

# Responding to Critical Incidents

## A Guide and Resources for Schools and Settings



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# **SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION**



## 1.1 What is a critical incident?

**A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school.**

(NEPS, 2016).

Examples of critical incidents that may affect schools and settings include (but are not limited to):

- The death of a pupil(s)/student(s) or member(s) of staff
- A serious accident involving pupil(s)/student(s) or member(s) of staff
- A major incident affecting the school building e.g. fire or flood
- A violent intrusion on to the school premises, e.g. an armed intruder, bomb scare
- A disaster in the community, e.g. a severe incident of flooding, transport accident, terrorism.

### How can the Educational Psychology Service help?

City of York Council Educational Psychology Service offers the following support to schools and settings experiencing critical incidents:

<b>Planning</b>	Helping senior leaders to assess the significance and impact of the event, to draw up a plan, to mobilise the schools resources and to access other support systems.
<b>Information and Advice</b>	Providing information and advice to staff as they come to terms with the situation. Signposting staff to additional support and resources if required.
<b>Support</b>	Being available for consultation to school staff as they support the students and each other.
<b>Screening</b>	Working with staff to identify students who are most in need of support, and developing procedures for reviewing their needs and supporting onward referral, if necessary.

City of York Council Educational Psychology Service does not work directly with children and young people during a critical incident, as research suggests that direct work is most effective when delivered by trusted, familiar adults.

**Critical incident support is offered to schools and settings as an additional service to their time allocation.**

## How to access support from the Educational Psychology Service

Critical incident support from the Educational Psychology Service can be accessed through the following process:

	<p><b>Identify</b></p>	<p>Identify a key member of staff to co-ordinate support from external services. This would typically be a member of the school/setting's Senior Leadership Team, but may be other members of staff.</p>
	<p><b>Call</b></p>	<p>Call a member of the Educational Psychology Service Senior Leadership Team (ideally on their mobile phone):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tina Hardman, Principal Educational Psychologist, 07909 872354 (available Mondays-Thursdays)</li> <li>- Claire Elsdon, Senior Educational Psychologist, 07881 806282 (available Mondays-Fridays)</li> <li>- Geraldine Jackson, Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist, 07909 685093 (available Mondays-Thursdays).</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Email</b></p>	<p>If you cannot get through by phone, send an email to your Educational Psychologist, Tina, Claire, and Geraldine, including a brief overview of the incident, marking the email as URGENT: CRITICAL INCIDENT.</p>

Contact details for all Educational Psychologists are listed on p. 28 of this guide.

## 1.2 Grief: A developmental perspective

As we grow older, our understanding of death changes. The categories below are broad descriptors of the developmental stages of a child's understanding of death. This is, of course, also dependent upon a child's experiences and cognitive/language development.

### Birth to two years:

- Do not understand the finality of death
- Can miss the presence of a primary care giver
- Will react to loss by crying, altering eating/sleeping habits
- Can become detached.

### Two to five years:

- Do not understand the finality of death
- Believe death is reversible
- Do not always have the vocabulary to express grief
- Feelings may be acted out in behaviour and play
- May have an interest in dead things
- May ask some questions over and over again
- Are likely to react in the light of their personal experiences of death.

### Six to nine years:

- Begin to understand the finality of death
- Believe death only happens to others
- Death is personified as ghosts or monsters
- Engage in magical thinking and may feel that they caused the death
- Have strong feelings of loss
- May lack the vocabulary to express feelings
- Often need permission to grieve (especially boys).

### Nine to twelve years:

- Understand the finality of death
- Have curiosity about the physical aspects of death
- Have the vocabulary to express feelings but often choose not to
- Need encouragement to express feelings
- May identify with the deceased by imitating mannerisms
- May have short attention spans
- Begin to realise that death is something that can happen to them.

### Thirteen to eighteen years:

- Have an adult understanding of death
- Can express feelings, but often choose not to
- Philosophise about life and death
- Search for meaning of death
- Death affects whole life (school/home relationships)
- May appear to be coping well when they are not (this is true of other ages too)
- Are often thrust into the role of comforter
- It is important to be aware that, at that this age, there can be a danger of children participating in dangerous/risk-taking behaviour such as drug, alcohol, and sexual promiscuity.

## Emotional and behavioural responses to death

Children and adults may present with emotional and/or behavioural responses during the grieving process. The table below provides an outline of some possible responses:

### Emotional Responses

#### **Fear:**

- That they may die
- About going to sleep
- About being separated from loved ones
- About being left alone (e.g. 'Who will look after me if...')

