

# CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Guidance for Schools in Herefordshire

## Following a critical incident please contact:

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## What is a critical incident?

A critical incident is defined as an event or events, usually sudden, which involves the experience of significant personal distress to a level that might overwhelm normal responses, procedures, and coping strategies, and which is likely to have emotional and organisational consequences.

## Who is this guide for?

This critical incidents guidelines document assists head teachers and school staff to deal as effectively as possible with critical incidents in schools. These guidelines have been written to take account of recent incidents and to provide schools with guidance and support information on how such incidents may be handled. This ranges from initial planning, through to immediate handling and reporting of an incident, to the after effects and how these can be handled with sensitivity and care.

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## Procedures to consider

Critical incidents may include, but are not limited to:

- The death/injury of a pupil, staff member and/or member of the school community
- The serious assault of a pupil, staff member and/or member of the school community
- The suicide of a pupil, staff member and/or member of the school community
- Natural events such as fires or floods
- Civil disturbance, criminal activity or terrorism.

Schools have regular fire drills and clear policies and procedures for reacting to fire and other emergencies. Equally, schools have child safeguarding policies and procedures in place. In the same way, it is important that in the event of a school experiencing a critical incident, the response should be a planned, tested and a considered one, avoiding possible panic while allowing grief to be expressed. An impulsive response could make the situation worse for all concerned, as such, it may be pertinent to consider creating a named Critical Incident Team in school, with planned roles for if a critical incident occurs. While death and/or serious injury are not subjects that are easily talked about, we need to be prepared to respond sensitively and professionally.

## Receiving the information at school

Firstly, the school should identify a key person (or persons) to lead the response that will follow. This could be the Head Teacher or the Deputy Head Teacher, or the person best placed to make take on this role as Key Person or Critical Incident Team Leader. Their initial action should be to confirm the information, record it and check it. It is essential to have the following facts confirmed:

1. What has happened.
2. Date and time of incident.
3. Location of incident.
4. Details of any injuries at the scene.
5. Who else witnessed the incident or are/were at the scene.
6. What advice have emergency services given.
7. What action has already been taken.
8. Any other important information.

The information above should be shared with the appropriate key person if this has not already been done. The Key Person should then contact The Service Director for Learning Skills and Achievement (Liz Farr) at Herefordshire Council. Local authority staff will be able to co-ordinate and provide advice on dealing with the media.

## Responding to a death

Take a moment to consider the action required. Check any action you take – you too may be in shock.

### The sudden death of a parent or close relative

If appropriate the nominated Key Person should discuss with the family who should break the news to the pupil or member of staff. In the case of the death of a pupil's parent or close relative, it is best that a parent or family member should do this with the support of an appointed member of staff such as the pupil's class or form teacher. If this is not possible, the Key Person or Critical Incident Team Leader would request someone suitable to break the sad news to the pupil or member of staff concerned.

The news of the death should also be given to all relevant staff, such as those who teach the pupil as soon as possible, whilst ensuring that family members and those who were close to the person are told first.

### The death of a pupil

Great support is needed in this event. On receiving the news of a pupil's death, the Key Person or Critical Incident Team Leader, after consultation with the family of the pupil to ascertain their wishes, should call appropriate colleagues together. A suggested procedure might be:

1. Gather together the staff at the earliest opportunity, perhaps during break time or lunch time and inform them of the news.
2. Allow time for shared grief amongst the staff. In smaller schools the pupil concerned might be well known to all the staff.
3. Allow the staff to share how they feel about what has happened.
4. Allow the staff to voice the concerns they have about telling the rest of the pupils/students.
5. Inform the teachers that they may need to address what has happened in their classes if the pupils so wish. In the same way as the staff were given time, so the pupils should be given sharing time in class. This sort of sharing time should be allowed over the coming days and weeks if the teachers sense the class is uncomfortable or becoming emotional.
6. Impress on the staff what facts are to be announced to the pupils/students.
7. To avoid rumours, exaggerations and development of the event, only the facts should be stated openly and honestly without assumptions or judgements. If possible, the next of kin should consent to what is to be announced. Be aware of the instant power of Twitter, Facebook etc. but do not rely on the veracity of any information gained by those means, not even when photographs have been shared.
8. Communicate to the staff how the announcement will be made. The deceased's immediate friends and class should be told first and foremost. After that the Key Person(s) or Bereavement Team should decide on the best course of action. Should it be a full school assembly, year groups, or the more intimate surroundings of a class/form group?

