



## **Coronavirus Related Critical Incident Support to Schools and Settings Bristol City Council Educational Psychology Service May 2020**

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

A critical incident may be defined as a sudden and unexpected event that has the potential to overwhelm the coping mechanisms of a whole school or members of the school community. The Coronavirus pandemic is impacting significantly upon our settings, families, communities and our way of life. The current situation means that there is an increased risk of critical incidents in the form of bereavements, both within a setting and its wider community. This is coupled with a general raised level of anxiety due to the uncertainty around the virus and the additional complication of settings being closed to all but vulnerable children and those of key workers who cannot be cared for at home.

### **What support can Bristol Educational Psychology Service offer?**

Bristol City Council's Educational Psychology Service (EPS) continues to offer critical incident support to Head Teachers and members of Senior Leadership Teams in all settings across the city. In the event of a Coronavirus-related critical incident, the EP Service's primary aim will be to offer short-term support to the Senior Leadership Team in order to facilitate the appropriate management of the event. This is in accordance with our established service approach to offering support in the event of a critical incident. The approach taken is based on research into best practice and is founded on supporting settings to manage the immediate aftermath of an event, including advice and support around communication, practical arrangements and managing emotions.

### **How might people respond to a Critical Incident?**

Whilst no two incidents are the same, responses to critical incidents follow a recognised pattern. With time, most children and adults will come to terms with what has happened and recover without the need for professional counselling. Research tells us that help and support is best given by trusted, familiar adults as and when it is needed. The EPS will support settings to facilitate this and to feel confident in this role. It is recognised that settings will be managing critical incidents in an unfamiliar and potentially challenging context, with most children at home and many staff working remotely for various reasons. Despite the huge efforts being

made to stay in regular contact with children and young people, school communities may feel less well-connected to each other in our current circumstances and the approaches taken will need to acknowledge the very different context within which we are working.

### **What should I do if a Critical Incident happens?**

When an incident occurs, it is important that settings let the LA know as soon as possible. **Please call Trading with Schools on 0117 922 2444** who will arrange for you to be contacted by a member of the EPS to identify what support is required. Initially, a senior member of the EPS will contact you in order to establish what steps have been taken so far and identify what needs to happen next. This contact will be made by telephone. We will endeavour to ensure that any further or ongoing support is provided by the link EP for the setting.

### **What will the EP do?**

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

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

### **Will there be any follow up support from the EPS?**

The EP(s) working with the setting will support you in the immediate aftermath of the incident and will also follow up with you over the next few days to support with any issues that may arise. In view of the current circumstances this will also be done remotely e.g. by phone, email or video call.

If after a period of time there are members of the setting's community who are showing signs of continued distress, the EP will discuss this and signpost to further support. We do not advise an immediate offer of counselling to bereaved children/young people: grief is a normal process and people grieve differently. Children and young people may, however, need reassurance that whatever emotions they are feeling are normal. It is only when feelings remain overwhelming over a period of weeks and interfere with the activities of daily living that counselling support may be a more appropriate offer. Some families with less community support may wish to seek professional support earlier, particularly during the phase of acute social distancing.

## Further Support

Further support and guidance is available on the Local Offer and through Bristol Learning City:

<https://www.bristollearningcity.com/directory/>

<https://www.bristol.gov.uk/web/bristol-local-offer/coronavirus-covid-19-what-you-need-to-know>

## Websites

### Child Bereavement UK:

<https://childbereavementuk.org/>

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/pages/category/elephants-tea-party>

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/coronavirus-supporting-children>

### Cruse:

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

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief>

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/coronavirus/children-and-young-people>

<https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/> for young people

### Grief Encounter:

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/>

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/serviceupdate/> Coronavirus-specific content

### Winston's Wish:

<https://www.winstonswish.org/>

<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus/>

### Samaritans:

<https://www.samaritans.org/> emotional support

### Papyrus:

<https://papyrus-uk.org/> prevention of suicide in young people

For further information, please contact: Jenny Maxwell (Assistant Principal Educational Psychologist [jenny.maxwell@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:jenny.maxwell@bristol.gov.uk)) or the link EP for your setting.

*With thanks to colleagues in York EPS who gave us permission to use their guidance as a basis for our own.*

# Coronavirus Related Critical Incident Flow Chart for Schools

