number of its members. Consider using a book or a blank display board to share memories and thoughts.
- Allow children the 'benefit of the doubt' if unsure as to whether or not their response is genuine. Some children / young people may use the event as an opportunity to avoid normal lessons, but this is usually quite rare.
- Offer appropriate reassurance and have plenty of tissues available.
- Keep staff regularly updated and supported. Providing comfort for distressed pupils is a difficult and draining task; all staff – including the senior management team, need the opportunity to express their own feelings. Having the time and space for this to happen is essential.
- Be alert for individual staff or pupils who may be particularly vulnerable to such events due to their own particular circumstances.

During the Days Following the Event

- It is important to try and re-establish normality within the running of the school. However, it is likely that continued opportunities for pupils to take 'time-out', and the availability of extra support, will be needed.
- Contact families directly effected to express sympathy.
- Ensure that a member of staff makes **contact** with any pupils who may have been affected if they are at home or in hospital.
- Arrange a sensitive return to school or alternative teaching if necessary.
- Establish procedures for identifying and monitoring the wellbeing of vulnerable pupils.
- Encourage pupils and staff to be open with their **feelings and memories** e.g. a collection of photographs. Some children may not know that they are 'allowed' to talk about the person who died. They should be.
- Ascertain details of the funeral arrangements. Allowing children and young people to attend the funeral may help in their grieving process. If the friends/classmates wish to attend, the permission of their parents needs to be obtained.
- It is recommended that pupils in primary schools are collected by, and attend the funeral, with their parents, taking them home afterwards if necessary. Secondary schools may be able to arrange transport and staffing to enable their pupils to attend. Links with Jersey Youth Service may also be helpful.
- An after-school meeting (arranged with relevant support staff if required) for parents to discuss practical concerns and / or bereavement issues may be helpful. Although the numbers attending may be small, this provision has been highly valued by parents.
- Continue to ensure that staff members have the opportunity (perhaps with the help of outside support) to deal with their own feelings, both about the incident and the distress of the pupils.



Subsequent Weeks and Months

The impact of the 'critical incident' is likely to continue to be felt for a considerable time.

- It will be important to **be vigilant** and to monitor pupils and staff so that any signs or symptoms of delayed grieving can be identified, and appropriate action taken. Pupils should be clear about who they can talk to, and those providing the listening service, need to be clear about their role, boundaries and confidentiality issues.
- Good **home-school links** will encourage the early reporting of difficulties being experienced in the home.
- Be aware of the potential power of anniversaries of the incident, or of the deceased person's birthday etc. in reawakening feelings of distress.
- Consider whether a school-based **memorial** would be helpful and appropriate. Always check this out with the family first. This could take the form of a service or ceremony, dedicated piece of equipment or furniture, an award, an area of the school grounds etc. Planning a memorial can, in itself, be a therapeutic act and such an event can acknowledge that an incident is over.

Long-Term Impact

The effects of trauma can manifest as:

- Re-experiencing of the trauma.
- Numbing of responsiveness to, or reduced involvement with, the external world beginning sometime after the trauma.
- Heightened anxiety and arousal.

Some affects of trauma include:

- Sleep disturbance.
- Separation difficulties.
- Concentration difficulties, day dreaming.
- Memory problems.
- Intrusive thoughts.
- Heightened alertness to dangers.
- Fears.
- Irritability, anger, rage.
- Behavioural difficulties.
- Depression.
- Anxiety/panic attacks.

Also some developmental aspects:

- Repetitive play.
- Repetitive drawing.
- Aggression/anti-social behaviour.
- Repeated questioning.

If you are concerned or worried about the long-term impact of a critical incident on a child or group or children, seek support from outside agencies, such as The Educational Psychology Team.

Support from Educational Psychology/PaWBS

Our involvement may include:

- Immediate telephone contact for practical support, information sharing and support for pupils, staff, and parents.
- Support for senior staff dealing directly with the media or distressed parents or governors
- Consultation with parents and staff around how to support children and young people who have experienced a traumatic event.
- Advice/information for teachers on strategies that may be helpful for colleagues who may have been traumatised.
- Initial debriefing for staff (see self-care checklist).
- Advice on the management of grief and loss in school, including coping with strong emotions such as anger; providing sympathetic and effective pastoral care.
- We believe school staff are the most appropriate adults to support pupils when at school. Occasionally however, it may feel appropriate for the EPs to provide some 'talking and listening' time for pupils in the aftermath if staff feel overwhelmed. The EP Team and Psychology and Wellbeing Service (PaWBS) can guide and advise staff in how to support pupils at this difficult time.
- Long-term monitoring of the impact of a CI as discussed through termly planning and review meetings.