9. It must be remembered that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotional feelings. Some will deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some even showing feelings of anger. There will be tears and distress.

## The death of more than one pupil in accidental or tragic circumstances

On receiving such news, the Key Person(s) or whole Critical Incident Team should be called together to be briefed with the salient facts and to decide what steps are to be taken. A suggested procedure might be:

1. The Key Person should gather together all known details of what has happened and ensure they are correct.
2. The first task of the Critical Incident Team, on meeting together, should be to determine the likely impact on various sections of the school. For example, how many classes will be affected by the loss of a pupil or pupils and what will be the impact?
3. It may be that the Critical Incident Team feel that extra help is needed. The Key Person might consider calling in support from the Local Authority (and/or Diocesan authorities or religious leaders if a Church or Faith school).
4. It is crucial that the Critical Incident Team set up an effective system of communication: Who will contact parents, if necessary? Who will meet with parents who arrive at school? Who will inform staff? Who will inform pupils/students?
5. Once again it is crucial that only facts are stated without comments or interpretations. It is imperative that rumours and interpretations of the truth are avoided.
6. Informing staff and pupils may follow the procedure already suggested (as in the previous section) in the event of the death of one child.
7. With such a tragedy as multiple deaths, it is absolutely crucial that pupils are given necessary time to try to put their thoughts and feelings into words. Very young children may not fully understand what has happened. They will, however, sense the feelings of grief present in the community. Young people in the early teen years and adolescents will react more deeply. All will suffer shock.
8. In the case of multiple deaths there is bound to be some media interest. The Key Person or member of the Critical Incident Team responsible for dealing with the media should prepare all the necessary statements. The Children's Services officer (and his/her deputy) in the local authority will be able to co-ordinate and advise on dealings with the media. Such statements should deal only with facts in as sympathetic a way as possible.
9. It may be necessary to have extra help in the school office. The Key Person or Critical Incident Team should agree a format of response to telephone inquiries. Such a format should be used as calmly as possible without appearing uncaring or cold.

## The death of a member of school staff

Most children and young people have difficulty facing this event as the teacher or other staff members are seen as being permanent fixtures within the school community. When such a death occurs it is doubly traumatic for the staff that not only have to look after their children who are disturbed, but also

grieve on their own personal level for a colleague. On receiving the news of a member of staff's death, the Key Person or Critical Incident Team Leader would call appropriate colleagues or the Critical Incident Team together. A suggested procedure might be:

1. Gather together the staff and inform them of the news.
2. Allow time for shared grief amongst the staff.
3. Allow the staff to share how they feel about what has happened.
4. Inform the teachers that they may need to address what has happened in their classes if the pupils wish to/demonstrate a need to. In the same way as the staff were given time, so the pupils should be given sharing time in class.
5. Impress on the staff what facts are to be announced to the pupils/students. To avoid rumours, exaggerations and development of the event, the facts should be stated simply. Be aware of the powerful influence of social media and how rapidly information can be shared via local networks e.g. on Facebook etc. However, be cautious about accepting the veracity of such information, and extremely cautious in how staff and the school communicate with parents and the school community via social media.
6. Communicate to the staff how the announcement will be made. Only essential and agreed facts should be shared.
7. Decide if it should require a full school assembly, year groups, or the more intimate surroundings of class/form groups?
8. It must be remembered that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotional feelings. Some will deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some even showing feelings of anger. There will be tears and distress. Everyone will be hurting to some degree or another.
9. Under such circumstances some staff may have difficulty coping themselves with the loss. Colleagues should watch carefully those teachers who seem particularly affected by the death of their fellow member of staff.
10. The resilience of staff and the level of immediate support needed by individuals will vary and the Key Person(s) need to be sensitive to this.

