



### **Hull City Psychological Service: Critical Incident Response to COVID-19**

Hull City Psychological Service has drawn up this guidance to advise how best to manage bereavement and grief during the COVID-19 pandemic. It covers different situations and emotions bereaved people may have to deal with. We will add to and update this information as required as the situation develops.

The coronavirus pandemic is impacting on all our schools, families, communities and way of life. The current situation means that there is an increased risk of critical incidents both in the school and the wider school community. This is coupled with a collective raised level of anxiety due to uncertainty around the corona crisis and the additional complication of the nationwide closure of schools.

*Generally people deal with adversity in a sensible way. People don't usually panic. People cope. People are tougher than we sometimes give them credit for. People show great courage, resourcefulness, adaptability, resiliency, hopefulness and humanitarianism (Wessely S, 2005)*

#### **What is a Critical Incident?**

A Critical Incident is any event that is unexpected, serious, and stressful and exceeds the coping capacity of individuals and the community. Such incidents might include the unexpected death or serious injury of a pupil or staff member, serious crime or abuse of pupils or a sudden and serious event which disrupts the emotional well-being of the school community.

In some cases, schools need support and guidance with Critical Incidents. The specifics of the support offered by Hull City Psychological Service will be determined on a case by case basis through consultation and will be dependent on the resilience of the community and the school's long term needs. As a service our involvement aims:

- To be flexible and responsive;
- To make any interventions the least intrusive but most effective.

In the event of a COVID-19 related critical incident, our primary aim will be to 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. Schools can still manage this in the particularly challenging circumstance when most children are at home and most staff are working remotely, and with many staff self-isolating with suspected Covid-19 or because they are at increased risk. Whilst huge efforts are being made to stay in regular contact with children and young people, school communities are likely to feel less connected. In recognition of these challenging circumstances we have adapted our critical incident response and have included additional resources and sources of support within this guidance. We will continue to follow our evidence based and established critical incident model with an understanding that the impact of the trauma will be influenced by factors such as the role of person who has died e.g. community member, member of school staff, child etc.

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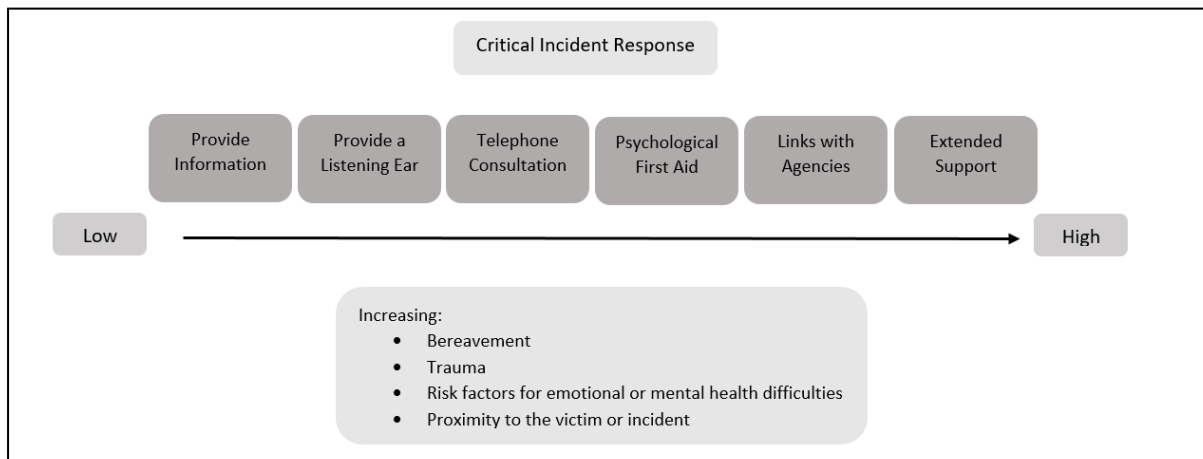
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All involvement offered will be in line with the following model:



