

Information for School Staff following a Critical Incident

A critical incident can be defined as:

an event that is outside the range of every day events, which involves the experience of a level of significant distress and which has the potential to overwhelm an individual or organisation, such that the normal coping mechanisms of the school and running of the school can be disrupted.

Critical incidents, although infrequent can cause disruption to the school day and require immediate action. Some examples of critical incidents affecting schools are as follows:

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide.
- An accident involving pupils or staff on or off the school premises.
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community.
- A physical attack on staff member(s) or student(s) or intrusion into the school.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.

Normal responses that students may experience

- Not being able to concentrate in class or not wanting to do school work
- Physical effects such as complaining of stomach pains or headache
- Changes in personality e.g. feeling anxious, depressed, isolated, becoming angry or irritable
- Recurring thoughts and dreams
- Changes in appetite or eating habits
- Changes in sleeping pattern

These reactions are all common responses. Most children make a healthy recovery with the support of family, friends and school.

Stages of grief

There is a series of stages of grief that students may go through in a fixed order:

- Shock and Denial
- Fear
- Anger
- Guilt
- Depression
- Acceptance

In the short term, as a staff member you can:

- Tell students the facts of the incident to help stop rumours
- Answer their questions as honestly as possible
- Create a supportive atmosphere where their feelings can be expressed
- Help them to realise that their grief is normal
- Be alert to changes in their behaviour
- Ensure students can make use of arrangements in school such as a quiet place/ someone to talk to
- Keep to the normal school routine where possible
- Help to create a network whereby students who are most affected can meet and talk with a member of staff

In the long term, as a staff member you can:

- Be supportive to vulnerable students (this may extend over a longer period of time)
- Seek professional support (on an individual level when necessary) for those students whose grieving symptoms persist
- Continue with your support as events are revisited (such as in the media), which may lead to new levels of understanding or distress

Refer to pages 21-27 of the Critical Incident Resource Guide for suggested class discussions, scripts to use, statements to avoid, class discussion/ possible script following a suicide and ways to communicate with individual students and parents/carers. For further advice and support contact the Educational Psychology Service.

Admin

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Post: Denbighshire County Council, PO Box 62, Ruthin, LL15 9AZ

For additional support

Educational Psychology Service

Audrey Ostanek (Lead Educational Psychologist)
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Kathryn Nash (Senior Educational Psychologist)
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Websites

Winston's Wish:

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care:

www.cruse.org.uk

Child Bereavement:

<https://childbereavementuk.org>

Hope Again:

www.hopeagain.org.uk