

Guidance for Somerset Schools and Colleges in Managing Critical Incidents 2018 to 2019

*Produced by SSE Educational Psychology Service on
Behalf of Somerset County Council.
Supported by Public Health (Somerset) & The Samaritans*

Somerset Educational Psychology Service Key Contacts for Schools:

Sedgemoor,
Taunton and West Somerset

Tel: 01823 334475

Kayleigh Partt and Guy Clayton
Senior EPs

Mendip and
South Somerset

Tel: 01749 822800

Julia Severn and Kate Lee
Senior EPs

Request for Support from the Educational Psychology Service Out of Office Hours (Emergencies only)

Telephone: 01392 872225

*(Please regard this telephone number as sensitive data and
it should not be placed in the public domain.)*

- This will put you through to the Fire Service Control Room.
- You then need to ask for the **Somerset Local Authorities' Civil Contingencies Duty Officer**.
- You will be required to leave your name, number and details of the request eg. advice/support required from Educational Psychology Service
- The duty officer will then make direct contact with one of the 4 Senior Educational Psychologists listed above.

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SECTION 1

PREPARING FOR A CRITICAL INCIDENT

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1.1 Introduction

What is a Critical Incident?

A **Critical Incident** may be defined as a single incident or sequence of incidents which:

- are sudden and unexpected
- contain real or imagined threats to a person
- overwhelm usual coping mechanisms
- cause severe disruption
- are traumatic to anyone

Critical Incidents affecting schools may include:

- The death of a pupil(s) or member(s) of staff through sudden accident, murder, terminal illness or suicide.
- A serious accident involving pupils and school personnel on or off school premises.
- A violent attack or violent intrusion onto school premises, e.g. involving an armed intruder or a bomb alert.
- Fire, flood, building collapse or major vandalism in school.
- A hostage situation.
- A significant event in the community, e.g. transport accident, terrorism.

Unfortunately traumatic incidents affecting schools and local communities seem to be on the increase. Whatever the scale of the incident, the effect on the individuals involved can be equally devastating.

What is our Role in a Critical Incident?

It is now recognised that children are no more or less resilient than adults to traumatic events and their reactions are basically the same. Schools, therefore, have an important role to play in helping children to understand and cope with the impact of such events. School is a normal place for a child to be and offers security at a time of insecurity. Teachers have many skills and techniques which they use routinely to help troubled children and, with some further training and confidence building, these skills can be adapted to help children cope with a range of traumatic incidents.



1.2 Available Support

What Support is Available to us in a Critical Incident?

The SSE Educational Psychology Service (EPS) working on behalf of Somerset County Council has a key role in:

- Providing schools with training to ensure confidence in their preparation to manage in the event of a critical incident (see Appendix 3 for details). Offering on-going support to schools including work with individual pupils or members of staff as appropriate. ***This will be delivered through the schools Educational Psychologist through their allocated or additionally commissioned time.***
- Offering direct support to schools immediately following a critical incident. On receiving a request for support from a Headteacher, the EPS will respond promptly with a level of support which is judged to be appropriate to the nature, size and severity of the event as follows (see contact numbers on cover). ***This work is considered a priority for the EPS and therefore may mean postponement of other planned work in schools. This work is funded directly by the Local Authority.***

LEVEL 1	Bereavement and Loss	Accident, illness, death of a pupil/member of staff/parent, out of school. Event is not sudden or/and traumatic. School able to cope, support strategies in place. Low impact/awareness for majority of pupils/staff. Advice needed for staff – coping with bereavement and loss, normal grieving process.	<u>Response:</u> Telephone conversation with Headteacher, with follow up visit by area EP as necessary.
LEVEL 2	Critical Incident	Accident, illness, death of a pupil/member of staff/parent at or near school, or on a school trip. Event is sudden and traumatic. School feels unable to cope, significant numbers of distressed pupils and staff. School request EPS support and advice to help manage the critical incident.	<u>Response:</u> Immediate support from the EPS by telephone (including an out of hours service.) Same day attendance in school if appropriate in order to support the Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team.
LEVEL 3	Major Disaster	Large scale disaster affecting the school and/or the local community. County's Emergency Planning Team implement disaster plan. EPS response is part of a much larger multi-agency response led by SSD and Emergency Planning Team. National as well as local impact – high media interest.	<u>Response:</u> Full EPS involvement co-ordinated by the Senior EP in liaison with lead personnel in other agencies.

Other Support:

- Emergency Services (999 in emergency, NHS 111 for non-emergency assistance)
- Emergency Duty Team (out of hours – 0300 123 2327)
- The Church
- The Charity Sector:
 - Childline (0800 1111 www.childline.org.uk)
 - Cruse Bereavement Care Somerset Area (01458 898 211 somerset@cruse.org.uk)
Somerset Area Cruse are part of the Somerset Area Suicide Bereavement Support Service which is run by MIND in Taunton
 - Mind (0300 330 5463 bereaved@mind.org.uk www.mindtws.org.uk)
 - Somerset Suicide Bereavement Support Service (mindtws.org.uk/somerset-suicide-bereavement-support/)
 - YoungMinds (parent helpline 0808 802 5544 www.youngminds.org.uk)
 - The Samaritans (116 123 jo@samaritans.org www.samaritans.org). Samaritans has developed a **free online resource** called DEAL which teachers can use to promote emotional health and wellbeing amongst young people ages about 14 and over. It has sessions on coping strategies, dealing with feelings and connecting with others as well as challenging topics such as bullying, depression and self-harm. The emphasis is on seeking help when it is needed and supporting others. For each session there are full teaching notes, worksheets, hand-outs and links to audio-visual resources. The sessions last about 50 minutes. The resource can be found at www.samaritans.org/deal



1.3 Building Our Resilience (R) to Cope with Bereavement

What should we have in place to be best equipped to deal with bereavement within our community?

SYSTEMS IN PLACE

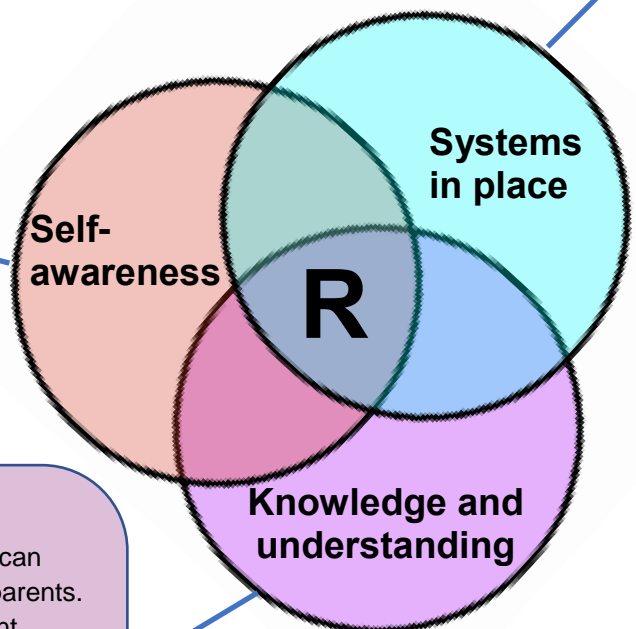
- ✓ **Prepared in case of emergency:**
 - Critical Incident Contingency Plan.
 - Bereavement and Loss Policy.
 - Confident to use solution-focused approaches.
- ✓ **Communication systems strong:**
 - A sense of 'togetherness' and trust, including SLT.
 - Strong communication between different members of the community.
 - Links with external agencies.
- ✓ **Support systems strong:**
 - Established ethos of emotional wellbeing amongst staff and students.
 - Proactive and ongoing mental health support where needed.
 - 'Growth mindset' culture; openness about needs, optimistic about adaptability, transparent support options.