## Anticipated death

The anticipated death of a member of the community, whilst very difficult to manage, enables the school to establish appropriate communication with the family to support those likely to be most affected before and after the death. There may also be issues of grieving around any change or loss of independence to the patient caused by the illness.

*Anticipatory grief is "any grief occurring prior to the loss as distinguished from the grief which occurs after loss" [C.K.Aldrich - The dying patient's grief. Journal of the American Medical Association].*

Many schools support adults, children and young people within their community who have to face the painful reality that a parent, child or someone close to them is terminally ill. Often attempts are made to protect children from knowledge of the inevitable, which may be in the immediate or indeed long term future. The child or young person in such a situation, needs understanding and support far more than

protection. In the vast majority of cases, the child has already perceived that something is seriously wrong and needs support to understand this. Most children do have the ability to deal with such difficult experiences. What is counterproductive are false statements, half-truths or silences with which questions are answered. Such answers confuse, distress and lead such children into needless anxiety.

When dealing with children and young people in a school setting who are suffering from anticipatory grief, the following advice may be useful.

1. Confirm the facts concerning the pupil or pupil's sick relative.
2. Communicate the information as appropriate (in line with school procedures and the family's wishes).
3. Discover what he/she has been told about the illness.
4. Never give false hope to the child or young person or his/her fellow pupils.
5. Allow the pupil to talk freely about the sick person. There can also be a place for a pupil to talk about his/her own future death, but clearly great sensitivity and discretion should be exercised. Such a conversation would take place in private with a trusted adult. The family's wishes about the possibility of such a conversation should have been ascertained and their views should both be respected and adhered to. A record of any such conversation should be kept.
6. Be honest! If you do not know the answer to a question, say so.
7. Do not inform the pupil or fellow pupils about any progression concerning the illness unless the family have given permission.

## Suicide

When a suicide occurs, it can be a traumatic event for the school and the community. Its impact on pupils, students and staff can be significant, eliciting a range of emotional and behavioural responses unique for each individual.

Talking to young people about suicide can feel daunting. However, research suggests that talking about suicide in a calm and straightforward manner, as well as providing information and support, is very important in helping people manage their feelings and making sense of what has happened.

The aim of talking is to limit the harmful impact of the death and to promote positive coping strategies and good mental health. When doing so, keep the following factors in mind:

1. Give accurate information about why people end their lives through suicide. Try to avoid talking about "committing" suicide, which has connotations of the legal and religious status of this type of death in former times. Mental health difficulties such as depression are often associated with suicide. Talking about the link might encourage people to seek help for themselves.



2. Avoid blame. Suicide often follows a range of contributory factors. It is rarely the result of a single particular event or person.
3. DO NOT MENTION THE METHOD OF SUICIDE OR ITS LOCATION. Avoid talking about how the person died. Research shows that talking about the method and the location increases the risk of contagion (copycat deaths). Thus, the particular details and setting should not be discussed. Respect the deceased's family's need for privacy at a desperately sad time as the means for avoiding the inevitable questions that some of us might want to ask.
4. All the feelings associated with other forms of death will be present when reacting to a suicide. Normalising these feelings and allowing young people to talk through their emotional responses (if that is what they want) can help in the grieving process.
5. Encourage people to know what support is available so that if they are feeling overwhelmed, unable to cope, or developing thoughts of suicide themselves, they can choose a person that they feel comfortable with, and who might increase the likelihood that they will seek help if wanted.
6. If you are worried that a young person might be at risk of suicide, it is important to talk to him or her about your concerns in a calm and non-judgemental manner. It will probably feel distinctly uncomfortable asking someone directly about suicidal thoughts or plans, but we have to know if there is a risk and if that risk is imminently about to be implemented. It can be a huge relief for a young person to have the permission to speak openly about how he or she is feeling and to have the opportunity to gain support.