Psychology and Well-Being Service

Inclusion and Early Intervention

Children, Young People, Education and Skill

PO Box 142 Highlands Campus

Jersey JE4 8QJ

01534 445504

**Educational Psychology Team Consultation Line
Available Wednesdays 12:30 to 3:30—07797 913411**

The Best Support

The first thing to acknowledge is that there is no 'best way'. The most useful guideline is to try and communicate that you care. It is probably better that you don't have preconceived ideas about what is the best way to help, as different people will appreciate different approaches and acts.

Here are a few guidelines to consider:

- What to say? In the initial stages you may need to say very little. A hug or a touch often communicates care (but be sensitive to those who may be uncomfortable about touch). Take your cues from the mourner.
- Religious messages: For people who are not religious, comments about God or Allah may be hurtful or annoying.
- Take care with the use of humour. Whilst it is a good idea to 'lighten' the atmosphere, what is humorous for one person may not seem funny to another and may be seen as an attempt to minimise the loss.
- Be yourself.
- Be realistic: avoid offering to do, or give, what you are not able to follow through.
- Avoid clichés – 'life just has to go on' etc.
- Don't probe for details about the affect of the situation or trauma but be a good, willing listener if the person wants to talk about it.
- Be available and sympathetic.
- Learn to accept silence. Don't feel that you have to force a conversation, chatter on aimlessly, or force socialisation.
- Avoid talking to people about disclosures made by another person.
- Avoid making assumptions. Do not attempt to tell the mourner how he or she feels, e.g. "you must feel really angry..." Ask naive questions such as, "I was wondering if you felt a bit sad this morning in the playground, or whether you were just cold?"
- You may, particularly at first, feel awkward or uncomfortable trying to help, or express your concern to people who have had a devastating personal experience. Possibly the best way to overcome this is to concentrate on the other person (rather than yourself) at the time.

Responding to traumas and other major disasters can be extremely exhausting, traumatic and overwhelming at times. This is true for the community as well as those directly affected. If you are in a 'helping role', or in a position of responsibility, you will have particular demands made upon you and you are likely to make heavy demands of yourself. Try to take care of yourself which will support you to help others.

Self Care Checklist

This is for anyone who is touched by the Critical Incident, whether directly or indirectly, e.g. office staff, family, friends - all should consider their own needs.

Immediate:

Ideally, find someone to talk to (colleague, friend, and partner) within the first 12 hours. If there is no one, sit quietly and go over the events in as much detail as possible. Carry out your own debrief in drawn/written form.

In addition, ask yourself or a colleague:

- Is my continued involvement appropriate?
- Is this the time to be involved in a different way?
- Do I need any additional support?
- Who should I talk to about my involvement / experience, so others understand how I am feeling (you may not feel sociable or you may feel angry etc)?

Short Term:

- Share your experiences with colleagues. Participate in personal/team discussion both for support and sharing of experiences.

- Be aware that you may experience physical and emotional symptoms such as fatigue, anxiety, depression, irritability, aggression, anger, etc., which are normal reactions.
- Consider setting up a 'buddy' system so that everyone is able to support each other.

Long Term:

- Be gentle with yourself! Remember that we can't 'fix' everything and we are bound to feel helpless at times. Caring and being available are sometimes more important than doing.
- Give support, encouragement and praise to peers and to management. Learn to accept it in return.
- At the end of each day, focus on a positive thing that occurred during the day.
- Take time to care for yourself, and engage in hobbies or relaxing activities.

If you feel you are continuing to have intrusive thoughts about the event, and these feelings are not lessening after a few weeks, you may need some more support. Your GP/work place may be able to signpost you to relevant help.



Sample Letter

Address line 1

Address line 2

Address line 3

Post Code

Date

Dear Parent/Carer

It is with great sadness and regret that I am writing to inform you about the death of (name and details of deceased, include outline details of what happened).

