

Supporting Critical Incidents During the COVID-19 Pandemic

“A critical incident may be defined as any sudden and unexpected incident or sequence of events which causes trauma within a school community and which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of that school.” Critical incidents vary greatly in magnitude and may include the sudden unexpected death of a staff member, a pupil or a member of family.

The current situation with coronavirus means that there is an increased risk of critical incidents both within school and the wider school community. This is coupled with a general raised level of anxiety due to the uncertainty around the virus, along with the additional complication of not all staff and children/young people currently accessing education onsite. This results in a loss of the ‘usual’ routines and support structures provided by education settings.

In the event of a critical incident occurring during this pandemic, the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) will continue to offer support to the school’s leadership team in order to plan and manage the situation. The approach taken is based on research into best practice and is founded on helping schools manage the immediate aftermath of an event, including advice and support around communication (with staff, parents and children/young people), practical arrangements, identifying and supporting vulnerable groups and managing emotions.

In the unfortunate event of a death or serious injury to a pupil or member of staff then please follow the guidance in the Council's Emergency & Critical Incident Guidance for Schools. The Council's emergency 24 hour contact number is 01482 392999.

You will then be contacted by a member of the EPS - either an Area Senior EP, or the Principal EP to identify and plan what support is required. They will talk with you about what steps have been taken so far and what needs to happen next. As well as supporting at the time, the Area Senior EP or Link EP will follow up with you over the next few days to support with any issues that arise. Due to the current situation, it is likely that this support be provided remotely over the phone or video call.

Whilst no two incidents are the same, responses to critical incidents follow a recognised pattern and with time, the majority of children and adults will come to terms with what has happened and recover without the need for professional bereavement or trauma counselling. Help and support in the immediate aftermath of an incident is best provided by trusted, familiar adults and peer support as and when it is needed. The EPS will support schools to facilitate this and to be confident in this role.

If after a period of time, if there are members of the school community who are showing signs of continued distress the link EP for the school can discuss this and signpost to further support where necessary.

Useful Resources

British Psychological Society (BPS) - Supporting yourselves and others: coping with death and grief during the Covid-19 pandemic

<https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/Supporting%20yourself%20and%20others.pdf>

Child Bereavement UK

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/pages/category/coronavirus>

Winston's Wish

<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus/>

Contact Information:

- Telephone: 01482 394000 (option 4 then option 2)
- Email: eps@eastriding.gov.uk
 - Catherine McKenna – Area Senior EP (West)
 - Helen Higgins – Area Senior EP (North)
 - Helen Mitton – Area Senior EP (East)
 - Elizabeth Holmes – Principal EP