

CASE SCENARIO 1

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED?

The police contacted the Headteacher first thing in the morning, at the beginning of a school day. They were seeking information about the listed next of kin of four siblings (aged 7, 5, 3 and 2), three of whom attended the school. Their mother had been killed in the early hours of the morning and their father was in police custody.

It transpired that the children had been at the police station since the early hours of the morning. The listed next of kin was a paternal aunt and the children were then taken to her home by the police.

The Headteacher and her administrator visited the paternal aunt later that morning, having found that she was on her own with the children and understandably, in a state of great distress. The children were extremely confused as they had not been told of their mother's death. The Headteacher released the administrator (who was a family friend) to stay with the aunt and the children.

The Headteacher telephoned the LA designated officer to seek support.

Relevant issues in this scenario.

- The mother was well known by most school staff and many children, as she was a regular visitor to the school. She had also worked in the local community home and was very well known locally.
- The Headteacher had previously been involved in counselling the mother.
- The eldest child had been seen by the Educational Psychologist for behaviour problems.
- The police had not contacted Social Services who were therefore not involved in the early stages. The school felt a heavy responsibility in relation to care issues.
- The incident happened on a Friday.
- The children could not be given immediate information about the circumstances of their mother's death as the police did not know if they wanted to interview them.
- The paternal aunt was a single parent with two teenage children. She lived in a two-bedroom accommodation some distance from the school.

SUPPORT FROM THE LA.

School Management Support

On receiving the Headteachers phone call the LA designated officer informed the LA Senior Management Team and the Educational Psychology Service. The designated officer kept in touch with the Headteacher by telephone and through personal visits.

The Educational Psychology Services (EPS)

Two members of the EPS visited the school on the afternoon of the incident to meet with the Headteacher. This was to offer some immediate support to the Headteacher but also to ascertain what support the school was likely to require over the coming weeks. Some practical issues were discussed in terms of information to staff, children and parents.

The next week, the link Educational Psychologist for the school, together with a colleague, offered support in the following ways:

- Attended a staff meeting to discuss issues arising.
- Offered sessions to staff to discuss the impact of the incident on children in their classes.
- Discussed how to support the children on their return to school.
- Held regular meetings with and made phone calls to the Headteacher.
- Liased with other relevant agencies, e.g. Social Services, trauma clinic.
- The Educational Psychologist for the school monitored the situation over the following weeks and kept in regular contact.
- The Principal Educational Psychologist telephoned and made a personal visit to the school.

Other Schools

The Headteacher received messages of support and offers of resource materials from other schools. This was highly valued.

CASE SCENARIO 2

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED?

Towards the end of the morning play in a primary school, a piece of lead guttering broke away from the top of a two storey, Victorian building and fell into the playground hitting a 10 year old boy on the head. The youngster had been playing football with a group of friends. Two or three of them were close by at the time of the accident.

The nursery nurse responsible for first aid was summoned and the other children were moved away back into class. There was a large volume of blood. It was clear that the injury was very serious affecting the side of the boys head. The ambulance arrived within 10 minutes but paramedics made a decision to summon a specialist head injury team that arrived by helicopter a few minutes later. The helicopter had to land in a confined space in the school playground. The youngster was airlifted to a specialist hospital.

The Headteacher had to make a decision to close the school at the end of the day to ensure safety on the site. The Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher and Administrator remained at school for the duration of the school closure, which lasted for four days. They were also in school over the weekend so that parents had a point of contact.

The Headteacher contacted the LA designated officer and the Safety Officer to seek support.

Relevant issues in this scenario.

- The incident was witnessed by a large number of children.
- Staff directly involved in caring for the boy while waiting for the ambulance were extremely shocked.
- Staff had to cope with remainder of the school day – the arrival of the helicopter, children who had witnessed the accident, worries about safety etc.
- The incident happened near the beginning of the academic year.
- The school had to be closed. Normal routine was disrupted.
- The injured boy remained critically ill for the first week or so. Fortunately he went on to recover. Also, he was in a hospital some distance away.
- Staff kept in close contact with the family and visited regularly.
- There were a number of staff who experienced family bereavements within a few weeks of the incident.

- Building works had to be carried out immediately to ensure safety and in the longer term to refurbish the school.

SUPPORT FROM THE LA.

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT SUPPORT.

On receiving the Headteachers phone call, the LA's designated Officer informed the LA's Senior Management Team and other departments. The designated officer kept in touch with the Headteacher by telephone and through personal visits. LA support staff were involved in arrangements to be made because the school was to be closed (e.g. cancelling transport and meals etc.)

Education Safety Officer

The Education Safety Officer worked closely with the Headteacher to advise on safety issues, to carry out a site survey and to initiate and monitor subsequent building works.

Communication Unit

Dealing with the media proved to be extremely stressful, particularly over the first few days. The Communications Unit offered vital support and help to the Headteacher to ensure that appropriate information was passed on and to provide a buffer zone.

Educational Psychology Service (EPS)

The Educational Psychologist for the school visited on the day of the incident to meet with the Headteacher and offer support. Practical issues were discussed in terms of offering support to staff and pupils. The Principal Educational Psychologist visited with the Educational Psychologist the next day. The Educational Psychologist spent most of the next few days based at the school in order to offer support, practical help and to be available to staff, parents and children who were experiencing distress. The following support was offered over the next week:

- The Educational Psychologist was at the school to consult with Headteacher and Deputy headteacher and to answer telephone queries.
- Home visits were carried out to children whose parents said they were upset. Several colleagues from the EPS team were involved.
- The Principal Educational Psychologist and the Educational Psychologist attended a staff meeting on the day the school re-opened.
- The Educational Psychologist for the school continued to offer support over the next few weeks.

Other Support

- The school received support in the form of messages and personal visits from the Chair of Education, the local MP, and the Executive Director of Children and Adults.
- There were many messages of support and offers of help from other schools.
- There were many messages of support from parents and friends of the school.