

COVID-19 related critical incident support

“A critical incident may be defined as any sudden and/or unexpected incident or sequence of events which causes trauma within a school community and which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of that school.”

Warwickshire’s Educational Psychology Service has offered critical incident (CI) support to head teachers/senior leadership teams within schools over many years. This is funded through the EPS core budget and available to all Warwickshire settings. The approach taken is based on research into best practice and is founded on helping schools manage the immediate aftermath of an event, including advice and support around communication, practical arrangements and managing emotions.

It is recognised that the best people to support children and young people immediately after experiencing grief or trauma are the adults that they know and trust, for example, **parents, carers** and/or **school staff**. However we recognise that these adults need to feel confident in supporting the child or young person

The response to the current situation – relating to COVID-19

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 unexpected deaths both in the school and the wider school community. This is coupled with raised levels of collective anxiety due to uncertainty around the coronavirus crisis and the additional complication of the nationwide closure of schools.

In the event of a COVID-19 related critical incident, the primary aim of Warwickshire Educational Psychology Service will be to offer short-term psychological support to the school management team to appropriately manage the event. The approach taken will include advice and support around communication, practical arrangements and managing emotions within the community. This work is in order to promote a sense of safety, calm, self and community efficacy, connectedness and hope.

It is recognised that it will be particularly challenging for schools to manage these incidents in the current circumstances when most children are at home, staff are working remotely, and many staff are self-isolating with suspected Covid-19 or because they are at increased risk. School communities are likely to feel less connected and especially over school holiday periods.

If you require support with a Critical Incident:

Phone 01926 742921 and a Business Support Assistant will take your details including your contact details and an outline of the incident. When the business support is unavailable please leave a message on the EPS answer-machine detailing:

- Your name, school and contact number; and
- Please making clear that you are seeking support with a critical incident.

You will receive telephone contact from an Educational Psychologist, where possible on the same day, who will discuss the situation with you, identify what steps have been taken so far and agree a course of action. This is likely to include:

- A timetable of EP guidance, advice & support through telephone and/or e-mail
- Sharing of sample letters and scripts for communicating with children, staff and parents
- Sharing of information to circulate to staff, parents and carers to support them in talking about loss and bereavement
- Sharing of guidance leaflets and resources
- Providing a focus for students to share feelings and an exploration of school sharing forums
- Identification of and planning for vulnerable children
- Practical issues such as memorials / books of condolences.

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 immediate 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 a perfectly normal reaction to the situation.

If, after a period of time, if there are members of the school community who are showing signs of continued distress the EP will discuss this and signpost to further support.

Websites providing support for loss and bereavement:

Grief Encounter - <https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/>

Support for bereaved children and their families

Child Bereavement UK - <https://childbereavementuk.org/>

Supports families and educates professionals when a baby or child of any age dies or is dying, or when a child is facing bereavement

Resources to equip pupils with coping skills for bereavement, now and in later life - <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/pages/category/elephants-tea-party>

Winston's Wish – <https://www.winstonswish.org/>

Information, advice and guidance for supporting bereaved children and young people. Has information specific to coronavirus (COVID-19)

CRUSE - <https://www.cruse.org.uk>

Support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies. There's a section for schools <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-schools>

Also - <https://www.samaritans.org/> and <https://papyrus-uk.org/> _for those effected by suicide.

With thanks to Bradford and Camden EPS.