*If you believe that a young person is at imminent risk of suicide ensure they are accompanied to the accident and emergency department of the local hospital immediately, and keep the person safe until they receive help.*

*Professional support can also be provided by phoning the CAMHS team on 01432 220450 and ask for the Crisis Team who address concerns about thoughts of suicide, and are also able to offer guidance to staff in determining the level of risk prior to referral.*

## Guidelines for breaking news of a death to pupils

On receiving news of the death of a student or a member of staff:

1. Consult with the bereaved family concerned to ascertain their wishes.
2. The group should be gathered together in an appropriate place. This is best done in familiar groups by someone they know.
3. Whoever is giving the news should prepare themselves with what to say, you might want to develop a script to help with this.

4. Try to be as composed as possible as this helps to reduce the possible over-emotional reaction of some students. Remember however, it is perfectly human and understandable if you are moved by the events.
5. Start by acknowledging that you have some sad news to give them.
6. Be honest; give the news stating simple facts which have been checked for accuracy.
7. Talk briefly about the person who has died.
8. Let the students know of any arrangements already in place or of any arrangements agreed by the family.
9. Underline how important their support is at this most difficult time and that it may be appropriate to involve them in a school response, e.g. letters, flowers, cards, funeral attendance, memorial etc.
10. Keep a watching brief throughout the assembly/meeting and for a period of time afterwards to pick up and support students and staff showing signs of distress.
11. Be particularly aware of students and staff who may be especially vulnerable from their own past experiences. It is possible that students with learning difficulties or with behaviour problems may not reflect the commonly accepted mood of the moment.
12. Similarly, be aware of students with different cultural experiences of death.
13. Have special consideration for students who might have close connections with anyone who might be blamed for causing the death.
14. Keep in contact with the family suffering the loss. Make a note to remember the anniversary.
15. Once the news has been received, it is important that normal routines in school are resumed.

## Memorial and funeral services

Funerals and memorial services are a way in which the family, friends and society can say goodbye to someone who has died. The values of funerals and memorial services are:

1. They acknowledge the deceased person and provide an opportunity for the person to be remembered.
2. They give the opportunity for the death to be put in a religious context, if that is appropriate for the family and/or for the school community.
3. They give significance to what has happened.
4. They provide a time when the bereaved try to come to terms with what has happened.
5. They provide a time to express sorrow. Such an occasion helps in the grieving process and should be encouraged at every opportunity.

6. If the funeral is that of a parent, then the school may wish to send a representative or representatives in support of the pupil who has lost a parent. Should the school wish to send children then please check with the family of the bereaved, and ensure permission has been given from the parents of those attending.
7. If the funeral is that of a pupil or member of staff then the numbers of pupils and teachers wishing to attend may be considerable. Again, please check with the family of the bereaved and with the parents of those attending.

The following should always be considered:

1. The Named Person should always contact the family of the deceased to discuss funeral arrangements and to ascertain the family's wishes regarding representation from the school.
2. Such wishes are paramount and should always be respected.
3. If the school is to be represented at the funeral by pupils, it would be good if the pupils received support from appropriate members of staff before and after the funeral service. Pupils should be told in advance what will happen at the funeral ceremony.
4. Under certain circumstances a form/class close to the bereaved may wish to send messages of sympathy to the bereaved family. These messages may be in the form of poems, cards, flowers, etc. The appropriate staff should ensure that all such presents are appropriate and the family of the deceased have been consulted.
5. Often a memorial service may be held in school. This could be a whole school assembly or within a class situation. The planning of such an occasion, choosing readings, poems, music, hymns, pictures, tributes etc. all assist in the grieving process. It might be appropriate to invite members of the bereaved family to share in such a service. Again, on such an occasion, staff members should be on hand to lend support to the pupils who could be upset when sharing in this part of the grieving process.
6. Confirm any agreed arrangements by letter to parents and ensure details are posted on the school's website.