SELF-AWARENESS

- ✓ Awareness of own needs as a whole system and how best to meet these.
- ✓ Awareness of own and others' personal vulnerabilities and how best to support these.
- ✓ Recognise when to call in support from others (pre-, during and post-event).
- ✓ Awareness that grief is hard and know some ways to cope with the journey.
- ✓ Commitment to building self-efficacy.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

- ✓ The stages of grief and typical grief behaviours so you can recognise and normalise these for staff, students and parents.
- ✓ What helps in a crisis and ideas about how to implement strategies in your setting.
- ✓ Which community members may be particularly vulnerable and when to refer onto other agencies for support.
- ✓ Stages of development and what to expect from different pupils.
- ✓ How suicide differs from other forms of bereavement and what might be needed in these situations.
- ✓ Emotional literacy; how yourself and others are feeling and how to manage these emotions.



Helpful documents:

SEMH Toolkit
Wise Before the Event

These elements reflect the key factors in the literature which comprise 'resiliency' (sense of mastery, sense of relatedness, emotion regulation) and 'organisational resilience' (proactivity, dynamic leadership, responsiveness to change, strong cooperative culture, keeping focused, holding a long-term view).



1.4 Developing a Critical Incident Contingency Plan

Although it is not possible to predict when and where a disaster will strike, there is much that schools can do to be prepared should the "worst" happen. Foremost in this is the development of a **Critical Incident Contingency Plan** so that in the event of a disaster, on whatever scale, staff can act quickly to cope with the distress and confusion and begin to regain a sense of control.

The experience of schools which have been involved in a critical incident shows that those which have made preliminary plans are able to act promptly and cope most effectively with the traumatic consequences of a critical incident. These plans would include clearly defined roles and responsibilities and actions, which can be initiated promptly in the event of a critical incident.

Foremost in this planning is the creation of a **Critical Incident Management Team**, based on the Senior Management Team but also including staff most suited in terms of their personal and practical skills and their availability and reliability. This team should aim to meet at least annually to review and update the Critical Incident Contingency Plan.

The school's Critical Incident Contingency Plan will have prepared procedures and responses that can be put into action in the immediate aftermath of a critical incident. It will need to be flexible enough to cope with a wide range of possible incidents which may occur either on or off site. **Managing a critical incident is a team effort with strong leadership.**

Our guidance for creating your Critical Incident Contingency Plan is as follows:

a. Assign Roles and Responsibilities

School staff should identify the key tasks which will need to be carried out in the event of an incident and agree which members of staff would be best suited for each task. It is likely that the Headteacher and Senior Management will be responsible for many, but not necessarily all of these tasks which may include for example:

- Contacting and liaising with support services, including the emergency services, the Educational Psychology Service, and other local support agencies as appropriate.
- Organising and supporting the school office staff.
- Dealing with the media, including social media.
- Managing those aspects of the school that continue to function normally.
- Allocating and staffing rooms for counselling/debriefing/support work, and a meeting room for parents.

The Critical Incident Contingency Team should:

- Meet regularly to review and update the school's Critical Incident Contingency Plan.
- Disseminate the plan to all staff and store a copy somewhere accessible.



- Consider procedures for informing new and temporary staff about the plan.

b. Prepare and Maintain Up-to-Date Lists of Contact Telephone Numbers

Prepare and maintain up-to-date lists of contact telephone numbers for:

- Pupils' parents/guardians
- Staff (including part time/supply teachers and assistants)
- Governors
- Support Agencies

Consider the following:

- Who needs to be on the lists?
- Where are they to be kept?
- When will they be updated and who will be responsible for this?
- Do office staff always have a contact number when Headteacher is off site?
- Is there a hard copy of information stored on a computer database?
- Is a copy stored out of school?
- Is there a list of staff who can provide additional help/back-up support both during and after school hours and at weekends - where is this list kept, are the contact numbers up to date?
- Make sure all the information for your school's Critical Incident Contingency Plan is kept together (e.g. lists, this booklet, Bill Yules' book) and that all staff know where to find it! Review its contents regularly and remind everyone about it - don't forget to include it as part of the induction process for new staff.
- List of staff with First Aid qualification.

c. Telephone Lines

Ensure there is a line that can be kept free for out-going calls and important in-coming calls.

d. Roles for Office Staff

These may include:

- making and/or receiving telephone calls.
- dealing with distressed visitors to the school.
- sorting and collating information.
- organising a parents room.
- dealing with "normal" school business.

Consider the following:

- Office staff need to be clear about the facts - who they should tell and what they should tell - always maintain appropriate standards of confidentiality.
- Keep records of telephone calls made and received/people contacted, etc. Consider preparing a proforma for this.



- Consider training for staff in how to deal with difficult/distressed people both in person and on the telephone. Is there a procedure for summoning help to the office in the event of any angry/violent visitor? Panic button?

This work will be very stressful for office staff, ensure that:-

- time on task is carefully monitored
- staff take regular breaks
- they have reserve staff on call to lend a hand.

e. School Trips Offsite

- Keep an accurate list of all staff and pupils involved
- Teacher in charge should also have a copy of this list
- Keep list of contact telephone numbers
- Teacher in charge should have up-to-date medical information about pupils (re allergies, epilepsy, etc).

f. Planning for a School Evacuation

- How will staff and pupils know where to go?
- What should you /could you take with you?
- Can you set up an incident room elsewhere?
- How will people be able to contact you?
- An up-to-date plan of the school site, showing access points, would be helpful for the emergency services.

g. Information Management

Dealing with the media including social media:

- have a clear and agreed response for the media
- office staff should not be expected to deal with the media
- this is a role for senior staff or the LA Press Officer
- Have a clear and agreed response for posting information electronically where appropriate. When dealing with a Critical Incident and Social Media it is important that the school acts quickly because others may post information. Be explicit about how the CI Contingency Plan links to the school's e-safety policy for staff and pupils.

Parents and students:

- Prepare proforma letter to parents - to give some brief facts and information about the incident and availability of support, etc. (see Appendix 1).
- Handouts for staff/pupils/parents about "normal" reactions to trauma/shock - these can be collated in advance but make sure everyone knows where to find them. Make these handouts available electronically e.g. via school website and/or SLP, so these can be accessed at all times.



h. Suicide

Although a school can be affected by many challenging incidents and accidents, suicide presents the unique risk of potentially being the trigger for another suicide. Schools with crisis plans in place are best equipped to deal with a suicide when it happens. Good planning for the aftermath of suicide makes it easier for people to respond effectively at a time when resilience may be low.

A postvention protocol is an agreed approach to responding to a suicide. In a school setting, this protocol should ideally:

- be a written protocol, developed in advance of a suicide;
- include working with the local community;
- involve the formation and training of a postvention team – be clear about who will do what;
- include procedures for notifying staff, parents and young people about a suicide;
- include guidelines on how to inform the school community and handle the media;
- identify appropriate postvention services and facilities;
- include procedures for recognising ‘at risk’ individuals (including staff) and identifying where people would be referred;
- include an evaluation of the effectiveness of the postvention and any follow-up protocol.

It is good practice that the whole school community would be aware of essential information included in such planning, including who to tell, what to say and what not to say, and who is vulnerable.

The national guidance produced by the Samaritans – **Help When We Needed it Most** (How to prepare and respond to suicide in schools and colleges) is attached as Appendix 2.



Finally: In the event of a major incident or disaster the emergency services (police, fire, ambulance) will take the Lead role and the Social Care Department have a

statutory duty to manage and co-ordinate the situation in line with Somerset County Council's Emergency Planning Procedures.