### What to expect from Hull City Psychological Service

1. Hull City Psychological Service (HCPS) will be informed of a critical incident by the Education Officer for Safeguarding who co-ordinates local authority support for schools following such incidents
2. The Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) will contact the school's Headteacher or other designated senior lead to discuss their individual needs and agree the level of support needed; the PEP may designate a Lead Educational Psychologist (EP) to co-ordinate ongoing support for the school
3. The PEP or Lead EP can be available remotely, via telephone or email, to support Heads/SLT in thinking about how to best approach the unique circumstance of the incident
4. Supporting documents, resources and other materials can be emailed to Heads/SLT
5. The PEP or Lead EP will 'check in' with Heads/SLT approximately a week after the incident
6. If members of the community are identified as having particular difficulty in managing their response to the incident or if there are more long-term difficulties the PEP or Lead EP along with the wider EP team can offer remote support to individuals; ideally this would be via video conferencing software if available.

**Headteachers can contact HCPS should they require support or guidance at any time – 01482 614258 or [city.psychologicalservice@hullcc.gov.uk](mailto:city.psychologicalservice@hullcc.gov.uk)**

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### What to expect during our support

Initially a senior member of Hull City Psychological Service will contact you in order to establish what steps have been taken so far and identify what needs to happen next. This contact will be made by telephone.

*What happens next depends on the magnitude of the incident and the individual needs of the setting.* However, it may include discussion of and advice around the following (with a focus on promoting connectedness, whilst physically apart, at this time):

- Clarifying the facts: what is known; perceived/potential narratives in the community, including social media
- Communication with parents/carers: how to communicate relevant and appropriate information; the messaging systems available; agreeing a form of words to express regret whilst reducing anxiety and possible panic; the importance of language, listening and the ability to ask questions
- Establishing the family's views on what can be shared/what they wish to be shared
- Communication of information to children/young people and staff: what, to whom, how and when
- Sharing information with staff to talk about typical responses to critical incidents and how to manage them
- Reducing anxiety and de-escalating panic responses in families, children and staff
- Providing a focus for children/young people to share their feelings e.g. use of tutor/mentor groups and other forums for sharing feelings
- Identification of and planning for vulnerable children and young people who may be affected
- Practical issues, such as memorials and books of condolence.

The EP(s) working with the setting will support you in the immediate aftermath of the incident and will also follow up with you over the next few days to support with any issues that may arise.

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### General Guidance & Additional Resources

Help and support are best provided by a trusted, familiar adult as and when it is needed. In 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. 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'.

#### Specific information about Covid-19

Family members of the person who has died may have particularly strong emotions around feelings of guilt as well as feelings of loss. They may have been socially isolated from the person who has died, and not had recent or usual levels of contact. The key focus with families is to listen to their concerns and worries, exploring the impact on the various members of their family. Relatively small-sounding or illogical issues may be overwhelming. Are any family members feeling in any way responsible? Are they dwelling on what they might have done differently, for example to protect the person who has died from infection? Should they be doing anything differently now to protect other members of the family?

Families or colleagues may need reassurance that their response is 'normal' and we can manage to hear them speak about painful issues. Those staff in direct contact with bereaved families will need support around them to debrief and process their own feelings. In particular, Headteachers will be holding and containing levels of anxiety from across different parts of the school community, and will need to think about where they get their own emotional support. This is in part why HCPS responds initially to Headteachers.

#### Grieving and isolation

Being bereaved can be an extremely lonely time. Talking with friends and family can be one of the most helpful ways to cope after someone close to us dies. Advice is usually to avoid isolating yourself, but we are in a situation where increasing numbers of people are being told to self-isolate and cut all but essential physical contact with others.

This can make feelings of loneliness and grief more intense. A bereaved family might be isolated together, and although this at times may be a support, at other times tensions and resentments could be magnified making it difficult for them to help each other. If children and teenagers are isolated it could be difficult for carers to keep them occupied and deal with their own emotions and fears. The impact of dealing with a bereavement, compounded with feelings of worry about external situations, can mean that feelings of grief aren't fully expressed.