#### **Guilt:**

- About feeling angry towards the deceased
- Feeling death was a punishment for something they have done
- Because they once wished the person dead
- Feeling they did not love the person enough
- About the last thing they said/did

#### **Anger:**

- With the person for dying and abandoning them
- With themselves for not doing something to prevent the death
- About God/religion
- About the injustice of life

#### **Confusion:**

- About what will happen next/their new role (e.g. within the family)
- About their own feelings
- About explanations they are given
- About God/religion

### Behavioural Responses

#### **Internalising behaviours:**

- Reluctance to go to school/reluctance to attend lessons
- Difficulties making and maintaining relationships
- Unwillingness to go out to play/socialise with peers
- Bedwetting
- Problems with focussing on or completing school and other work
- Lower self-esteem and self-confidence
- Sleep disturbance/nightmares
- Eating problems/change in eating patterns
- Complaining of headaches/stomach aches/pains or be prone to illness or infection
- Anxiety about own/others' health, even when the health concern appears relatively 'minor'

#### **Externalising behaviours:**

- Starting to bully others
- Sullenness/irritability/clinginess/dependence/separation anxiety
- Wanting to contact loved ones regularly
- Becoming upset by seemingly 'minor' events
- Aggression, anger and non-compliance
- Demonstrating low energy/exhaustion or becoming surprisingly hyperactive
- Regression to younger patterns of behaviour

## When to seek external support for children and young people

Following a death, the reactions of children and young people may cause a great deal of concern, and some families feel they should get specialist help immediately. However, with the right support from the people around them, most children will be able to cope with the death of a loved one. Gradually they will learn to deal with all of the changes.

### **How do I know if a child/young person needs support from external professionals?**

Children might need extra support from professionals in the longer term if they:

- Imitate the dead person all the time
- Talk regularly about wanting to die or join the dead person
- Talk about wanting to take their own life or giving away possessions
- Experience long-term symptoms of other mental health needs (e.g. significant weight loss due to loss of appetite).

### **Who should I speak to?**

After speaking to the child/young person and parents/carers, settings should:

- Contact their school Wellbeing Worker in the first instance, if applicable
- Contact CAMHS for further support via the Single Point of Access contact number: **01904615300**.

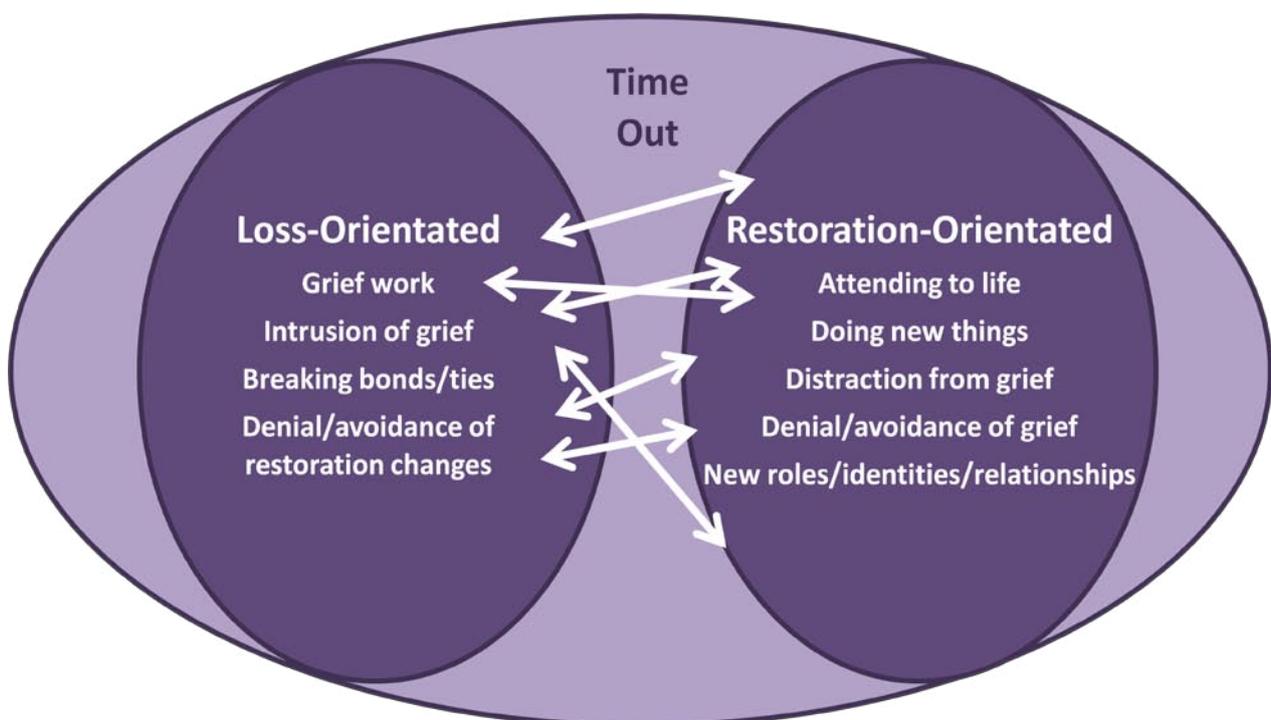
**If you feel a child is at immediate and significant risk to themselves or others (e.g. a suicide attempt has been made/is ongoing within school), call 999.**

## 1.3 A model of grieving

Models of grief can help us to understand the underlying functions of emotional and behavioural responses to grief. Stroebe and Schut's 'Dual Process Model' (2001, 2010) provides a useful framework for understanding grieving in children and adults. The model proposes two categories of 'stressors' associated with bereavement, including:

- **Loss-orientated:** Concentrating on, processing and appraising the loss
- **Restoration-orientated:** Rethinking/re-orientating and re-planning one's life in the face of bereavement.

The model proposes that a person may 'oscillate' between different aspects of loss and/or stressor categories. For example, a person may move from one loss-orientated stressor to another, or move from a loss-orientated stressor to a restoration-orientated stressor. On some occasions, people may also experience 'time out' from the grieving process.