SECTION 2

MANAGING A CRITICAL INCIDENT (“CPR”)

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2.1 Communication

Critical Incident Management Team and the Contingency Plan

In the event of a Critical Incident the school's Critical Incident Management Team (or identified key personnel) will need to act promptly and be responsible for dealing with the following issues:

- Implementing the School's Critical Incident Contingency Plan
- Emergency Services (check these have been contacted as necessary)

Gathering Information

A vital first task is to obtain accurate information about the incident. Rumours spread quickly and can add to the distress of those involved.

Find out:-

- What has happened
- Where and when
- Extent of injuries, numbers and names
- Location of injured and uninjured

Accessing Support

The school should contact the Senior Educational Psychologist at the Area Base who will initiate the Critical Incident Response Procedure.

Contact Telephone Numbers:

West Somerset, Sedgemoor and Taunton: Tel: 01823 334475

Mendip and South Somerset: Tel: 01749 822800

Informing Staff

- Ensure all staff are informed promptly of the incident - it may be necessary to convene a short staff meeting.
- Establish procedures for keeping staff up to date with incoming information.
- Agree how and when pupils will be informed (see page 12).
- Be sensitive to the feelings of staff, particularly those who are closest to the pupils and adults involved in the incident and to those who have had recent personal traumas.



Informing Governors/Local Authority

The Chair of Governors and the Principal Educational Psychologist should be informed as soon as possible after a major incident.

Informing Parents - of Children Directly Involved

- Parents of children directly involved should be contacted quickly and with sensitivity.
- Consistency and reliability of information is essential. Avoid relying on a chain of communication.
- The school may need to set a room aside in school for meetings with parents.
- Schools should always have an up to date list of pupils' next of kin and where to make contact with them. Ensure all adults with parental responsibility are informed.
- In the event of an incident involving death or serious injury, particularly off site, the police will often make the first contact with families.

If using the telephone:

- Fully brief the member of staff making the contact, recognising that this can be a very stressful task.
- Take careful note of those parents who have been contacted and those who still need to be informed so that duplicate messages are not given.
- Where appropriate offer help with transport arrangements.
- Check that the parents are not on their own. Make suggestions for contacting relatives or neighbours as appropriate.
- Inform parents of the telephone number in school that has been dedicated to receiving enquiries.
- Inform parents how to obtain more information and when they can expect this to be available.
- Where appropriate and with permission, give the contact numbers of other families involved in the crisis.

Informing Parents - of Children not Directly Involved

Wherever possible, parents of all other children in the school should be informed that the school has experienced an incident and that their child may be upset.

Prepare a letter to parents for distribution as soon as possible which gives:

- brief details of the incident without names;
- an explanation about the involvement of the Educational Psychology Service or other services supporting staff and pupils at the school;
- how parents can get more information.



(See Appendix 1 for example letter).

Informing Pupils

- Some staff may find it difficult to be involved in the dissemination of information to pupils and the Critical Incident Management Team should be sensitive to this.
- Pupils should be told simply and honestly what has happened. This is probably best done in the smallest groups possible - classes, tutor groups or year groups.
- Questions should be answered in a straightforward way, passing on only facts and avoiding speculation.
- Some classes, tutor groups or year groups may be more directly affected by the incident and will benefit from extra consideration, support and sensitive handling of information.
- Siblings and other close relatives of victims should be informed separately and, where possible, in liaison with parents.

Dealing with the Enquiries

The school may be inundated with telephone calls. People will need to staff the telephone which can be a stressful task.

- The confidential nature of the task should be emphasised to all telephone operators and clear guidance given on what it is appropriate to say.
- An agreed factual statement should be available for the telephone operators, which includes reassurance about the action being taken at the school/incident site.
- Those answering the telephones should keep notes and have them checked against school records so that there is certainty about who has telephoned in and who should still be contacted. This should include media, governors, etc.

Dealing with the Media

- Identify a senior member of staff to liaise with the media.
- Prepare a brief written statement which can be read out or handed to reporters. Stick to the facts - do not be tempted into speculative comments.
- Liaise with LA Communications Team (Press Office) - who will advise on the content and presentation of the statement. This will be provided at point of request to academies at no charge. Any additional support will be invoiced.
- Tell reporters when they can expect further information and aim to work co-operatively with the press.
- In the event of a death prepare some positive comments about the pupils/staff who have died and expressions of sympathy for the bereaved family.



Dealing with Social Media

The Communications Team (Press Office) can advise and give practical help to Headteachers on dealing with the media – tel: **01823 355020**.

Social media can be defined as being web based platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, blogs etc. They are distinct from web pages as they encourage a high level of user generated content and interaction. One feature of this media is the speed at which messages can be transmitted.

When dealing with a critical incident and social media it is important that the school acts quickly because others may post information

- Identify a member of staff to take responsibility for dealing with social media
- Staff should be informed that in accordance with the Teaching Standards and the school e-safety policy they should not make any comment on any social media without the permission of the Senior Management Team.
- A message should be placed on the school website and within any school social media accounts. The message could follow these lines:

'You may be aware of a recent event within the school community. We ask you to respect the relevant family's privacy and sensitivities by considering if you should post any comments, especially on Social Media. We will inform you through the normal channels of any relevant developments.'

If in the rare circumstance schools are made aware of posts that are against the rules of the relevant Social Media service then they should get in contact with that service to ask them to remove the comments. Schools might like to consider getting in contact with **The UK Safer Internet Centre's Professional Online Safety helpline** by phoning **0344 381 4772** or emailing helpline@saferinternet.org.uk who will offer advice in these circumstances.

If further advice or guidance is needed then schools should contact the **eLearning and Information Management Team** at elimAdmin@somerset.gov.uk or visit www.somersetelim.org



2.2 Provide Support

Support from the Educational Psychology Service

The Educational Psychologists who respond to the school's request for help in dealing with a Critical Incident work alongside the Headteacher and Senior Management. This support is aimed at helping school staff manage and cope, both professionally and personally, with the impact of the incident on their school and local community. It is designed to be flexible and responsive to the school's needs at all times.

The team will be able to offer a range of support including:

- Advice and help for staff in dealing with distressed pupils, parents and colleagues.
- Psychological support for those pupils and adults most closely affected by the incident.
- Advice on dealing with the media and other demands made on school staff at this time
- Advice on dealing appropriately with social media such as Facebook and Twitter. This will include strategies for dealing with the spread of information.
- Advice on issues such as "marking the event" and "getting back to normal".
- Advice on ways to manage the likely short term and long term effects of the incident on individuals, the school and the local community.

Supporting Staff in the Event of a Critical Incident

- It is expected that schools will have already given careful thought about which members of staff may be best suited to particular jobs and responsibilities.
- There should be recognition of the differing needs of each affected individual.
- All staff need to be familiar with the school's Critical Incident Contingency Plan.
- Teachers need to consider their own feelings related to either the present incident or past experiences, so they can feel comfortable in dealing with children's distress.
- Some teachers may wish to take a less active role in supporting others.
- School staff need to be supportive of each other at this time, e.g. staff may wish to schedule staff meetings in order to receive further advice on how to support bereaved children.
- All staff need to be aware of possible delayed reactions, particularly of those actively involved.
- Staff who are co-ordinating the school's response should be supported and scheduled for relief periods.
- Arrangements may need to be made for staff to see a counsellor or talk with an outside agency/support worker, either singly or as a group.



- Some staff may find it helpful to make a personal gesture, such as by sending cards/flowers, letter of condolence, attending the funeral.