I want to reassure you that the pupils and adults in school will be offered support. The next few days will be difficult for all, but it will be important to maintain our normal routines, whilst allowing everyone to grieve in their way and time.

Advice from The Psychology and Wellbeing Service will be available to us in order to provide additional support.

If you have any concerns then you are most welcome to make contact with the school.

Yours sincerely

Your Name

Head teacher

In the Event of a Suicide

Schools need to ensure that great care is taken when using the term 'suicide'. It should not be used until it has been established, with a good degree of certainty, that the death was as a result of suicide. Families may be very sensitive about the use of the term.

A staff member should contact the family to establish the exact facts and the family's wishes about how the death should be described. The phrases 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' may be used instead.

When a person dies through suicide, those who know the person experience a deep sense of shock. The unexpectedness of the death, and the taboo often associated with suicide, can leave a school community feeling unsure of how to proceed. A wide range of reactions are experienced and close friends and relations may be especially upset. For some, it may bring back memories of other loss experiences. For a small number, especially those who may already be experiencing difficulties, it may raise the awareness of suicide as an option. There may also be a number of students who may not be impacted by the event.

Concerns about youth suicide have led to increasing demands for schools to assume a role and responsibility in the prevention and management of suicidal behaviour among students. While schools are key settings for reaching young people at a formative stage of development, careful consideration needs to be given as to the most appropriate approach to suicide prevention in the school setting.

Programmes focused directly on raising student awareness of suicide may appear desirable, especially in the aftermath of a suicide, when there is a heightened awareness of the need to do something, but they are controversial. It is thought that they may carry the risk of increasing suicidal behaviour among young people through normalising it as a legitimate response to adolescent stress. Suicide awareness programmes aimed at school staff are often more appropriate.

School policies and programmes should promote mental health and wellbeing; the development of school care systems that assist in the early identification of students at risk; the provision of targeted interventions for this group of students; work at interagency level to support the promotion of mental health, and to facilitate access to services that are responsive to the needs of young people.

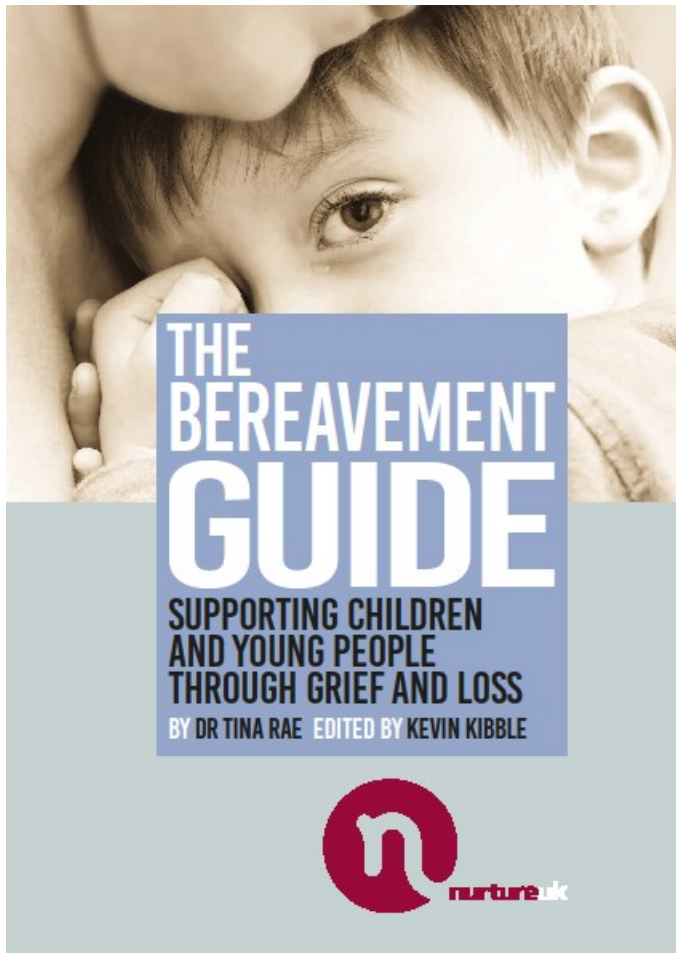
There is a formal procedure for alerts when there is a suicide:

The police will be alerted and then a chain of communications will occur which will involve the following personnel. (The order of contact may vary depending on individual circumstances:

- Director General
- Director of Inclusion and Early Intervention
- Head teacher
- Principal Educational Psychologist
- Psychology and Well-being Service

The Director of Inclusion and Early Intervention, and The Head of Psychology and Well-being (PaWBS) will work closely to determine a critical incident management and support plan. A CAMHS manger might also be linked to the school to create an awareness of the 'ripple effect' of suicide, and possible repeats (this is linked to safeguarding).