**N.B. Grief work** means confronting the reality of death, going through events that happened before/at the time of the death, and focusing on memories.

## 1.4 Witnessing a critical incident

Pupils/students and staff who have witnessed a critical incident event may require extra support. The diagram below provides some ideas:

### Pupils/Students

#### Immediately after the event:

- Direct them immediately to a quiet, private area (ideally taking a route in which other pupils/students won't see them)
- Identify a member of staff who has a positive relationship with the pupil/student to sit with them
- Inform parents/carers as soon as possible and allow them to come to school/pick up their child.

#### Further down the line:

- Encourage them to talk about/engage in activities to express their memories and feelings about the event, including what they saw, what they heard, how they felt/feel, what they thought, what they did
- Follow guidance on 'The First Few Days' on p. 24
- Talk to them about how to respond to questions from students about what they saw
- Contact your Wellbeing Worker or CAMHS via Single Point of Access if regular flashbacks, nightmares or extreme avoidance are experienced in the longer term.

### Staff

#### Immediately after the event:

- Direct them immediately to a quiet, private area. Staff who have witnessed an event may want to have their own space away from pupils/students who have witnessed an event
- Identify a member of staff who has not witnessed the event to sit with them
- Provide written information about how to access further support (see 'Further Support' on p. 27)
- Allow them to go home. Check to make sure there will be someone at home to take care of them
- Check in with the member(s) of staff regularly by telephone.

#### Further down the line:

- Remind them about further support options
- Allow them to talk openly about the event
- Talk to them about how to respond to questions from students about what they saw (if applicable)
- Work with the member of staff to develop a flexible return to work plan (if applicable).

## 1.5 Death by suicide

When a person dies as a result of suicide, staff in schools and settings may feel particularly unsure about how to respond. The section below provides information about how to talk about suicide and how to keep other children and young people safe.

### Tips for talking about suicide:

When a doctor feels the cause of a death is unknown, 'unnatural', or sudden and unexplained, the death may be reported to a coroner, who may decide a post-mortem is required. After the post-mortem, a coroner may hold an inquest if the cause of death is still unknown, or if the person may have died violently or unnaturally. There will always be an inquest if suicide is the suspected cause of death. **The word 'suicide' should not be used until this has been confirmed by the inquest as the cause of death.** Instead, explain that investigations are ongoing, and the nature and cause of death are currently unknown.

When the cause of death has been confirmed as suicide, or when a person/immediate family member has confirmed that a suicide attempt has been made:

- Use phrases such as:
  - Died by suicide
  - Attempted suicide
  - Taking one's own life
- Avoid describing suicide using phrases such as:
  - Committed suicide (which implies suicide is a crime)
  - Victim
  - A successful/unsuccessful/failed suicide attempt
  - A cry for help
- Agree with family members what information will be shared with pupils/students and staff, including what wording will be used
- Stick to the facts, even if there is only limited information available. Do not speculate about motives

- Address rumours and reinforce the need for students to be extremely sensitive and careful about what they post on social media
- Carry out the same procedures/rituals as you would for any other student death to avoid portraying suicide as 'unique'.

### Keeping other children and young people safe:

When a person from the school community has died and there are rumours or concerns within the community that the cause of death was suicide, it is important to:

- Talk to students about what support is available for bereavement and mental health
- Talk to students about what to do if they are worried about someone else's mental health
- Place leaflets/posters around schools signposting students to further support
- Take any talk about suicide seriously, including both direct talk of suicide and indirect references to wanting to join the student who died. Contact your school Wellbeing Worker in the first instance, if applicable, or contact CAMHS for further support via the Single Point of Access contact number: **01904615300**
- **If you feel a child is at immediate and significant risk to themselves or others (e.g. a suicide attempt has been made/is ongoing within school), call 999.**

**Further information self harm and suicidal behaviour in children and young people is available via:**

<http://www.yor-ok.org.uk/downloads/Safeguarding%20-%20Integrated%20Working/COY%20Self%20Harm%20and%20Suicidal%20Behaviour%20Oct%202017.pdf>

**Further information about responding to a suicide is provided by the Samaritans via:**

<https://www.samaritans.org/education/step-by-step/resources/respond-to-suspected-suicide-schools>

**The Samaritans also provide free telephone support in the aftermath of an attempted or suspected suicide in a school or college community: 0808 168 2528.**