Supporting Pupils in the Event of a Critical Incident

Pupils need access to clear and concise information

- Teachers should stick to the facts and not be tempted to give speculative comments.
- Act promptly to dispel rumours and mis-information which can cause unnecessary distress
- Be explicit in acknowledgement of the event.
- Give opportunities for pupils to talk through personal reactions whilst wherever possible maintaining school routines and timetables.
- It is helpful to provide a quiet, private place for pupils to go to during unstructured times of the school day which should be appropriately staffed.
- Allow pupils to express feelings.
- Anticipate and understand pupils' reactions.
- It is important to help pupils realise that grief is a *natural* and *normal* reaction to loss.
- Children with previous bereavement/loss/separation experiences and those with special educational needs may need extra support.
- Be alert to the possible occurrence of unhelpful grief responses such as anger, bullying and scapegoating - act promptly and positively to defuse and deflect such behaviours.

Formal grieving

- Give opportunities for pupils to write and draw, send cards or flowers, letters of condolence, attend funerals, plant a tree, etc. A special assembly or memorial service may be appropriate.
- ensure that you are prepared for flowers being brought into the school. Identify a safe area where these can be left and inform pupils when they will be removed.
- Be aware of differences in cultural, spiritual, religious values.

Establish normal routines

- School is the normal place for a child to be and offers security at a time of insecurity.
- Children will look to teachers for role models of how to deal with death and crisis.
- Trauma reactions are normal reactions and are best helped in a normal and familiar environment.
- Returning to the normal routine of school also reinforces a feeling of security.



- Encourage and support the return of school of pupils and staff most affected.
- Recognise that emotions and feelings may differ from pupil to pupil.
- Strong feelings and emotions are perfectly normal reactions in the immediate aftermath.

Supporting Parents in the Event of a Critical Incident

- Whether the incident has occurred at the school or off site, parents are likely to look to the school for information, advice and support.
- Prepare a room with tea/coffee-making facilities where parents can congregate.
- Allocate a member of staff to be available to talk parents and keep them up-to-date with information as it becomes available.
- Provide information leaflets about the impact of trauma and sudden death and likely reactions - these can be prepared and collected in advance by the school as part of the Contingency planning process. In the event of a Critical Incident these leaflets can be made available electronically.
- Provide information about the types of support that are available to them and their children both in school and within their local community (this information can also form part of the Contingency planning process).

Responding to Suicide

It is particularly important that the school responds to a suicide within 48 hours. This is necessary to maintain the structure and order of the school routine, while facilitating the expression of grief, and reducing the risk of imitative suicide. It is also important within the immediate aftermath that people develop helpful narratives about the suicide.

Sources of support for schools following suicide through:

- The Educational Psychology Service will be able provide a first response to support Senior Leadership Teams. Advice and support can also be provided on the development of a post-vention protocol.
- The Suicide Prevention Strategy (Public Health) currently offers support direct to schools following a suicide. Contact Louise Finnis by email at lfinnis@somerset.gov.uk
- The Samaritans currently offer practical advice and support service for a school community following a suicide (see Appendix 2). In the time immediately following an incident the local Samaritans branch can offer emotional support for staff and parents on the phone on Freephone **116 123**, by email at jo@samaritans.org or by arrangement, face to face on school premises.
- Somerset Suicide Bereavement Service for anyone bereaved by Suicide. Tel 0300 330 5463 bereaved@mindtws.org.uk





- POPYRUS – Prevention of Young Suicide. Tel 0800 068 4141
Text Service 07786 209697 Email pat@papyrus-uk.org
www.papyrus-uk.org

Responding to Terrorism

Talking To Children About Terrorism And War

Although difficult, these conversations are extremely important. They give adults an opportunity to help children feel more secure and understand the world in which they live.

Listen to Children:

- Create a time and place for children to ask their questions. Don't force children to talk about things until they're ready.
- Remember that children tend to personalise situations. For example, they may worry about friends or relatives who live in a city or country associated with incidents or events.
- Help children find ways to express themselves. Some children may not be able to talk about their thoughts, feelings, or fears. They may be more comfortable drawing pictures, playing with toys, or writing stories or poems directly or indirectly related to current events.

Answer Children's Questions:

- Use words and concepts the child can understand. Make your explanation appropriate to the child's age and level of understanding. Don't overload a child with too much information.
- Give children honest answers and information. Children will usually know if you're not being honest.
- Be prepared to repeat explanations or have several conversations. Some information may be hard to accept or understand. Asking the same question over and over may be the child's way of asking for reassurance.
- Acknowledge and support the child's thoughts, feelings, and reactions. Let the child know that you think their questions and concerns are important.
- Be consistent and reassuring, but don't make unrealistic promises.
- Avoid stereotyping groups of people by race, nationality, or religion. Use the opportunity to teach tolerance and explain prejudice.
- Remember that children learn from watching their parents and teachers. They are very interested in how you respond to events. They learn from listening to your conversations with other adults.
- Let children know how you are feeling. It's OK for them to know if you are anxious or worried about events. However, don't burden them with your concerns.
- Don't confront the child's way of handling events. If a child feels reassured by saying that things are happening very far away, it's usually best not to disagree. The child may need to think about events this way to feel safe.



Provide Support:

- Don't let children watch lots of violent or upsetting images on TV. Repetitive frightening images or scenes can be very disturbing, especially to young children.
- Help children establish a predictable routine and schedule. Children are reassured by structure and familiarity. School, sports, birthdays, holidays, and group activities take on added importance during stressful times.
- Coordinate information between home and school. Parents should know about activities and discussions at school. Teachers should know about the child's specific fears or concerns.
- Children who have experienced trauma or losses may show more intense reactions to tragedies or news of war or terrorist incidents. These children may need extra support and attention.
- Watch for physical symptoms related to stress. Many children show anxiety and stress through complaints of physical aches and pains.
- Watch for possible preoccupation with violent movies or war theme video/computer games.
- Children who seem preoccupied or very stressed about war, fighting, or terrorism should be evaluated by a qualified mental health professional. Other signs that a child may need professional help include: on-going trouble sleeping, persistent upsetting thoughts, fearful images, intense fears about death, and trouble leaving their parents or going to school. The child's physician can assist with appropriate referrals.
- Help children communicate with others and express themselves at home. Some children may want to write letters to the Prime Minister, Mayor, local newspaper, or to grieving families.
- Let children be children. They may not want to think or talk a lot about these events. It is OK if they'd rather play ball, climb trees, or ride their bike, etc.
- War and terrorism are not easy for anyone to comprehend or accept. Understandably, many young children feel confused, upset, and anxious. Parents, teachers, and caring adults can help by listening and responding in an honest, consistent, and supportive manner. Most children, even those exposed to trauma, are quite resilient. Like most adults, they can and do get through difficult times and go on with their lives. By creating an open environment where they feel free to ask questions, adults can help them cope and reduce the possibility of emotional difficulties.

Talking To Teenagers About Terrorism And War

Terrorism is a violent act committed by people who want to get attention for their cause. When a terrorist strikes, it seems like the entire world is upside down and confusing. It's hard to believe what's happened or that someone would do something like that. Acts of terrorism have been a reality in many places for years. Terrorism scares everyone because no one knows when or where it will take place.

- Give yourself a fear reality check. It's normal to be worried about your safety and your family's safety. Even though your chances of being in an attack are

very, very small, the images you see on TV or online make terrorist attacks seem close by.

