

COVID-19 related critical incident support in schools: Ealing Educational Psychology Service April 2020

Background

This leaflet is informed by materials developed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic by Educational Psychology Services nationally and shared through the National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists (NAPEP).
A critical incident may be defined as:

“... Any event outside the usual realm of human experience that is markedly distressing and evokes a reaction of intense fear and helplessness...”
(Holowenko, 2015, p.26)

Such events may overwhelm the normal coping mechanism of the school.
The Covid-19 pandemic has led to significant impact on our schools, communities and way of life. Nationwide school closures for many pupils and changes to the way we live are currently leading to increased levels of uncertainty and anxiety. There is also an increased risk of critical incidents in schools and the wider community.

Ealing Educational Psychology Service

Ealing Educational Psychology Service (EPS) continues to offer a critical incident response to Head teachers and Senior Leadership Teams in all settings in the borough.

In the event of a COVID-19 related critical incident, the Ealing EPS will offer short-term psychological support to the school's management team to appropriately manage the event. The approach taken will focus on supporting the school to promote a sense of safety, calm, self and community efficacy, connectedness and hope. This approach is based on research into best practice in this area.

Currently when most children are at home and staff are working remotely, the management of critical incidents is likely to present a range of new and unanticipated challenges. Even though huge efforts are being made to stay in regular contact with children and young people, school communities are likely to feel less connected especially over school holiday periods. Approaches need to acknowledge the different context in which we now work.

Support and Intervention

Each Critical Incident is unique. Responses however follow a recognised pattern:

- With time, most children and adults will come to terms with what has happened and recover without the need for professional counselling. We do not advise an immediate offer of counselling to bereaved families. Grief is a normal process and those who are grieving may need to be reassured that whatever emotions they are feeling, it is perfectly normal, and there is no one process of grieving for all.
- Help and support are best provided by a trusted, familiar adult as and when it is needed.
- It is usually only when feelings remain overwhelming over a period of weeks when counselling support may become a more appropriate offer. Some families with less community support may wish to seek professional support earlier, in particular while we remain in 'lock-down'.
- Many schools may choose to contact their school counsellor to support direct work with families.

When a Critical Incident occurs

- It is important that the school and other settings let the Local Authority know as soon as possible about the incident. The EPS (Principal or Senior Educational psychologist) will then be informed. Schools can contact their allocated school EP or the Principal and Senior Educational Psychologists directly. Contact details can be found at the end of this document.
- Initially a senior member of the EPS will contact you in order to find out what steps have been taken so far and identify with you what needs to happen next. This contact will usually be by phone or video call. Typically, any further and ongoing support will be provided by the school EP with a member of the Ealing EPS team.

What happens when we work with you following a critical incident?

This depends on the nature of the incident and the needs of the individual setting. We will discuss this with the Head teacher or the designated member of the school's senior leadership team. In the current context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the discussions will include a focus on promoting connectedness while still apart. It usually involves discussions about:

- Clarifying the facts – what is known, what are perceived or potential narratives in the community, including social media

- Communication with parents – language, messaging, listening and asking questions
- What is the family's views on what can be shared / what they want to be shared?
- How to communicate the information to children and staff – to whom, and when
- Share information with school staff to talk about typical responses to critical incidents and how to manage them
- Reducing anxiety and de-escalating panic responses – families, children and staff
- Support and signposting for staff and pupils both within school and externally regarding their own wellbeing
- Identification of and planning for vulnerable children who may be affected.

The EP working with the school or setting will support you in the immediate aftermath of the incident and follow up with you over the next few days to help support with any issues, which arise. In the current circumstances, this will be done remotely by phone or video call.