## **SECTION TWO: PRACTICAL RESOURCES**



## 2.1 Checklist for responding to critical incidents

Checklist for responding to critical incidents	✓
Lead taken by senior member of staff on news breaking	
Gather factual information re: what has happened, where and when, names of people directly involved	
Organise a planning meeting between school management to agree on actions and priorities – immediate (day 1), medium term (next few days/week) and longer term (month/half term)	
Provide a script for office staff	
Ensure staff are briefed as soon as possible with the available facts (often this is via a morning briefing session or meeting at lunchtime/end of school day). Be aware of staff who will be affected most (e.g. staff who have recently experienced a bereavement)	
Inform staff who are absent (so they don't hear via social media etc)	
Inform Chair of Governors and ask him/her to cascade to other governors	
Establish a clear communication route/times with outside services/professionals e.g. EP, Wellbeing Worker	
Keep a record of all incoming and outgoing calls/advice, and names of contact people	
Identify a 'safe space' where the most vulnerable children/young people can go and ensure staff are there to listen to them.	
Agree with staff how to inform pupils, starting with class/tutor/year group most affected	
Advise staff on how to handle children's feelings, (and not mask their own feelings). Be alert to staff who are struggling and need support	
Inform pupils and provide them with an opportunity in class to ask questions and discuss what has happened	
Continue normal timetable as much as possible (with flexibility for specific cohort/tutor group if needed)	
Plan flexibly and sensitively how to support the pupil(s) most affected back in to class whilst providing some support outside class if needed	
Encourage staff to talk during breaks	
Inform parents as necessary, reassure them that pupils will be supported, and advise them on how to listen to and support their children. Draft letter – keep it brief, factual and include acknowledgment of the family's grief. Explain that staff are being supported by CYC services but that their children are being supported by familiar and trusted staff in school who know the children best. The letter should be sent to CYC Communications Team for checking (newsdesk@york.gov.uk)	
For high profile cases, nominate a member of SLT to deal directly with the media. Contact CYC Communications Team for advice and support	
Gather staff involved for a short de-briefing at the end of the day. Give staff permission to leave school early	
Be mindful of any staff who are returning to an empty house. Offer them a contact/buddy if they need to talk	
Ask staff to monitor the effects on adults and children over time and feed this back to member(s) of staff co-ordinating the incident	
Consider family wishes when thinking through funeral arrangements e.g. which staff will go to represent school, authorising absence for close friends to attend with parents (school should not take responsibility for supervising), having an assembly so those not attending the funeral have the opportunity to share memories of his/her life and say goodbye	

## 2.2 Breaking the news to pupils/students

### Ideas for different age groups

#### Early Years and Lower Primary

- Read a story about bereavement
- Model your emotions e.g. 'I feel very sad', 'I feel angry'
- Explain how the children might feel e.g. 'You might feel cross, sad, confused, nothing at all'
- Be very clear in your language use e.g. explaining that this means the person can't come back, even though they would like to

#### Upper Primary

- Reassure pupils that they are safe, and their loved ones are safe
- Model and acknowledge your own emotions, encourage pupils to talk about their own emotions (including anger)
- Continue to encourage children to grieve/talk about the dead person after breaking the news
- Explain that maintaining routines (e.g. coming to school) may help them to feel better
- Provide information about where pupils can go if they need to chat/need space

#### Secondary

- Try to address rumours as quickly as possible
- Consider discussing social media e.g. what is/isn't acceptable to discuss
- Discuss helpful coping mechanisms (e.g. talking to a trusted person, talking to friends, memorial activities)
- Encourage non-verbal outlets for expressing emotions e.g. drawing, playing sport
- Revisit the topic of grief again at a later date, encouraging open, respectful discussions about philosophies around death/dying/religion

#### Post-16

- Provide signposting information for help-seeking within and outside of College
- Offer time for discussions
- Consider what they may have already heard/read e.g. in the press, on social media

### General tips:

- Tell pupils/students as soon as possible
- Break the news in small 'natural' groups e.g. tutor/class groups, avoiding whole school assemblies

- Encourage questions
- Use words such as 'death' and 'dead'. Avoid ambiguous language e.g.:
  - Passed away, gone to sleep, having 'lost' someone
  - If you refer to 'heaven', the pupil may think this is a place that someone could come back from
- Try to find out as much as possible. Give as much truth as possible to pupils/students (in negotiation with the affected family/pupil)
- Let children know it is ok to show their emotions
- Be aware of individual pupil/student previous experiences of death. Meet with individual pupils if necessary
- Address the most affected pupils/students separately.

### Template scripts for breaking the news

Three template scripts are provided below, with thanks to Winston's Wish and the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). Before using these scripts, please ensure you establish exactly what information can and cannot be shared with pupils/students, as in the majority of cases, the names and hospital locations of injured people would not usually be released.

"I've got some really sad news to tell you today that might upset you. I know most of you will have heard of cancer, and know that sometimes people with cancer get better, but other times people die from it. Mrs Smith, the Geography teacher and Year 11 tutor, has been ill with cancer for a long time. I have to tell you that Mrs Smith died yesterday in hospital".

"Sometimes people have accidents at work, at home, at school or on the road. People may be hurt or injured in the accident and they may have to go to hospital for treatment. Sadly, there are some accidents that cause people to die. I have some really sad news to tell you that might upset you. Yesterday Stephen, who is in Year 4, was in an accident and he was so badly injured that he died".

“Some students from our school have been involved in a road traffic accident. Some deaths have occurred and some are injured. Those who have died are..... The injured are.....They are being treated in..... There are.....who are very seriously injured, and others are ok, but are being checked out by medical staff. We are getting information on an ongoing basis and will let you know if there is anything important you need to know. Please be careful to stick to the facts and not to engage in spreading rumours about injuries or further deaths. This could be very distressing for others, especially if not accurate. I understand that this information might be very upsetting so if you would like to talk to someone about this further, you should...”.