- Share your feelings. Anger, sadness, fear, and numbness are some of the reactions you might have. Don't be embarrassed or afraid to express how you feel. Just talking and sharing your feelings with your parents, friends, teachers, and others can help them and help you.
- Take care of yourself. Losing sleep, not eating, and worrying too much can make you sick. As much as possible, try to get enough sleep, eat right, exercise, and keep a normal routine. It may be hard to do, but it can keep you healthy and better able to handle a tough time.
- Limit the time you spend watching the news. It's good to be informed about what's happening, but spending hours watching the news reports can make you feel more anxious and sad.
- Be respectful of others. You may have heard certain countries, religions, or political causes blamed for terrorism. But very few people believe in killing and hurting innocent people to make their point. Don't give into prejudice by blaming a whole group, or disliking people just because of the country where they were born, the faith they practice, the way they dress, or the colour of their skin.
- Join with others. Participating in candlelight vigils, religious ceremonies, memorial services, or other events can be helpful. It's a way to show you care and that the community is sticking together during a sad time.
- Get additional support. A traumatic event can cause strong reactions, but if your feelings make it impossible for you to function and do normal stuff, like go to school, it's time to seek additional help. Turn to a parent, teacher, religious leader, or guidance counsellor, so you can get the help you need.

Health Warning

- ❖ You may do no more than your best.
- ❖ Expect to feel a range of emotions, e.g. anxious, guilty, frightened, and upset.
- ❖ Mistakes may happen - we are only human.
- ❖ Do not expect instant results.
- ❖ Do not expect to please everyone.
- ❖ Learn from what has happened.

NB: *You will be affected* - remember to ask for help if needed.



2.3 Reflecting

Considerations after the Critical Incident

- Self-care and care for staff; be aware of delayed responses and provide opportunities to reflect on resiliency of the community and individuals.
- Be mindful of significant dates and how these may take on new meaning for individuals and the community.
- Holding a memorial/setting up a special place; be careful this does not prevent the school community from moving on from the Critical Incident.
- Revisit knowledge and understanding of the nature of grief; recognise this in members of the school community and notice signs that individuals may be struggling
- Reflect on what the school has learned from the Critical Incident and what would be done differently if there was another. Update the Critical Incident Contingency Plan as necessary.
- What skills need to be developed in our staff and students?
- In what ways could we commemorate the Critical Incident that acknowledge the emotion of the event but look forward to a more hopeful future and our resiliency?
- 6 months following a suicide (through the Suicide Prevention Strategy, Somerset Public Health) places are offered to schools on the ASIST training (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training). This course is designed for caregivers to provide suicide first aid to persons at risk of suicide and for schools it would be part of their longer term planning to support students at risk.
- In the months following an incident the local Samaritans branch offers school talks for groups of students. These focus on emotional health, strategies for coping and seeking help when it is needed.



SECTION 3

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3.1 Book lists for Children and Young People

Children under 7 years

Non-Fiction

"Remembering Mum" by G Perkins and L Morris. Publication A & C Black, 1991

"Someone Special has Died", written and published by The Department of Social Work, St Christopher's Hospice, 1989

"Ewen's Little Brother" by S Lamont. Pub: Victoria Publications, 1989

Fiction

"The Very Hungry Caterpillar" by E Carle. Pub: Picture Puffin, 1974

"Fred" by Posy Simmonds. Pub: Picture Puffin, 1989

"Grandpa's Slide Show" by D Gould. Pub: Puffin, 1990

"Water Bugs and Dragonflies" by D Stickney. Pub: Mowbray, 1984

"When Uncle Bob Dies" by Althea. Pub: Dinosaur, 1982

"Grandpa" by J Burningham. Pub: Picture Puffin, 1988

"Badger's Parting Gifts" by S Varley. Pub: Anderson, 1985

"The Snowman" by R Briggs. Pub: Picture Puffin, 1980

"I'll Always Love You" by H Wilhelm. Pub: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985

"The Velveteen Rabbit" by M Williams. Pub: Heineman, 1991

"The Big Sea" by J Eachus. Publishers: Walker Books, 1994

"Scruppy" by E Dale. Publishers: Anderson Press, 1996

"This is the Bear on the Scary Night" by S Hayes and H Craig. Publishers Walker Books, 1991

"Christmas with Grandfather" by W Wolf. Publisher: North South Books, 1994



Children 7-11 Years

Non-Fiction

"Lifetimes" by B Mellonie & R Ingpen. Pub: Paper Tiger, 1993

"Death" by K Bryant-Mole. Pub: Wayland, 1992

"How it Feels When a Parent Dies" by J Krementz. Pub: Gollancz, 1991

"Good Grief (1): Talking and Learning about Loss and Death" by Barbara Ward and Jamie Houghton. Pub: B Ward & Associates, 1992

"Good Grief (2): Exploring Feelings, Loss and Death with Under 11's" B Ward & Associates, 1989

"When Someone Very Special Dies: Children can learn to cope with grief" by Marge Heegaard

Fiction

"Charlotte's Web" by E B White, Pub: Puffin, 1963

"A Taste of Blackberries" by D Buchanan-Smith. Pub: Penguin, 1986

"Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird" by J Little. Pub: Puffin, 1985

"Walkabout" by J Vance Marshall. Pub: Puffin, 1959

"Why the Whales Came" by M Morpurgo. Pub: Madarin, 1987

"Bridge to Terabithia" by K Paterson. Pub: Puffin, 1980

The Narnia Books by C S Lewis. Pub: Picture Lions, 1950s

Young People 11 Years +

Non-Fiction

"My Father Died" and "My Mother Died" by S Wallbank. Cruse - Bereavement Care

"Your Parent Has Died" written and published by the Department of Social Work, St Christopher's Hospice, 1991

"Facing Grief: Bereavement and the Young Adult" by S Wallbank. Pub: The Lutterworth Press, 1991



Fiction

- "To Hell With Dying" by A Walker. Pub: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989
- "Fox in Winter" by J Branfield. Pub: Collins, 1981
- "The Friends" by R Guy. Pub: Puffin Plus, 1977
- "The Charlie Barber Treatment" by C Lloyd. Pub: Walker, 1989
- "Comfort Herself" by G Kaye. Pub: Mammoth, 1984
- "Alex" and "Alex in Winter" by T Duder. Pub: Puffin Plus, 1990 and 1991
- "In the Springterm Of The Year" by Susan Hill. Pub: Penguin, 1974
- "Perfect Happiness" by Penelope Lively. Pub: Penguin, 1985

Books for Adults Dealing with Children's Grief

- "Helping Younger Bereaved Brothers and Sisters" by The Compassionate Friends, 1991
- "Caring For Bereaved Children" by Mary Bending. Pub: Cruse - Bereavement Care, 1993
- "The Motherless Child" by Dr Dora Black. Pub: Cruse - Bereavement Care
- "On Loving Your Child" by D A Torrie. Pub: Cruse - Bereavement Care
- "So Will I Comfort You" by J Kander. Pub: Lux Verbi, 1990
- "Beyond Grief: A Guide for Recovering from The Death of a Loved One" by C Staudacher. Pub: Souvenir Press, 1987

Further advice regarding these and other publications can be obtained from Cruse - Bereavement Care, 126 Sheen Road, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 1UR. Tel: 0181 940 4818

Key Source: "Wise Before the Event. Coping with Crises in Schools" by William Yule and Anne Gold. Pub: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.