Version	Date	Responsible Officer
Version 1	3.6.24	Duncan Wilkins
Version 2	21.5.21	Kamran Khan
Version 3	3.6.24	Kamran Khan



# Appendix 1: Children and young people's understanding, needs and reactions to death

## Coping with loss

Each child has to cope with the loss of a loved person in his or her own individual way. There are many factors that influence how this is accomplished. It is possible, however, to suggest the following indicators as the main influences that affect the journey of grief following the death of a close friend, a parent or other family member:

- The type of death and the rituals that accompany it;
- The relationship the child experienced with the deceased;
- The ability of the surviving parent to care for and nurture the child;
- The ability of the family members to offer emotional support to the child and surviving parent;
- Other family influences such as the size of the family, its financial security and stability, and its ability to cope with change and disruption;
- The support the child may receive from peers and school;
- The child's own stage in understanding the concept of death.

[Ages below are for general guidance only]

## Understanding needs and reactions as a result of death: birth to age 4

### Understanding

- There is little or no understanding of death.
- Infants may sense the absence of a parent.
- Infants may miss familiar sounds, smells and touches.
- Children may sense feelings of sadness, and become aware of anxiety or distress around them.
- In the second year onwards, the early understanding of grief is apparent. Children may search for the missing person.
- There may be an increase in anger.
- There is a growing awareness of non-verbal expressions.
- Children understand death to be temporary and reversible. The deceased is expected to return.
- Some children are illogical in blaming self for what has happened. They believe their actions can control events and this leads to feelings of guilt.

- Some children think that death and sleeping are the same. This promotes fear.

## Needs

- The child needs positive care and attention. It is imperative that (s) he receives nurturing care. If nurturing attention is absent, this can lead to difficulties with establishing close emotional ties in adult life.
- The child needs to feel close to primary carers. The child may fear losing the primary carer's love. If possible, time spent away from primary carer should be limited. There is a need for holding and hugging.
- It is difficult for children to cope with the many changes that can happen to the family. A consistency in environment and routines is helpful in these circumstances of change. Any changes in family circumstances affecting the child should, if possible, be gradual.
- Children of this age are unable to verbalise feelings even though they are keenly aware of non-verbal expressions. Consequently, they have a need to act out such feelings. This often results in misbehaviour or disobedience and such children need to learn appropriate ways to release hostility, frustration and aggression.
- There is the beginning of a realisation that they are missing someone that others have in their families.

## Reactions

- In the first year, a change in mood or way of caring, or absence of carer may cause distress to the child.
- This can show itself in increased crying, irritability, disturbed sleep patterns, erratic feeding.
- The demonstration of denial in the form of shock is displayed along with despair at the prolonged absence of the person who is no longer present. Many children will consistently ask for the absent parent.
- Many children cling to the principal carer as a source of comfort. Further clinging and insatiable demands may be made for affection and approval.
- Some children become lethargic and pre-occupied.
- The infant may become withdrawn and unresponsive. This can show itself in a refusal to hold eye-contact, to smile or seek any form of physical comfort.
- There is distress manifested in disturbed sleeping and eating patterns.
- Yearning for the deceased may promote a demonstration of anger.
- There are also feelings of guilt because of the belief they are responsible for the death.

- This can promote demanding behaviour, regression to baby behaviour and language, tantrums and bed-wetting.
- Many children display physical aggression, hitting, biting, and bullying.
- Outward signs of grief are not always visible. Children can behave as if nothing has happened.

## Understanding needs and reactions as a result of death: age 5 to 10

### Understanding

- There is a complete realisation that someone is missing from the family unit.
- Within this age range children come to understand the permanence and irreversibility of death.
- They understand death is the result of accident or illness.
- There is a tendency to fantasise. They believe they can talk to the dead person or that the bereaved is watching over them.
- Some think that what has happened to their family is a punishment. They blame themselves for what has happened.
- Some believe their actions control the behaviour and destiny of others.
- Children become a little less egocentric and begin to show empathy to others.
- Some still believe it is right to take on an adult role, which can prevent the coming to terms with loss.

### Needs

- There is a need for the changes that are occurring in the family to be explained. Otherwise they will be misunderstood.
- There is a need to be reassured regarding their fear of being abandoned by the remaining parent.
- The child yearns for the absent parent.
- There is a need for reassurance, attention and love.
- There is a need for children to learn appropriate ways to release hostility, frustration and aggression.
- There is a fear of the future. This can show itself in exaggerated concerns about money, food, and the home.
- Some children become self-conscious about the family being different from others. Again there is a need for explanation and reassurance.