### **Tips for responding to difficult questions**

- Ensure all staff are aware of what can/cannot be shared with pupils/students
- Don't panic if you don't know the answer, or don't know how to answer a question. Use phrases such as 'We don't know the answer to that yet, but will tell you as soon as we know'
- Try to predict difficult questions and consider developing a script for responding to these questions
- The leaflet 'When Someone Close Dies' (York EPS) contains a script for commonly asked questions.

## 2.4 Breaking the news to parents/guardians

### Sample letter template: Death of a child

Dear Parents /Carers,

Your child's tutor had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>. <Name> was a <insert description e.g. caring, funny, and intelligent person> who loved <insert hobbies/interests> and was <e.g. cherished by the whole school community>. We are deeply saddened by <Name's> death, <(s)he> will be greatly missed and our thoughts are with the <family name>.

They were told that <Name> died from an illness called cancer, and that sometimes people who have cancer can get better, but other times people die from it. <Name> had been ill with cancer for a long time and died at home yesterday.

When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of feelings of sadness, anger, and confusion - these are all normal. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school, but I have included some information alongside this letter which may help you to answer your child's questions as they arise (*include 'When Someone Close Dies', York EPS alongside your letter*). During this difficult time, school staff will aim to keep school routines as normal as possible, in order to provide a secure and stable educational setting. However, we also understand that children may be more emotional and become distressed periodically, so a safe space has been set up in <location> for children to use when they are feeling distressed.

A special <assembly/service> will be held for children and staff on <insert day> to celebrate <Name's> life and contribution to the school community.

Yours sincerely,

<Name>, Headteacher

## Sample letter template: Death of a member of staff

Dear Parents/Carers,

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the tragic death of <Name>, who has been a teacher at this school for <number> years.

Our thoughts are with <Name's> family at this time and in an effort to try and respond to <his/her> death in a positive way, all children have been informed.

The children were told that <Name> died from an asthma attack on <date>. A number of pupils have been identified as being asthmatic and <Name>, the School Nurse has today reassured them that it is unusual for a person to die from asthma.

When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of feelings - sadness, anger, and confusion - which are all normal. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school, but I have made available some information which may help you to answer your child's questions as they arise. You can obtain this from the school office.

An assembly will be held for students/pupils and staff on <insert day> to celebrate <Name's> life and contribution to the school community.

Yours sincerely,

<Name>, Headteacher

## Sample letter template: Sudden death

Dear Parents/Carers,

The school has experienced (the sudden death, accidental injury, etc.) of <Name> in <year>. <Name> was a <insert description e.g. caring, funny, and intelligent person> who loved <insert hobbies/interests> and was <e.g. cherished by the whole school community>. We are deeply saddened by <Name's> death, <(s)he> will be greatly missed and our thoughts are with the <family name>.

We have support structures in place to help your child cope during this difficult time <elaborate>.

It is possible that your child may have some feelings and questions s/he may like to discuss with you. It is important to give factual information that is matched to your child's age and emotional maturity.

All children are different and will express their feelings in different ways. It is not uncommon for children to have difficulty concentrating or be fearful, anxious, or irritable. They may become withdrawn, cry, complain of physical aches and pains, have difficulty sleeping or have nightmares. Some may not want to eat. These are generally short term reaction. You can help your child by taking time to listen and by encouraging him/her to express feelings. Over the course of the coming days, please keep an eye on your child and allow him/her to express their feelings without criticism.

Although classes will continue as usual, I anticipate that the next few days will be difficult for everyone.

*(Optional)* An information night for parents is planned for <date, time and place>. At that time, further information about how to help children in grief will be given.

The leaflet for parents included alongside this letter provides further information about how to talk to your child about death. *(Include 'Supporting Bereaved Children and Young People', York EPS alongside your letter)*

Young people frequently turn to social media to see what others are saying, or to find out more information. At these times it is important that you monitor their use and engage with them about what they read. We urge you to emphasise and reinforce the need to be extremely sensitive and careful about what they post.

If you would like advice you may contact the following people at the school <details>.

Yours sincerely,

<Name>, Headteacher

## Sample letter template: Violent death

Dear Parents/Carers,

I need to inform you about a very sad event that has happened. A child/young person from the neighbourhood, the sister/ brother of <Name>, a student here at school, was killed as a result of <a violent attack, violent incident in the street etc.> <when>. We are all profoundly saddened by <his/her> death.

We have shared this information and had discussions with all of our students so that they know what has happened. School staff members have been available for students on an on-going basis today. Other support personnel <including psychologists etc., according to actual arrangements> are available to advise staff in their support of students.

The death of any young person is tragic, but a violent death is even more difficult. It is hard to have to teach our children about the violence in our world and to accept that sometimes we do not have the power to prevent it.

This death may cause a variety of reactions in your child. Some children/young people may be afraid for their own life and for the lives of those they love. Take time to listen to their fears and reassure them that what has happened is rare.

We have enclosed some additional information that may be useful during this time.

The media are in the vicinity of the school and may approach you or your children. You need not respond to their questions if you are approached. We will not allow the media to interview your child at school and our general advice is that you should not let your children be interviewed. They may not be mature enough to judge what to say at such a difficult and sensitive time and may say something they will regret later.

In these times, young people tend to turn to social media to see what others are saying, or to find out more information. While social media can be of great consolation, we would urge you to reinforce the need to be extremely sensitive about what your son/daughter might post to others.