Resources and Useful Websites



Bereavement charities—Jersey

Jersey Hospice Care - Community Bereavement Service, 01534 876555
www.jerseyhospicecare.com

Mind Jersey—0800 7359404
www.mindjersey.org

Childline—0800 1111, www.childline.org

Samaritans—116 123, www.samaritans.org

Citizens Advice Bureau—01534 724942,
www.cab.org.je

Bereavement charities—UK

Jeremiahs Journey—Support for children, young people and their families when they are facing grief: www.jeremiahsjourney.org.uk

Young minds—Advice and mental health support: www.youngminds.org.uk

Childline 0800 1111, www.childline.org

Kooth—Free counselling and support, www.kooth.com

4 mental health – new resource to help you find ways to feel a bit calmer and for ideas to help you cope - www.learn.4mentalhealth.com

CRUSE Bereavement Care—0800 808 1677
www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Youth website of CRUSE—Website designed for young people by young people.
www.hopeagain.org.uk

The Compassionate Friends UK—Support for siblings. www.tcfsiblingsupport.org.uk

Child Bereavement UK - supports families when a child of any age dies, or is dying, or when a child is facing bereavement. <https://childbereavementuk.org>

Winston's Wish - Charity for bereaved children: www.winstonswish.org.uk

Marie Curie—0800 090 2309
www.mariecurie.org.uk

Reading resources

This is a suggested Reading List to use with Pupils (a more comprehensive list is available on the Winston's Wish website).

Books for children under 5 years

- I Miss You - A First Look at Death, P. Thomas ISBN 0764117645
- Goodbye Mousie , R.H. Harris ISBN 978-0689871344
- Goodbye Grandma , D. Brauna ISBN 1405219017
- Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine: Your Activity Book to Help When Someone Has Died, Crossley and Sheppard ISBN-10: 1869890582
- The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back: A Story for Children Who Have Lost Someone They Love, M. Sunderland ISBN-13: 978-0863884634
- The invisible String, P. Karst
- The Invisible String Workbook, Creative Activities to Comfort, Calm and Connect, D. Wyss
- Michael Rosen's Sad Book, M. Rosen

Books for children aged 5—8 years

- Badgers Parting Gifts , S. Varley ISBN 978-0006643173
- Always and Forever, A, Durant ISBN 978-0552548779
- Flamingo Dream, D.J. Napoli ISBN 978-0688167967 (About a father who is ill then dies.)
- The Sunshine Cat, M. Moss ISBN 978-1841215679 (A child's cat gets killed in a road accident.)
- When Dinosaurs die, L.K. Brown and M. Brown ISBN 031611955 (A factual book exploring issues about why someone dies and feelings about death.)

Books for children aged 9—12 years

- Michael Rosen's SAD BOOK, M. Rosen ISBN 978-1406313161 (Refers to Michael Rosen's son dying and how it affects him.)
- Milly's Bug Nut, J. Janey ISBN 978-0-9539123-4-6 (About a girl whose father dies.)
- Water Bugs and Dragonflies, D. Stickney ISBN 978-0264674414(A pocket book explaining death.)
- What on Earth to do when someone dies, T. Romain ISBN 978-1575420554

Books for young people aged 13 –16

Help for the Hard Times, E. Hipp ISBN 1-56838-085-5 (Refers to different types of loss and grief , with skills to help teenagers.)

The Spying Game, P. Moon ISBN 978-1842750049 (About a boy whose father dies , revealing the boys response.)

Vicky Angel, J. Wilson ISBN 978-0440865896 (A girl's friend is run over and killed).

Straight Talk about Death for Teenagers: How to Cope with Losing Someone you Love, E.A. Grollman ISBN 978-0807025017

Books for teachers and parents

Help is at Hand: Support after someone may have died by suicide.