### Reactions

- There can be regression to the reactions of younger children: crying, bed-wetting, thumb-sucking, disturbed sleeping or eating patterns, aggression towards or withdrawal from others.
- Children may become irritable.
- In many children, there can be present a fear for their own survival and a fear that the other parent may also die.
- Many children display psychosomatic complaints such as headaches, feelings of nausea and diarrhoea.
- There can also be disruption in school attendance.
- Many children show a fall in academic achievement.
- Many children display a lack of self-esteem and self-confidence.
- The outward signs of grief are not always visible. Peer pressure may make the child feel they are not able to express their feelings.
- The fear of ridicule by peers may be strong. This may give the impression that they do not need support. Some become the target of bullying by peers who do not understand the grief being experienced.
- Many children display physical aggression, hitting, kicking, biting, and bullying.
- Other common behaviour indicators are the refusal to speak or insatiable demands for affection and approval.
- Some bereaved children can bully others as a way of reasserting themselves in their own confused emotional state.
- Some can become pre-occupied with death.
- There is a real fear of the future. The child may feel that there is nowhere for him/her to feel safe.
- Some children of this age have a problem with self-identity.
- Sometimes an insatiable hunger for money and material things can develop.

## Understanding needs and reactions as a result of death: age 11 to 18

### Understanding

- At this age, young people begin to think abstractly about death.
- The concept of death becomes accepted as something totally irreversible.
- Many tend to think about the justice and injustice of death.
- Adolescents begin to contemplate their own mortality.
- Some begin to explore the different beliefs about an after-life.



- There is a consciousness, and sometimes, shame that the family is different.
- Changes in family situations can cause anger, fear, a loss of personal identity, and low self-esteem.

## Needs

- There is a need to hide the intense emotional pain. This is often expressed in extreme anger.
- There is a need for security as there is often a feeling of vulnerability. All questions should be answered honestly.
- This can be a time of depression and loneliness.
- Many young people feel the need to busy themselves with activities and friends, and seeking approval. There is a need for peer approval.
- There is an acute sensitivity to family tensions.
- There may be a desire to compensate feelings of loss with more possessions.
- Parental illness is a great fear.
- Authority is often challenged.

## Reactions

- Adolescence is already a time of transition, from the security of childhood to the independence of self and personal identity. Loss adds pressure to this natural progression.
- Bereavement can add to the young person's unwillingness to communicate with adults.
- They may become over-sensitive amongst their peers.
- The predominant reaction at this age is one of anger, which may be a cover for the pain being experienced. With some, the anger they feel makes them aggressive and anti-social towards their families and within their different community groupings.
- Some have difficulty coping with the loneliness they may feel and their own inability to reach out for support.
- Some young people may withdraw from friends and activities.
- Some have continual experience of nightmares.
- School work may suffer as the young person tries to come to terms with his/her feelings. Some may begin cheating in an attempt to keep up with work. Absence and lateness may increase.
- Often the young person may resort to lying. Some may resort to stealing / shoplifting.
- Many young people suffer from psychosomatic illnesses such as headaches or stomach aches.
- There may be frequent mood swings in this adolescent period. There is a great sensitivity to emotional tension in the family which is often expressed negatively.

- Many young people are overwhelmed with the additional responsibility of substituting for the missing parent in family matters.
- Typical adolescent fears are: illness of parent, inadequate money, being different to others, being ridiculed, being lonely, and being unpopular.
- Many adolescents suffer from mood swings: from elation to severe depression and withdrawal from family or friends.
- There may be an increased attitude of violence and aggression to self or others.
- Some display eating, obsessive and self-harming disorders.
- Some resort to alcohol, drugs and sexual promiscuity.
- In extreme cases, suicidal tendencies may be displayed.

## Appendix 2: School review of its procedures

The following questions have been prepared to assist a school to review its experiences and procedures, if or when a critical incident such as a death affects the school community, and also offers an opportunity to review how long-term support is offered to those who grieve.