Our thoughts are with <family name> and with each of you.

Yours sincerely,

<Name>, Headteacher

## 2.5 Dealing with the media

The prospect of dealing with the media can be intimidating, but can be made to feel more manageable with sufficient preparation. The section below provides some information about what to consider, and a sample media announcement:

- Prepare a factual statement to be delivered directly to camera by the Headteacher or chair of governors. Send the statement to City of York Council's Communication Team (01904 555 515, [newsdesk@york.gov.uk](mailto:newsdesk@york.gov.uk)) for approval
- Before the announcement, ask for a list of potential questions from the media
- Don't be drawn into giving personal details, or answering questions you haven't prepared for
- Establish whether and how your statement may be edited
- Don't make off-the-record comments or respond to quotes from other sources
- Ask for support from City of York Council's Communication Team (01904 555 515, [newsdesk@york.gov.uk](mailto:newsdesk@york.gov.uk)).

### Sample media announcement

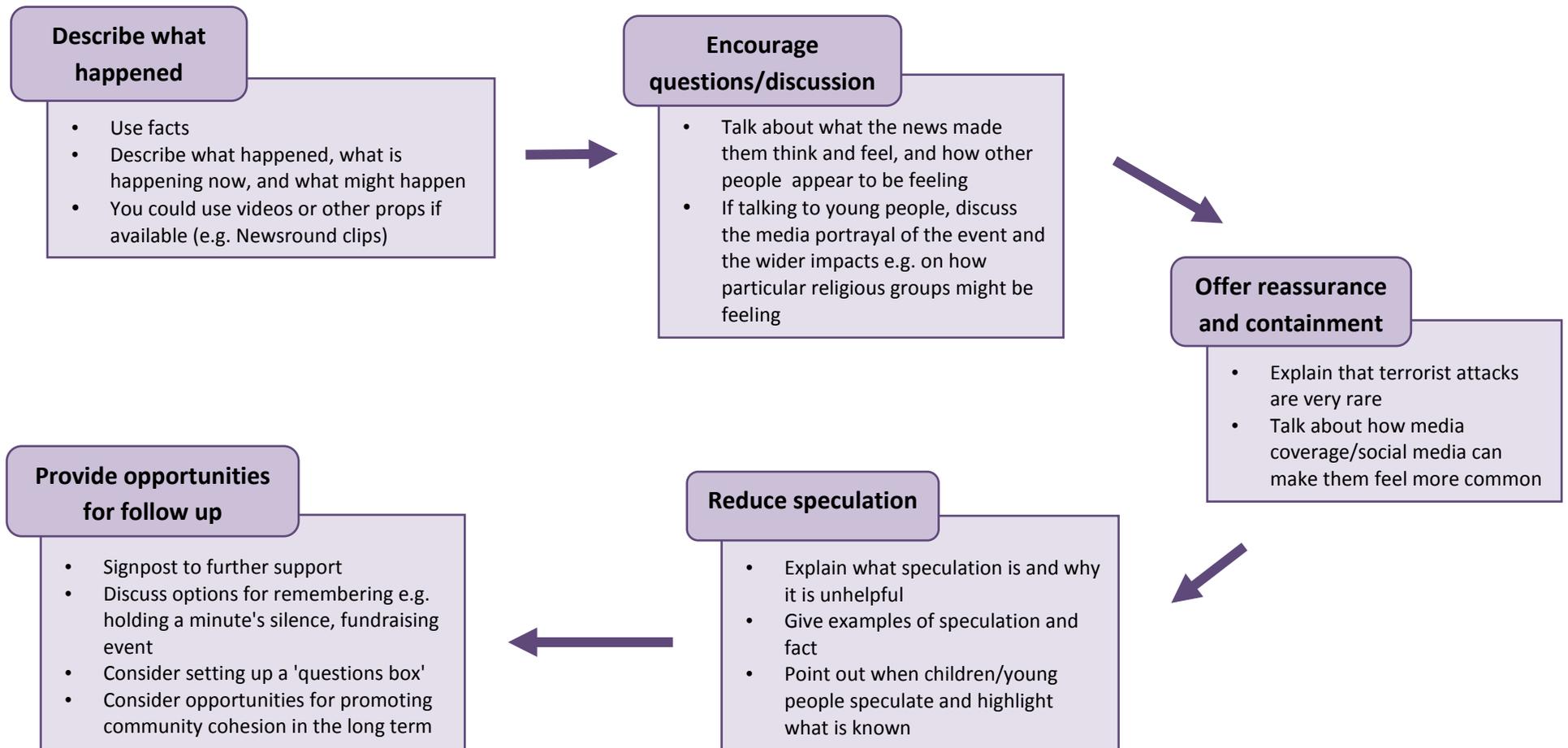
My name is <Name> and I am the Headteacher at <Name> School. We learned this morning of the death of <one of our students or name of student>. This is a terrible tragedy for the family(ies), our school and our community. We are deeply saddened by these events. Our sympathy and thoughts are with <Name's> family and friends.

<Name of student/students> was a <e.g. year 5 boy> and will be greatly missed by all who knew him. We have been in contact with <his/her> parents and they have requested that we all understand their need for privacy at this difficult time.