Sources of Further Information

Child Bereavement Charity

Tel: 01494 568900

E-mail: support@childbereavementuk.org

Web: www.childbereavement.org.uk

Child Death Helpline Department

York House

37 Queen Square

London

WC1N 3BH

Helpline: 0800 282 986 / 0808 800 6019 if calling from a mobile phone

Web: www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk

Childline

NSPCC

Weston House

42 Curtan Road

London

EC2A 3NH

Helpline: 0800 1111

Web: www.childline.org.uk

Compass (Somerset Children's Community-Based Palliative Care and Bereavement Service)

Children's Unit

Old Building

Musgrove Park Hospital

Taunton

Somerset

TA1 5DA

Tel: 01823 344693

Web: www.tsft.nhs.uk/gps-and-healthcare-professionals/departments/compass/

Compassionate Friends (Self-help organisation for bereaved parents)

14 New King Street

Deptford

London

SE8 3HS

Helpline: 0345 123 2304

E-mail: helpline@tcf.org.uk

Web: www.tcf.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care

PO Box 800

Richmond

Surrey

TW9 1RG

Helpline: 0808 808 1677

E-mail: helpline@cruse.org.uk

Web: www.cruse.org.uk



Local Cruse Branches:

Bristol area -
9A St James Barton
Bristol
BS1 3LT
Tel: 0117 926 4045
Email: bristol@cruse.org.uk

Somerset area -
Crispin Community Centre
Leigh Road
Street
Somerset
BA16 0HA
Tel: 01458 898211
Email: somerset@cruse.org.uk
Somerset Area Cruse are part of the Somerset Area Suicide Bereavement Support Service which is run by MIND in Taunton

Mandala

(Groups for bereaved children and young people in Somerset)
St Margaret's Hospice
Heron Drive
Bishops Hull
Taunton
Somerset
TA1 5HA
Tel: 01823 365621
Tel: 0845 0708910
Web: www.barnardos.org.uk/mandala

Papyrus – prevention of young suicide: www.papyrus-uk.org

St Margaret's Hospice
Little Tarrat Lane
Yeovil
Somerset
BA20 2HU
Tel: 01935 709480
Email: Kacey.Leader@st-margarets-hospice.org.uk
Bereavement Service: 01935 709497
Web: www.st-margarets-hospice.org.uk

Somerset Suicide Bereavement Support Service
mindtws.org.uk/somerset-suicide-bereavement-support/

Samaritans provide a 24-hour service offering confidential emotional support to anyone who is in crisis.

Helpline: Freephone 116 123
E-mail: jo@samaritans.org
Web: www.samaritans.org



Responding to a suicide

E-mail stepbystep@samaritans.org

Freephone 0808 168 2528

www.samaritans.org/your-community/supporting-schools/step-step

The Rainbow Centre for Children

(For children affected by cancer, life threatening illness and bereavement)

27 Lilymead Avenue

Bristol

BS4 2BY

Tel: 0117 985 3343

Web: www.rainbowcentre.org.uk

Email: contact@rainbowcentre.org.uk

Together for Short Lives

(Association for Children with Terminal and Life-threatening conditions and their families)

New Bond House

Bond Street

Bristol

BS2 9AG

Helpline: 0808 8088 100

Tel: 0117 989 7820

Web: www.togetherforshortlives.org.uk/

Winston's Wish for anyone caring for a child who has been bereaved:

Winston's Wish

3rd Floor

Cheltenham House

Clarence Street

Cheltenham

Glos

GL50 3JR

Helpline: 08088 020 021

E-mail: info@winstonswish.org.uk

Web: www.winstonswish.org

The Young Minds Parent Information Service provides information and advice on child mental health issues.

Tel: 0808 802 5544

Web: www.youngminds.org.uk





Useful Telephone Numbers

As part of a contingency plan, this list should be regularly updated and attached to a Staff Notice Board or in a Staff Handbook.

Contact	Name	Telephone Number
LA PRESS OFFICER		01823 355020 - Option 1
EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE	<p>Sedgemoor, Taunton & West Somerset Kayleigh Partt & Guy Clayton – Senior EPs</p> <p>Mendip & South Somerset Julia Severn & Kate Lee – Senior EPS</p>	<p>01823 334475</p> <p>01749 822800</p>
SPECIALIST CAMHS Mendip South Somerset West (Taunton, Sedgemoor & West Somerset)		<p>01749 836561</p> <p>01935 384140</p> <p>01823 368368</p>
E LEARNING AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT eLIM (SOCIAL MEDIA/ESAFETY)	www.somersetelim.org	
CRUSE	FREEPHONE	0808 808 1677
SOMERSET DIRECT	<p>Mon-Fri 8 am – 6 pm Sat 9 am – 4 pm</p> <p>Out of Hours – Emergency Duty Team (includes NHS)</p>	<p>0300 123 2224</p> <p>0300 123 2327</p>
CHILDLINE	FREEPHONE	0800 11 11
LOCAL HOSPITALS	<p>Musgrove Park Hospital Royal United Hospital - Bath Weston General Hospital Yeovil District Hospital</p>	<p>01823 333444 01225 428331</p> <p>01934 636363 01935 475122 / 01935 606060</p>
SOMERSET CHILDREN SAFEGUARDING BOARD	<p><u>Please note:</u> For emergencies please phone Somerset Direct</p>	0300 123 2224

APPENDIX 1

Proforma Letter

FOR SCHOOLS TO SEND TO PARENTS IN THE EVENT OF A TRAGIC INCIDENT

Dear Parents

You may have heard that/it is with sadness and regret that I have to inform you
(brief details of the incident, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person(s) lost, and the sense of loss).

Explain that the pupils in the school have been told this sad news today by their teachers. And that we will/have remembered in a service/assembly.

Our thoughts are with’s parents at this sad time.

[In the event of a sudden/traumatic death in the school or local community – “During the day we have been supported by the Educational Psychology Service and this help will continue as necessary during the coming days”.]

I hope this information is helpful.

Yours faithfully



APPENDIX 2

Help When We Needed it Most

How to Prepare for and Respond to Suicide in Schools and Colleges



HELP WHEN WE NEEDED IT MOST

How to prepare and
respond to suicide
in schools.

FUNDED BY
**COMIC
RELIEF**

SAMARITANS
STEP BY STEP

Nobody likes to think about a death in school, let alone suicide. Yet suicide is a leading cause of death for young people in the UK and ROI. Sadly it is always a possibility that a student, parent or member of staff might choose to take their own life.

However upsetting this must be, schools play an important role in reducing the likelihood of copycat behaviour and helping recovery by preparing and responding to the situation properly.

This document guides you through the process of preparing for and responding to suicide appropriately and constructively, in order to help rebuild the well being of the school community and reduce the risk of further deaths. We based this guidance on research and best practice concerning suicide response within school communities from across the world.

Every situation is different and Samaritans has been learning from the communities we have supported so that we can share our learning with others. We have specialist knowledge and skills. In the event of a suicide, we can offer support, advice, guidance and local contacts all based on 60 years' experience working towards our vision that fewer people die by suicide.

Our Step by Step service aims to:

- Reach out to high risk people and communities to reduce the risk of further suicide;
- Support a school community to prepare for, respond to and recover from a completed or attempted suicide;
- Provide information and support to help the school community come to terms with what has happened and prevent stigma and isolation in the school community.

SAMARITANS
STEP BY STEP

Further information about suicide grief, the myths and facts about suicide can be downloaded from the Samaritans website: www.samaritans.org

CONTENTS

This guidance forms part of Samaritans' Step by Step service to schools, which offers specially trained volunteers who can assist school leadership teams with their suicide response.

Contact stepbystep@samaritans.org or **Freephone*** 0808 168 2528 for further information.

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*Calls are free from landlines and some mobile providers.



How to prepare and respond to suicide in schools 5

Creating a response plan

Although a school can be affected by many challenging incidents, including sickness and accidental death, it is suicide that presents the unique risk of potentially being the trigger for another suicide.

The key to coping with a crisis is to plan. It is particularly important that the school responds to a suicide within 48 hours. This is necessary to maintain the structure and order of the school routine, while facilitating the expression of grief, and reducing the risk of imitative suicide.

Schools with crisis plans in place are best equipped to deal with a suicide when it happens. Good planning for the aftermath of suicide makes it easier for people to respond effectively at a time when resilience may be low.