Isolation can also make it harder to process grief. At times like this when there is a constant stream of new and distressing information, people can find themselves distracted from dealing with their grief.

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### Information, Advice and Guidance

- Coronavirus: supporting bereaved children and young people: <https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-supporting-bereaved-children-and-young-people/>
- Coronavirus: How to say goodbye when a funeral isn't possible: <https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-funerals-alternative-goodbyes/>
- Death Through Serious Illness: <https://www.winstonswish.org/serious-illness/>
- Coronavirus: grieving and isolation: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/coronavirus/grieving-and-isolation>
- Coronavirus: grief and trauma: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/coronavirus/trauma>
- Coronavirus: funerals and memorials: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/coronavirus/funerals>
- Coronavirus: anger and blame: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/coronavirus/anger-and-blame>
- Coronavirus: feeling guilty: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/coronavirus/guilt>
- Coronavirus: feeling your bereavement is not a priority: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/coronavirus/bereavement-priorities>
- Coronavirus: children and young people: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/coronavirus/children-and-young-people>
- Coronavirus: coping with talk of death and dying: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/Coronavirus/death-talk>

### Online Resources

- ELSA Support: <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/downloads/category/elsa-resources/bereavementandloss/>
- Winston's Wish: <https://www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/supporting-a-bereaved-child/>
- Books and resources for bereaved children and young people, including those with special educational or additional needs: <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/resources-for-children-and-young-people>
- Information, books and resources to support bereaved children and young people: <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/supporting-bereaved-children-and-young-people>

### Books

- *'Something Bad Happened: A Kid's Guide to Coping with events in the News'* by Dawn Huebner. How to process different world events (ages 6-12).
- *'The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back'* by Margot Sunderland. A story for children who have lost someone they love (ages 4-12).
- *'Draw on Your Emotions'* by Margot Sunderland. A resource to help people express and communicate their emotions.
- *'What To Do When You're Scared & Worried: A Guide for Kids'* by James Crist. A help guide to processing fears and worries (ages 9-13).
- *'The Way I Feel'* by Janan Cain. Explores feelings and a helpful way to talk about emotions with young children.
- *'A Terrible Thing Happened'* by Margaret Holmes. A story for children who have witnessed violence or trauma (ages 4-8).

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# Hull City Psychological Service

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## Helplines

### Child Bereavement UK:

0800 02 888 40

[support@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:support@childbereavementuk.org)

### Winston's Wish:

08088 020 021

[ask@winstonswish.org](mailto:ask@winstonswish.org)

### YoungMinds Crisis Messenger:

Text YM to 85258 (free, 24/7 mental health crisis support)

### Childline:

0800 1111 (24 hours)

<https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat/>

### The Mix:

0808 808 4994 (24 hours)

<https://www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team>

### Samaritans:

[jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) / <https://www.samaritans.org/> / <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/>

Phone 116 123 (24 hours)

## Child Bereavement Support Organisations

- [www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk) The Childhood Bereavement Network is a network of organisations and individuals working with bereaved children and young people.
- [www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org) Child Bereavement UK offer information, guidance and advice when a child dies or when a child is bereaved.
- <https://childrengrieve.org> The National Alliance for Grieving Children promote awareness of the needs of grieving children and teens and provides education and resources for anyone supporting them.
- <https://www.cruse.org.uk/> Cruse Bereavement Care help children, young people and adults when someone dies.
- [www.griefencounter.org.uk](http://www.griefencounter.org.uk) Grief Encounter helps bereaved children get help, recognition and understanding following their loss.
- <https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/> Hope Again is a website designed for young people by young people. It is part of Cruse Bereavement Care's Youth Involvement Project.
- [www.rainbowsgb.org](http://www.rainbowsgb.org) Rainbows helps children and young people grieve and grow after a loss.
- <https://www.suddendeath.org/> Sudden helps anyone coping with sudden bereavement.
- [www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org) Winston's Wish is a provider of services to bereaved children, young people and their families in the UK.

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