Offers of support have been pouring in and are greatly appreciated. Our school has implemented our Critical Incident Management Plan. Psychologists from the City of York Council Educational Psychological Service have been with us to support and advise teachers in their efforts to assist our students at this time. The teachers have been helping students to deal with the tragic event, and the school has been open to parents to support them and to offer them advice and guidance.

We would ask you to respect the privacy of the family(ies) and the school at this time. Thank you.

## 2.6 Talking about terrorist attacks



## 2.7 Talking to bereaved family members

The prospect of talking to a bereaved family can be daunting. The diagram below aims to give some tips on what to say when making an initial telephone call to family members, but could be adapted according to the situation:

### Before making the call

Ensure you have a piece of paper and a pen to hand to make notes.

### Step One

Explain the purpose of the call. Tell the person that you are calling to express your condolences and ask if now is a good time to talk.

### Step Two

Empathise and allow the person to direct the conversation. Share your feelings (e.g. 'I was so sad/shocked to hear...').

### Step Three

Establish the facts. Write down key pieces of information.

### Step Four

Talk to the person about how they would like you to share the information with staff and pupils/students. Establish what they would/would not want you to share. Talk about funeral arrangements and who they would/would not want to attend (including how many people and whether they want to invite friends of the deceased). Talk about the family's religious, cultural, and spiritual beliefs.

### Step Five

Let the person know when you will next be in touch. Tell them if/when they can visit the school/setting, and let them know you will be thinking of them.

## 2.8 The first few days: Ideas and considerations

The first few days following a critical incident require a careful balance between:

- **Maintaining routine**
- **Giving space to grieve and process emotions**
- **Adapting to the change**
- **Giving opportunities to remember the person.**

The section below aims to give some ideas and considerations.

### Ideas:

- Initially (e.g. in the first couple of days) give pupils/students who are struggling the option to leave a lesson if they feel distressed, making it clear where you would like them to go and telling them that you will check to make sure they are ok
- Create a temporary designated 'quiet room' for people to use when they feel overwhelmed. Careful consideration will need to be given to how the quiet room is staffed. All staff should be aware of the purpose and function of the quiet room, and how this facility can be accessed by pupils/students
- Try to include children/young people who are absent from school (including siblings or close family) as much as possible, e.g. by:
  - Sending work home, if appropriate
  - Sending home letters/a card of condolence signed by the class
  - Giving children/young people opportunities to attend lessons/talk to peers or staff members via Skype
  - Making a plan for the child/young person to return to school/college, in collaboration with the child/young person and family members.
- If you reach a tricky topic in the curriculum, use this as an opportunity to open up conversation and reflect with pupils/students, rather than

avoiding the topic. You may want to forewarn specific individual children/young people.

### Considerations:

- If a member of staff has died, think about what you will do to cover their duties
- If a pupil/student has died, think about/talk to other pupils about what you will do when you get to their name when calling the register. If the pupil/student was on a sports team, agree with other team members about what you will do about their position/shirt etc.
- In large schools and colleges (i.e. where young people have contact with multiple teachers/staff and sometimes for only one lesson a week), you might want to consider sending a photograph of the deceased young person to relevant staff via the intranet
- Consider protocol for supporting staff who feel suddenly overwhelmed (e.g. mid-lesson). Identify a place/room for staff to use, and procedure for arranging emergency cover
- Think about how to share out the day-to-day responsibilities of key members of staff involved in managing the critical incident, to give them time to cover critical incident duties.
- Consider having extra staff to supervise unstructured times when emotions may be heightened.

#### Critical incidents during exam periods

Children and young people involved in a critical incident during an examination period may be eligible for **special consideration**. If you feel that a pupil/student or group of pupils/students may be eligible for special consideration, you should **contact relevant exam boards as soon as possible**.

Flooding is an issue that affects families and communities in York to varying extents, and some areas of the city are more vulnerable than others. The text box below aims to provide some guidance around supporting children and families who have been affected by flooding:

### **Flooding in York: Some ideas and considerations**

#### ***Considerations:***

- Children may have lost possessions (including school possessions)
- Children may have witnessed their homes flooding
- At school, children may be worried about what is happening to their home and/or family
- Children who have experienced flooding may panic or be unable to concentrate when it rains.

#### ***Ideas:***

- Find out about local relief centres/and or food banks
- Put up posters signposting support (visible from outside the school so can be seen at weekends/in holidays)
- Give children/young people the opportunity to telephone home/check the weather forecast
- Find out what children/families have lost and provide replacements/loans if possible, e.g. text books, uniform
- Consider providing access to breakfast club/school dinners/after school clubs.

The latest information and guidance relating to a specific flooding event is shared on the City of York Council website:

[https://www.york.gov.uk/info/20149/emergencies/1808/floods -  
\\_latest advice and information](https://www.york.gov.uk/info/20149/emergencies/1808/floods_-_latest_advice_and_information)

## 2.9 Ideas for memorials

Memorials are often most successful when an idea is the result of consultation and agreement from the family and friends of the person who has died.