A postvention¹ protocol is an agreed approach to responding to a suicide. In a school setting, this protocol should ideally:

- be a written protocol, developed in advance of a suicide;
- include working with the local community;
- involve the formation and training of a postvention team – be clear about who will do what;
- include procedures for notifying staff, parents and young people about a suicide;
- include guidelines on how to inform the school community and handle the media;
- identify appropriate postvention services and facilities;
- include procedures for recognising 'at risk' individuals (including staff) and identifying where people would be referred;
- include an evaluation of the effectiveness of the postvention and any follow-up protocol.

It is good practice that the whole school community would be aware of essential information included in such planning, including who to tell, what to say and what not to say, and who is vulnerable.

1 Postvention "is the term given to activities and programmes that are intended to assist those who have been bereaved by suicide to cope with what has happened. Suicide prevention and postvention are closely related in that postvention can also prevent further deaths." (p.3, New Zealand Ministry of Youth Development, 'Guidance for community organisations involved in suicide postvention', 2005)

Accessing support

We are available to offer practical support and advice to schools both in preparing for and reacting to a sudden death.

Contact our Step by Step service (StepbyStep@samaritans.org) or Freephone* 0808 168 2528 and we will do all we can to help you deal with a situation you may never have faced before.

Your local authority and other organisations listed at the end of this guidance may also be able to provide emotional support and advice on specific issues.

It is important that the school returns to normal routine as soon as possible but some students and staff may need further support.

Samaritans is available round the clock, every day of the year by phone, email, text, letter or face-to-face visits in a branch for anyone who might be struggling to cope. We have provided contact details for emotional support at the end of this booklet.

We can also assist with raising awareness of emotional health among young people, by offering talks in schools. Contact your local Samaritans branch to find out more.

*Calls are free from landlines and some mobile providers.



Breaking the news

Samaritans' Step by Step service can work with you to consider the ways in which a school may become aware of a suicide, and how to respond to these to prevent rumour and misinformation and to consider the best actions to take in such cases.

- Establish the facts before acting on news of a suicide. Contact the police or the family as soon as you can to confirm the death and whether or not it is being treated as suicide. Be aware that it is likely to be many months before an inquest (or fatal accident inquiry in Scotland) is held, and that in many cases narrative verdicts may mean that the death is not officially recorded as suicide. It is important to note that there may be a great deal of speculation within the school community, and that schools often have to act on the basis that the death is being *treated* as suicide.
- Notify the school (or local authority) incident management team. It is important to act quickly, while at the same time preparing the school leadership team and administration for continuous enquiries once the death is made known.
- Breaking the news to young people can be extremely difficult. Tell staff first and give them time to take in the news before addressing students. Make sure that staff know where and to whom they can turn for emotional support.
- Best practice suggests that, where possible, it is better to break the news to students in small groups or classes.
- When breaking the news it is important to be factual but to avoid excessive detail about the suicidal act itself. Rumours may be circulating and people may ask directly but try not to disclose details about the method used, whether there was a suicide note, or its contents.
- Consider preparing a statement for staff to use to ensure consistency across the school.
- Consider providing immediate counselling or emotional support to students and staff at the school. This may be arranged by the local authority.
- Try to strike a balance between sensitivity to those who are grieving and in shock, on the one hand, and the need to maintain the school routine, on the other. It may be helpful to set aside a room where students can go if they are upset.

Handling the media

Dealing with the media can add to what is an already stressful situation. We advise you to appoint a single media spokesperson for the school and discourage other students and staff from making public comments.

The media spokesperson should prepare a statement for the media, and not deviate from it. Avoid giving details of the suicide method or any suicide note, or giving simple 'explanations' of the suicide such as '*...was stressed about exam results*'.

Use phrases like:	Avoid phrases like:
<i>A suicide</i>	<i>A successful suicide attempt</i>
<i>Die by suicide</i>	<i>An unsuccessful/failed suicide attempt</i>
<i>Take one's own life</i>	<i>Commit suicide</i>
<i>A suicide attempt</i>	<i>Suicide victim</i>
<i>A completed suicide</i>	<i>Just a cry for help</i>
<i>Person at risk of suicide</i>	<i>Suicide-prone person</i>
<i>Help prevent suicide</i>	

Samaritans has published guidelines for the media, to ensure that reporting of suicide is sensitive and responsible. Samaritans' media team can help support you and the family in handling the media during a crisis situation and advise you on options available if you are unhappy with coverage.

Contact the press team (including out of hours) on: **+44 (0)7943 809 162**.



Contacting the school community

If a suicide has affected the school community you will need to consider how to inform them. The Samaritans Step by Step service can advise and assist with this and can provide template letters on request.

Parents/carers and all staff need to know:

- In brief what has happened (see 'Breaking the news' on page 8).
- What support the school is putting in place.
- What actions the school will take with regards to funerals and memorials.
- Where to find further information about suicide and grief.
- Where to access support for themselves.
- What to do if they are worried about someone else.

Communicating sensitively and appropriately about suicide

Information provided to the school community in the immediate aftermath of suicide should include and reinforce:

- facts (not rumours);
- an understanding that death is permanent;
- an exploration of normal and wide-ranging reactions to suicide (expressions of anger and guilt are entirely normal);
- an understanding that, with support, people can cope;
- an understanding that fleeting thoughts of suicide are not unusual;
- an awareness of suicidal warning signs and resources available to help;
- an understanding of funeral expectations.

When discussing any suicide that has occurred, it is strongly recommended that the information given:

- is factually correct but does not include detail of the suicidal act itself;
- does not romanticise, glorify or vilify the death;
- does not include details of any suicide note;
- does not include speculation over the motive for suicide – suicide is a very complex issue and there is a danger in drawing overly simplistic conclusions about causality.

Identifying and supporting vulnerable students

Those affected by suicide are themselves at increased risk of serious upset and may potentially be at greater risk of taking their own life. School staff should be asked to identify any young people who are vulnerable, and efforts should be made to provide additional support or referral to specialist services.

Suicide is a complex issue, usually with no single cause, and it is therefore not possible to generalise. However, there is some evidence to suggest that people who have previously experienced bereavement or undergone a personal crisis, people with mental health problems, and people in marginal groups may be more vulnerable. Teachers who know the students best should be alert to any students who are excessively upset or disturbed by the death. These young people should be offered appropriate support without delay.



Starting difficult conversations

If you're worried about a young person, try to get them to talk to you.

- Often people want to talk, but won't speak until someone asks how they are. Try asking open questions, like *'What happened about...'*, *'Tell me about...'*, *'How do you feel about...'*
- Repeat back what they say to show you understand and ask more questions.
- Focus on their feelings instead of trying to solve the problem - it can be of more help and shows you care.
- Respect what they tell you. Sometimes it's easy to want to try and fix a young person's problems, or give them advice. Try and let them make their own decisions.

How do I start a conversation with someone I'm concerned about?

You might feel that you don't know how to help someone, because you don't know what to tell them or how to solve their problems. You don't need to be an expert. In fact, sometimes people who think they have the answers to a problem are less helpful.

Don't forget that every person is different, so that what worked for one will not always work for another.

Find a good time and place

Ask gentle questions, and listen with care. Ask them how they feel.

If you're gentle and calm it's ok to bring up the subject of self-harm or suicide.

The more open the question the better. Questions that help someone talk through their problems instead of being able to say 'yes' or 'no' are the most useful.

Questions such as:

- 🕒 **When** – *'When did you realise?'*
- 📍 **Where** – *'Where did that happen?'*
- 🗨️ **What** – *'What else happened?'*
- 👉 **How** – *'How did that feel?'*
- 🤔 **Why** – be careful with this one as it can make someone defensive. *'What made you choose that?'* or *'What were you thinking about at the time?'* are more effective.

Find out how they feel

Revealing their innermost emotions – anger, sadness, fear, hope, jealousy, despair and so on – can be a huge relief.

It sometimes also give clues about what the person is really most worried about.