If after a period of time, there are members of the setting's community who are showing signs of continued distress the EP will discuss this and signpost to further support. We do not advise an immediate offer of counselling to bereaved children/young people: grief is a normal process and there is no one process for everyone who grieves. Children/young people may, however, need reassurance that whatever emotions they are feeling are normal. It is only when feelings remain overwhelming over a period of weeks and interfere with the activities of daily living that counselling support may be a more appropriate offer. Some families with less community support may wish to seek professional support earlier, particularly during the phase of acute social distancing.

Settings may also wish to contact ECRIS for referral to SAFE or their Education Wellbeing Practitioners (if in the Emotional Well Being Trail Blazer project) for support for children beyond the aftermath of the immediate critical incident.

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With thanks to colleagues from the National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists (NAPEP) Bradford, Camden, Merton and York EPS whose critical incident advice supplemented our own.

Reference

Holowenko, H. (2015) Early Interventions for children in the aftermath of a crisis. *Early Interventions for Trauma* (pp. 26-43). Leicester: British Psychological Society

Useful Websites

Websites with information to support settings when a member of staff or child/young person dies or is affected by the death of a loved one. Some sites offer specific content around Coronavirus.

Link	Description
https://www.andnextcomesl.com/2018/09/free-social-stories-about-death-and-funerals.html	Social stories about death and funerals
http://www.breakingbadnews.org/ten-top-tips-for-breaking-bad-news/	Tips about how to break bad news to young people
https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/parents-and-young-people/information-for-parents-and-carers/death-in-the-family---helping-children-to-cope-the-impact-on-children-and-adolescents-for-parents-and-carers	Information for parents/carers to help children cope with a loss
https://www.jkp.com/uk/i-have-a-question-about-death-1.html/	A book that schools/families can buy about explaining death to young people
http://www.winstonswish.org.uk/	A charity that provides support, helpline and chat for supporting young people who have suffered a loss- also includes resources such as bespoke books.
https://www.childbereavementuk.org/resources-for-children-and-young-people	A charity that provides support, helpline and chat for supporting young people who have suffered a loss
https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/deal/	Support for schools around bereavement
https://www.childbereavementuk.org/primary-schools-supporting-bereaved-children	Provides a school's information pack
https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-schools	Resources for schools
https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-parents	Resources for parents
https://www.cruse.org.uk/coronavirus/children-and-young-people	Resources for children and young people
https://www.goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk/content/resources/Whole_School_Approach_to_LossAndBereavement).pdf	A whole school approach to supporting loss and bereavement
https://www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/professionals-and-training/	Bereavement training for professionals
https://www.ealing.gov.uk/info/201023/children_and_families_social_care/1187/safe_-_supportive_action_for_families_in_ealing	Ealing Council's supportive action for families

http://benziesangmassocialstoriesforautism.blogspot.com/2013/05/when-someone-dies.html	Social story about death for ASD children
https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-schools-support-children-young-people/	Supporting young people who may face or have faced a bereavement during COVID19
https://www.ealingfamiliesdirectory.org.uk/kb5/ealing/directory/results.page?qt=bereavement&term=&sorttype=relevance	Charities around Ealing that provide bereavement support: Bereft, Halo, Voice, Ealing Abbey Counselling service, Rainbow trust, Asian family counselling service and log cabin charity.
https://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/blog/2017/12/04/new-free-resources-to-support-bereaved-and-grieving-children	Free resources to support bereaved and grieving children- has activity ideas that can be completed with children.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUS89IFr0XA	Video about talking to children who are bereaved
https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/grief-and-loss/	Symptoms of grief and loss- also has real life stories in the form of blog pages
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMpDam54eOc	Video on explaining to a young child what a funeral is
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFm-SXeJwI8	Supporting bereaved children through difficult times. Child Bereavement UK.
https://www.autism.org.uk/about/family-life/bereavement.aspx	National Autism Society on Bereavement
https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/ https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/serviceupdate/	Provides support for bereaved children and those who care for them Coronavirus-specific content
https://papyrus-uk.org/prevention-of-suicide-in-young-people	Papyrus – Suicide Prevention charity