

AFTER THE EVENT – GETTING BACK TO NORMAL

The effects of some incidents can reverberate for years. Professor Yule, in his very useful book, 'Wise before the Event', points out that tragedies can bring people together. In some schools the experience is so profound that staff want to retain the sense of community that it generated.

In the longer term thought will need to be given to the following issues:

- Working with staff to monitor pupils, particularly those who are more vulnerable.
- Clarifying procedures for referring pupils for individual help.
- Informing any new staff of those pupils who were affected, how they were affected and how they could most usefully be supported. Staff who have recently experienced a trauma or bereavement in their own personal lives may be particularly vulnerable. Schools can 'buy in' to a counselling service called 'Care First' and, indeed some schools already do. Care First offer a confidential telephone counselling service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If a school wishes to purchase this service then they should contact Schools HR.
- Being aware that some pupils' ability to concentrate is affected after a critical incident. Some pupils may therefore plateau in their learning, for a period and may find it difficult to study. If public examinations are imminent for pupils involved in a critical incident, it is important to make the examining boards aware of the situation.
- Recognising and if appropriate, marking anniversaries. Anniversaries can be very difficult times. It is better if decisions about how to manage them are made collectively in advance. The decision making process should take into account the wishes of the parents of pupils who were killed or injured. Some suggestions for marking anniversaries are as follows: an annual concert or commemorative assembly, an annual memorial prize or the planting of a tree or special garden that blooms at the appropriate time.
- Remembering that if the incident does attract media attention it is likely that the interest will continue for many weeks.
- Being aware that legal processes and enquiries can interfere with mourning. They can prolong or impede it or, as a new legal process commences, can bring back distressing memories. Schools need to be aware when staff members are involved in these legal processes, for example, boards of enquiry, court appearances etc.
- Support for the Headteacher. It is the Headteacher who oversees and manages their school through a critical incident and one cannot underestimate the physical and emotional toll that this can have. After the event the Headteacher concerned will be offered the opportunity of a formal debriefing with an appropriate senior officer.