Published by States of Jersey, 2016



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document 20160127 J

When a Parent Dies

- A representative from the school should discuss with the family and, if appropriate, the child what information should be given to classmates and other school pupils.
 - Some will want to be absent and some will want to participate.
 - Use this opportunity to talk about grief and reactions.
- Consider whether a representative from the school should attend the funeral. Some closest friends may also want to attend.
- After the bereavement, there will be a long period when the child will have a reduced capacity to work.
- Extra help may be needed at a later time.
- Let the child decide how much s/he wants to talk about what happened, but let them know you are willing to listen if s/he comes to you.
- Maintain contact with the home about the child's progress in school.

Talking to Children about a Health Pandemic—Covid-19 (Coronavirus)

In the current context of Covid-19, parents are faced with the challenge of explaining to their children a whole new situation which brings with it a whole new vocabulary: lockdown, the need to stay home with school being closed, physical distancing when out and about and the need for frequent hand washing. These conversations are extremely important as they give parents an opportunity to help their children feel more secure and understand the world in which they live.

Situations such as the current health pandemic are not easy for anyone to comprehend or accept. Understandably, many young children might feel confused, upset, and anxious. Parents, teachers, and caring adults can help by listening and responding in an honest, consistent, and supportive manner. Most children, even those exposed to trauma, are quite resilient. Like most adults, they can and do get through difficult times, and go on with their lives. By creating an open environment where they feel free to ask questions, parents can help them cope and reduce the possibility of emotional difficulties.

The following information may be helpful to parents and carers when talking with children and young people:

Listen

- Create a time and place for children to ask their questions. Don't force children to talk about things until they 'are ready.
- Remember that children tend to personalize situations. For example, they may worry about friends or relatives who may live in the UK or other countries.
- Support children to find ways to express themselves. Some children may not be able to talk about their thoughts, feelings, or fears. They may be more comfortable drawing pictures, playing with toys, or writing stories or poems directly or indirectly related to current events.

Provide Support

Help children establish a predictable routine and schedule. Children are reassured by structure and familiarity. Family rituals and routines and activities take on added importance during stressful times.

Children who have experienced trauma or losses may show more intense reactions to tragedies, news of critical incidents, such as COVID -19, and lockdown policies. These children may need extra support and attention.

Watch for physical symptoms related to stress. Many children show anxiety and stress through complaints of physical aches and pains.

Watch for possible preoccupation with violent movies or war theme video/computer games.

Children who seem preoccupied, or much stressed about health concerns for themselves, or family and friends, should be evaluated by a qualified mental health professional. Other signs that a child may need professional help include: on-going trouble sleeping, persistent upsetting thoughts, fearful images, intense fears about death, and trouble leaving their parents or going to school. The child's GP can assist with appropriate referrals.

Help children communicate with others and express themselves at home.

Let children be children. They may not want to think, or talk a lot, about these events. It is OK if they'd rather play ball, climb trees, or ride their bike, etc.

Taking Care of Well-being: young people, parents and teachers

- Give yourself a fear reality check. It's normal to be worried about your safety, and your family's safety, even though you may be observing all the guidelines given by the government.
- Share your feelings. Anger, sadness, fear, and numbness are some of the reactions you might have. Don't be embarrassed or afraid to express how you feel. Just talking and sharing your feelings with your parents, friends, teachers, and others can help them and help you.
- Take care of yourself. Losing sleep, not eating, and worrying too much can make you sick. As much as possible, try to get enough sleep, eat right, exercise, and keep a normal routine. It may be hard to do, but it can keep you healthy and better able to handle a tough time.
- Limit the time you spend watching the news. It's good to be informed about what's happening, but spending hours watching the news reports can make you feel more anxious and sad.
- Be respectful of others. When out and about you may observe others not adhering to the guidance about social distancing, try not to give in to negative feelings towards others or the situation.
- Keep in touch with friends and loved ones via your preferred platforms for communication. Connecting with others to share and talk through your feelings may be helpful during this challenging time.
- Get additional support. A traumatic event can cause strong reactions, but if your feelings make it impossible for you to function and do normal stuff, like go to school, it's time to seek additional help. Turn to a parent, teacher, religious leader, or guidance counsellor, so you can get the help you need.