Check that they know where to get help

Useful questions you might ask them include:

- 👤 *'Who else have you talked to about this?'*
- 👤 *'What do you think about getting some help?'*
- 👤 *'Would you like me to come with you?'*

If you say something that appears to cause more upset, don't panic:

- 👤 **show you are listening;**
- 👤 **look after yourself, and talk to someone too.**



Memorials

This is a difficult issue that needs to be carefully managed, taking account of the wide range of feelings that are likely to be displayed.

It is natural to want to pay tribute to those who have died. However, it is important not to sensationalise or glamorise suicide as that may act as a trigger for anyone who is deeply affected. School managers should set a time limit for memorials [about two weeks]. They may offer to forward cards and other tribute material to the family afterwards. Permanent memorials following a suicide are generally to be discouraged.

Schools cannot control online memorials and other social networking activity following a suicide. However, students should be warned about the risks of online memorials – their comments may become public/published without their permission, online memorials can attract negative and hurtful comment and anything that romanticises suicide can be harmful to those who are vulnerable. Schools could consider establishing an online memorial on their own website, which they can then moderate and remove after an agreed time.

Funerals

The nature of the student's death should not by itself encourage greater attendance at the funeral than it would for any other tragic death at the school.

We recommend that parents or guardians accompany students who want to attend.

Those who don't attend should have normal classes to go to.

If appropriate, engage the faith leader prior to the funeral to suggest that eulogies should be fitting and do not sensationalise what has happened.

Responding to suspected suicide

It can take many months for an inquest (or fatal accident inquiry in Scotland) to be held, and in many cases unexplained deaths are not given a verdict of suicide. Schools and authorities often have to act on whether an unexplained death is being treated as suicide.

In some cases, where there is an ongoing investigation or where the family does not want the cause of death to be disclosed (or reported as suicide), it can be challenging for a school to decide how to proceed.

In this situation, schools should state that the nature and cause of death are still being determined and that additional information will be forthcoming.

Acknowledge that there are rumours (which are often inaccurate), and remind students that rumours can be deeply hurtful, distressing and unfair to the deceased person, their family and their friends.

If there is an ongoing investigation, schools should check with local police before speaking about the death with students who may need to be interviewed by the authorities.

If the family does not want the nature or cause of death to be disclosed

While the fact that someone has died may be disclosed immediately, information about the nature and cause of death should not be disclosed until the family has been consulted. If the death has been declared a suicide but the family does not want this disclosed, someone from the school who has a good relationship with the family should contact them. They should explain that students are already talking about the death, and that having adults in the school community talk to students about suicide and its causes can help keep students safe.

If the family refuses to permit disclosure, schools can simply state that the family has requested that information is not shared. Schools can still take the opportunity to acknowledge rumours about suicide, and to address the topic of suicide in a responsible way to assist other young people who may be depressed or suicidal.

In addition, it is suggested that mental health professionals should be working alongside the school in helping to meet the immediate counselling needs of affected students.



Responding to attempted suicide

While suicide is the second most common cause of death among young people aged 10-24, most suicide attempts do not result in death.²

Young people may return to school following a suicide attempt, and schools should not underestimate the impact of this on other students.

It is imperative that anyone who has attempted suicide is appropriately referred to and cared for by mental health professionals. Mental health professionals will be able to work alongside the school in the following key areas:

- 🕒 Planning support for a student who has attempted suicide.
- 🕒 Helping meet the immediate counselling needs of affected students.
- 🕒 Identifying other vulnerable young people.

If a school is informed of an attempted suicide that took place away from the school or the attempt occurred without the awareness of other students, there is a small possibility that the spread of information may be contained. If complete containment of information is a real possibility, it should be discussed with the family as soon as possible. In such circumstances, any communication with staff, students and parents will be on a “need to know basis” only, in consultation with the young person, their family and appropriate mental health professionals

If the details of the attempted suicide are already known in the school population, schools may understandably be anxious about addressing this. Advice should be sought from the mental health professionals caring for the young person as they may be able to provide considerable assistance. It is essential that a support plan is developed and approved by an identified staff member (the school counsellor if the school has one), the student, the family and the mental health professionals before the student returns to school.

When meeting with the young person’s family, critical areas for sensitive discussion are:

- 🕒 What information is provided to which sections of the school community.
- 🕒 The support plan for their child’s return to school.
- 🕒 The support for any siblings in the school.
- 🕒 Liaison with the mental health professional.

2 The World Health Organisation states that “...suicide attempts... are up to 20 times more frequent than completed suicide.”
www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/suicideprevent/en downloaded 3 December 2012.

Further Information about Samaritans

For further information and support either about suicide or developing a critical incident plan that includes suicide, please contact us.

stepbystep@samaritans.org

Freephone* 0808 168 2528

www.samaritans.org

Samaritans can assist schools by offering:

- Assistance and advice about dealing with suicide or unexplained death.
- Schools talks to raise awareness of emotional health issues among young people.
- Information from our website.

*Calls are free from landlines and some mobile providers.



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Other sources of support

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

Through the BACP you can find information about counsellors in your area.

www.bacp.co.uk

ChildLine

Provides support services for children and young people. Phone the free, 24-hour helpline for children and young people in the UK about any problem.

T 0800 1111

www.childline.org.uk

Choose Life: The National Strategy and Action Plan to prevent suicide in Scotland

www.chooselife.net

Cruse Bereavement Care

Promotes the well being of bereaved people and enables anyone bereaved by death to understand their grief and cope with their loss. The organisation provides support and offers information, advice, education and training services.

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland

www.crusescotland.org.uk

NAPEP UK: Local Authorities Educational Psychology Services Crisis Response Team Network

A support network for peers involved in Local Authority Educational Psychology Services that offer support to school communities following a traumatic incident. The network shares information, discusses best practice and provides the opportunity to respond to large scale cross border incidents in a co-ordinated way.

www.napep.org

Selfharm.co.uk

Selfharm.co.uk is a project dedicated to supporting young people impacted by self-harm, providing a safe space to talk, ask any questions and to be honest about what's going on in their lives.

www.selfharm.co.uk

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)

Aims to provide a safe, confidential environment in which bereaved people can share their experiences and feelings, so giving and gaining support from each other. It is staffed by many who have been bereaved by suicide.

www.uk-sobs.org.uk

Winston's Wish

Winston's Wish is the largest provider of services to bereaved children, young people and their families in the UK. They have lots of information and support available for children who are bereaved through suicide.

www.winstonswish.org.uk

YoungMinds

YoungMinds is the UK's leading national charity committed to improving the mental health and emotional well-being of all children and young people.

www.youngminds.org.uk

Someone to talk to – people contact us when things are getting to them. They don't have to be suicidal.

We're always here – round the clock, every single day of the year.

A safe place – as volunteers we're ordinary people, and keep all our conversations private.

People can be themselves – whoever they are, however they feel, whatever life's done to them.

We're a charity – it's the public's kind donations that keep our helpline open.

FOR EMOTIONAL SUPPORT



08457 90 90 90*^(UK)
1850 60 90 90*^(ROI)



jo@samaritans.org



www.samaritans.org



Chris, PO Box 90 90
Stirling FK8 2SA



visit us – find your nearest
branch on our website

Samaritans Registered Office
The Upper Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell, Surrey KT17 2AF
T 020 8394 8300 F 020 8394 8301

* Please see our website for latest call charges.

Patron: HRH The Prince of Wales. Founded in 1953 by the late Prebendary Dr Chad Varah CH CBE. A charity registered in England and Wales no. 219432, in Scotland no. SC040604 and no. SC009843, and in Ireland no. CHY11880. Incorporated in England and Wales in 1963 as a company limited by guarantee no. 757372, and in Ireland no. 450 409.

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