Questions and prompts for discussion:

- As a school community, what experiences have there been of reacting to death? How do we feel about how we reacted?
- If sudden or anticipated death were to happen within the community this year, are there appropriate, agreed procedures in place?
- If appropriate procedures are in place, when there is a death or a critical incident, are all staff aware of these procedures? Where can these procedures be found?
- Would it help if we had a team approach to this issue i.e. a named Critical Incident Team?
- Following discussion, what actions need to be taken, who will take the matter forward, when for, should anyone else be involved, when will reporting back take place?

## Appendix 3: Coping with grief: guidance for parents and carers

- Every child will respond differently to bereavement depending on age, temperament and many other things. Reactions may include tantrums, denial, feelings of guilt, irritability, tiredness, displaying indifference, or unusually good or quiet behaviour.
- You may need to reassure your child that s/he is not to blame for the person who has died.
- Try to maintain as normal a routine as possible. Children need to remain within the family home and not moved to a seemingly 'protected' environment.
- Don't hide your own grief. Seeing you grieve and talking with you about the person who has died may help a child express his or her own feelings.
- Drawing and playing may help young children work through their grief and express their feelings. Older children may like to keep a journal of their thoughts and feelings.
- Suggest books to children they might like to read exploring themes of loss and bereavement. A list of helpful fiction and non-fiction books are listed and these may be available from school.
- Reassure your child that they do not have to feel guilty about having fun. Explain that the person who has died would be happy at the thought of children enjoying themselves.
- Try not to burden older children by expecting them to be brave or take on the role of the person who has died.
- Young children tend to know more than you think. They will notice a change of atmosphere at home and may overhear adult conversations. Try to keep them informed as to what is happening rather than letting them hear things second hand.
- Be prepared for unusual and or repeated questioning.
- A child's question may be more straightforward than it appears. 'Where has x gone?' may not require you to delve into deep theology. It could be simply about the location of the grave.
- Try to be open and honest with your child and admit when you don't know the answers. This is a process you are going through together.
- Explain that the dead person can no longer feel pain, or heat, or cold. This may relieve some of the child's anxieties about burial/cremation.
- Some phrases cause confusion and should be avoided. Talking about death as a long sleep may make the child afraid of going to bed at night. Using the word 'lost' could also introduce a hope that the dead person may be found.
- Reassure your child that other healthy family members, including themselves, have a long healthy and happy life ahead of them.
- Older children may need reassurance over arguments they may have had with the person who has died.

## School

- Remember that your child may be scared of leaving you or the rest of the family in case another death occurs when they are away.
- Remember though, that going to school is a way of maintaining a degree of normality. It may also be the only place where a child can escape the atmosphere of grief at home.
- Keep in contact with your child's teacher to see how your child is coping. Explain to school how you have approached the death with the child. Your school will provide continuing support for you and you will be in their thoughts. Do not hesitate to talk to them. Keep them informed of anniversaries and birthdays that might be particularly sensitive times for you all.
- Talk to your child about his or her friends. Explain that friends, yours too, often find it difficult to know what to say or how to help.
- Make sure you always try to arrive on time to meet your child.

## Saying goodbye

- At funerals some people will be sad and cry. Sometimes a child would like to have an input into the service. Your school should be able to support them to do this, perhaps by choosing a favourite song or reading.
- If a child wants to go the funeral, let them make the choice. It's okay to go. It's also okay not to go, although experience would suggest that going is actually more helpful in most circumstances. If a child does attend the funeral, it is useful to explain in advance what will happen. For instance, the Christian funeral service is essentially, a Liturgy of Thanksgiving for the life of the person who has died, a celebration of their gifts and our opportunity to say goodbye.
- If a child chooses not to go to a funeral look for other ways of celebrating the life of the person and saying goodbye. Encourage the child to talk or write about the person.
- When a baby dies shortly after birth it may be helpful for older brothers and sisters to be alone to say hello and goodbye by themselves.
- When a sibling dies, the child may need to be given the choice as to how to say goodbye. Long term support may be needed. Acknowledging their loss is essential.

