



Department for Children, Adults and Health

CRITICAL INCIDENTS IN SCHOOLS

Guidance for Planning

Educational Psychology Service

Schools are strongly recommended to make plans to prepare for a possible critical incident. This booklet has been produced with this in mind.

In particular, schools are invited to identify individuals with specific responsibilities and to record these in this booklet.

The booklet should continue to work as an aide memoire/checklist but also provides spaces to allow schools to customise it with their own information.

This guidance supplements the Local Authority's guide to schools;

RESPONDING TO AN EMERGENCY: A GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS

Definition of 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
- are likely to overwhelm usual coping mechanisms
- cause severe/significant disruption
- are likely to be traumatic to most people

A **critical incident** might include deaths from abroad that affect people in the community such as war-based incidents, traumatic world events, local events within the community such as the murder of a local figure or an event that traumatises the community.

Critical incidents affecting schools may include:-

- The death or significant injury of a pupil(s) or member(s) of staff through sudden accident, murder, assault, sudden death or diagnosis of a 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, eg involving an armed intruder or a bomb alert
- Intrusion onto school premises resulting from such activity as a car chase
- Fire, flood, building collapse, or major vandalism in school.
- A hostage situation.
- A disaster in the community, eg transport accident, terrorism.
- A disaster affecting a community such as an international incident or war based deaths, which may occur in a distant part of the globe but have a local community affect.

Critical incidents affecting communities may include:-

- Traumatic national events such as suicide bombings
- A viral epidemic or pandemic
- Community based unexpected violence such as serious intrusion into a house or public setting
- Significant accident or community disruption such as a bus crash
- An event affecting the stability of a community such as a call to war in an army barracks

In the event of a critical incident, you should phone the following number(s) for assistance in the order they are listed:

Please leave a message saying that you have had a critical incident and outline briefly what has happened and who is the best person in the setting to call back and the best contact number for that person to be contacted on.

During Office Hours: (08:45 – 17:00 Monday to Thursday; 08:45 – 16:30 Friday):

Business Support North at Patchway Hub: 01454 863335, or BSNL@southglos.gov.uk

Business Support South at Kingswood Hub: 01454 866303, or SouthPreventativeBusinessSupportTeam@southglos.gov.uk

They will contact CAH Business Support (so that the relevant leads in ELS Directorate are informed) and the Educational Psychology Service.

Out of Office Hours, Bank Holidays and Weekends

01454 615165

The Emergency Duty Team (EDT) will notify the Strategic Communications team where necessary.

What happens next?

Once you have left a message, Business Support will get in touch with the relevant EPs and one of the service will contact the school and support them with the consequences of a critical incident.

While critical incidents are, thankfully, rare, their effects can be profound and schools and others are encouraged to plan for the eventuality, to consider who might be affected and how best they might be supported. The following pages 5 – 9 provide guidance for your own plan.



Department for Children and Young People

Emergency Contacts

School Link EP is

Telephone No:

To avoid confusion, please start your conversation the following way:

"I am of School/Organisation. I need to inform you of a critical incident concerning my school. My telephone number is"

Ensure that details of the incident are taken and recorded	
Person responsible:	
Essential Details include:	• What has happened • The time of the incident • The location of the incident • Details of any injuries at the scene • Who else witnessed the incident/or are at the scene • What support is immediately available+

Notify the Local Authority (LA) of a critical incident and to request assistance if necessary.	
Person responsible: (Please complete)	

Ensure a dedicated emergency line is operational	
Person responsible:	
School/organisation emergency telephone no:	

Contact governors as appropriate	
Person responsible:	
Governors to contact (Name)	Phone Number
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Ensure appropriate letter home to parents (Sample letter is included in this booklet)	
Person responsible:	

Ensure that the Council's Media team is contacted:

01454 863200 or email StrategicCommunications@southglos.gov.uk.

Media Dos and Don'ts

Don't: Engage with any journalist or media outlet. If they approach you, you should inform them politely that all enquiries are handled by the council's media team and ask them to call 01454 863200 or email StrategicCommunications@southglos.gov.uk.

Do: Tell the council's media team immediately about any work or issue that has the potential to attract media interest or risk.

Do: Respond promptly and provide as much information as you can in order to help the media team manage a potential media issue or answer a media enquiry

Ensure that those receiving phone calls from the media during the critical incident, know to refer these to the SGC Media team	
Person responsible:	

Establish procedure for informing staff, including non-teaching staff	
Person responsible:	

Establish procedure for informing children and young people including use of scripts where appropriate	
Person responsible:	

Identify vulnerable children/young people/adults	
Person responsible:	

Plan arrangements for the rest of the day with staff and/or LA Critical Incident Team	
Person responsible:	

Suggested Guidelines for Informing Pupils in Small Groups about a Death

Preparation:

Information about circumstances of the death to be shared with all staff, there needs to be clarity about what information can be shared with the children, e.g. what is in the public domain, what has been agreed by the family.

If any member of staff feels unable to tell their class, they need to know that this is okay and alternative arrangements should be made.

Be aware of children/young people who have been recently bereaved.

Whole school to be told at the same time, preferably in small class groups – as early as possible after the event.

With class/group (including some suggested wording):

“I need to share some sad news with you all..... (brief description of who/position in the school) has died.”

Give the information about the death. Use age appropriate, simple and clear language, avoid euphemisms. If children ask questions, be clear about what information can be shared with them. Answer questions openly and honestly. It is okay to say “I don’t know” or “We don’t know yet” or “Maybe we will find out later”.

Acknowledge that different people will react/feel differently. All possible responses are fine. Tell children they should talk to someone if they feel really upset, worried, anxious, can’t sleep, etc. Say that it is also okay to be happy and have fun.

Encourage pupils to take care of/look after each other – and be aware of other’s feelings.

Allow children to talk about the person who died. Consider facilitating means of expressing feelings such as painting, drawing, writing, etc. Make a decision about whether this is appropriate, depending on how close the children were to the person who died, or whether to proceed with your usual lesson.

“There will be opportunities for us all to have time to talk and remember ... in our own way. We will talk to you again at some point about how we want to do this.”

“School will continue as normal.” Talk about how any exceptions and arrangements, eg support available for pupils who are very upset, (eg Critical Incident Team), how to access this support.

“You will get a letter to take home to your parents/carers at the end of the day.”

Sample Letter when a Pupil/Teacher has Died

Feel free to use this sample letter as a basis for a letter from your school, 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. Liaison with SGC Media team would be recommended before sending out the letter.

According to the circumstances, your link Educational Psychologist can support you in adapting the letter below.

Dear Parent/Carer,

Please read with due care and attention to those around you and how you react to the news.

It is with great sadness that I have to inform you about the (sudden unexpected) death of xxx, one of our pupils/teachers in Year x.. The children were told this morning by their class teacher/tutor.

The full details 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 he/she 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 about xxx if they want. Trained staff from the Educational Psychology Service 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 xxx's family at this difficult time and the whole school community sends them our sincerest sympathy and support.

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

Yours sincerely

XXXXXXXXXX

Headteacher