**A memory box, in which children/young people can collect poems they have written, pictures, photos, items**

**A memorial garden or planting a tree/bush in their memory**

**Having a special lunch time serving the person's favourite**

**Holding a charitable event related to the person's interests, e.g. a play or performance, a readathon**

**A condolence book**

**An assembly to celebrate the person's/people's life/lives**

**A wall display or plaque (which could be taken down and given to the family at a later date)**

**Naming a trophy or award after the person/people**

**Holding a memorial service – consult with family members, pupils/students and staff about what this might involve**

**Wearing the person's favourite colour for a day, or on the day of the assembly/service**

## 2.10 Further support

### For supporting children and families:

- **Winston's Wish:** <https://www.winstonswish.org.uk/>, 08088 020 021
- **Cruse:** <https://www.cruse.org.uk/>, 01904 481162, 0808 808 1677
- **Self harm and suicidal behaviour in children and young people:**  
<http://www.yor-ok.org.uk/downloads/Safeguarding%20-%20Integrated%20Working/COY%20Self%20Harm%20and%20Suicidal%20Behaviour%20Oct%2017.pdf>
- City of York Educational Psychology leaflets:
  - **'When Someone Close Dies':**  
[https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/download/578/when\\_someone\\_close\\_dies](https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/download/578/when_someone_close_dies)
  - **'Supporting Bereaved Children and Young People':**  
[https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/883/supporting\\_bereaved\\_children](https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/883/supporting_bereaved_children)

### For staff:

- **Cruse:** <https://www.cruse.org.uk/>, 01904 481162, 0808 808 1677
- **YorWellbeing:** [www.yorwellbeing.com](http://www.yorwellbeing.com)
- **Education Support Partnership** (a UK charity dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of teachers and the entire education workforce):  
<https://www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk/>, 08000 562 561
- All **ELSAs** (Emotional Literacy Support Assistants) receive training on loss and bereavement, so are likely to be a useful source of information within school
- Schools are able to buy in staff training on loss and bereavement from **York Educational Psychology Service.**

### Suicide information:

- **Samaritans Step by Step:** <https://www.samaritans.org/education/step-by-step/resources/respond-to-suspected-suicide-schools>, 0808 168 2528
- **Charlie Waller Memorial Trust:** <https://www.cwmt.org.uk/>
- **Papyrus** (prevention of young suicide): <https://www.papyrus-uk.org/>

N.B. Specific emergency help lines/emails are often set up in response to some critical incidents (e.g. bombings, floods).

## 2.11 Emergency contact list

	Name	Phone	Mobile	Email
Educational Psychologists	Cathy Ardern	01904 555 897	07535 239 480	<a href="mailto:cathy.ardern@york.gov.uk">cathy.ardern@york.gov.uk</a>
	Lisa Atkin	01904 553 677	07909 872 354	<a href="mailto:lisa.atkin@york.gov.uk">lisa.atkin@york.gov.uk</a>
	Claire Elsdon	01904 554 328	07881 806 282	<a href="mailto:claire.elsdon@york.gov.uk">claire.elsdon@york.gov.uk</a>
	Liz Firth	01904 555 879	07534 435 495	<a href="mailto:liz.firth@york.gov.uk">liz.firth@york.gov.uk</a>
	Danielle Goodall	01904 555 605	07785 714 964	<a href="mailto:danielle.goodall@york.gov.uk">danielle.goodall@york.gov.uk</a>
	Tina Hardman	01904 554 305	07909 872 354	<a href="mailto:tina.hardman@york.gov.uk">tina.hardman@york.gov.uk</a>
	Geraldine Jackson	01904 551 370	07909 685 093	<a href="mailto:geraldine.jackson@york.gov.uk">geraldine.jackson@york.gov.uk</a>
	Julia Johns	01904 552 900	07909 872 314	<a href="mailto:julia.johns@york.gov.uk">julia.johns@york.gov.uk</a>
	Emma Truelove	01904 554 307	07535 246 238	<a href="mailto:emma.truelove@york.gov.uk">emma.truelove@york.gov.uk</a>
	Alison Walker	01904 551 445	07990 783 135	<a href="mailto:alison.walker@york.gov.uk">alison.walker@york.gov.uk</a>
	Jo Williams	01904 554 321	07909 872 368	<a href="mailto:jo.williams@york.gov.uk">jo.williams@york.gov.uk</a>
	<b>Major Incident Response Team (MIRT)</b>		07974 745 194 (24 hour)	<a href="mailto:alex.sutcliffe@northyorks.gov.uk">alex.sutcliffe@northyorks.gov.uk</a>
	<b>CYC Communications Team</b>	01904 555 515		<a href="mailto:newsdesk@york.gov.uk">newsdesk@york.gov.uk</a>

**This document has been produced with reference to guidance from the National Educational Psychological Service, Winston's Wish, and North Yorkshire County Council's Loss and Bereavement Guidance for Schools. We are grateful for all information and advice shared by colleagues in other Educational Psychology Services.**

**This information can be provided in your own language.**

我們也用您們的語言提供這個信息 (Cantonese)

Ta informacja może być dostarczona w twoim własnym języku. (Polish)

Bu bilgiyi kendi dilinizde almanız mümkündür. (Turkish)

**☎ 01904 551550**

If you would like this information in an accessible format (for example in large print, on CD or by email) or another language please telephone:

01904 551550

or email:

[educational.psychology@york.gov.uk](mailto:educational.psychology@york.gov.uk)