## Ways of remembering

- In the early stages of bereavement it may seem far too painful to worry about mementos but later many people find such things helpful. Ask your child if there is any particular item they would like to have. It could be important that you let all significant adults know how special this is to the child.
- It may be helpful to visit places together which hold special memories.

- Look through photographs together and share memories and stories. You may wish to make a memory box.

## Appendix 4: Sample letter when a pupil/teacher has died

Feel free to use this sample letter as a basis for a letter from your school/setting, you can adapt and change it to your particular circumstances. You may also want to write a completely different letter, but the following might be useful to consider. We suggest to discuss the content of the letter with the family involved. In some circumstances it may not be appropriate to share the name of the person who died with the whole school community. Please consider discussing this your educational psychologist.

If you are sending the letter out electronically, please ensure that it is **not** sent to the parents/carers of the pupil who died.

*Dear Parent/Carer,*

*It is with great sadness that I have to inform you about the (sudden) death of xxx (name if agreed with the family), one of our pupils/members of staff in Year x. The children were told this morning by their class teacher/form tutor.*

*Xxx (or a child/member of staff in our school/ in year x) died as a result of/ or the full detail surrounding the death are not known at this stage – but children have been reassured that this is something that does not happen very often. Your child may or may not want to talk about it, but it is likely that they will need your special care, attention and reassurance at this difficult time.*

*We are all deeply affected by the death, but we are trying, for the children's sake, to keep the school as normal as possible over the coming days, whilst allowing the children opportunities to talk if they want to. Trained staff from the Critical Incident Team are helping to support us through this difficult time. If you feel that your child needs extra support, please let us know.*

*Our thoughts are with the family, and the whole school community sends them our most sincere sympathy and support.*

*If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Xxx*

*Headteacher*

## Appendix 5: Links and resources

### **Local support in relation to safeguarding:**

[Safeguarding Children Partnership - Herefordshire Safeguarding Boards and Partnerships](#)

Information published on the council's [Talk Community website](#) may be helpful to staff in contact with bereaved families:

Local Support from [Phoenix Bereavement Services – on the Talk Community Directory](#)

Providing direct bereavement/counselling work with children and young people aged 5-25

### **Websites with information to support schools when a member of staff or pupil dies or are affected by the death of a loved one, as well as local services to support with mental health.**

[Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service \(CAMHS\)](#) Herefordshire

The team will support or signpost the young person (and their families where appropriate) to a children's mental health and wellbeing service, or alternative support, according to each individual case.

[Grief Encounter](#)

Support for bereaved children and their families

[Child Bereavement UK](#)

Support for families when a child dies

[Resources to equip pupils with coping skills for bereavement](#), now and in later life

[Winston's Wish](#)

Support for children and young people after the death of a parent or sibling or with anxiety relating to COVID-19.

[CRUSE](#)

Support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies. There's a [section for schools](#)

Local Contact - 01432 359469 [herefordshire@cruse.org.uk](mailto:herefordshire@cruse.org.uk)

[Childline:](#)

The [Diocese of Hereford](#) can provide contact details for your local church or faith group contact: 01432 373300



[Healthy Minds](#) is a free and confidential service, run by Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust, which can help if you're feeling stressed, anxious or depressed. Contact: 01432 347606

### [MIND: Contacts for Young People](#)

#### [The Samaritans](#)

[Herefordshire Samaritans](#) offer a telephone and drop in service, if you're struggling and need help  
Contact: 0330 094 5717 (local call charges apply)

#### [Papyrus](#)

Services for those affected by suicide

#### [CLD Trust](#)

CLD trust [Counselling service for CYP 5-25 years](#)

#### [Child Bereavement UK](#)

Bereavement counselling service for Children and Young people up to the age of 25

[St Michael's Hospice](#) offer information, advice, support and counselling for those who have been bereaved, along with a number of informal social friends groups across the county.

Contact: 01432 851000 [info@st-michaels-hospice.org.uk](mailto:info@st-michaels-hospice.org.uk)