

Educational psychologists

The role and educational psychologists training

All Educational Psychologists (EPs) have an honours degree in Psychology, are qualified and experienced teachers and have a Masters degree in Educational Psychology. They are thus in a unique position to understand and help with both the institutional and the individual effects of a critical incident.

Which educational psychologist will be available to help?

Every school in the borough has an attached EP who visits on a regular basis. If a school experiences a critical incident it will be the attached EP who will be available to help, possibly with the assistance of other members of the service depending on the extent of the crisis.

The Educational Psychology Service believes that where possible those who offer help should be trusted colleagues familiar to the school community and who will continue to visit the school on a longer-term basis. Thus, most EPs who work for Ealing local authority have undergone training to help with critical incidents. This has included bereavement counselling, recognising posttraumatic stress and how to conduct debriefing interviews.

How to access help from the educational psychology service (EPS)

When a Headteacher telephones the Schools Service to report a critical incident the officer who takes the call will complete a Critical Incident Proforma that will be copied to the Senior Management Team, the Principal Educational Social Worker and the Principal EP.

Normally, the PEP will then pass the information on to the link EP who will telephone the Headteacher to discuss how he/she may help. In the case of a very severe incident, for example, where several pupils and/or teachers are directly involved, the PEP will make direct contact with the Headteacher to assess needs and discuss how the EPS can help. In this case, it is likely that other members of the EPS will be asked to become involved, in addition to the link EP.

Time management issues

If a school suffers a critical incident, the PEP may decide to direct additional EP time (in addition to the time already allocated), on a temporary basis. The Educational Psychology Service does not have access to additional staff who can be called on at a time of crisis and so it may be necessary to postpone some of the Service's appointments at other schools.

This would be exceptional. It is anticipated that Headteachers would be very sympathetic to a neighbouring school undergoing a crisis and the need to focus resources there for a brief period. Fortunately, severe traumatic incidents are rare but plans have to be in place as any school in the borough could be affected at any time.

Ways of helping

There are a range of ways in which an EP can help a school to cope with a critical incident:

- Short Term Help (as soon as possible after the critical incident)
- Advice to pupils, parents and staff in response to trauma and the management of grief.
- Conducting group debriefing sessions.
- Conducting individual debriefing interviews with pupils.
- Acting as group facilitators to pupils who were present at the time of the incident to provide opportunities for them to share their concerns and feelings.
- Longer Term Help
- Supporting members of staff in helping pupils in their class to cope with the effects of the critical incident on a longer-term basis.
- There is the possibility that a member of staff or pupil will need ongoing counselling. The EP can advise on how to access such help.

Record keeping

No permanent records will be kept of interviews conducted unless, in the case of children, their parents consider it would be beneficial in the future.

Support staff

The Educational Psychology Service is a Support for pre-school, school aged children and young people. The service will advise staff and parents on how they can support pupils to cope with the effects of a critical incident. A critical incident may affect some staff at a very deep level. This can be the case where an individual has had a recent bereavement themselves.

The EPs does not have the resources to offer ongoing individual help to schools staff. However, many schools in the local authority buy in to a telephone counselling service called Focus Counselling, which operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Focus Counselling also offers the opportunity for face-to-face sessions, depending on need.

Contact:

- **Judith Chambers-Thomas**, Educational psychology service: jthomas@ealing.gov.uk 020 8825 5050

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Last updated: 03 Jun 2024